



**Talent Management and Talent Retention in SMEs in Emerging
Markets: A case study of the Nigerian context**

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by

Marilyn Nwaigwe, BA., MA.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this PhD thesis is the original work that I authored. It has not been submitted for any degree or professional qualification elsewhere. All sources and contributions have been appropriately acknowledged, and this work adheres to the academic integrity guidelines set forth by the University of Hull.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to every woman who has ever doubted their capability and ability. To the women who are often made to believe their worth lies solely in being wives and mothers. Your strength, intelligence, and potential extend far beyond these roles. Despite societal pressures and stereotypes, you embody resilience and capability in all areas of life. This project honours your diverse talents and aspirations, acknowledging the barriers you overcome daily. You are an inspiration, proving that women can achieve greatness in every sphere. And to the women who have managed to chase their ambitions while navigating the highly demanding waters of motherhood, your strength, resilience, and commitment to balancing careers and family life inspire many. Navigating career advancement while nurturing your family is a remarkable feat to be incredibly proud of. This project is dedicated to your sacrifices and daily challenges. You are a testament to multifaceted success, inspiring future generations to pursue their dreams.

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Abstract

Talent Management (TM) is a new field of study within the Nigerian context, particularly among SMEs. As with other management disciplines, TM is intrinsically linked to the environment in which businesses operate, making the Nigerian national context a major influence on TM practices. Despite its significance, there remains a notable gap in research on the conceptualisation of Talent management within Nigerian SMEs. Moreover, the application of TM practices for talent retention in the context of Nigerian SMEs is a highly unexplored area. As talent management is a holistic strategy (which needs to be implemented in full to get the best results) for businesses, it is, therefore, necessary to explore TM practices in Nigerian SMEs through a holistic lens which explores the processes of talent identification and definition, talent attraction, talent development, and talent retention. Nonetheless, existing TM studies are focused on exploring TM concepts from a Western and multinational companies' perspective; thus, there is a lack of empirical investigations on TM practices in the context of Africa, especially Nigeria. This study explores talent management from a holistic perspective, linking TM practices to the influence of internal factors such as organisational size, financial capacity, and management's orientation about HRM and TM, and external factors such as national business environment, national politics, national economy, sociocultural norms, and legal requirements.

Adopting an interpretivist perspective and an inductive approach, this study employs a case study methodology. Data was gathered from five case companies through primary sources (interview participants) and analysed qualitatively. The theoretical foundation of this study is primarily based on existing TM literature, with a focus on talent identification, definition, attraction, development, and retention as key processes. Resource-based view, social exchange theory, and institutional theories serve as the primary theoretical frameworks for understanding talent definitions, talent management, and talent turnover within case study SMEs.

In conclusion, the study underscores the necessity of viewing TM in Nigerian SMEs through a comprehensive understanding of the national context in which they exist. The study offers both theoretical contributions and practical strategies for effective talent retention. This approach not only addresses the current research gap but also enhances the overall understanding and implementation of TM in the distinctive context of Nigerian SMEs

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Abbreviations

AI- Artificial Intelligence

ATS-Application Tracking Software

BCE-Before Current Era

BC-Before Christ

BBC- British Broadcasting Corporation

BOI-Bank of Industry

CAC-Corporate Affairs Commission

CBN-Central Bank of Nigeria

CEE-Central and Eastern European

CEO-Chief Executive Officer

CIPD-Chartered Institute of Personnel Development

CSR- Corporate Social Responsibility

FME- Federal Ministry of Education

FMLE- Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment

G20- Group of Twenty

GDP- Gross Domestic Produce

GTM-Global Talent Management

HC-Human Capital

HR-Human Resources

HRD- Human Resource Development

HRM- Human Resource Management

IBM-International Business Machines Corporation ICT- Information and Communication Technology

IEIs- Innovation Enterprise Institutions

IFC- International Finance Corporation

ILO- International Labour Organisation

IMF-International Monetary Funds

LETf-Lagos State Entrepreneurial Trust Fund

MNC-Multinational Corporations

MNE-Multinational Enterprises

MSME-Micro, Small, And Medium Enterprises

MD-Managing Director

NAFDAC-National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control

NBS-National Bureau of Statistics

NEDEP-National Enterprise Development Programme

NEEDS-National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy

NGN- Nigerian Naira

NHRD-National Human Resource Development

NLC- Nigeria Labour Congress

NOS- National Occupational Standards

NPC- National Pension Commission

NSQF- National Skills Qualification Framework

NUC-National Universities Commission

NUPENG-Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers

ODFEL- Open, Distance and Flexible E-Learning

OECD-The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

PFA- Pension Fund Administrator

PFC- Pension Fund Custodian

PENGASSAN- Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria

PWC- Price Water Cooper

RSA-Retirement Savings Account

RBV-Resource-Based View

SET-Social Exchange Theory

SMEDAN-Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria

SMEs- Small and Medium Enterprises

SHRM-Strategic Human Resource Management

STM- Strategic Talent Management

TUC-Trade Union Congress

TM- Talent Management

TVET-Technical and Vocational Education and Training

UNHCR- United Nations High Commission for Refugees

UNDP-United Nations Development Program

UNESCO-United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UK-United Kingdom

USA-United States of America

USAID-U.S. Agency for International Development

USD-United States Dollars

VAT-Value Added Tax

VE1s- Vocational Enterprise Institutions

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and Background

Since the dawn of the technological and industrialised age, organisations have battled numerous challenges to withstand the ever-competitive and fast-paced global market. These challenges are instigated by different factors ranging from economic, technological, socio-cultural, and institutional to intra-organisational activities (ILO, 2009). Issues such as new trends in global markets, industrialisation, change in demographics, technological advancements and innovation, and people management can pose severe challenges to organisations (CIPD, 2007; Guthridge et al., 2008; ILO, 2009). SMEs in emerging economies such as Nigeria are not spared from the ongoing global economic recession. Thus, they must remain competitive by identifying, recruiting and retaining the best employees in their organisations.

Practitioner literature asserts that one of the most challenging issues firms face is the pressure to constantly be on the lookout for sterling talent in a market where the demand for talent is far greater than its supply (Schuler and Tarique, 2009). This is particularly significant for organisations that target highly skilled candidates with core competencies (Schuler and Tarique, 2009). Thus, there is a high level of competition among organisations for these scarce resources. The fact that human capital can enable organisations to gain significant advantages (higher market values, curb high turnover, survive globalisation of market and labour forces) has made the need to attract, acquire, develop and retain the right set of people with appropriate skill a top priority to these firms regardless of their size, industry and location (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). Likewise, McKinsey and Company suggested that having the right talent is essential for organisations to have a competitive edge (Huang and Tansley, 2012; Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

Tansley (2011) suggests that due to the unavailability of talented employees, organisations have begun to put strategic management practices in place to prevent their human resources from leaving. These relatively new practices within Human Resource Management (HRM) are quickly gaining prominence in both academia and the business world and have been referred to as Talent Management (TM) (Strack, 2014; Sparrow et al., 2014). TM has, thus, grown to become a focal point for researchers and practitioners. The search for the term produces approximately 1,580,000 and 17,000,000 hits on Google Scholar and Google, respectively (Collings et al. 2017). This reflects a sudden upward surge of interest in this area of management, particularly as academic research in this area only became significant around 2009 as opposed to practitioner interest, which started in the 1990s (McDonnell et al., 2017). Also, the increase in academic interest is evident in the growing number of special issues published on TM (Sparrow et al., 2015).

Although academics like Cappelli & Keller (2017) trace the history of TM back to fifty years ago, Collings et al. (2017) attribute the recent popularity of the TM concept to work carried out by the McKinsey consultants in the mid-1990s in a bid to understand the challenges of an ageing population and shortage of certain skills in the American labour market. Whilst raising awareness and providing valuable insights on how to strengthen an organisation's human capital to significantly improve business performance, McKinsey and Company's research also claimed that contrary to popular belief, "best practices" were not the distinguishing factor between high-performing companies and their counterparts. Instead, it is their adoption of the organisational practice of a top-to-bottom talent management mindset (Collings et al. 2017). Despite the attention the McKinsey group put on TM, academic reviews highlight specific concerns, such as the inconsistency in establishing conceptual and intellectual boundaries for TM, arguing that further development of this field is limited by the lack of consensus on the definition of TM (Collings & Mellahi. 2009; Tarique & Schuler, 2010; Collins et al., 2017). In other words, the breadth and depth of literature on TM emphasises the importance of talent development and discusses the contributions of TM to organisational success; however, remains unclear about the exact meaning of "talent" and TM (Huang and Tansley, 2012). Moreover, most of the theoretical and empirical work on TM is still based on the US and Anglo-Saxon experiences, with little or no attention paid to other nations (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). Hence, the efficacy of TM and its activities cannot be wholly understood in different national contexts (particularly emerging markets) and organisations because most research on TM has focused on the context of Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) (Festing et al. 2013).

The need for research on TM in emerging markets is buttressed by the lack of clarity on whether "Western" TM practices will be effective in emerging markets (Skuzza et al., 2014). However, researchers are faced with the challenge of understanding these nations' cultural contexts, which is further instigated by the fast-paced development and business growth in these nations. The importance of emerging markets to the global economy is represented in the prediction that in the next few years, the total gross national products of emerging markets will surpass those of developed economies (Hoskisson et al., 2000). There is an existing shift as emerging markets account for an excess of over 59% of global economic output as opposed to the 40% contributed by advanced economies (IMF, 2019). Thus, these nations are quickly becoming attractive business locations. This poses serious implications for HR approaches and TM.

A more pressing and highly overlooked issue is the lack of literature on TM in SMEs. This is an important issue and should be given more light as SMEs have become a key contributor to the growth of the global economy because they constitute the vast majority of companies globally. (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). A staggering 99% of the companies in OECD and G20 countries have been categorised as SMEs,

with their value-added generation ranked at over 60% (OECD, 2015). Relatively, SMEs constitute 90% of businesses in emerging markets, generating more than 50% of total employment (OECD, 2017). Additionally, SMEs contribute up to 40% of national income (GDP) in emerging economies, and these numbers increase significantly when informal SMEs are included (World Bank, 2020). Surprisingly, despite the importance of SMEs in the global economy, very few academic publications address TM in SMEs. Going by existing research that sheds light on the peculiarities of SMEs, the evidence suggests that their approach to HR and HR practices differ from those of their MNEs counterparts (Cappelli, 2010; Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). In addition, there is a shift in the competition for talent from local to regional and global levels (Scullion et al., 2010; Sparrow et al., 2014). By 2030, an estimated 600 million jobs must be created to absorb the growing global workforce. Thus, the continuous and rapid development of SMEs has become a high priority for many governments around the world (World Bank, 2020).

There is a dearth of conceptual and empirical literature on TM in emerging markets, specifically in the African context. This thesis seeks to illuminate this issue.

1.2 Aim of the Study

Generally, this research aims to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive and sophisticated theoretical as well as empirical framework for TM in SMEs in emerging markets. It aims to thoroughly explore TM practices' current state in terms of talent attraction, development, recruitment and retention within SMEs in emerging markets and, specifically, in the Nigerian context. The study also seeks to identify and understand the challenges hindering talent management and retention in Nigerian SMEs. It will assess the importance of talent management, its practical application, and how these practices influence talent retention and firm performance in Nigerian SMEs.

Finally, it seeks to critically review existing literature and identify and address gaps in empirical research on talent and talent management.

RATIONALE OF STUDY

The rationale behind this study is to address the persistent gap in the contextual study of TM. This is because academics agree that the research context (both the SME context and the emerging markets context) is underrepresented in TM research. Exploring the concept of TM from different contexts will create an advancement as it will help illuminate the impact of context on the meaning and implementation of TM. Contribute to the study of TM in SMEs in Nigeria as academics and researchers have reiterated that this is increasingly significant as TM is one of the most pressing human capital challenges faced by twenty-first-century organisations, especially in Nigeria, where despite significant

interest in talent management, theoretical, contextual, and empirical evidence on the subject is almost non-existent.

1.3 Statement of problem

Research highlights that most companies globally are SMEs, and these organisations play a significant role in the global economy (OECD, 2017). Despite SMEs' global significance in terms of output and employment generation, there remains a dearth of academic literature on TM in SMEs. Conversely, multinational enterprises (MNEs) have been the focal point of academic research on TM (Festing and Schafer, 2014; Valverde et al., 2013). The need for more research on talent management in the context of SMEs cannot be overemphasised. HR and TM practices for large organisations may not necessarily work for smaller firms. Research on talent management practices in MNEs suggests that TM practices cannot easily be transferred to the SME context (Festing and Schafer, 2013).

Additionally, there is a significant level of complexity and instability associated with the evolution and growth of small organisations; new functions, jobs and hierarchical levels are spontaneously added at intervals (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). Hence, SMEs need to have readily available guidelines for talent management practices and policies that are backed by empirical, conceptual, and theoretical frameworks (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). There is even less research on talent management in emerging markets and the peculiar challenges and opportunities it presents (Bluen, 2012). This is a problem that, if left unattended to, might create more future problems for SMEs in the areas of attraction and retention of talent, as human resources in the SME context tend to be of great importance to the success of any firm regardless of size and location (Bluen, 2012).

1.4 Research questions

RQ 1 What are the major Talent Management issues and challenges faced by SMEs globally?

- a) Do SMEs adopt formal talent policies or TM practices?

RQ 2 What is the state of Talent Management conceptualisation in Nigerian SMEs

- a) How do Nigerian SMEs define, attract, develop, and retain talented employees?
- b) What are the notable TM challenges faced, and to what degree do Nigerian SMEs have TM policies?

1.5 Research objectives

- 1 To critically review the literature about theories, concepts and models related to Talent Management, particularly in the SME context.

- 2 To investigate the meaning of talent and understand how talent is defined, attracted, developed, and retained in Nigerian SMEs.
- 3 To identify and analyse notable TM issues and challenges faced by Nigerian SMEs and to provide a conceptual contribution to the area of study.
- 4 To critically examine the role of talent management in the attraction, development and retention of employees and the overall growth objectives of SMEs in Nigerian SMEs
- 5 To make recommendations based on the findings of this study, which seek to increase our understanding of the factors impacting effective TM in SMEs.

1.6 Significance of Study

It is widely accepted that globally, the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) sector acts as a catalyst for economic growth and development. Additionally, a large body of evidence indicates that SMEs, mainly young firms, make outstanding contributions to the innovation system by introducing new products and adapting existing products to the needs of customers (OECD, 2000). SMEs provide most of the employment opportunities and contribute significantly to the economy's overall performance (OECD, 2017; IFC, 2010). Nevertheless, the dynamic nature of this sector also makes it susceptible to a high failure rate, which is caused by sudden shifts in economic policy, global trends, global shocks in international markets and many unforeseen situations. Thus, this study is significant in several ways:

- The study will contribute to the understanding of TM in the emerging market context. Gallardo-Gallardo (2013) highlights that the development of scholarly work within the field of TM is marred by the lack of consensus on what talent is. This study will contribute to the identification of a contextual definition of talent and TM by investigating how SMEs in Nigeria define and identify talent.
- Additionally, this study's findings will aim to make a valuable contribution to the existing literature on TM in SMEs. This area remains unexplored in emerging markets (specifically Nigeria). It may also prove resourceful to other researchers who wish to undertake further research.
- Through a critical analysis of the definitions, identifications and application of TM in SMEs and how these talents are managed in Nigeria, a proper understanding of TM strategies adopted within the Nigerian context will be developed.

- This study examines the importance of developing talent management activities in Nigerian SMEs. The study's impact is potentially important, as its findings can create awareness of the need to develop talent management strategies in Nigeria.
- SMEs in Nigeria are constantly faced with the challenge of talent retention (Siyanbola & Gilman, 2017). This is because most small businesses struggle with adopting HR best practices from their large counterparts due to the cost of implementation and lack of adequately qualified managers (Siyanbola & Gilman, 2017). This study will investigate alternative HR practices adopted by SMEs and their success or failure rate so far.
- Based on the findings, this study will attempt to make recommendations to small businesses in Nigeria on how to effectively manage human resources and talent to curb their high turnover rate and maintain a competitive advantage over their business rivals.

1.7 Research limitations

The following are the anticipated limitations of this study:

- 1 This research scope is limited to the context of Nigerian SMEs.
- 2 It is anticipated that only a small number of companies in Nigeria adopt formal TM practices. Consequently, finding organisations with management processes worthy of study might be challenging.
- 3 The study may be limited to a relatively small sample of organisations; hence, it is anticipated that the research findings may not be generalisable to a different context.

1.8 Research Structure

The thesis has six chapters, and the six chapters are as follows:

1.8.1 Chapter 1 Introduction

Chapter 1 briefly introduces this research and explains why the study of TM needs to be explored further and why understanding the concept of talent is important in different contexts. The rationale of the research is briefly explained, and the significance of the study is highlighted. Finally, the research aim, objectives, and questions are also discussed in this chapter.

1.8.2 Chapter 2 national context of study

This chapter will provide an overview of the national context of the study. It will cover details ranging from Nigeria's geographical location to its economic, Political, socio-cultural, economic, religious, and business environment using a pestle analysis. It will also investigate the contribution of SMEs to

Nigeria's economic growth and development and their role in eradicating overflow in the Nigerian labour market. This chapter will also explore the state of HRM policies in the country in general and the HR challenges faced by businesses in Nigeria.

1.8.3 Chapter 3 Literature Review of Talent Management

The literature review chapter presents a review of the concept of talent and talent management; it will be split into two parts. The first part of the literature review will conduct a generic exploration of the concept of talent management globally, particularly the definitions and identification of talent. This part of the review will include a look at the origin of the concept of talent and how that has evolved. Questions about the nature of talent will be explored. The second part of this chapter will review the literature on TM in emerging markets. It will try to identify the issue of differentiation in HR practices in advanced countries as opposed to those in emerging markets. The chapter will further investigate how talent is managed whilst also delving into the challenges of managing talent.

1.8.4 Chapter 4 Review of Literature on Talent Management in SMEs

This chapter will investigate the TM concept in SMEs. Looking at the differences between HR practices in the organisational context of SMEs as opposed to those of Multinational corporations, emphasising their recruitment, selection, development and retention practices. This section of the literature review will also discuss talent retention and the factors that influence/affect talent retention in SMEs.

1.8.5 Chapter 5 Methodology

This chapter will lay out the methodology used in this study. It will detail this thesis's research philosophy, strategy, and method, explaining why these are appropriate for addressing the research questions. Furthermore, the chapter will highlight how the research was designed and adapted, the data collection approach, and the ethical issues that arose. Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) mention that one paramount aspect of research is a clear understanding of its philosophy, as this is crucial in selecting research methodology, strategy and methods that answer research questions without ambiguity. Ontologically, this research adopts a subjectivist view to explore and investigate TM in the context of Nigerian SMEs from the perception and resultant actions of employees and managers. It will seek to identify and explore the subjective meanings that inspire a high level of staff turnover experienced by SMEs in this context. The subjectivist view is appropriate for this research because Nigerian SMEs are socially constructed entities/organisations; TM and retention can only be understood from the perspective of people directly involved. This research adopts an interpretive paradigm. According to Saunders et al. (2012), an interpretive research stance deals with subjective meanings, and focus is usually placed on specific details of a situation and the reality behind such details. This aids the researcher's attempt to understand the world from the perspective of their

research subjects. It believes that reality is socially constructed, multiple and subjective. This paradigm will enable the researcher to explore and understand the state of TM and the current problems that lead to staff turnover based on the experiences of employees, managers and organisations in the research context. The research views participants as social actors in Nigerian SMEs. The interpretivist philosophical paradigm will allow the researcher to enter the social world of Nigerian SMEs and gain understanding from employees' (Talents') points of view.

This research follows an inductive/grounded research approach. For this research, an analysis based on observation will be conducted, and findings will be evaluated to answer the stated research questions and possibly build theories on talent management in SMEs. An inductive research approach uses collected data to explore a phenomenon and explain patterns (Saunders et al., 2016; Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005).

The research will follow a qualitative study approach as the analysis will be based on non-numerical data. This is because the research aims to explore the various meanings, definitions, conceptions, characteristics, and descriptions of TM and retention in SMEs in general and, specifically, TM in SMEs in Nigeria. The research will adopt an exploratory research design to answer the what, why and how questions (although Blumberg et al., 2014 assert that every research tends to exhibit traces of description). Lastly, the research will use techniques such as interviews, observations, films or documentation to answer the research questions. Thus, it will be based on a combination of monitoring and communication.

This research will use a purposive sampling technique, as participating organisations and individuals will not be selected randomly.

In line with the recommendation by Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), this research will use multiple case studies to explore the concept of TM and talent retention in Nigerian SMEs. As Yin (2014) states, case study methods are recommended for studies of organisations and their practices, ranging from implementing and evaluating policies, employee relations, and organisational management to adaptation and change management and processes. Thus, it will follow an exploratory case study design. Case studies will be drawn from the most prominent industrial sectors in the Nigerian small and medium enterprise market, such as Oil and gas, Banking and Finance, real estate and Information Technology.

1.8.6 Chapter 6 Data analysis and findings

This chapter will interpret and analyse the data gathered from interviews. Details of the findings of the empirical research will be given. Discussion of the findings will be linked to existing theories and

previous studies. There are several data analysis techniques in qualitative research, including narrative analysis, grounded theory, pattern matching, content analysis and thematic analysis (Berg & Lune, 2012; Creswell, 2014). The data gathered for this research will be analysed using the thematic analysis technique. This technique has been chosen because, as Robson (2011) states, thematic analysis covers a broader range than content analysis, as it has been described as a technique for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.

Additionally, Joffe (2012) described thematic analysis as “the method for identifying and analysing patterns of meaning in a data set and illustrates themes that are important in the description of the phenomenon under study. The result of thematic analysis highlights the most salient constellations of meaning present in the data set.”

1.8.7 Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter will present the research conclusions and recommendations. It will also highlight the research's contributions to theory, methodology, policy setting, and practice. This section will highlight the research limitations from the researcher's perspective and make recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE IN NATIONAL CONTEXT OF STUDY

2.1 Background Study of Nigeria

Nigeria has been categorised as a country with a long history (Commonwealth, 2020). As early as 5000 BCE, agriculture developed independently in the plateau area of Jos, which was a meeting point for cultural influences from Egypt and the Upper Niger Valley. Around 3000 BCE, the early settlers in the plateau area of Nigeria developed more complex societies and gradually advanced to the South. Between 800-500 BC, Jos Plateau was a settlement for the Nok people, a neolithic and Iron-age civilisation population (BBC, 2019). The Nok people were producers of elegant terracotta figures and sculptures. They were also agriculturists who made tools and weapons out of iron. The 11th Century saw city-states, empires and kingdoms forming. In the North, two powerful empires arose. These were the Hausa-Bokwoi and Kanem-Bornu. People reared castles and horses, produced textiles, leather and iron, and grew cotton and cereals (Commonwealth, 2020; BBC, 2019). Contact between these people

and Egypt, as well as other North African countries, saw them convert to Islam and trade in gold, enslaved people, salt and textiles across the Sahara (Commonwealth, 2020).

In the South, the Oyo Kingdom was formed, with Ife being the spiritual centre of the Yoruba ethnic group to date. There was also the Benin Kingdom, widely known for contributing to the world's artistic heritage due to its production of naturalistic but slightly idealised elegant, delicate and beautiful head sculptures made from bronze. The 15th Century brought Portuguese navigators to Nigerian coasts, leading to a trade between the Portuguese and the Benin people. Enslaved people were sold in exchange for spices, firearms, the art of writing and Christianity (Commonwealth, 2020; BBC, 2019). Britain displaced Portugal as the leader of the slave trade in the 18th Century. By the 19th century, Christian missionaries strengthened their campaign against the slave trade, which led to its abolishment (Commonwealth, 2020). Shortly after, a new trade-in palm oil began, which made the economy of Southern Nigeria proliferate. In 1861, the British annexed Lagos, and by 1900-1914, they had consolidated control over Nigeria as a colony and protectorate through a system of indirect rule via local heads and leaders. However, these leaders were still firmly subordinate to colonial authority. From 1914 to 1960, Nigerians were included in the governor's advisory council, a constitution was created and amended, Nigeria became a federation, regions gained internal self-government, and Federal House of Representatives elections were held. Nigeria gained independence on October 1, 1960. Between 1966 and 1999, Nigeria was under the rule of the Military except for a short timeline between 1979-1983.

1967-1970 saw the infamous Biafran War (between the Nigerian government and the seceded Eastern states-Republic of Biafra). Nigeria witnessed eight successful and attempted coups between 1966 and 1960 (BC, 2019). Since it adopted democratic rule in 1991, Nigeria has had four democratically elected Presidents. Nigeria has experienced several ethnic, religious, and political crises that have stunted the growth of the country's economy. Militancy in the South has brought about a loss of investors and the relocation of numerous leading MNCs from the county's oil-producing region. Fig 2.1 below shows Nigeria's location on the map of Africa.

2.1.1 Geographical Location



Figure 2.1 Map of Africa. Source: <https://www.africaguide.com/afmap.htm>

Officially addressed as the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Nigeria is situated in the Western parts of Africa. It lies between longitudes 3 degrees and 14 degrees and latitudes 4 degrees and 140 degrees, with a land mass of 923,768 sqkm. It is bordered to the North by the Republics of Chad and Niger. To the West, it shares its borders with the Republic of Benin. It is bordered to the East by the Republic of Cameroon- this extends right down to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, also referred to as the Gulf of Guinea, which forms the Southern boundaries of the Nigerian territory. With 800km of coastline and being the home of Africa's most prominent and busiest seaport, Nigeria has the potential to become a maritime giant. With 31.29% of arable land, one cannot overemphasise that land is abundant for agricultural, commercial and industrial purposes.

Climatic conditions vary across Nigeria. The climate is equatorial in the South, arid in the north, and very tropical in the central region. Temperatures across the country are mostly high, with two primary seasons: the wet/rainy season, which begins around April to October, and the dry season, which lasts from November to March. The Southeastern part of the country experiences extremes during the wet season, as annual rainfall can reach up to 330cm. In contrast, the extremes of the dry seasons are experienced in the Northern parts of Nigeria, with temperatures ranging from 33-38 degrees centigrade. A part of the dry season is also accompanied by lower temperatures and a dusty and hazy atmosphere brought by the Northeast winds from the Arabian Peninsula across the Sahara. Because of the rainfall distribution, which is more significant in the South than in the North, there are two main types of vegetation: forest and savanna. However, each vegetation type has three variants: Forest savanna, saline water swamp, Guinea savanna, fresh-water swamp, Sudan savanna, and tropical evergreen Sahel Savanna.

The savanna regions are the leading growers of grains, grasses, tubers, vegetables, and cotton, while the tropical evergreen rainforests mainly grow timber, cocoa, rubber, etc. Lastly, the mountain vegetation is situated on the isolated high plateau region on the east end of the country (Nigerian Embassy, 2015).

2.1.2 Population

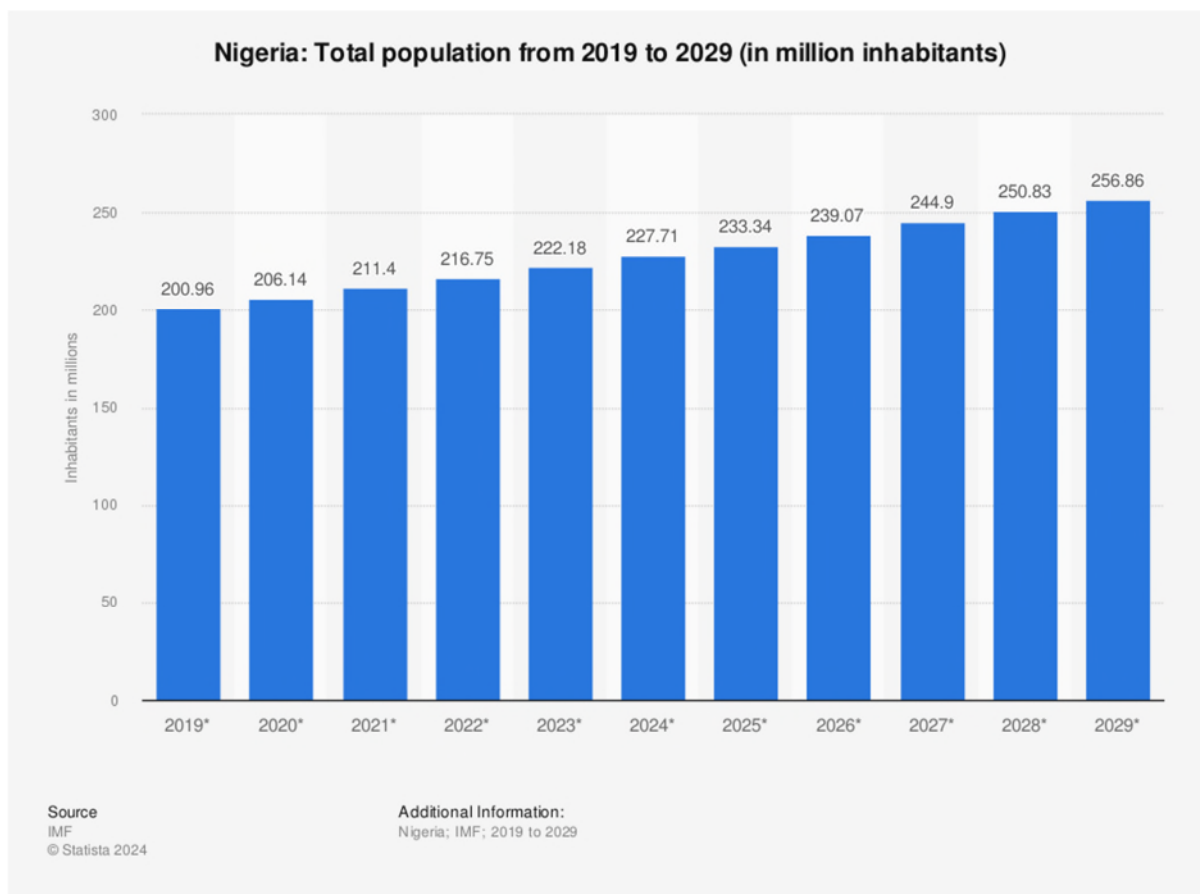


Figure 2.2 Statistics of Nigerian population. Source: Nigeria - total population 2019-2029 | Statista

According to statistics by the IMF (2024), Nigeria has an estimated population of 227,538.352 and is expected to reach 256,830.00 by mid-2029. Thus, Nigeria has maintained its status as the most populous African country and the 6th most populous country globally. As of 2020, Nigeria accounts for 47% of West Africa's population (this is projected to increase by 3% in the next few years) and has one of the largest populations of youths in the world; a multiethnic and culturally diverse society, Nigeria comprises of 36 autonomous states with an abundance of resources (World Bank, 2020). The 36 states in the Federal Republic of Nigeria are shown in the map below.



Figure 2.3 Map of Nigeria. Source: <https://www.actualitix.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/carte-regionsnigeria.jpg>

2.2 Nigerian Culture

The multiplicity of ethnic groups shapes the Nigerian cultural scene. The country has over 520 languages and three major ethnic groups, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, predominantly in the North, SouthEast, and South-West. The next ethnic groups in line with regards to size are the TIV people in the North Central, the Efik-Ibibio in the South-South, Ijaw in the Niger Delta and the Edo people also in the South-South part of Nigeria. The rest of Nigeria's ethnic groups regarded as the "minorities" are found in different parts of the country. The Northern part of Nigeria is predominantly Muslim. The Yorubas have a blend of Muslims and Christians, while the South-South are predominantly Christians. This research analysed Nigerian culture using Edward T Hall's cultural theory and Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Fig 2.4 below shows the analysis of Nigerian culture using Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

2.2.1 Cultural Theory- Hofstede's Cultural Dimension

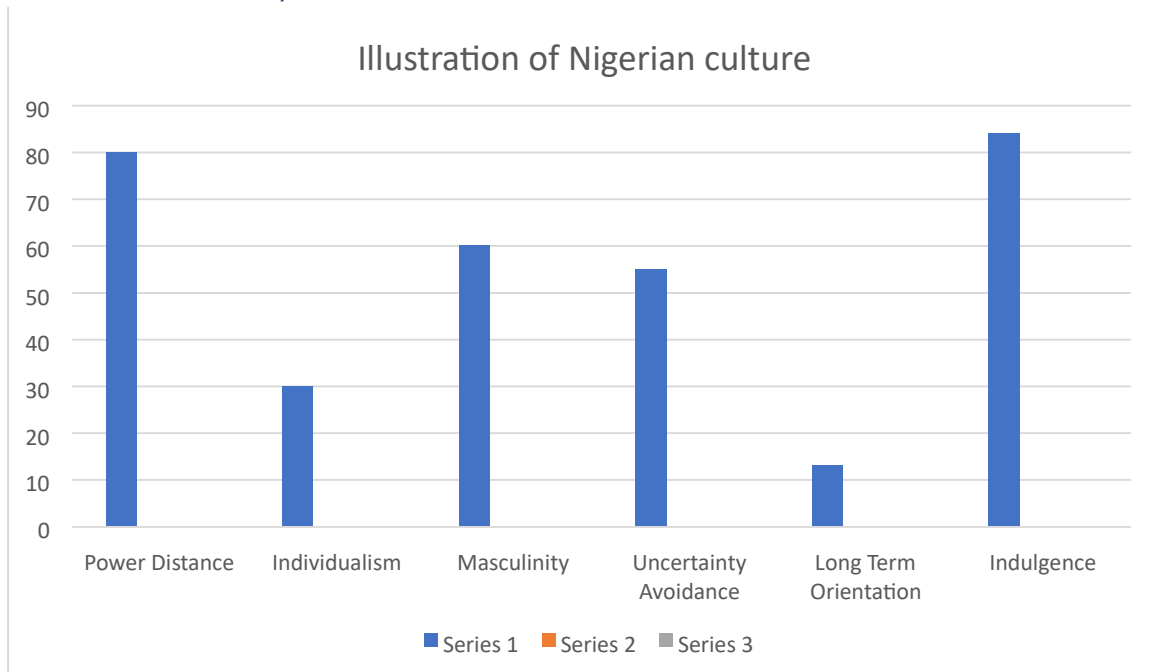


Figure 2.4. Source: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>

Hofstede's 1980 survey initially categorised inter-country variation among employees into four independent dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, masculinity, and later, a fifth dimension, 'short-term orientation', was added (Dragendijk & Slangen, 2006). Despite its prominence, this theory has continued to receive several black lashes from different authors. Schwartz (1999) criticises this theory by arguing that the dimensions are not exhaustive and fail to explore the intricacies of national culture (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2018). Also, the survey "may not have comprised all relevant questions given that it was not originally designed to identify national culture dimensions" (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2018). Likewise, Steenkamp (2001) said that the IBM employees who partook in the survey cannot be deemed as representatives of the vast population of their countries regarding differences in technological, scientific and educational backgrounds.

Using Hofstede's cultural dimensions to analyse the country's cultural inclinations, it is evident that Nigeria scores high on the first two dimensions, power distance and collectivism. These two cultural features of Nigerian society will be analysed further in section 2.4.3. Nigeria also scores high on the masculinity dimension. A score of 60 indicates that Nigerian society is driven by competition, achievement and success (Hofstede, 1980). Success is defined by the winner or best in any field. This is the direct opposite of a feminine society whose dominant societal value is care and quality of life, where the quality of life determines success. The critical difference between masculine and feminine society is that individuals are motivated to stand out or be the best and like what they do. In Nigerian society, children are pushed to be at the top of their classes and coerced into studying courses that are

assumed to fetch more income, such as Medicine, engineering and IT-related courses. Studying administrative courses such as HR, Business management and so on is seen as a waste of resources and time. A direct comparison is made between peers about achievements and success. In organisations, managers are inclined to be assertive and decisive; competition and performance conflicts are resolved by letting employees fight it out (Reiche et al., 2019). There is a clear distinction between women's and men's social roles (Fred, 2013).

The uncertainty avoidance dimension describes the degree to which members of a society feel threatened by unknown or uncertain situations (Hofstede, 1980; Fred, 2013; Reiche et al., 2019). Hofstede's cultural tool does not specify where Nigeria lies on this dimension. However, with a score of 55, the country gravitates more towards a high level of uncertainty avoidance than a low one. The Nigerian society displays active, aggressive, emotional, compulsive, security seeking and intolerant attitudes. There is an inner need to work harder and a need for rules and precision (Fred, 2019). Kamoche et al. (2004) state that a culture with substantial uncertainty avoidance seeks to structure social systems in a way that order and predictability are essential. Nigerians have norms, values, and beliefs. Rules and regulations are considered very important. It emphasises the roles of experts and people with authority, as their views are always considered correct.

Nigeria ranks very low with a score of 13 on the long-term versus short-term orientation. The Nigerian society exhibits short-term orientation (Hofstede, 1980). Nigerian culture is normative as opposed to pragmatic. Members of society prefer to view societal change with suspicion and would instead maintain time-honoured traditions and norms (Hofstede, 1980). Nigerians typically respect established traditions, are normative in their thinking, prefer quick results, spend time to keep up with social pressure, and have little or no inclinations to save.

The indulgence dimension addresses the degree to which people try to control their desires and impulses based on their upbringing (Hofstede, 1980). Nigeria scores 80 on this dimension, which makes it an indulgent society. Nigerians possess a highly positive attitude and are primarily optimistic. A high level of importance is placed on leisure time, which results in people acting as they please and spending finances as they wish; members of Nigerian society are generally open to exploring their impulses and desires regarding having fun and enjoying life.

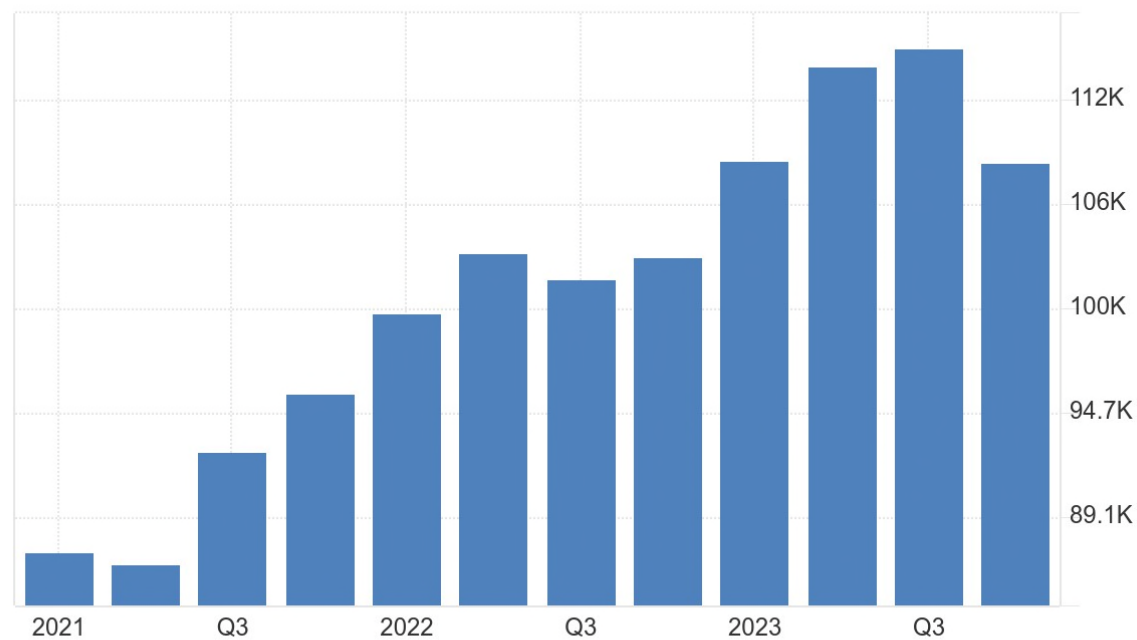
2.3 The Nigerian economic context

With abundant natural resources, Nigeria is Africa's biggest oil exporter and has the largest natural gas reserves on the continent (Business Insider Africa, 2024). Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an average rate of 5.7% per year between 2006- 2015. This is because the unstable oil prices increased by 8% in 2006 and decreased by -1.5% in 2015 (World Bank, 2019; African Economic Outlook, 2019; African Development Bank, 2019). From 2015 to 2022, growth rates declined, and GDP per capita stagnated due to various factors; these included monetary and exchange rate policy distortions, rising fiscal deficits caused by reduced oil production and an expensive fuel subsidy program, increased trade protectionism, and external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Worldbank, 2024). Growth was higher in 2018 (at 1.9%), was more broad-based, and remained stable at 2.3% in the first half of 2019. However, in 2018, the oil and gas sector reverted to its decreased input from the second quarter of the year, and the non-oil economy was thus the main driver of growth in 2018 (World Bank, 2019). This sector has surpassed the 10% from oil and 22% from agriculture, reflecting a recovery in services and industry, specifically mining, quarrying, and manufacturing. (African Development Bank, 2019; African Economic Outlook, 2019). Despite this, economic growth fell below the population growth rate, government projections and pre-recession levels (PWC, 2019). Domestic demand remains constrained by stagnating private consumption in the context of high inflation (11% in the first half of 2019-IMF, 2019).

While other sectors slowed down significantly due to factors such as regional crises, terrible weather conditions and so on, the non-oil sector, which remained negative until the late part of 2017, picked up momentum through 2018 (albeit it remained weak) with services, mainly information and communications technology resuming as the critical driver (World Bank, 2019). On the production side, Agricultural growth remains below potential due to continued insurgency in the Northeast and ongoing farmer-herdsmen conflicts. Industrial performance is mixed. Oil GDP growth is stable while manufacturing production is expected to slow down in 2019 due to a weaker power sector performance. The deterioration of economic fundamentals resulted in the country's inflation reaching a 24-year high of 31.7% in February 2024 (World Bank, 2024).

Although Nigeria's economy has performed much better in recent years than in the late 1970s or mid-1980s, oil prices remained the number one determinant of the country's growth pattern (Price Water Cooper, 2019). Nigeria emerged from recession in 2017 with a growth rate of 0.8%, driven mainly by the oil sector. With fiscal revenues below 7% of GDP, increased public spending widened the deficit, financed mainly by borrowing (African Development Bank Group, 2019). Fig 2. 5 below shows the overall national debt as of the last quarter 2023.

NG Government Debt - USD Million



Source: tradingeconomics.com | Debt Management Office, Nigeria

Figure 2.5 Nigerian debt figures. Source: Nigeria Government Debt (tradingeconomics.com)

At the end of June 2019, total public debt was \$83.9 billion—14.6% higher than the year before. The debt represented 20.1% of GDP, up from 17.5% in 2018 (African Development Bank Group, 2019). Domestic public debt amounted to \$56.7 billion, and external public debt \$27.2 billion. The share of bilateral debt in total debt was estimated at 12.1%, and that of Eurobonds at 40.8%. High debt service payments, estimated at more than half of federally collected revenues, created fiscal risks for the country (African Development Bank Group, 2019). However, there is an improvement as Nigeria's government debt stood at 108,229.34 USD million in the fourth quarter of 2023, marking a decline from the third quarter's 114,350 USD million (Trading Economics, 2023).

Poverty remains widespread as the poverty rate in over half of Nigeria's 36 states remains above the national average. In 2023, Nigeria's inflation surged to a record high of 24.7% annually, fuelled by increasing food and energy prices, the removal of the petrol subsidy, loose monetary policy, and naira depreciation (World Bank, 2024). This spike in inflation outpaced nominal earnings, resulting in an additional 10 million Nigerians falling into poverty (World Bank, 2024). The World Bank projects that by the end of 2024, approximately 40.7% of Nigerians will live below the international poverty line. High poverty reflects rising unemployment, estimated at 23.1% in 2018, up from 14.2% in 2016 (African Development Bank Group, 2019). The unemployment rate, representing the share of the labour force actively seeking work, was 4.2% in Q2 2023, up from 4.1% in Q1 2023 (National Bureau of Statistics,

2023). Among men, the rate was 3.5%, and among women, it was 5.9%. In urban areas, the unemployment rate was 5.9%, while in rural areas, it was 2.5%. For 15-24-year-olds, the rate was 7.2%. By educational attainment, the unemployment rates were 8.0% for post-secondary, 5.4% for upper secondary, 3.7% for lower secondary, 3.0% for primary, and 2.5% for those without formal education. Nevertheless, Real GDP growth is projected to rise to 2.9% in 2020 and 3.3% in 2021, depending on the implementation of the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (2017–2020), which emphasises economic diversification (African Economic Outlook, 2019). Similarly, The International Monetary Fund, IMF, reiterates its forecast that Nigeria's economy, as measured by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), will grow by 2.5 per cent in 2020 (IMF, 2020).

With its current population figure and with over 65% of that figure being below the age of 35, Nigeria has been faced with the task of making a policy change as no country with the abundant potential and size in land and population can afford to maintain a status as a growing economy on a single commodity (oil) (SMEDAN, 2013). Moreover, the unpredictability of Nigeria's growth continually imposes substantial welfare costs on Nigerian households. The onslaught of the oil price shock in 2014 presented the government with a new and potentially crucial challenge of building an institutional and policy framework capable of withstanding the unpredictability of the oil sector and supporting the sustainability of the non-oil economy (World Bank, 2019). Since the oil sector is not labour-intensive, coupled with the weak state of the non-oil economy, a quarter of the workforce was unemployed in 2018 (World Bank, 2019; PWC, 2019). Accordingly, World Bank (2019) asserts that while Nigeria has made some progress in socio-economic terms in recent years, its human capital development remains weak due to under-investment. The country ranked 152 of 157 countries in the World Bank's 2018 Human Capital Index. Additionally, even though Nigeria has attained significant progress in socioeconomic terms in recent years, its human capital development remains unimpressive due to a lack of investment; thus, the country ranked 152 of 157 countries in the World Bank's 2018 Human Capital Index (World Bank, 2019). Fig 2.6 below summarises Nigeria's real GDP and inflation rates.

- Real GDP (Annual percent change) -3.3
- Inflation rate, average consumer prices (Annual per cent change) 26.3

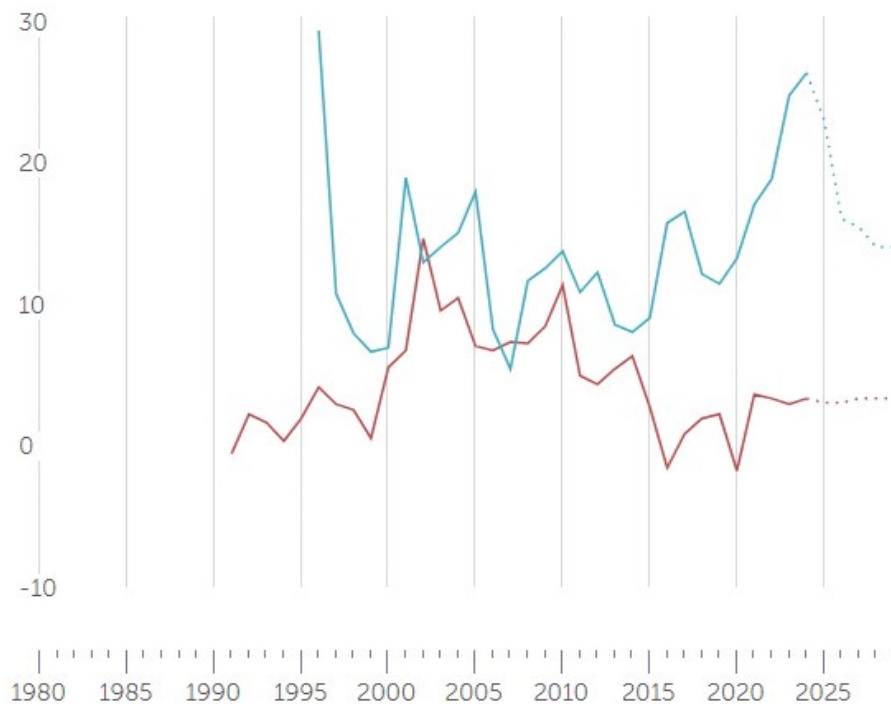


Figure 2.6 Representation of Nigeria's GDP, inflation rate and average consumer prices. Source: <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/NGA>

A country's economy significantly influences its national business environment. Economic conditions affect consumer purchasing power, business costs, and investment decisions, shaping overall business performance, competitiveness, and market stability. The next section carries out a pestle analysis of the Nigerian business environment.

2.3.1 Pestle analysis of factors affecting the Nigerian business environment

A business environment is defined as forces, dimensions, factors and measures that directly or indirectly impact a business organisation's operations (Dogara, 2015). Gareth (2004) defines a business environment as the enabling conditions for economic competitiveness. He further reports that the business and investment climate, policy, institutional, regulatory, and legal factors influence incentives for private sector investment. Similarly, the nexus of policies, infrastructure, geographic features, human resources, and institutions that determine the efficiency with which various organisations operate can be tagged as the business environment of that context (Eifert et al., 2005). Business environments primarily have the potential to determine the growth and success of a firm or its failure (Dogara, 2015; World Bank, 2009). These determinants could be government policies, interest rates on capital, the nature of market competition or technological sophistication. The Nigerian business environment is peculiar compared to other business environments globally. A PESTLE analysis is done below to understand the Nigerian business environment.

2.3.1.1 Political Factor

For about 15 years, Nigeria has operated under uninterrupted civilian governments. With more than 20 political parties, the country operates a multi-party system. However, there are two dominant and opposing political parties. During the last fifteen years, there have been changes in governments. The last general elections, which saw the ruling party back to power, took place in 2023. Thus, by 2027, Nigeria will be preparing for another election as the government adopts a four-year tenure system. Communication and media sectors usually record huge turnover during elections as they are usually characterised by excessive spending. For businesses involved in contracts, the political nature of the country might be disadvantageous to some extent, as there is a tendency for existing projects or contracts to be annulled if there is a change in government, mainly if governance changes to a different political party. This has been attributed to a lack of change management or continuity practices in the public sector. Generally, Nigeria seems to be politically stable save for the terrorist uprising in the North and agitations by militant groups in the South. These unrests have impacted the business environment negatively as the country has seen massive withdrawals of significant oil and gas companies from the affected regions.

Nigeria's corruption perception index is 25 points out of 100 on the 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index reported by Transparency International. The Corruption Index in Nigeria averaged 21.48 Points from 1996 until 2023 (Transparency International, 2024). In 2015, Nigeria ranked 136 out of 175 least corrupt countries. By 2023, Nigeria ranked 145 out of 185 least corrupt countries (Transparency International, 2024). Business confidence in Nigeria plummeted from 26.60 in February to 6.60 in March 2020 and then grew to 9.8% in February 2024 (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2024). The following section looks at the effects of economic factors on the Nigerian business environment.

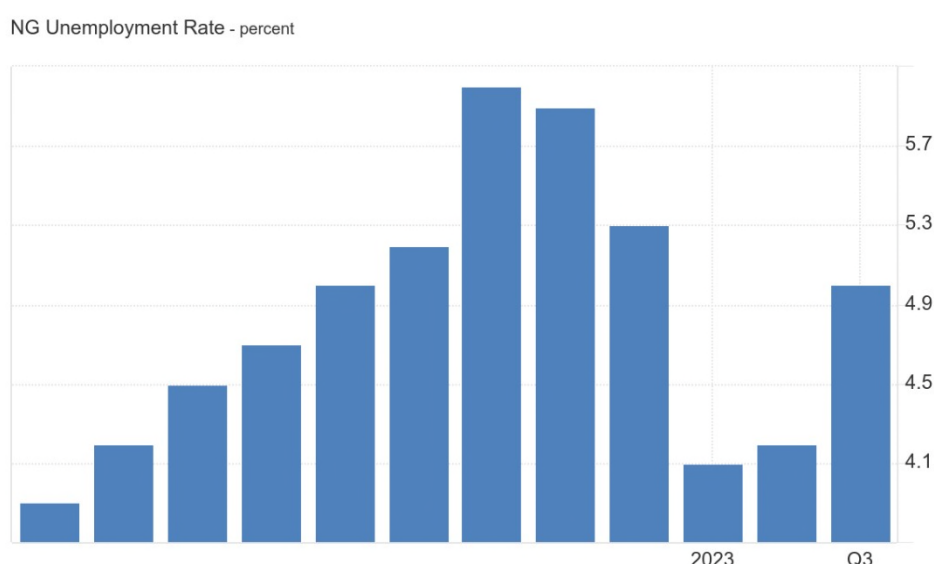
2.3.1.2 Economic Factors

Because the country operates on federalism with federal, state and local governments as the three tiers of government, revenue is distributed to the state and local governments by the Federal government. Due to recent economic instability, revenue disbursed to state and local governments hardly cover their recurrent or capital expenditure. Thus, most states are faced with the inability to pay workers' salaries for months unending. The resultant negative effect of this for businesses is the lack of disposable income amongst residents, as people prefer to spend the available finances on their basic needs. The reduction in people's spending power is mostly felt by businesses in the service sectors, and regardless of the economic situation, retail and manufacturing businesses still find themselves being patronised.

The foreign exchange rate is a major issue for businesses in Nigeria as it is quite high when measured against major currencies. The official rate stood at N370/380 to \$1 as of March 2020, whilst the parallel

market rate stands at N410/415 to \$1. The exchange rate as of September 2024 is N1638 to \$1, whilst the parallel market rate stands at N1,700 to \$1. This is quite bad as many retail businesses import a large portion of their products. For the few companies that export products to foreign countries, this is a good period for them as profit margins are quite high. Furthermore, high exchange rates result in a steady rise in the prices of consumer goods, which also results in an increase in the inflation rate. Therefore, individuals and businesses are forced to cut down their budgets and reduce their purchasing power.

As stated in section 2.3, unemployment is at an all-time high. Cyclical Unemployment in Nigeria is a result of a decrease in the demand for goods and services. It is caused by the economic recession or situation that forces companies to terminate a few workers to reduce the costs of running their businesses in Nigeria. However, the high rate of unemployment means that businesses have access to cheap labour. Thus, it is cost-effective for labour-intensive businesses to be in Nigeria. Statistics for unemployment in Nigeria are shown in Fig 2.7 below.



Source: tradingeconomics.com | National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria

Figure 2.7 Unemployment rate in Nigeria. [Nigeria Unemployment Rate \(tradingeconomics.com\)](https://tradingeconomics.com)

In Africa and particularly Nigeria, the supply of infrastructure is quite low. Poor infrastructure increases transaction costs and makes African firms less competitive when compared to their international counterparts. The costs of transportation, logistics, telecommunication, water, electricity, security, and bribes are high, and firms suffer great losses due to transportation problems, power and water outages and crime (Bah & Fang, 2015; Lutz & Ndikumana, 2008).

However, the 2020 report by the World Bank sees Nigeria ranking 131 out of 190 countries on the ease of doing business index. This indicates an upward movement by 15 places from the 2019 ranking of

146(World Bank, 2019). The report states that the country improved in eight indicators, especially with the ease of dealing with construction permits. This means that it has become easier to build warehouses, factories, etc. (including obtaining the necessary licenses and permits) in Nigeria (World Bank, 2019). Given this upward movement in the overall ease of doing business ranking, there is no doubt that the government is making efforts to improve the business environment and investor confidence, which will automatically attract more investors into the country.

2.3.1.3 Socio-Cultural Factors

Nigeria, with its diverse cultures and multi-ethnic background, experiences significant socio-cultural impacts on its business environment. These factors include health consciousness, population growth rate, age distribution, career attitudes, and emphasis on safety nets. The culture of its people profoundly influences business activities and operations, shaping the Nigerian business landscape. Because management practices cannot exist in a vacuum, socio-cultural factors and their impacts on businesses and management have become a recurring topic in cross-cultural management literature (Munene et al., 2000).

Going by Hofstede (1980), collectivism and power distance are the main cultural values that lay the framework for the discussion of the socio-cultural context of businesses in Nigeria. As a collectivist society, with a score of 30% on the individualism dimension, Nigerians find meaning in life through social interactions. There is a high level of interdependence amongst members of a society. People identify with groups in which they are embedded: participating in shared ways of life. The collectivist nature of the Nigerian society is eminent in the fact that people pledge long-term commitment to these groups they belong to, and each member is expected to assume responsibility for one another. These groups are often linked as extended families and members share moral and material support. It is an unspoken moral rule for employed and well doing members of these families to provide for and support the elderly and less privileged members.

In business settings, recruitment and selection, promotion, reward as well as layoffs take employee in-group into consideration, employee/employer relationships are laid on moral terms like a family link (Reiche et al;2019). However, Samuel Aryee in Kamoche et al. (2004) states that this undermines the much-encouraged meritocracy in a bureaucratic organisation as it promotes particularistic rather than universalistic business practices. Two reasons may help explain such a practice. First, managers may consider having a moral obligation to help their less fortunate relatives or tribesmen. In Nigeria, there is a belief that the organisation is an extension of the extended family. Hence, like in families or in-groups, employees expect the organisation to cater to their material and socio-emotional needs. In cases of loss, childbirth, marriages or ceremonies, there is a moral obligation on organisations to offer donations either in cash or services to employees.

As Kuada (1994) puts it, “the dominant leadership style is authoritarian-benevolence. This is characterized by close supervision of subordinates, elaborate instructions on all matters, and disapproval of deviations from such instructions”. Due to the centralization of authority, employees are faced with the choice of having a good relationship with supervisors and managers or risk having a successful career. Managers and supervisors develop some sort of patron-client relationship with subordinates where subordinates who are loyal and compliant to their agenda are provided with more opportunities, privileges, rewards and protection (Kuada, 1994).

2.3.1.4 Technological Factor

Reports state that Africa had the highest business discontinuation rate compared with other continents in 2015 and 2016 (Global entrepreneurship monitor, 2017). A few studies have pointed out possible factors that might have contributed to this phenomenon. They have attributed a large proportion of failed businesses to lack of technology (You et al., 2019). In recent times, Nigerians are rapidly becoming computer savvy. A vast number of Nigerian youths are computer literate. Nevertheless, personal computers and other technological devices remain a luxury to some people. However, smartphones seem to be bridging the digital divide between different categories of people. With smartphones, people are fast becoming active users of the internet. There are currently an estimated 103 million internet users in Nigeria with internet penetration amounting to 55.4% of the population in 2023. Fig 2.8 below shows a comparison of internet usage among African countries.

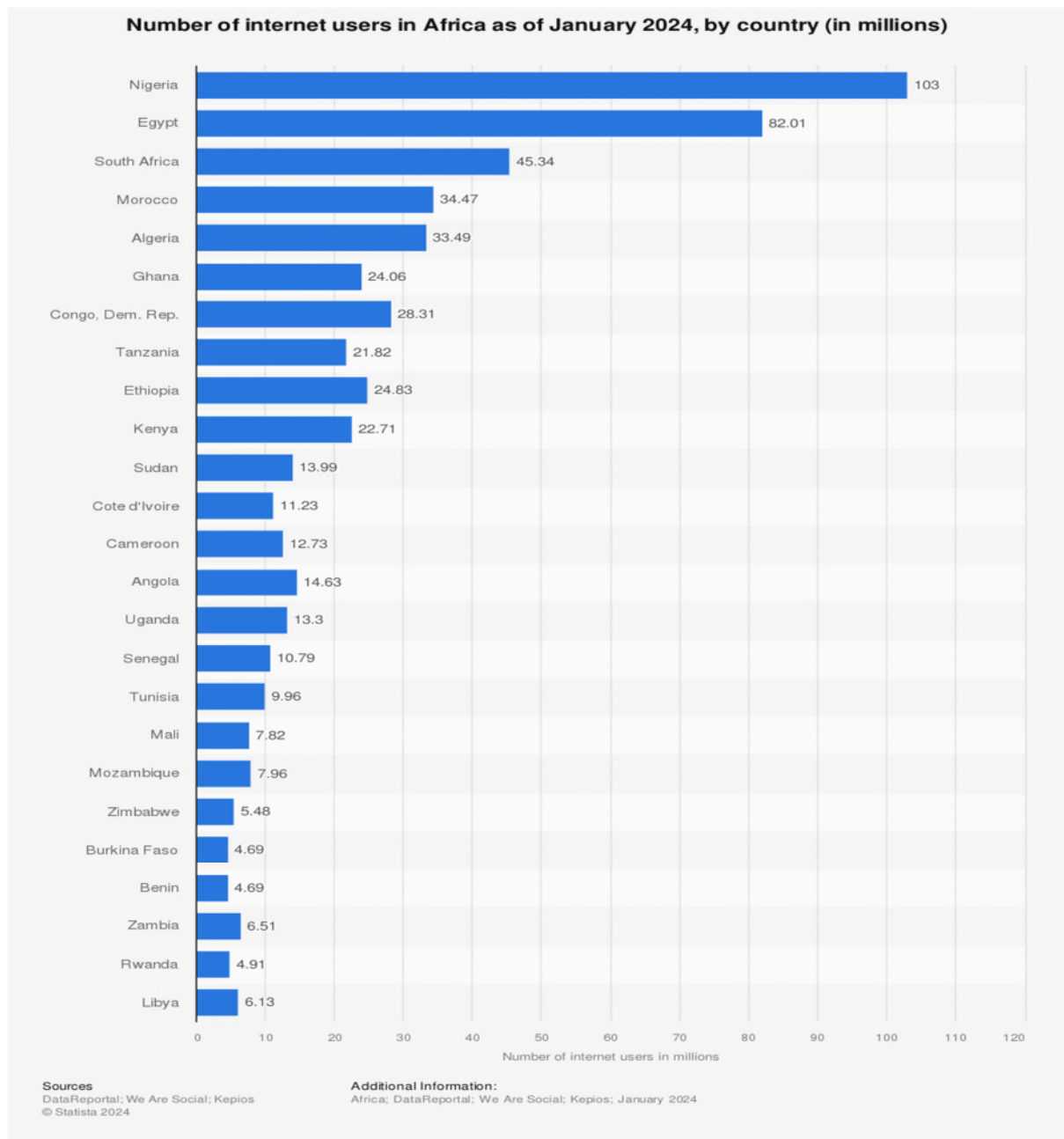


Figure 2.8 Number of internet users in Nigeria source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/183849/internetusers-nigeria>

In Nigeria, the proliferation of social media and internet usage has significantly aided businesses in reaching their target audiences. The prevalence of online advertising has democratised marketing, allowing even small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to generate and disseminate content without the necessity of third-party intermediaries. This capacity for direct customer engagement empowers businesses to control their outreach strategies, thereby creating a more equitable competitive landscape between large corporations and smaller enterprises.

2.3.1.5 Legal Factors

In Nigeria, the legal national minimum wage was set at thirty thousand naira per month in 2020. From 2018 to 2020, the average minimum wage was twenty-six thousand naira, peaking at thirty thousand naira in 2019, reaching a low of eighteen thousand naira in 2018 and is currently set at seventy-seven thousand naira in 2024. Despite this, many organisations pay less than the minimum wage, partly due to intense labour market competition driven by high unemployment rates and the absence of an effective enforcement body. Nigeria's tax laws are regularly updated to eliminate outdated provisions and simplify new regulations. Key taxes affecting businesses and individuals include Personal Income Tax and Company Income Tax. The country employs a progressive tax system for Personal Income Tax, where higher earnings lead to higher tax rates. Taxes may be direct or indirect and can be levied on individual incomes, corporate incomes, assets, and transactions. The enforcement of tax laws is managed by three main authorities: the Federal Inland Revenue Service, the State Internal Revenue Service, and the Local Government Revenue Committee.

In Nigeria, businesses are legally obligated to pay applicable taxes, with penalties imposed for noncompliance. The Federal and State Inland Revenue Services have introduced an integrated tax system, making tax evasion nearly impossible. Businesses must register with these services and obtain a tax identification number to open corporate bank accounts (Mark, 2014). However, business owners have expressed frustration with the imposition of various taxes and levies on the same income or profit base by different tax authorities. This multiplicity of taxes imposes significant costs, creates uncertainty for investors, and undermines Nigeria's global competitiveness. The excessive taxation contributes to Nigeria's low ranking on the ease of doing business index and adversely impacts SMEs.

2.3.1.6 Environmental Factors

These include environmental aspects such as weather, climate, and climate change, drought; earthquake, and erosion which may affect industries like tourism, farming, and insurance (Comfort & Teryisa, 2017). Growing awareness of the potential impacts of climate change is affecting how companies operate and the products they offer, both creating new markets and diminishing or destroying existing ones. Small businesses are globally recognized as vital drivers of economic success, contributing significantly to job creation, sales, and tax revenue (World Bank, 2020). In Nigeria, they are particularly important for providing employment to low-skilled workers (SMEDAN, 2019). However, according to SMEDAN, 80% of Nigerian SMEs fail before their fifth anniversary, often due to tax-related issues such as multiple taxations and excessive tax burdens. Government policies frequently fail to account for the unique challenges faced by SMEs, treating them similarly to large corporations, which exacerbates their difficulties (SMEDAN, 2019). The next section examines the definition of SME in the Nigerian context.

2.4 Definition of SMEs

The definition of SMEs is typically tailored to each based on the role of SMEs in the economy and the specific policies and programs agencies or institutions empowered to develop SMEs. For example, what constitutes a small business in developed economies like Japan, Germany, and the USA might be classified as medium or large in a developing country such as Nigeria (Abosede et al., 2016). Additionally, SME definitions can vary over time and between agencies, reflecting changes in policy focus and economic conditions.

The Survey Report on MSMEs in Nigeria (2012) distinguishes small and medium enterprises based on asset size and workforce. Small enterprises were defined as those with total assets, excluding land and buildings, between 5 million and 50 million Naira and a workforce of 10 to 49 employees (Abosede et al., 2016). Medium enterprises, in contrast, have assets between 50 million and 500 million Naira and employ between 50 and 199 individuals. Despite these criteria, the number of employees remains the most used metric for SME classification due to its ease of measurement and availability. The Commission of the European Communities (1992) acknowledges the necessity for flexibility in defining SMEs due to industrial and regional differences. According to the European Commission (2005, 2008), medium enterprises have fewer than 250 employees and a turnover of less than €50 million; small enterprises have fewer than 50 employees and a turnover below €10 million; and micro enterprises have fewer than ten employees and a turnover of less than €2 million. However, studies by Turner, Ledwith, and Kelly (2010) indicate that these ranges do not align with observed data, where the average turnover per employee is approximately €100,000, not €200,000. They further argue that the European Commission's primary measure of size—employee count—suggests a transition from micro to small enterprises occurs with around 15 employees rather than 10.

However, their findings confirm that the transition from small to medium enterprises occurs at around 50 employees when many companies face a growth crisis. Various scholars and institutions have made notable agitations regarding the number of workers employed in an enterprise. According to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2009), a business in the manufacturing sector is considered small if it employs fewer than 100 employees. Although no official definition exists for medium-sized enterprises, McMahon (2001) suggests that businesses with 100 to 199 employees are generally categorised as medium-sized. A 2020 Central Bank of Nigeria report defines SMEs as businesses with a turnover of less than N100 million per annum and fewer than 300 employees. The report also indicates that 96% of Nigerian businesses are SMEs, compared to 53% in the US and 65% in Europe. Therefore, SMEs play a huge role in curbing unemployment in Nigeria.

2.5 SMEs and their role in curbing unemployment in Nigeria

According to the last collaborative survey by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and the National Bureau of Statistics in 2013, the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector employed 59,741,211 people, representing 84.02% of the total labour force. This sector contributes 54% to Nigeria's GDP. Given its economic significance, the MSME sector warrants substantial academic and practitioner research. Despite notable growth, challenges remain, including the struggle to access funding, lack of skilled workforce, multiplicity of taxes, and high business costs. The 2010 survey by the National Bureau of Statistics and SMEDAN highlighted that the SME sector is poised to absorb up to 80% of jobs, improve per capita income, add value to raw materials, boost export earnings, enhance capacity utilisation in crucial industries, and drive economic expansion and GDP growth.

Based on the above, SMEs in Nigeria need to be evaluated to unlock their growth and development potential. Such an evaluation will provide a status report on the impact of existing funding and support strategies on SMEs, guiding policy assessment, redirection, and formulation, especially in the current economic climate. The following section explores how SMEs contribute to economic growth and development.

2.6 SMEs and their contribution to Economic growth and Development in Nigeria

To diversify revenue generation, policymakers in Nigeria have increasingly focused on the MSME sector as a crucial contributor to the national economy's growth. Over the past twelve years, significant efforts have been made to bolster this sector, including the establishment of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), the implementation of the National Enterprise Development Programme (NEDEP), and the creation of MSME national and state councils (SMEDAN, 2013). These initiatives recognise the SME sector as the backbone of developed economies and a critical contributor to employment, economic, and export growth (PWC, 2019; World Bank, 2020; Hamilton & Nwokah, 2009). In South Africa, SMEs contribute 52% to national GDP, account for 60% of employment, and represent 91% of businesses. In Nigeria, SMEs account for 84% of employment and 96% of businesses, contributing approximately 48% to national GDP over the last five years. Around 17.4 million SMEs constitute about 50% of industrial jobs and nearly 90% of the manufacturing sector by the number of enterprises (PWC, 2019).

Hamilton and Nwokah (2009) and Tom et al. (2016) emphasise SMEs' significant role in Nigeria's economic development. SMEs contribute through the production of various goods and services, job creation at relatively low capital costs, reducing income disparities, and developing a skilled and semiskilled workforce for future industrial expansion. They also create linkages between economically,

socially, and geographically diverse sectors, enhance technical, technological, and entrepreneurial capacities, and promote industrial diffusion and regional balance (Hamilton and Nwokah, 2009; SMEDAN, 2019; Tom et al., 2016). Research by SMEDAN (2019) indicates that Nigeria has an estimated 41,543,028 MSMEs, with 99.8% being micro-enterprises, 0.17% small enterprises, and 0.004% medium enterprises. Small enterprises predominantly operate in education, manufacturing, and wholesale/retail trade, making up 68% of the sector. Medium enterprises focus on manufacturing, wholesale/retail trade, human health and social work. Micro-enterprises are mainly involved in wholesale/retail trade, agriculture, and other services, constituting 76.3% of the sector. To further understand and support SMEs, PwC is conducting its first survey series on Nigerian SMEs. The study aims to identify the challenges faced by the sector, explore opportunities for growth and investment, provide solutions to mitigate risks and assess the outlook for SMEs across various industries. The following section analyses existing literature on challenges faced by SMEs in Nigeria.

2.7 Challenges of Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria

Despite the significant contributions of SMEs to the Nigerian economy, several persistent challenges hinder their growth and development. Over 25% of Nigerian SMEs fail within their first five years of operation (CBN, 2006). Key challenges include:

- **Limited Financing**

A National Bureau of Statistics survey identified finance as the main challenge for 73.24% of MSMEs (Tom, 2016). Only 4.2% of over 41 million MSMEs have accessed reasonable loans and overdrafts from banks and other financial institutions. New entrants or start-ups find funding impossible to secure (SMEDAN, 2014). As a result, SME owners often rely on personal savings, donations, or loans from family and friends. High interest rates from non-conventional banks and stringent conditions set by financial institutions further complicate access to financing (Essien, 2006). However, the government has established various financing schemes, including industry and commerce banks, agricultural banks, loan schemes, and microfinance banks, such as low-interest loans from the Bank of Industry (BOI), the Bank of Agriculture, and CBN SME Initiatives. Lagos State also contributes through the Lagos State Entrepreneurial Trust Fund (LETf).

- **Lack of Infrastructure**

The poor state of infrastructure is a significant obstacle to SME growth. Nigeria's erratic power supply forces companies to rely on expensive diesel-operated generators, significantly increasing operational costs (Tom et al., 2016). Additionally, poor road access and inadequate

social amenities hinder SME operations. Though the government is responsible for providing an enabling environment, SMEs often must assume this responsibility, using funds to ensure basic amenities like power and comfortable working environments. Nigeria has the potential to generate about 12,522 megawatts of electric power but currently generates only about 4,000 megawatts, which is insufficient (USAID, 2020). The Minister of Power, Works, and Housing highlighted Nigeria's infrastructural deficit, noting that by 2016, only 28,980 km of the 193,200 km road network had been constructed in 55 years of independence (Vanguard, 2017). A 2015 World Health Organisation report indicated that Nigeria has Africa's most minor safe roads, accounting for one in four road deaths. Nigeria's road network also lags regional and global peers; for instance, in 2015, South Africa had 750,000 km of roads compared to Nigeria's 200,000 km. The poor state and limited size of Nigerian roads make transporting goods and services a significant challenge for businesses.

- **Government Policies**

The Federal Government's primary objective in supporting small businesses includes mobilising local resources, mitigating rural-urban migration, creating employment opportunities, and ensuring the even dispersal of industrial enterprises across Nigeria (Trade Journal, 1995). The overarching goal is to assist indigenous entrepreneurs in establishing and growing into industrial giants. However, government macroeconomic policies have been inconsistent due to political instability. Although initiatives exist to increase loanable funds to SMEs, provide loans to rural borrowers and the agricultural sector, and cap lending rates below 21%, implementation remains questionable (Tom, 2016). Fiscal policies such as personal income tax reductions, tax reliefs for manufacturing companies, and establishing Export Processing Zones face similar implementation challenges. The Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission Act (1995), replacing the restrictive Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree, aimed to encourage foreign investment inflow, yet results have been negligible. Even with government-subsidized fertiliser for farmers, access at approved rates remains problematic. Efforts like the Ministry of Solid Minerals to diversify export revenue and the Ministry of Women Affairs to promote women's development activities have yielded limited progress (Isimoya, 2005).

SMEs face significant bureaucratic hurdles from government agencies such as the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), and Customs. For instance, obtaining NAFDAC approval for food items or drugs can take years, often requiring organisations to pay up to five times the official price to expedite approval. Despite recent government initiatives to ease doing business, substantial issues

remain. While government policies and efforts exist to support SMEs, inconsistent implementation, bureaucratic challenges, and heavy tax burdens hinder the sector's growth.

- **Inadequate Management Capacity**

Like large organisations, SMEs face environmental conditions that are familiar drivers of strategic decisions. Globalisation and technological advancement subject SMEs to rapid, novel, and discontinuous changes prevalent in the global business world (Abosedo et al., 2016). Owners and managers recognise the threats these changes pose and are becoming agents of change, adapting traditional methods to prepare for and manage the rapidly changing environments (Lynch, 2018; Thompson et al., 2017; David & David, 2015). David and David (2015) argue that adopting a more formal management process can positively impact a firm's growth and development, enhancing its size and capability. Like their global counterparts, Nigerian SMEs require less sophisticated strategic or specialist management skills than large corporations. However, SME managers/owners often fail to adequately plan, organise, coordinate, and control available human and material resources (Tom et al., 2016). Strategic management, which involves developing sustainable competitive advantages and value creation (Ramachandran, Mukherji & Sud, 2006; Abosedo et al., 2016), is a process of formulating and implementing policies and practices based on resource availability and the assessment of external and internal environmental factors (Nag et al., 2007).

Strategic management is crucial for organisational success as it defines goals and objectives and aids in developing long-term policies and plans to achieve them (Abosedo et al., 2016). The SME sector continues to struggle with Human Resource Management (HRM) policies, with little attention given to how these challenges could lead to business failure. The succeeding section addresses Nigerian labour laws and HRM in Nigeria.

2.8 Human Resource Management in Nigeria

It is not far-fetched that Human resources play a crucial role in national and organisational development. Within any organisation, human resources are responsible for effectively utilising other inputs, such as capital and technology, throughout production (Onodogu, 2012). They are often considered the lifeblood of an organisation, with a firm's success heavily reliant on its human resources (Anyim et al., 2011; Fajana et al., 2011; Onodogu, 2012). Despite technological advancements, human resources remain the most essential and adaptable component of an organisation (Fajana et al., 2011). Similarly, human resources integrate various resources in the right mix to formulate relevant strategies for achieving the firm's objectives (Jabbour & Santos, 2008; Sonnenberg et al., 2011). This crucial feature of human resources is vital for making informed decisions and effectively addressing internal and external challenges (Sonnenberg et al., 2011). Moreover, the growing complexity and volatility of

the global business environment underscore firms' increasing reliance on their human resources. Given that individuals differ in their aspirations, needs, motivations, and interests, managing human resources can be complex and problematic, as these factors may affect behaviour at work and potentially conflict with organisational goals (Sonnenberg et al., 2011). Human Resource Management (HRM), strategic management, and planning are essential for aligning employee needs with organisational objectives (Jabbour & Santos, 2008; Onodogu, 2012). Positive employer-employee relations are vital for Nigerian and global economies' stable and sustainable development. However, many organisations, notably Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), face challenges due to inadequate funding for human resource management research and development (Fajana & Ige, 2007; Fajana, 2011; Onodugo, 2012).

Human Resource Management (HRM) policies and practices are implemented in economic, political, legal, and social contexts. Therefore, managers and organisations must have substantial cultural and historical knowledge of local conditions to understand the processes, philosophies, and challenges associated with national HRM models (Hofstede, 1993). As foreign and local investments in Nigeria continue to increase, firms must develop capabilities and leverage local competencies. Acquiring knowledge about and adapting to crucial HRM practices, as well as understanding the factors influencing HRM in Nigeria, will become increasingly crucial for business operations and success in the country (Fajana et al., 2011; Anyim et al., 2011). Consequently, organisational practices and operations must align with the broader external cultural environment.

HRM was introduced into Nigerian literature in the 1940s during the colonial era with industrialisation and commercialisation and later evolved into wage employment (Fajana et al., 2011). Despite significant growth since then, HRM in Nigeria has been marked by a lack of professionalism and specialisation (Fajana, 2009; Fajana et al., 2011; Anyim et al., 2011). Several factors contribute to the challenges faced by HRM practices in Nigeria, including socio-cultural elements. Notably, over-reliance on religion, culture, language, educational qualifications, and gender as criteria for employment are prominent features of HRM in Nigeria (Fajana et al., 2011). Consequently, an individual's employment opportunities are significantly influenced by these variables. Although Nigeria has an excess labour supply, a talent shortage makes it increasingly difficult to attract, develop, and retain skilled individuals (Fajana, 2009).

Despite the push for high performance driving the need for effective management, HRM in Nigeria is still considered nascent and under-researched (Fajana & Ige, 2007). Additionally, a lack of indigenous and comprehensive HRM models exacerbates the issue. HRM practices in Nigeria are often characterised by ethnocentrism, with many principles and practices borrowed from Western countries (Fajana et al., 2011). Consequently, HRM practices in Nigeria reflect a Westernized approach, albeit

with some cultural and institutional adaptations. As Azolukwam and Perkins (2009), cited in Fajana et al. (2011), suggest, organisations that are sensitive to individuals' socialisation and aware of the economic, historical, political, and social contexts can effectively adapt HRM practices from their parent cultures to developing countries like Nigeria.

Several factors impact HRM practices in Nigeria, including a shortage of internal manpower to handle all necessary tasks. The complexity of the current business environment, driven by globalisation, technological advancements, and deregulation, often surpasses the capacity of many companies, making it challenging to complete specialised projects without increasing the workforce (Olofin & Folawewo, 2006). Historically, some Nigerian organisations have emphasised learning and development to equip employees with the skills needed for a global business environment (Fajana et al., 2011). However, recent trends indicate a shift towards HR practices borrowed from foreign models, such as contract or temporary employment and outsourcing, which reduce the number of permanent employees on the payroll (Eboh & Agu, 2007). This shift can lead to a loss of employee commitment, loyalty, and psychological attachment. In Nigeria, organisational control rests solely with management, which effectively manages and aligns the workforce with organisational goals (Eboh & Agu, 2007; Fajana et al., 2011).

Although recruitment and selection processes are formally structured and based on objective criteria like job experience, education, and skills (Eboh & Agu, 2007), there are frequent complaints about unfair practices. Critics argue that hiring decisions are often influenced by personal connections or political affiliations rather than merit (Kamoche et al., 2004). In practice, securing employment often depends more on personal networks than qualifications, particularly in the public sector and MSMEs (Anyim et al., 2011). Although systematic studies on the impact of nepotism and corruption on the hiring process in Nigeria are lacking, anecdotal evidence suggests that employees frequently share ethnic backgrounds with senior management. This practice, sometimes viewed as a moral duty rather than nepotism (Takyi-Asiedu, 1993), can lead to biased managerial behaviour. Although there is no empirical proof that “ethnic proximity” between managers and employees could influence managers’ behaviour towards employees, one can speculate that managers will act differently toward employees based on their ethnic groups (Constant D. Beugre in Kamoche et al., 2004). Hence, employees are divided into in-group members and out-group with In-group members being employees from the same ethnic group as the manager and out-group members, employees who are not from the same ethnic group as the manager (Kamoche et al., 2004). In-group members may enjoy preferential treatment, such as closer relationships with managers, better communication, job security, and more opportunities for training and development (Kamoche et al., 2004; Anyim et al., 2011).

Performance appraisal in Nigeria, as in many West African countries, often relies on written evaluations (Fajana et al., 2011). Research by Arthur et al. (1995) on HRM practices in West Africa found that supervisory ratings are the primary source of performance information, with limited employee input. Performance appraisals are rarely used for promotions or compensation decisions (Kamoche et al., 2004). Promotions are typically based on seniority and may be influenced by ethnic and loyalty considerations, raising questions about the fairness of the evaluation process. In authoritarian environments, evaluations are often biased, with the supervisor's assessment prevailing (Waiguchu, 1999). The lack of strategic management and clear performance goals contributes to vague performance criteria, allowing subjectivity in the appraisal process (Arthur et al., 1995; Fajana, 2011). Given Nigeria's high-power distance, performance reviews are often based more on compliance than productivity (Arthur et al., 1995). Performance appraisals are generally conducted annually and are more common in medium and large organisations (Arthur et al., 1995).

Salaries and other benefits in Nigeria are typically determined through collective bargaining between unions and employers or employees' associations (Eboh & Agu, 2007; Anyim et al., 2011; Fajana et al., 2011). Private sector organisations generally offer higher basic wages compared to public sector organisations. The level of wages is influenced by factors such as skill requirements, job risk, time commitment, and experience, with wage scales often established through job analysis and evaluation (Fajana et al., 2011). The public sector's starting salaries are typically determined by educational qualifications and the organisation's entry point. Wage adjustments may also occur when the government mandates general wage increases for both sectors. For unskilled and semi-skilled employees, basic wages are set according to the national minimum wage, with trade unions, staff associations, and employers negotiating salaries based on this standard. The Nigerian business environment is highly unionised, with oil workers categorised into unions by their occupational roles: white-collar workers belong to the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN), while production workers are members of the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG). National unions such as the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) and the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) also exist.

Recently, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of learning and development within Nigerian organisations. Many companies now provide educational support and subsidies for job-related training, and some adjust wage structures to include allowances for education and training (Fajana et al., 2011). However, these training programs are often expected to be job-related and mutually beneficial to employers and employees.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter highlights the main features of the Nigerian Business Environment. It initially provides a general overview of Nigeria's background, including its history, geographical location, population, and culture. The subsequent part of the chapter addresses the role SMEs play as the drivers of employment and a huge contributor to economic growth in the country.

The chapter also uses a pestle analysis to indicate the Nigerian business environment and the challenges that are facing businesses. Finally, it sheds light on the status of HRM in the country while highlighting the impact of culture on HR practices such as recruitment and selection, performance appraisal and remuneration.

The background analysis of Nigeria reveals a complex interplay of factors influencing human resource management, as well as institutional, cultural, environmental, and economic factors. These factors highlight the challenges faced by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria, particularly in managing human resources and talent effectively. Studying Talent Management within Nigerian SMEs can enrich academic literature by providing insights into how these enterprises navigate resource constraints, cultural influences, and competitive pressures. This research could offer a nuanced understanding of talent management strategies tailored to the Nigerian context, potentially guiding future HR practices and policies in similar emerging economies.

The next chapter will present a critical review of the TM literature.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

Based on McKinsey's report, Talent Management (TM) has received wide recognition since it originated as a part of mainstream HR in the 1990s. The report highlighted the potential “war for talent” while noting the increasing scarcity of talent, reinforced by the aggressive competition surrounding the attraction and retention of talent. This situation leads to the creation of human capital advantage, which in turn results in the attainment of competitive advantage (Collings et al., 2018). The McKinsey Group anticipated significant HR challenges with effectively managing talent over the next decades (Thunnissen et al., 2013). Despite this outcry for the need to further invest in TM, focus has primarily been placed on individual and organisational levels instead of considering other contextual factors that have important implications for TM (Collings et al., 2018; Lanvin and Evans, 2017).

In line with the aims and objectives of this research, this chapter is split into two parts—the first part is a critical review of the TM literature by comparing relevant literature in this field. The last two decades have seen an increase in research on TM (Iles et al., 2010; Jawali et al, 2022; Mellahi & Collings, 2010; Nijs, Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, & Sels, 2014; Skuza & Scullion, 2021; Thunissen & Scullion, 2020), this chapter further aims to identify limitations within the TM literature as well as challenges or issues faced by SMEs on a global scale while exploring the definition, evolution, and growth of TM. It also investigates the approaches to TM and its philosophies.

The second part investigates TM in Africa, specifically in Nigeria. It examines HR/TM challenges from the point of view of Nigerian SMEs.

SMEs cannot afford to underestimate the importance of TM, as it creates an opportunity for organisations to enhance their effectiveness while maintaining a competitive advantage by recruiting, developing, nurturing, and retaining talent (Iles et al., 2010 & McDonnell et al., 2010).

3.2 Overview of Talent Management

At the core of TM is the concept of ‘talent’, which has become a crucial source for maximising organisational performance and is pivotal to the success of most businesses in the currently unstable, chaotic, and complex economic climate. Extensive and continuous research has produced numerous strategies, ideas, and models of TM, thus highlighting its usefulness and success so far.

There are numerous definitions and understandings of the concept of TM. Although existing literature suggests the lack of a universally accepted definition of the term, there are some consensuses on how it is defined. In their academic work, Lewis and Heckman (2006) highlight three schools of thought on TM: TM as HRM, TM as activities targeted at a talent pool, and TM as activities aimed at managing talent flow. They stated that a group of authors view TM as synonymous with HRM because they both involve people management throughout organisations. Iles et al. (2010) also state that TM involves exclusive HR activities such as attraction, recruitment, development, and retention. This view argues that talent equates to human capital and is essentially the same as HRM (Thunissen et al., 2013). However, Tarique and Schuler (2010) addressed three significant differences to highlight the difference between TM and HRM globally. First, they state that TM involves just two significant stakeholders: a firm and an employee, whereas HRM impacts more stakeholders, including society, a firm, employees, customers, and investors. Going further, they state that the third difference is that TM’s primary focus is on planning, staffing, appraising, compensating, and training, while HRM covers a range of more diversified and extensive practices (Tarique & Schuler 2010; Sparrow et al. 2017). Thus, while Tarique and Schuler disagree with the first school of thought stipulated by Lewis and Heckman (2006), they admit that TM is a part of HRM and can impact HRM activities.

The second stream of thought considers TM to be activities or processes undertaken to ensure adequate flow of a small segment of employees who belong to the “talent pool” (Lewis & Heckman 2006). From this perspective, TM activities such as recruitment, development and retention are focused on the talent pool instead of being general (Collings & Mellahi 2009). The third stream of thought focuses on developing talent by managing talent flow through the organisation (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Here, the focus is placed on the steady inflow of talent instead of a particular talent pool. The main objectives of TM practices are high-performing talents and talents with the most potential (Iles et al., 2010). However, these views have been criticised by authors who note that the first view is unnecessary as it depicts TM as a mere re-labelling of HRM (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). They also criticised the second school of thought as it replicates the function of succession planning and workforce management, offering neither the theory nor practice of TM. Lastly, they criticised the third view, stating that even though it emphasises the need to strategically manage all high-potential or high-performing employees by investing in the development of their talents on the one hand, it suggests that employees are generally of equal value on the other hand (Lewis and Heckman, 2006).

3.2.1 Strategic Talent Management (STM)

Following the three views of TM summarised by Lewis & Heckman (2006), as discussed in section 3.2, Collings & Mellahi (2009) highlighted a fourth view: Strategic Talent Management (STM). They defined STM as the process of systematically identifying key positions that can effectively contribute to the organisation’s quest for competitive advantage. Contrary to previous approaches that start with identifying talents, the focal point for this stream of thought is the systematic identification of critical positions (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). This stream of thought ensures that identified and attracted talents are committed to the organisation by proposing the implementation of a strategic orientation (HR architecture) that reflects carefully planned and executed HRM practices focused on improving motivation, performance and, subsequently, organisational effectiveness (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

According to Collings and Mellahi (2009), while Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) generally focuses on all employees within an organisation, STM focuses on employees who occupy or are being groomed to occupy pivotal talent positions. Different contributions by different groups of employees help distinguish between STM and SHRM. Fig 3.1 below outlines a theoretical model of strategic talent management designed by Collings and Mellahi, illustrating how systematically identifying key positions and strategically managing the talent within those positions can lead to sustained competitive advantage.

Fig 3.1 Theoretical model of STM

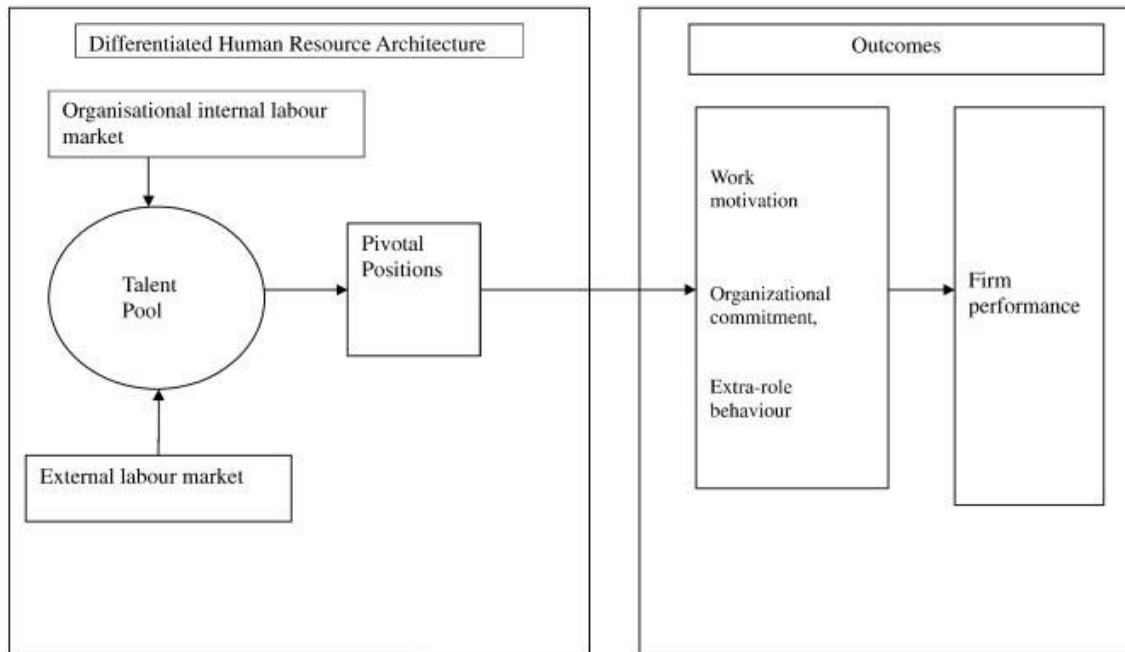


Figure 3.1 Strategic Talent Management. (Collings & Mellahi, 2009)

This model underscores the importance of a targeted approach to talent management. Strategic positions are identified first, and then efforts are concentrated on ensuring that these positions are filled with the right talent, thereby aligning TM practices with the organisation's overall strategic goals. Section 3.3 below gives an overview of talent management's emergence and evolution over the years.

3.3 The emergence and evolution of Talent Management

As predicted by the McKinsey Group in 1998, TM has become one of, if not the most crucial HR function and challenges facing businesses, governments, and countries in the 2000s (Sparrow et al. 2017). The McKinsey study highlighted a remarkable change from “The Old Reality”, which saw employees as a resource akin to machines and capital, to “The New Reality”, which views people with specific abilities and special skills as the major source of competitive advantage (Collings & Mellahi 2009). They stated that productivity, revenue, and profit were primarily driven by the top 20% of employees, without significant impact from average performers (Axelrod et al. 2001). Nonetheless, the study was updated in 2000 to demonstrate that the preceding three years had seen an increasing difficulty in recruiting, with 89% of managers highlighting recruitment as their primary challenge and 90% of managers expressing significant difficulty in retaining talents. Similarly, Keller and Meany (2017) report that in the last two decades, the demand for talent supersedes the supply by a wide margin, with one-third of managers identifying talent as their most pressing managerial concern. Also, the global financial crisis of 2008 further contributed to the increased complexity of TM. The crisis and the increase in global personnel mobility have resulted in heightened difficulties in recruiting and retaining talent, particularly in SMEs and emerging economies (Scullion et al., 2008). In 2013, there was a 42% increase

in employers competing to attract highly skilled individuals, rising from 20% in 2009 (CIPD & Hays 2013).

Multiple literature sources point to the fact that the increase in demand and decline in the supply of human capital capable of contributing to the growth and performance of firms in the early 1990s led to the development of TM as a field of interest to academics and practitioners (Aleksy et al., 2021). Subsequently, TM has continued to gather more interest as compelling global evidence demonstrates that firms are struggling to find enough of these talents, which they are in dire need of (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017; Jeff Schwartz, 2011; Kazmin et al., 2011). As Scullion & Collings (2011) state, seventy out of one hundred corporate leaders spend over 20% of their time on TM activities. Thus, TM has become a crucial factor in firms' decision-making processes. Heidrick & Struggles (2012), in their study, "Strategic Talent Management: The Emergence of a New Discipline", state that the heightened impact of global demographic trends, coupled with the persistent economic uncertainty and an increasing skills shortage, poses a triple threat to businesses on the talent front. As a pre-emptive measure, forward-thinking organisations are prioritising talent (particularly leadership talent). These organisations focus on allocating the task of aligning business and talent objectives and goals to senior talent executives, thus marking the emergence of a new discipline of Strategic Talent (Heidrick & Struggles, 2012).

Given the complexity and competitiveness of the global economy and business environment, organisations are now more than ever aware of the undeniable fact that their survival depends on talent (Collings et al., 2018; Scullion et al., 2008). Presently, talent management development is perceived as the driving force of business and one of the key factors in gaining and sustaining competitive advantage in organisations. A new study, "Future of Work" by Korn Ferry Institute, which includes a sweeping country-by-country analysis, suggests that by 2030, global human talent will experience a shortage of more than 85 million people. This shortage, if left unchecked by 2030, could result in unrealised revenues of approximately \$8.5 trillion (Korn Ferry, 2020). They further stated that Governments and organisations must make talent strategy a key priority and take steps now to educate, train, and upskill their existing workforces (Korn Ferry, 2020). Likewise, a study by the Manpower Group (2019) shows that Companies of all sizes, from large firms (250+ employees) to medium, small, and micro firms (less than ten employees), are struggling to attract talent.

The attraction and retention of skilled workers have never been more challenging, as 54% of companies globally report difficulty in finding suitable talent to fill positions (The Manpower Group, 2019). Thus, there appears to be a renewed emphasis on talent management, as over half of CEOs prioritise TM and subsequently allow for an increase in talent management budgets (CIPD, 2020). This

proves that organisations have begun to take strategic steps to ensure that talents are identified and properly managed to achieve the organisational goals and objectives.

Bersin (2006), in his retrospect of the evolution of the HR function in three stages, states that the first stage was in the 70s and 80s when HR was a business function tagged “personnel department” and was tasked solely with payroll, reward systems, and recruitment practices. This function evolved into Strategic HR, the second stage, in the 80s and 90s as organisations realised that the importance of HR surpassed the business function, encompassing essential activities like job role design, recruitment, training and development, performance management, and the design of compensation packages (Bersin, 2006). However, recent years have witnessed the third stage: TM. HR has now evolved into a common and important management practice, spanning areas such as workforce and succession planning, organisational capability, competency management, and performance management (Bersin, 2006). Here, the key focus is on how to achieve a more effective and efficient competency-based recruitment process, identifying talent’s ability and potential, maintaining an effective organisational culture, identifying competency gaps, designing and delivering training programs to fill these gaps, identifying pivotal positions to hire the right people, and identifying high performers to deploy appropriately (Bersin, 2006).

Bersin (2006) identifies the various stages that lead to effective TM, as shown in Figure 3.2 below.

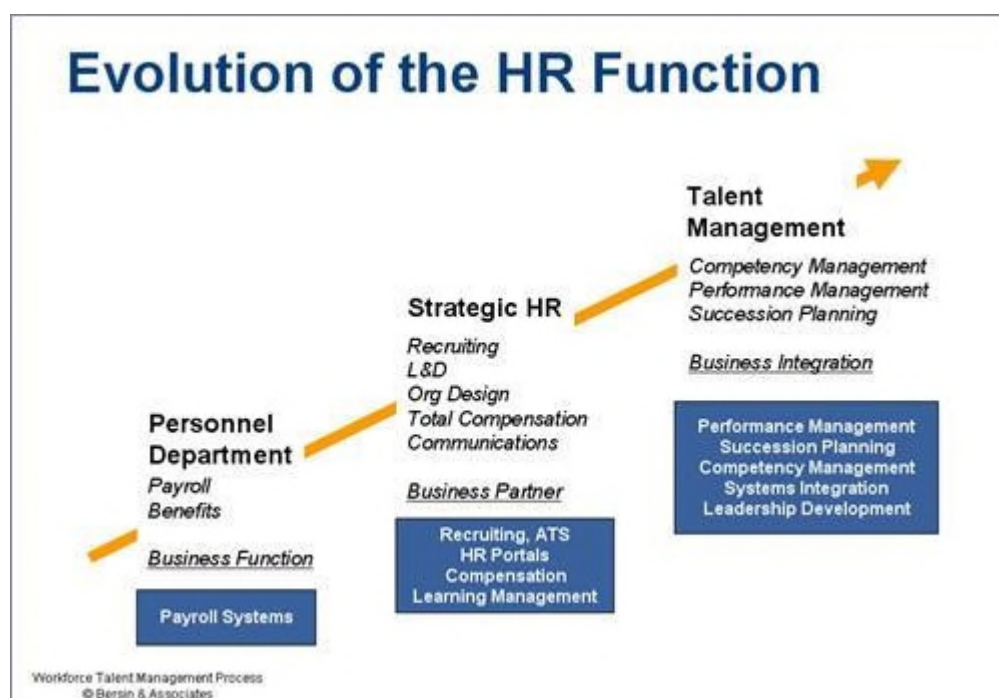


Figure 3.2 HR evolution. Source: Bersin, (2006)

Despite this evolution, there still exists ambiguity in the definitions of some recurring terms in this field of study, as TM is increasingly seen as an aspect of SHRM rather than a new element in the evolution of HR. These ambiguities are explored in the following section.

3.4 Themes in Talent Management

3.4.1 The Concept of Talent Management

The literature presents various definitions and understandings of TM from literature. A review of the TM literature review reveals no universal definition. However, Berger and Berger (2004) highlight three primary objectives of TM, which are outlined below:

- (i) To identify, select, and cultivate employees who inspire others to perform at a demonstrably superior level.
- (ii) To identify, develop, and assign employees who are suitably qualified to key roles within an organisation.
- (iii) To allocate available resources to employees, such as training, job assignments, coaching, and compensation based on the potential or actual contribution to achieving organisational excellence.

Table 3.1 below presents a range of TM definitions by various authors.

Source	Associated terms	Talent management definition
Rothwell (1994)	Succession executive development	Practices to ensure continuous leadership development to fill critical positions in an organisation, as well as enhance individual performance
Sloan, Hazucha, & Van Katwyk (2003)	Outcome	Strategic leadership management of talent to place the right person in the right job at the right time
Creelman (2004)	Succession planning	A "mindset" to effective succession planning
Pascal (2004)	Decision making	Managing the demand, supply and flow of talent through effective human capital
Ashton & Morton (2005)	SHRM	Strategic HR approach and business planning to develop organisational effectiveness through improving talent performance and potential who can achieve organisational success. At the same time improving the entire workforce performance to their potential
Duttagupta (2005)	Decision making	An approach to manage the flow of talent to ensure sufficient supply of talent in the right place at the right time
Warren (2006)	Talent development	The process of identification, development and retention of talent to ensure short-and long-term of resources through executives and high performers
Jerusalim & Hausdorf (2007)	Talent pool	Identifying and developing high potentials to be able to work in leadership roles in the future
Cappelli (2008)	Workforce planning	Workforce planning of human capital resource
Collings & Mellahi (2009)	Strategic Talent management (STM)	Systematic identification of key roles and critical positions which differently contribute to the organisation, creating sustainable competitive advantage, developing a talent pool of high potentials and high performers, as well as developing HR architecture to facilitate filling these roles and positions
Silzer & Dowell (2010)	STM	Designing and implementing programs, procedures and cultural environment to recruit, develop and retain talent to meet the business need and achieve organisational success
Davies and Davies (2010)	STM	A process of identifying, developing, engaging, retaining and deploying high potential individuals who demonstrate high value to an organisation
Scullion and Collings (2011)	Global Talent management (GTM)	Global talent management that includes all organisational activities through recruitment and selection, training and development, and retaining the top skilled and qualified employees in mission-critical roles on a global scale

Table 3.1 Talent Management Definitions. Source: Dries (2013)

The term Talent Management holds varied meanings across different people and organisations. According to Harvard Business Review (2008), TM simply means anticipating the need for human capital and then setting out a plan to meet it. On the one hand, some individuals suggest that TM refers to the management of highly valued individuals who are considered skilled or talented (Waheed et al., 2012). Correspondingly, CIPD (2020) states that TM "is the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention, and deployment of those individuals who are of value to an organisation, either in view of their 'high potential' for the future or because they are fulfilling business/operation-critical roles". Conversely, TM is more widely viewed as the management of talent in general. Proponents of this view believe that every employee has a degree of talent that should be identified, developed, and managed for organisational benefits (Thunnissen, 2013). TM is a term that encompasses a vast set of activities, including HR planning, performance management, succession planning and so on (Hartley, 2004). Festing & Schäfer (2014) similarly describe TM as an overarching

term covering a breadth of activities such as employee performance management, HR planning, and succession planning

Creelman (2004, p.3) posits that TM is a perspective, or a “mindset that addresses all corporate issues from the standpoint of —will this affect our critical talent, if yes, how? and —what is the role of talent in this issue?”. He further defines TM as “the process of attracting, recruiting, and retaining talented employees, which involves a continuous process of external recruitment and selection, and internal development and retention” (Creelman 2004; P.3). According to a CIPD report TM makes it imperative for HR professionals and their clients to have a clear understanding of how they define talent, who they regard as talent and what their typical background might be (CIPD, 2007). Furthermore, TM involves the use of succession and contingency planning tools, as well as data from the workforce, to understand and keep track of the talent within an organisation, the number of talents further needed, and the identification of individuals who are particularly valuable to the organisation (CIPD, 2020). TM also involves performance appraisal, and the use of motivational factors enables employees to realise and utilise their full potential for organisational benefits (CIPD, 2009; Waheed et al., 2012; Sidani and Al Ariss, 2014). Clutterbuck (2012) and Kamil & Salleh (2013) highlight the psychological contract aspect of TM, asserting that the relationship between organisations and their employees dictates that the TM approach should cater to employee development, goals, and aspirations.

Some believe that the concept of TM is merely another organisational trend, akin to other buzzwords whose prominence will eventually fade (Sinha, 2012). To buttress this, Jackson (2001), cited in Collings (2003), asserts that management fads are an unavoidable evil that has always existed and will continue to do so. However, he notes that the contemporary era is distinguished by the rapid rise and fall of numerous conflicting fashions and their influence on modern managers. Similarly, a few authors argue that TM is just a rechristening and recycling of pre-existing ideas: “*old wine in new bottles*” (Chuai et al., 2008; Schuler & Tarique, 2010). Raja & Swapna (2012) further highlight that several researchers have shown that TM practitioners have been championing the same ideas and approaches to Talent Management for decades. Contrarily, CIPD (2007) and Iles (2013) argue that TM is not just a management fad and is more than just “a rave of the moment but a crucial element for business success. Correspondingly, Collings (2014) posits that TM is far more than just another HR process, emphasising that the talent mindset is not simply another HR trend.

Other authors question the distinctiveness of TM from traditional HRM, asserting that practices such as succession planning, assessment centres, and 360-degree feedback are often used as promotional exercises that do not yield any actual change to organisational processes (Ozbilgin et al., 2013; Schuler

& Tarique, 2010). In other words, while TM may be a grand vision theoretically, it can be practically ineffective. Nonetheless, there is no consensus on whether the popularity of TM will eventually fade away, as has happened with many other management terms after a brief period of prominence (Sidani and Al Ariss, 2014). Research by the World Economic Forum and the Boston Consulting Group (2011), in conjunction with the Manpower Group (2011), suggests that the shortage of talent is an urgent global issue which cuts across various positions and regions, making the concept's decline in the near future unlikely.

Grobler & Diedericks (2009), Mwila & Turay (2018), and Anlesinyan et al. (2019) view TM as a process involving the integration of various initiatives, strategies, and programs aimed at attracting, developing, and retaining employees. Furthermore, Mwila & Turay (2018) point out that TM, in this context, is mainly viewed as a performance management method comprising various elements that form part of strategic human resource management throughout the entire employment cycle within an organisation. However, several authors have questioned this view. Liakopoulos & Schwartz (2009) state that most organisations see TM as a composition of programs or activities to manage the employee life cycle, including recruitment and selection, learning and development, performance management, succession planning and so on.

In summary, some authors contend that TM is fundamentally about developing and creating leaders (Chuai et al. 2010). Notwithstanding that the success of every organisation is highly dependent on its talent (Regardless of what approach they adopt to their definition of talent), the confusion surrounding the definition of TM could hinder its practice and implementation, particularly in SMEs. The diverse perspectives presented above indicate that each author offers an individual viewpoint, implicitly claiming the value of Talent Management. Although many of these claims provide useful insights, they remain largely untested. Exploring the definitions of talent is crucial for understanding how organisations identify, develop, and manage their most valuable employees. The next section delves into the diverse definitions of talent, examining different perspectives and interpretations across various empirical contexts.

3.4.2 Defining Talent

Although the phrase '*war for talent*' coined by the McKinsey Group has become part of the business lexicon and TM has gained popularity within organisational management, academics and business experts have yet to agree upon a universal definition of the term (Meyers et al. 2013). Efforts are being made to address persistent issues in TM literature through empirical and theoretical studies (Pocztowski et al., 2021). Some recurring themes attempting to encompass the essence of talent include:

- Talent enhances organisational value and performance.
- Talent is rare, unique, and incomparable.
- Talent creates and maintains competitive advantage.
- Talent is innovative and creative.
- Talent encompasses the knowledge, skills, and abilities pivotal for organisational success.
- The ongoing war for talent affects both developed and emerging economies. For developed nations, talent scarcity is exacerbated by demographic shifts, such as an ageing population and a noticeable decline in the young population. For emerging economies, factors like brain drain contribute to the talent shortage.

Research aims to establish the essence of talent while recognising its meaning based on specific perspectives and contexts. The existence of two approaches (narrow and broad) to defining talent has resulted in persistent ambiguity, confusion, and inconsistency regarding its indicators (Pocztowski et al., 2021). Similarly, Collings & Mellahi (2009) note that reviews on TM literature still lack a clear definition or theoretical concept of talent and TM. Reaching a consensus on the definition of talent is vital for a profound understanding of TM and could help determine the framework for organisational activities regarding TM (Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Vaiman, Scullion & Collings, 2012). This section discusses various definitions of talent and TM's concepts, perspectives, and philosophies. Pocztowski et al. (2021) state that talent was historically a measurable quantity, such as IQ or specific skills, from a cognitive perspective. Over time, this understanding evolved to encompass an individual predisposition, recognising inherent abilities and potential for growth beyond mere quantifiable metrics. This view evolved to perceive talent as a natural ability that needed nurturing. Proponents of this view see talent as an innate ability rather than a product of personal effort or choice (Thunnissen & Van, 2015). Likewise, Williams (2002) highlights various tensions resulting in multiple definitions of talent, attributing these tensions to whether the term is subjective versus objective, innate versus acquired, inclusive versus exclusive.

From the subjective approach, Williams (2002) posits that talent refers to people with exceptional competencies or abilities. For Bratton et al. (2016), the subjective approach sees people as a collective entity, such as a talented team or personnel within an organisation. This approach distinguishes between the inclusive talent view, which suggests that every member of a workforce possesses the skills required to do the job and only needs appropriate training and development to reach their potential, and the exclusive talent view, which sees only a tiny proportion of people with high potential or high performers as talent (Preece et al. 2010). In contrast, the objective approach refers to talent as the characteristics and traits of people, such as their skills and abilities (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Poczowski (2016) postulates that this approach sees talent as an individual with extraordinary traits (competencies, abilities, and skills). Table 3.2 below shows a range of definitions of talent by different authors.

Source	Associated terms	Talent definition
Howe et al. (1998)	Ability	Inborn ability as excellent criteria to succeed in the future
Gagné (2000)	Ability Skills	Superior skills and abilities with long-term development
Williams (2000)	Ability Competence Potential	People who possess one or more of: exceptional ability, achievement, comparable ability, transferable competence, high potentials
Buckingham and Vosburgh(2001)	Thought Behaviour	Productive patterns of vision, feeling, or attitude
Jerico (2001)	Ability Capacity	Group of committed professionals that can accomplish outstanding results in specific context
Michaels et al. (2001)	Ability Knowledge Skills	The sum of individual ability, skill, knowledge, attitude, experience and the ability to learn and grow
Barber (2004)	Ability Skills	Exceptional skills and abilities
Deverson and Kennedy (2005)	Ability Attitude	Exceptional aptitude and special mental ability
Lewis and Heckman (2006)	–	Talent is fundamentally a euphemism for 'people'
Tansley, Harris, Stewart, and Turner (2006)	Ability Knowledge Potential Skills	Complex combination of individual's values, cognitive ability, knowledge, skills and potential
Gooleman (2006)	Value	Top performers whose value worth ten times as much as other individuals in a particular organisation
Throne and Pellant (2006)	Ability	An outstanding ability that can be distinctly applied
Stahl et al. (2007)	Capability Performance	The top ranked employees of ability and performance
Tansley et al. (2007)	Performance Potential	Individuals who either make immediate contribution and a difference or who demonstrate the highest potential in the long term
Ulrich (2007)	Commitment Competence Contribution	Talent: competence (skills, knowledge and values that are required to perform a job), commitment (individual who work hardly toward the organisation success, contribution (a real contribution and meaningful work)
Cheese, Thomas, and Craig (2008)	Experience Knowledge Skills	Set of skills, knowledge, experience and attitudes to work in a certain role
González-Cruz et al. (2009)	Competence	Developing and applying set of competencies that allow individual to perform in a specific position
Silzer and Dowell (2010)	–	Some cases refer to the entire workforce
Silzer and Dowell (2010)	Ability Competence Skills	A pool of employees with outstanding skills and abilities in different areas such as technological areas
Bethke-Langenegger(2012)	Competence Knowledge	A leader or specialist who possess high qualification profile including knowledge, social and systematic approach, ability to learn to do achievements
Ulrich and Smallwood (2012)	Competence	Talent=competence (skills, knowledge and behaviours needed in the right job in the right time) × commitment (ability to do the job) × contribution (purposive and meaningful contribution)

Table 3.2 Definitions of talent- Meyers et al., 2013

Pocztowski et al. (2021) state that authors who view talent from a cognitive perspective advocate that talent is “a natural ability to outperform in a specific field without any special training- a kind of giftedness”. Similarly, Meyers et al. (2013) state that from the innate-ability perspective, talent is seen

as natural “giftedness”, extreme intelligence, and exceptional abilities. Researchers in education assert that talent is “giftedness” as a natural ability prevalent among the top 10% of people of similar age demography within disciplines like science, technology, engineering, sports, art, music, and mathematics (Gagné 2011). Buckingham & Vosburgh (2001) argue that while skills can be learned and easily acquired, talent is unique and more challenging to acquire. In HRM, talent is defined as an innate ability which allows individuals with exceptional skills, intelligence, brain power and creativity to contribute to problem-solving in organisations (Gallardo-Gallardo (2013). Contrary to the above definitions, Cohn et al. (2005) define talent as an ordinary potential that can be acquired and further developed through training and practice. A recurring issue with defining talent is the contradictory views of whether the term refers to innate ability or whether talent is a quality that can be acquired through education, training, and experiences.

From the perspective of psychology, Poczowski et al. (2021) state that talent means having a clear self-concept within an organisation or profession in general. Likewise, Oettingen et al. (2012) opine that talented people possess a clear, stable, and vivid perception of their long-term objectives, interests, aims and talents. However, positive psychologists see talent as an individual’s personal and psychological strength, which enables them to perform exceptionally or at their personal best (Wood et al., 2011; Poczowski et al., 2021). Correspondingly, Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000) and Peterson & Seligman (2004) define talent as a “potential for excellence,” which allows individuals to perform to the best of their ability by engaging their positive individual traits and strengths. They further defined strengths as traits such as gratitude, kindness, and creativity that elicit positive feelings of self-actualisation, motivation, and powerful energy. Wood et al. (2011) suggest that talent is linked to self-fulfilment, meaning individuals can reach their full potential to achieve their goals. Based on the acquired perspective, talent can be developed through learning, training, education, and experience (Poczowski et al., 2021). Thus, every individual possesses dormant talents that can be groomed through learning to attain an excellent level of performance. Accordingly, Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) agree that talent is an experience of learning and working.

From an HRM viewpoint, talent is seen as human capital (“a measurable competence resource, knowledge, social and personal attributes applied to generate economic value or effective performance”), social capital (“the sum of possessed and obtainable resources mobilised because an organisation’s member belongs to a social network”), political capital (“recognition as the criterion of choice”), and cultural capital (“sustained habits and traditions transmitted from generation to generation and becoming part of organisation’s memory”). (Poczowski et al. 2021). This view can be linked to the resource-based view theory, where the main determinant of an individual’s value is their

contribution to the firm (Meyers & Woerkman, 2014). However, in the general business context, the most prevalent debate in defining talent is exclusiveness versus inclusiveness (Meyers & Woerkman, 2014; Poczowski, 2021).

3.4.2.1 Inclusive and Exclusive Approaches to Talent Management

Two clear understandings of TM are the inclusive and exclusive approaches to viewing talent (Krishnan & Scullion 2016). The exclusive approach selectively focuses on high-performing individuals or those with high potential, while the inclusive approach sees all employees as equally valuable (Devins & Gold, 2014; Krishnan & Scullion, 2016). Inclusiveness assumes that all employees possess strengths that can be valuable to the organisation under the right circumstances (Buckingham & Vosburgh 2001). Additionally, as a firm's success is reliant on the overall value of its workforce rather than just a few talents, achieving organisational goals and objectives without contributions from the entire workforce is almost impossible (Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001; Devins & Gold, 2014). Therefore, equal treatment of employees and equitable distribution of organisational resources are essential. However, Collings & Mellahi (2009) critique the inclusive approach, stating that while it benefits both individuals and organisations at large, it leads to an increased HR budget and may not be cost-effective. Likewise, Bothner et al. (2011) argue that a higher percentage of an organisation's resources should be invested in high performers to improve their performance and, subsequently, boost their return on investment. Meyers et al. (2020) developed a conceptual framework that categorises the inclusive approach based on two parameters- stable and developable.

The *inclusive/stable talent view* builds on the assumption that all humans innately possess stable and positive characteristics, or 'strengths' (Meyers et al., 2020). This approach is linked to positive psychology, which argues that people who utilise their strengths will be happy and perform at their best (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). managers adopting this view highlight the strengths of all employees regardless of how distinct they may be, and focus is placed on improving person-job fit to ensure tasks are in alignment with employees' strengths (Meyers et al., 2020). Managers with an inclusive/developable talent view assume that every "ordinary" employee can develop extraordinary skills and become exceptional performers given the right training (Biswas-Diener et al., 2011; Ericsson et al., 1993).

Contrary to the inclusive view, the exclusive approach views talent as an elite group of employees who stand out from others (Poczowski et al. 2021). This approach identifies high achievers within the internal pool of employees, justifying disproportionate investment in a select group. Sparrow et al.

(2011) and Stahl et al. (2012) state that this approach, based on workforce differentiation, is the most dominant TM approach. According to the CIPD (2012), three out of five organisations adopt an exclusive view of talent, while two out of five adopt an inclusive approach. Meyers et al. (2020) categorise the *exclusive-stable* talent view along the dimensions of stable and developable, stating that people with the exclusive-stable mindset believe that only 20% of employees are talented and have unique skills, competencies, or ‘gifts’ (Tansley, 2011). Based on this, the workforce is divided into groups, with more favourable treatments rendered to talented employees to bind them to the organisation (Meyers et al. 2020). Managers with an *exclusive-developable talent view* believe that talent is a rare and dormant trait that yields excellence if actively used and developed but can be wasted if undiscovered and unused (Gagné, 2004). These managers consider employees as talents if they exhibit the potential to perform excellently in the future (Meyers et al., 2020).

While conceptual frameworks of talent suggest that talent is an individual’s input into an organisation (which could be in the form of motivation, interests, ambition) and their output (performance outcomes) (Pocztowski et al., 2021), Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013); Meyers et al. (2013) highlight a different approach that emphasises the universalism of talent. This approach describes talent from two dimensions: (1) Context-dependent (talent is situational and non-transferable), Contextindependent (here, talent is transferable), and (2) pre-ordained, learnt and explicitly tailored to achieve a particular outcome (Pocztowski et al. (2021). See Fig 3.3 below

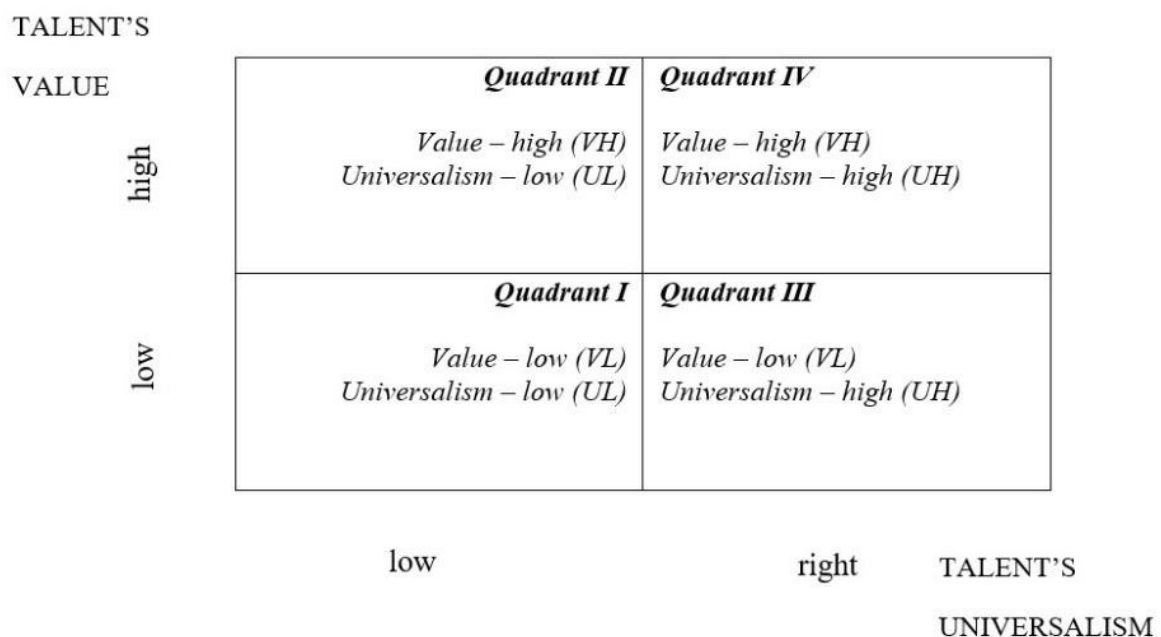


Figure 3.3 Dimensions of Talent: Pocztowski (2021)

3.4.2.2 Understanding Talent Management: Inclusive and Exclusive Approaches

As seen in Fig 3.3 above, Quadrant 1 suggests inclusiveness. Here, talent is believed to be learned, developed, or modified to serve the organisation's needs. Talent is strictly measured by individual input, and all employees are part of a talent pool if they have potential (Pocztowski et al., 2021).

Contrarily, high-performing employees are crucial for organisational success and are described as "best of class" or "A players" (Smart, 2005). These individuals are seen as intelligent, innovative workers who show initiative and produce high-quality work in a timely and cost-effective manner (Smart, 2005). Quadrant 2 suggests exclusiveness. Even though talent can be acquired, it is situational, bound to the organisation's context, and emphasis is placed on output (Pocztowski et al., 2021). Talents here are employees with outstanding expertise and above-average performance. Correspondingly, Stahl et al. (2007) state that talents are top performers in terms of performance and capability.

Quadrant 3 is inclusive, where talent is learned and can be transferrable. Emphasis is placed on output, i.e., the performance outcome of talented individuals (Pocztowski et al., 2021). This approach treats most employees as talents, implying that sophisticated training and development can enhance their skills, making them capable of contributing to organisational success (Silzer & Church 2009). Quadrant 4 states that talent is innate, independent of organisational context, and the focus is on input (Pocztowski et al., 2021). According to Bollander et al. (2017), the four organisational indicators of talent include *humanistic type* (a subjective and inclusive approach that views all employees as talents), *competitive type* (a subjective-exclusive approach that views talent as a unique configuration of individual traits existing in a limited number of employees), *The Elitist type* (an exclusive approach that views talent as inborn, rare and highly unique), and the *Entrepreneurial type* (an inclusive approach as it sees all employees as potential talents).

The exclusive approach to talent advocates for workforce differentiation by allocating resources to develop a small group of high-performing and competent individuals, where the "winner-takes-all" (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013). While the exclusive approach is criticised for difficulties associated with performance appraisal and assessment of the capability of high-potential individuals, the inclusive approach is criticised for being less cost-effective (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013). Additionally, workforce differentiation could negatively affect organisational morale if only a particular set of employees are rewarded (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Given the numerous definitions and views surrounding "talent," organisations need an in-depth understanding to adopt the best-fit talent management practices. To successfully execute a process, one must first understand its complex details. Hence, understanding the concept of talent management is crucial.

3.5 Theoretical Approaches to Talent Management

The growth of academic research on TM has led to varying goals, ranges and approaches to TM (Pocztowski et al., 2021). As previously stated, an organisation's choice of what TM approach or perspective plays a crucial role in developing their TM policies and practices (Pocztowski et al. 2021). Iles et al. (2010) and Collings et al. (2017) highlight four recently developed approaches to TM, created based on the two main dimensions of defining talent: exclusiveness versus inclusiveness and position versus people (Pocztowski et al. 2021). Similarly, Cohn et al. (2005) argued that TM can be viewed from an inclusive versus exclusive approach or a stable versus developable. Accordingly, they identified four distinct perspectives on TM: exclusive and developable, exclusive and stable, inclusive and developable, and inclusive and stable. Pocztowski et al. (2021), in their recent book, make use of "position versus people" in place of "stable versus developable". See Fig 3.4 below

3.4 Talent Management Perspectives

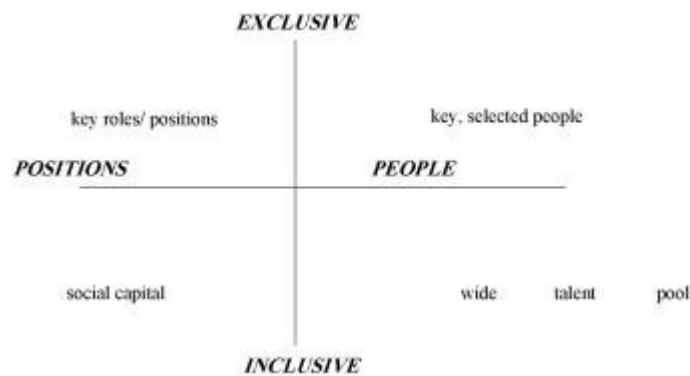


Fig 3.4 Talent management perspectives. Source: Iles et al. (2010)

The exclusive position emphasises the importance of attracting highly talented individuals, known as "A players," to fill strategically critical positions, referred to as "A positions" (Iles et al., 2010; Meyers & Woerkom, 2014; Pocztowski et al., 2021). McDonnell et al. (2017) suggest that this approach aligns with the STM stance by prioritising the identification of key positions followed by the identification of talents to fill these positions to achieve high performance. In this perspective, employees fall into three categories: "A players" (a small group of outperformers 'with talent' of around 20%, occupying pivotal positions), "B Players" (a group of reliable high performers occupying supportive positions) and "C players" (a larger group of workers 'without talent' who are easy choices for outsourcing as they do not contribute any significant value to the organisation) (Pocztowski et al., 2021; Meyers et al., 2020). Only employees ('A players') who occupy these positions are considered talents (Iles et al., 2010).

Proponents believe in disproportionate investment in "A players" to maximise organisational success (Iles et al., 2010; Pocztowski et al., 2021). Ideally, an "A performance" is the outcome of a combination of 'A players' and 'A positions', based on the strategic importance of their positions to the organisation.

(in summary, A positions=A players=A performance) (Iles et al., 2010). A study by General Electric company shows that between 10%- 20% of their workforce are categorised as “A players,” 70% as “B players,” and 10%-20% as “C players” (Meyers & Woerkom 2014; Meyers et al., 2020). Although organisations that adopt this approach gain a competitive advantage as they can fill their crucial positions with talented individuals, there is always the issue of the accuracy in gauging the correlation between intelligence and performance, as well as the challenge of retaining talents (Meyers & Woerkom, 2014).

The Exclusive-people TM perspective adopts a narrow view of talent, focusing on individuals with potential talent, special skills, or capabilities to achieve outstanding performance and significantly impact the firm's performance (Morton, 2005). These individuals, often comprising about 10%-15% of an organisation, demonstrate more incredible accomplishments, inspire others to achieve greater accomplishments and represent the core values, visions, and competencies of the organisation (Berger, 2004; Iles et al., 2010; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2012). As it is impossible for HR activities aimed at acquiring, developing, motivating, and retaining employees to be directed at the entire workforce, this perspective emphasises employment segmentation, where workforce segments are treated differently based on their value propositions (Iles et al., 2010; McDonnell et al., 2017; Pocztowski et al., 2021). High-potential individuals undergo three stages: (i) identification, (ii) assignment to special tasks and training, and (iii) assignment to senior management positions. Therefore, this approach promotes progression and performance improvement, resulting in a high return on investment (Pocztowski et al., 2021).

Arguments in favour of the people-exclusive perspective state that it is reasonable and mandatory to invest scarce resources and developmental opportunities in individuals with the most potential, provided it does not come to the detriment of other employees (Walker, 2002; Iles et al., 2010). Ledford and Kochanski (2004) argue that workforce segmentation is essential for TM, with successful organisations focusing on dominant talent segments rather than trying to cater to all employees. However, this approach also presents certain risks. Directing talent management (TM) programs exclusively towards high-potential individuals can lead to feelings of disappointment, low morale, and lack of motivation among those who are not selected (Pocztowski et al., 2021). Employees who perceive themselves as overlooked or undervalued may experience diminished job satisfaction and engagement, which can negatively impact the overall organisational climate and productivity.

Therefore, while the people-exclusive perspective can yield high returns by fostering the development of top talent, it also necessitates careful consideration of the broader workforce's morale and engagement to mitigate potential negative consequences.

The Inclusive-position perspective, also referred to as social capital by Iles et al. (2010) or inclusivestable by Dries (2013), takes a “universal” approach to TM, emphasising that all workers possess unique strengths, qualities, and skills that can contribute to competitive advantage if identified and harnessed (Dries, 2013). This perspective views all positions as vital, fostering organisational unity and cooperation by eliminating the negative impacts of ranking positions and talents (Meyers et al., 2020; Pocztowski et al., 2021). This approach fosters organisational unity and cooperation as it eliminates the negative impacts of ranking positions and talents (Meyers et al., 2020; Pocztowski et al., 2021). Proponents criticise TM approaches that neglect the significance of context, organisational capital, and social capital, overemphasising individualism (Iles et al., 2010). Similarly, several definitions of TM downplay the impact of factors such as teamwork, culture, division of labour and leadership in shaping talent (Iles et al., 2010). Iles & Preece (2006) differentiate between ‘leader development’ (focusing on enhancing the human capital of individuals) and ‘leadership development’ (enhancing social capital through group actions). A major issue with this approach is the potential inefficiency of employees lacking the required skills and competencies (Meyers & Woerkm, 2014). Additionally, this approach incurs higher investment in human capital, which may not yield proportional returns (Pocztowski et al., 2021).

The inclusive-people approach is described as humanistic, which believes every employee is talented and that management should harness these talents to maximise performance (Iles et al., 2010; Pocztowski et al., 2021). Dweck (2012) refers to this quest as the “growth mindset.” This perspective treats TM similarly to HRM as it argues that all employees can become outstanding performers if they are given opportunities to (i) put their strengths into practice, (ii) take note of contextual factors, (ii) actively monitor the utilisation of their strengths (Biswas-Diener et al. 2011). While this approach requires significant investment and resources, making it challenging for SMEs (Meyers & Woerkm 2014), Warren (2006) asserts that ‘an inclusive TM strategy is a competitive necessity’. However, this approach increases the risk of losing talents due to their universalism and transferability (Pocztowski et al., 2021).

The approaches to TM discussed above are primarily applicable to large companies and multinational corporations (MNCs) with formalised processes and complex structures. Their applicability in the contexts of SMEs and emerging markets requires further research.

3.5.1 Talent Management Philosophies

The primary focus of TM is to identify positions crucial for achieving a competitive advantage and to develop systems, policies, and practices that are aimed at developing a competitively advantaged HR. Therefore, it is pertinent for organisations to critically examine which TM philosophy to adopt (Scullion & Collings 2010). The four main TM philosophies that distinguish between TM from HRM are people, positions, pools, and practices (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Scullion & Collings, 2010; Clutterbuck & Haddock-Millar, 2013; Sparrow et al., 2014).

The people philosophy is elitist, focusing on categorising individuals. As discussed in section 3.5, this philosophy advocates for a pay-for-person system (where jobs are seen as uncertain and too flexible to be sized) as opposed to a pay-for-the-position system (where jobs are evaluated based on their size and complexity (Sparrow & Makram 2015). This approach suggests that TM can be a leadership encouraging differentiation between over-performance and low-performance or an egalitarian system where every individual is seen as a repertoire of qualities that can be enhanced. Here, high performance is not attainable by everyone, necessitating a differential investment approach (Sparrow & Makram 2015). However, this focus on human capital rather than systems may impact organisational effectiveness, with high pay and rewards for differentiated employees potentially leading to negative behaviours and performance in the long run (Sparrow et al. 2014). balancing the talented segment with other employees is complex, requiring organisations to strive for equilibrium between sourcing talented individuals and developing collective organisational effectiveness or risk discomfort from a differentiated approach to talent (Sparrow et al. 2014).

Unlike the people philosophy, which suggests that TM lacks sophisticated processes and relies on fundamental beliefs or rational decisions made by top managers and executives about the significance of talented individuals and the development of an internal labour market, the practices philosophy promotes the significance of a core set of sophisticated TM practices and processes (Meyers & Woerkom, 2014). This philosophy underscores the role of HR architecture in creating a coherent system aligned with business strategy through programmes, practices, and processes (Silzer & Dowell, 2010; Meyers & Woerkom, 2014). These practices may include talent identification and recruitment, developing an employee value proposition, employer branding, engagement and retention strategies, and talent flow management through effective onboarding, remuneration and reward system, succession planning, internal mobility, career development, coaching and mentoring through leadership programmes and establishing a talent review process based on individual and organisational performance (Al Ariss et al. 2014). Despite these features, the practices' philosophy does not address what constitutes effective TM or how these practices can deliver organisational value (Sparrow & Makram 2015).

The position philosophy is premised on the idea that organisations make greater investments in positions that contribute to their competitive advantage, reflecting a differentiated HR architecture (Huselid, 2006). Critics highlight two issues: the uncertainty in assessing the criticality of roles and the dependency of essential roles on a series of small but crucial jobs (Sparrow et al., 2014). This philosophy enhances organisational effectiveness by emphasising the strategic alignment of TM with organisational design and business models (Sparrow et al., 2014).

The strategic pool approach is focused on workforce planning, forecasting the need for talent, and creating pivotal talent pools that impact organisational performance. Although this philosophy advocates the creation of pivotal talent pools by grouping people or positions who have a significant impact on organisational performance, unlike the position philosophy, it identifies pools of strategic value (Sparrow & Makram 2015). This approach goes beyond human capital theory and applies supplychain management processes to anticipate and plan for labour supply and demand uncertainties, potentially creating unjust systems, wider pay differences, and an overemphasis on individual performance (Sparrow & Makram, 2015). Furthermore, decisions are limited by senior managers' cognitive limits, who may lack the time, ability, or readiness to appraise data accurately to identify and select individuals who are “good enough” to make the cut (Collings, 2014). This approach calls for a nuanced understanding of TM, incorporating models and frameworks that extend farther than the HR analytic skillset or human capital theory, such as risk management, mitigation disciplines, optimisation, or supply chain management, to address uncertainties (Sparrow & Makram, 2015).

In summary, the people approach aligns with the resource-based view theory, highlighting the significance of individuals without relying on sophisticated TM practices, focusing on talent sourcing and performance management based on managers' decisions. This entails that talent is exclusively stable without considering the locus of organisational effectiveness. In contrast, the position approach responds to criticism of the people approach, encouraging investment in roles that significantly contribute to competitive advantage. The latter assumes pivotal positions are static, neglecting the dynamic organisational context, such as the evolving key positions in SMEs. Hence, organisations must consider external and internal factors when choosing a TM philosophy, as the absence of a universally agreed approach to TM implies that the best fit depends on organisational context.

Given the critical role of selecting an appropriate TM philosophy, the implementation of an effective talent management process becomes imperative. This process encompasses the systematic identification, development, and retention of individuals who possess the potential to drive organisational success, ensuring alignment with the chosen TM philosophy and overall business strategy. Section 3.6 below discusses the different TM processes.

3.6 Talent Management Process

Two key steps to commence the TM Process are linking the organisation's TM objectives and designing an implementation strategy (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). This may involve creating a 'talent pool' of highperforming or high-potential employees for future roles and implementing a customised HRM structure to aid the recruitment and retention of the best-fit individuals for these roles (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Additionally, the TM process comprises a series of interrelated activities, such as the identification, attraction, development, and retention of high-performing and high-potential individuals who can contribute to organisational success (Jyoti & Rani 2014). Beyond designing a TM strategy, activities begin with identifying whether talents can be sourced internally and need to be recruited externally, followed by developing and retaining the recruited talents (Chabault, Hulin, & Soparnot, 2012). This is shown in Figure 3.5 below.

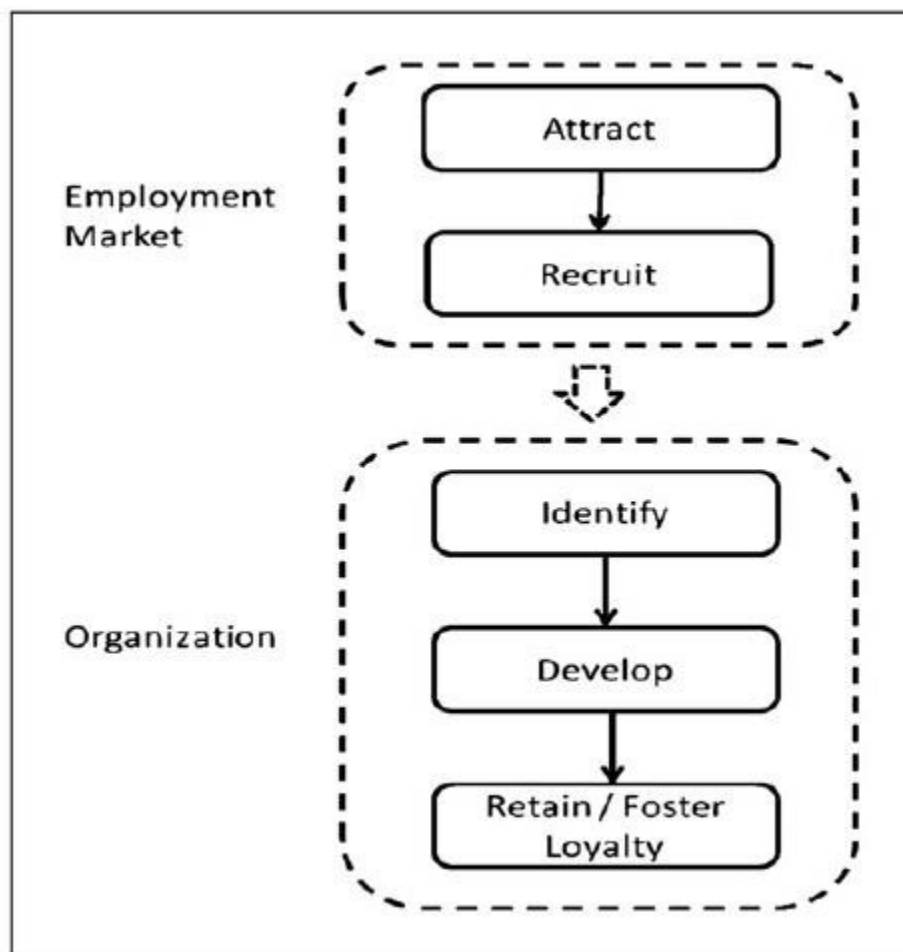


Figure 3.5 Talent Management Process; Source; Chabault, Hulin, & Soparnot, (2012)

A review of the TM process reveals its similarity to existing frameworks for designing and implementing HRM practices in areas such as employee resourcing and development (Dries, 2013; Vaiman et al. 2018). Therefore, arguments have been made that TM processes are deeply rooted in standard HRM practices. However, although TM has been categorised as a discipline under HRM, it covers a specific niche (Dries, 2013; Vaiman et al. 2018). The distinction between TM and HRM is that TM, as a practice, applies strategic and modernised approaches to ensure the availability of high-performing and high-potential individuals (Ambrosius 2016; Vaiman et al. 2018). Thus, attracting and developing talents, succession planning, and talent retention of talents are crucial TM practices that extend beyond traditional HRM practices of managing common employees (Kaur, 2013; Iles et al., 2010; Vaiman, 2010; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Tansley and Sempik 2008).

3.6.1 Talent Acquisition

Talent shortage remains the most crucial challenge for managers at organisational, national, and international levels as attraction and recruitment of highly skilled and talented candidates become more difficult due to the increase in the demand for critical skills (ManpowerGroup, 2020). The global skills shortage has almost doubled, reaching its highest level since 2007, with 54% of organisations reporting difficulties in attracting skilled talent (ManpowerGroup, 2020). Specifically, the U.S. (69%), Mexico (52%), Italy (47%), and Spain (41%) report the most significant shortages (ManpowerGroup, 2020). Consequently, talent acquisition is a vital step in TM.

The talent acquisition process involves the identification, attraction, evaluation and staffing of talented individuals (Thunnissen et al., 2013). The context-specific nature of this research and discrepancies in the definition of talent give rise to two central debates: whether talent is innate or acquired. Those who argue that talent is innate highlight the importance of the identification and selection processes (Meyers et al., 2013), while those who see talent as acquired stress the importance of development (Dries, 2013; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014).

In many Western countries, talent is viewed as an innate ability that leads to above-average performance. In contrast, in Africa, talent is viewed as outstanding accomplishments obtained through years of multiple training and development. In Nigeria, organisations are more inclined to attract and develop local talent with the hopes of retaining them than attract foreign talent; this is partly due to costs and government policies favouring local hires (Anas et al., 2020). Studies suggest that top managers are inclined to recruit talented individuals who already possess the required skills and competencies and are less interested in setting up systems and practices for developing such talent in people (Dries, 2013). Thus, TM practices are based on the assumption that talent is innate and focus

mainly on attracting the most talented individuals in the labour market and, hopefully, retaining them (Meyers et al., 2013).

Organisations often adopt either an internal or external approach to identifying talent. recognising "acquired talent" and highlighting the importance of HR development, using diverse HR practices to expand employees' knowledge, skills, and competencies (Meyers et al., 2013). Here, the focus is on nurturing the potential of talented individuals and preparing them for more challenging roles (Meyers et al., 2013). This approach of internal selection or "promotion from within" creates a strong link between talent 'selection' and talent 'development' processes (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). While both approaches to talent acquisition seem efficient, relying solely on one approach may be ineffective. External talent acquisition can bring new ideas and experiences. In contrast, internal development and promotion of existing talent may foster commitment and maximise performance as talents are conversant with organisational culture, systems, and requirements (Meyers et al., 2013). In addition, providing opportunities for development and career progression can help retention and support succession planning (CIPD, 2020).

Organisations use both formal and informal recruitment channels, such as career fairs, consultancy firms, and placements (Collings 2009; Taylor 2014). Recently, four main recruitment mediums have emerged: websites, commercial job boards, recruitment agencies, and professional networking sites like LinkedIn (CIPD, 2020). In the UK, corporate websites, recruitment agencies, and employee referral schemes are most effective (CIPD 2013). However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on talent acquisition has undoubtedly been huge. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted talent acquisition, shifting focus towards training, development, and retention and increasing the use of technology in recruitment (CIPD, 2020). Although this was common pre-pandemic, it has become a necessity as traditional face-to-face interviews and assessment processes are unachievable.

Scholars have argued that employer branding is a crucial element of TM, particularly the talent attraction process (Jansen & Van der Pool, 2009; Scullion & Collings, 2011). Attracting talents involves marketing the organisation to an audience that will fulfil its talent requirements (Stahl et al. 2012). Creating a promising employer brand has been seen as a valuable method for attraction and recruitment, as a good brand aids talent attraction (Jansen & Van der Pool, 2009). For Nigerian businesses, a strong brand identity can influence a candidate's decision to accept a job offer. Enhancing an employer's brand and reputation through timely news releases and media events can build organisational character and make it a desirable workplace (Stahl et al., 2012). However, most talent attraction literature is based on Western contexts; these common talent attraction methods may not be as effective in the Nigerian context due to cultural and social factors. In Nigeria, referrals are a

common recruitment method due to the collectivist nature of society. Additionally, the possibility of talent attraction and development being influenced by some existing issues in the Nigerian business environment needs to be elaborated. Understanding these issues is crucial for exploring TM practices like talent development and retention.

3.6.2 Talent Development

An essential aspect of TM in general, talent development refers to the design and implementation of developmental strategies aimed at ensuring a continuous flow of talent. This is achieved through succession planning, leadership development measures, and the creation of development paths (Garavan et al., 2012). Since acquiring talents externally from the labour market may not fulfil organisations' talent needs, internal talent development may be a better option as it allows businesses to develop industry- and firm-specific knowledge and competencies. Organisations may adopt either an inclusive or exclusive approach to talent development, just as with the definition of talent (Garavan et al., 2012). The inclusive approach focuses on the general development of all employees, while the exclusive approach targets specific individuals for pivotal positions (Garavan et al., 2012).

Arguments suggest that talent management supports employee development within organisations (Jones et al. 2012). Studies reveal a positive impact of employee development on both organisational performance and individual performance (Vidal-Salazar et al. 2012, Georgiadis & Pitelis 2016). Nadler (1979) stated that employee development prepares employees for progression as the organisation changes, develops, and expands. Organisations must offer developmental and promotion opportunities to enhance employees' personal growth (CIPD, 2020). New learning opportunities and skill development initiatives like job rotation can suffice in the absence of internal promotion (Stahl et al., 2012; Taylor, 2014; CIPD, 2020). According to CIPD (2011), many definitions of talent development are based on an exclusive approach, which is more prevalent in organisations. They further stated that the exclusive talent development approach is mainly aimed at high potentials, senior managers, and future leaders. A hybrid talent development approach, providing opportunities to different talent categories, has been suggested (Garavan et al., 2012). This may motivate employees, but the lack of literature on talent development behaviours in the Nigerian context leaves uncertainty about what would work best.

Understanding both the business environment and the future needs of the organisation is crucial for talent development (Elegbe 2010). For SMEs, talent development remains a significant challenge due to their informal management style and limited resources compared to larger firms (Krishnan & Scullion 2016). In Nigeria, there has been a change from traditional classroom learning to workrelated activities. Nigerian businesses implement strategic developmental activities such as seminars and workshops delivered by experts. Larger organisations may even send employees abroad for further

learning to broaden their perspectives (Elegbe, 2010). However, many managers view training and development programs as expenses rather than investments in human capital.

3.6.3 Succession Planning

Succession planning has become more prominent due to persistent skills shortages and is now implemented by both large and smaller organisations. While Succession planning is a systematic process put in place to develop and retain knowledge, ensure leadership continuity, and provide future advancement (Rothwell, 2010; CIPD, 2020), succession management broadly refers to a firm's ability to identify and develop high-potential talents, future leaders, and senior managers to successfully fill leadership and key business positions (Rothwell, 2010; CIPD, 2020)

Succession planning mainly covers senior jobs in organisations and, in terms of internal promotion, ensures a pool of employees with the attributes, knowledge, and abilities to occupy senior roles if they become vacant (Taylor 2014). According to CIPD (2020), Succession planning can adopt either a traditional approach, where large companies run highly structured, confidential top-down succession schemes to find internal successors for critical top positions, or a modern approach, which promotes more openness and diversity and has closer links to TM practices, which promotes more openness and diversity and has closer links to TM practices. Critics of the traditional approach highlight its failure to recognise non-managerial roles, regardless of their importance to the organisation's success (CIPD, 2020). consequently, the growing uncertainty, increasing speed of change, and flatter organisational structures have led to a decline in this approach.

Succession planning can create new knowledge patterns, increase employee loyalty and engagement, and result in lower turnover rates. It can be seen as a retention strategy that offers developmental opportunities (Ahsan, 2018), leading to improved employee performance (Ali & Mehreen, 2019). Effective management of succession between employer and employee creates opportunities for both parties to achieve their goals. However, succession planning poses challenges for SMEs in Nigeria, as many are run by family members and friends who occupy senior positions (Ugoani, 2020). According to PwC (2016), only a few Nigerian SMEs have a succession planning process for senior positions, while the rest have none, resulting in high turnover rates for SMEs (Ugoani, 2020).

The lack of succession planning is a serious problem for the survival of family-owned businesses in Nigeria, with 94.2% of entrepreneurs not having a succession plan (Onuoha, 2013). found that succession laws and Nigeria's multicultural nature hinder smooth succession in family businesses. These laws are ambiguous, encompassing native laws and customs. Musa & Semasinghe (2014) discovered that many founders of family-owned firms avoid succession planning due to fear of losing control of the business. They also found that inheritance issues among family members impede the

continuity of family enterprises. Onuoha's (2013) study on poor succession planning by entrepreneurs in Nigeria found that entrepreneurs' feelings of good health, lack of interest by potential successors, lack of knowledge about succession planning, and fear of mismanagement are all contributory factors to poor succession planning. In addition, Aderonke's (2014) research on culture determinants and family business succession in Jos, Nigeria, found that cultural factors such as extended family system, inheritance traditions, and education significantly impact successful succession in family enterprises (Ogbechie & Anetor, 2015).

Building on the challenges of succession planning and the retention of high-potential employees, workforce differentiation emerges as a strategic approach to enhance organisational performance. Section 3.6.3.1 below analysis the concept of workforce differentiation in relation to Talent management.

3.6.3.1 Work Force Differentiation

Cappelli & Keller (2017) argue that the economic recession of the 70s led to a spread of an exclusive approach to TM, as organisations realised that equal investments in all employees implied high management costs. Consequently, maintaining an inclusive approach became increasingly difficult and expensive. Lepak and Snell (1999), among others, have questioned the idea of an ideal HR architecture for managing employees, suggesting that adopting homogeneous practices can be detrimental to an organisation's value proposition by leaving no room to focus on the most productive resources. Prior research on HR practices proposed a homogeneous approach to employee management, advocating for HR best practices across different firms regardless of context (Huselid 1995; Lepak & Snell, 1999). However, Lepak & Snell (1999) proposed a framework that advocated for varied investments based on employees' capabilities. The popularity of TM has since led to a greater focus on differentiation in HR, initially at the employee level and later at the job role/position level (Baker et al., 2009; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Collings (2017) defined workforce differentiation as a formalised approach to segmenting the workforce based on employees' competence or the nature of their roles to reflect the differential potential to generate value (Collings, 2017).

Huselid & Becker (2015) argue that organisations failing to differentiate their workforce strategies will suffer from gross underperformance. Workforce differentiation practitioners generally believe that organisations can create value through diverse workforce designs and management strategies. Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2015), Huselid & Becker (2011), and Huselid et al. (2017) contend that workforce differentiation is mainly about investing more in high-potential employees who are likely to generate greater returns on investment for the business. This differential strategy focuses on a small number of employees deemed most important due to their higher contributions to organisational performance. However, some academics (Collings, 2014; Meyers & Werkom, 2014; Meyers et al.,

2020) argue that there is no empirical proof of a direct link between workforce differentiation, strategic talent management, and organisational performance. Nevertheless, Baker & Huselid (1998), cited in Huselid & Becker (2011), argue for the adoption of recruitment and selection strategies consistent with firms' competitive strategies, reward systems that support successful strategy implementation, and training and development strategies guided by performance management systems and business objectives.

Managers face the challenge of deciding where to adopt uniform strategies for all employees (e.g., staffing, performance management, compensation, rewards) and where to differentiate (i.e., roles requiring more investment to attract, select, develop, and retain top talent) (Huselid & Becker, 2011). However, Beatty & Schneier (1997; p.30) suggest that HRM can be more effective by focusing on a "core competency workforce". However, Huselid and Becker (2011) state that academic literature on HR strategy concludes that the ROI of high-performance work systems is financially, economically, and statistically significant. Weis & Schaefer (2012) highlight scientific proof that aligning workforce competencies with business strategy can promote competitive advantage. Workforce differentiation is a practical approach to aligning business strategy with HRM. Lepak and Snell (1999), Wright et al. (2001), and others argue that employees' value should be reflected in how they are managed; employees with different values should be managed with a differentiated HR architecture, customising some practices to fit the specific requirements of high-value employees while standardising others for the rest.

Weis and Schaefer also propose a differentiated psychological contract, arguing that employment relations between employees and organisations should vary based on employees' value. Lepak and Snell (1999) proposed a framework for workforce differentiation, shown in Fig. 3.6 below.

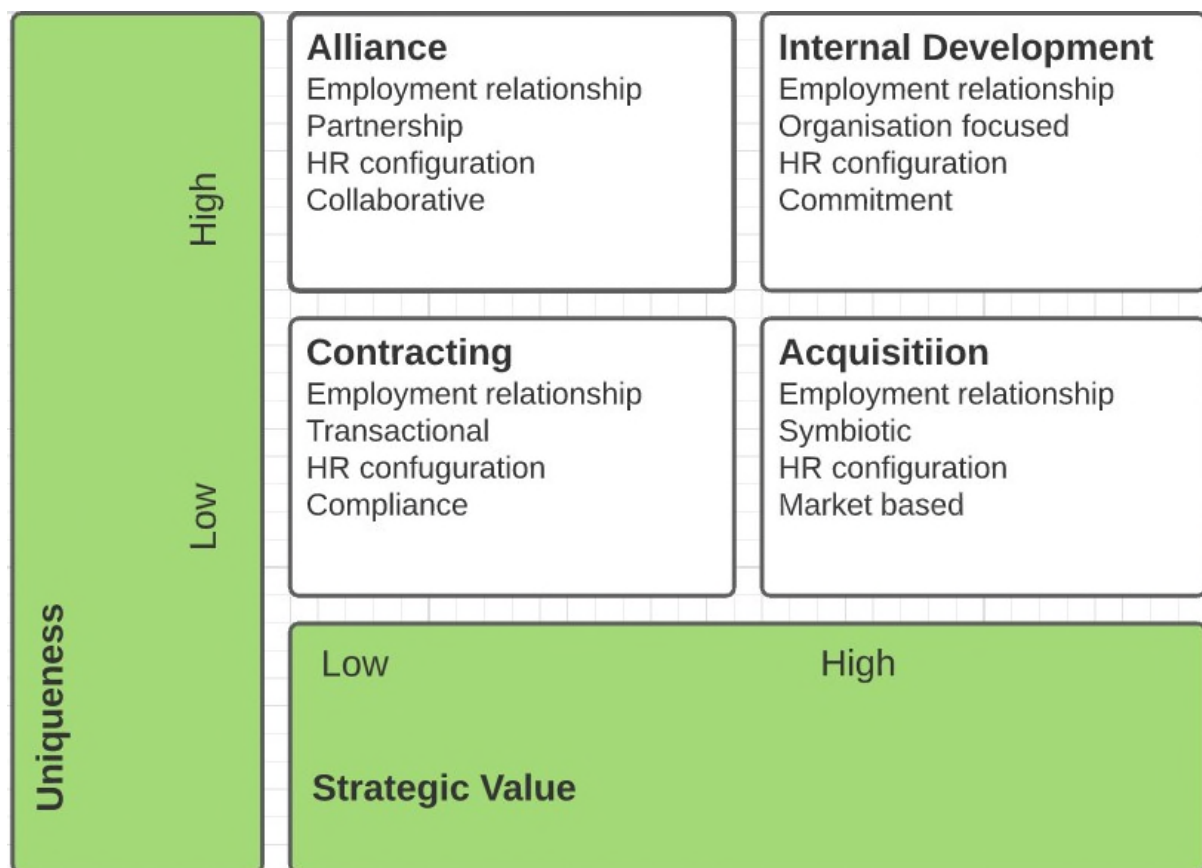


Figure 3.6 Framework of Workforce Differentiation Source: Lepak & Snell, 1999, p.36

This framework is based on two dimensions: the unique nature of human capital (HC) concerning firm specificity versus the availability and use of skills and the strategic value of HC. This model suggests that employees with high strategic value and uniqueness should be managed with an organisationfocused psychological contract geared towards commitment (Weis & Shaefer, 2012).

Regarding what HR practice should operate within a differential HR architecture, Huselid et al. (2005) highlight practices like evaluation, development, compensation, and succession, while Huselid and Becker (2011) suggest attraction, selection, and retention, and Scholz (2010) recommends employer branding. Lepak & Snell (1999; 2002) look at differentiation from employees' characteristics, like the value of knowledge and skills, stating that employees with the most valuable/unique skills are strategic assets contributing to organisational efficiency and effectiveness. Collings & Mellahi (2009) address workforce differentiation based on the identification of pivotal positions, suggesting that TM resources must be allocated to employees or groups with greater strategic contribution, maintaining talent pools to ensure key roles are filled, and establishing a differential and commitment-oriented HR architecture. They emphasise that "key" positions are not necessarily senior positions.

Huselid et al. (2005), Becker & Huselid (2006), and Huselid & Becker (2011) view differentiation based on the value of job roles, stating that the behaviours of key employees who contribute to organisational

strategic objectives are complementary to effective strategy implementation. Here, the value and uniqueness of employees' knowledge and skills are secondary to the distribution of performance in strategic roles. Despite support for workforce differentiation, it could conflict with organisational cultures that are knowledge-based, innovative, and network-driven. Features such as team orientation, cross-functional collaborations, and dedication to organisational goals may suffer from the implementation of workforce differentiation (Weis & Shaefer, 2011). Additionally, workforce differentiation, if not implemented cautiously, could appear segregating and discriminatory, creating an 'us versus them' mindset, leading to demotivation, low performance and high turnover (Weis & Shaefer, 2012). High turnover from workforce differentiation can lead to increased recruitment costs, knowledge loss, and diminished organisational cohesion and performance. Therefore, organisations strive to promote talent retention. Section 3.6.4 below discusses talent retention as a TM activity.

3.6.4 Talent Retention

Retention refers to the extent to which organisations retain their employees, often measured by the percentage of employees with service lengths typically exceeding one year relative to the percentage of the total workforce (CIPD, 2020). For some, talent retention is defined as an organisation's ability to retain its valued employees (Taylor, 2014). Similarly, Collings and Mellahi (2009) assert that many businesses see talent retention as their ability to retain members of their talent pool. Thus, retention management involves a systematic effort to create an environment conducive to employee retention through policies and practices that address employees' needs (CIPD, 2020).

High turnover incurs significant costs, including loss of time, effort, customer satisfaction, business performance, and the expenses associated with recruiting and developing new employees (Jauhari et al., 2013). While many of the costs are indirect (e.g., administrative or management time), substantial direct costs can arise, mainly when recruitment involves advertisements or agencies (CIPD, 2020). Despite the critical importance of talent retention in talent management (TM), it remains a significant challenge for managers and organisations, impacting their ability to achieve organisational success and maintain a competitive advantage (Pregolato et al. 2017). CIPD (2020) reported that 80% of organisations faced critical challenges in retaining senior staff in 2016, yet only 40% of organisations had implemented substantial policies or initiatives to improve their staff retention. Taylor (2014) argues that an Organisation's ability to retain staff is influenced by push (factors that lead to employees' resignation due to feelings of injustice or unfairness, boredom, disengagement and lack of motivation to do their daily tasks, lack of adequate coaching and mentoring, and lack of training and development opportunities) and pull factors (factors that can be offered by other organisations such as job satisfaction, higher pay, rewards and benefits, long-term career opportunities and job security).

Various studies have explored factors contributing to the high turnover rate. Job pressure, lack of job satisfaction, and low commitment are frequently cited as common reasons employees leave their organisations (Alhmoud & Rjoub, 2019; CIPD, 2020). A review of TM literature multiple strategies to improve talent retention. Jiang and Iles (2011) and Shah (2011) argue that employer branding is a critical aspect of talent retention. Some studies approach talent retention from the perspective of organisational commitment, emphasising psychological ownership as a significant factor in retaining talent (Martin & Groen-in't-woud, in Scullion & Collings, 2011; Olckers and Du Plessis, 2012). In the European context, learning opportunities and organisational commitment significantly influence talent retention (Alessia and Regina, 2008). These authors analysed the link between talent retention and organisational commitment through different lenses; they unanimously agree that talent retention is driven by organisational commitment, which has long been viewed as an important mediator for turnover and employee retention (Meyer et al., 2002). Research indicates that some significant talent retention factors, like job confidence, opportunity for growth, room for success, fair exchange, and positive influence, may foster talent commitment, as leavers are usually less satisfied with these than stayers (HayGroup, 2013).

Other TM literature examines talent retention through the determinants of turnover intention, such as career development, rewards, and work environment (Phillips & Roper, 2009; Ma & Trigo, 2008). Chinyio et al. (2018) argue that organisations can offer intrinsic, extrinsic, tangible, intangible and social rewards as incentives to retain employees. Studies investigating the relationship between rewards and employee commitment have found that increased motivation and retention lead to higher individual performance and workforce loyalty (Newman & Sheikh 2012; Morgan et al. 2013). Additionally, Research highlights that motivation, recognition, and job satisfaction are more effective factors for talent retention than pay raises and extrinsic rewards (Taylor 2014). Although many studies have analysed the relationship between employee retention and turnover, few have specifically examined the link between talent retention and turnover (Belbin et al., 2012; Chinyio et al., 2018). CIPD (2013) suggests that retention practices such as improving line managers' skills, creating learning and development opportunities, and offering pay increments are the most effective methods to reduce voluntary turnover. However, these practices, based on Western contexts, may not be as effective in Nigeria. Turnover rates have steadily increased as talented employees seek opportunities elsewhere, driven by economic downturns, job insecurity, workforce mobility, and a shortage of highly skilled individuals (Anlesinya et al., 2019; Ohunakin et al., 2020). These authors note that retention management in Africa, particularly Nigeria, has been under-researched, necessitating further investigation to understand the determinants of effective talent retention.

Effective talent retention is closely linked to talent deployment. Strategically placing individuals in roles that align with their skills and aspirations not only maximises their contribution to the organisation but also enhances their job satisfaction and commitment, reducing the likelihood of turnover. The next section discusses the significance of talent deployment to Talent management.

3.6.4.1 Talent Deployment

CIPD (2020) explains deployment as the process of positioning identified talents to fill critical workforce gaps, ensuring the most efficient and effective use of the workforce. This can involve placing identified talents in short-term roles, such as critical projects or task forces, or selecting them for long-term positions (Australian Public Service Commission, 2018). CIPD further emphasises that deployment is most effective when combined with workforce planning, long-term skills development, and a supportive mobility policy. Therefore, organisations must not only identify and understand their skills gaps but also address them by designing and implementing necessary skills enhancement opportunities and training. This includes job rotations and secondments to support progression and growth, as successful deployment represents a return on investment in a talent management system.

Contrary to the common belief that talent alone distinguishes the best organisations from the rest, Mankins (2020) for Harvard Business Review argues that the best-performing companies do not necessarily have better people. Based on a study by Bain & Company, which assessed global companies and senior executives' workforce productivity, it was found that many top companies have a similar percentage of top talent as others. What sets them apart is how they deploy their talent (Mankins, 2020). In a survey conducted by Mankins (2020) involving 300 top executives from large organisations globally, the findings revealed:

- a) On average, 15% of an organisation's workforce are A players.
- b) There are no drastic differences in the proportion of top talent between the best performing organisations (top quartile) and others (remaining three quartiles), with top talent comprising 16% for the best and 14% for the rest.

While talent identification is crucial in the talent management process, effective deployment of identified talents is equally important (Mankins, 2020; CIPD, 2020). Certain roles are inherently pivotal to the successful execution of organisational strategy and performance. Organisations with strategic talent management (STM) practices identify these roles and deploy their most talented employees to fill them, thereby boosting productivity and competitive advantage. Conger & Pillans (2018) argue that the best way to develop future leaders is through relevant on-the-job experience. Thus, building a talent

pipeline requires organisations and their talents to work together to create a portfolio of job assignments that provide the strategically relevant experiences necessary for filling pivotal roles. Organisations must also consider whether their deployment processes help talents gain the experiences needed for career progression, whether individual development plans are factored into shortlisting for vacant positions, and what mechanisms exist for individuals to express their desired job moves for career advancement (Conger & Pillan, 2018).

3.7 Context of Talent Management in SMEs

Talent management has become a critical focus for organisations seeking sustainable competitive advantage, particularly within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). SMEs, which account for a significant portion of the global economy, face unique challenges in attracting, developing, and retaining skilled employees. The context of talent management in SMEs is characterised by limited resources, a dynamic labour market, and a need for agility in human resource practices (Tansley, 2011). Unlike large corporations, SMEs often lack formalised talent management systems, making it imperative for them to adopt innovative strategies tailored to their specific circumstances (Sparrow et al., 2015). The next section explores the implication of organisational size on TM practices.

3.7.1 Theoretical implication of organisational size

Several studies highlight that SMEs differ significantly from larger firms in the HR practices adopted and in their overall approach to HRM (Rabi & Gilman, 2012; Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). They argue that HR practices vary depending on the size of the organisation. Unlike SMEs, large organisations are more likely to adopt sophisticated staffing practices, develop advanced internal labour pools, offer more career advancement opportunities, provide higher extrinsic rewards (Wallace & Kay, 2009), use formal performance appraisal methods (Jack et al., 2006), and invest more in learning and development (Cappelli, 2010). Additionally, SMEs typically spend less on managing personnel and are less likely to have formal HR policies because they focus on administrative rather than strategic levels (Kaliannan et al., 2016; Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). However, while organisational size is significant in predicting formal HR practices, it is not the only factor. (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017; Pauli & Pocztowski, 2019). Differences in HR practice sophistication among SMEs highlight the influence of industry and contextual factors on employment relations in these firms (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017; Pauli & Pocztowski, 2019). To better understand the implications of organisational size on TM and HR practices, this section examines institutional theory, economic theory, and resource dependency theory.

Proponents of institutional theory view organisations as social entities whose performance is evaluated within socially constructed environments (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017; Tatoglu, 2016). As the resources, legitimacy, and stakeholder acceptance necessary for business survival are controlled by

various entities, firms must shape their management practices to align with their environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). For example, SMEs and large organisations may be required to uphold different legal standards when implementing HR practices. Potential employees scrutinise organisations by comparing their culture, policies, and practices with industry standards (Williamson, 2000). Nevertheless, Williamson et al. (2002) argue that the pressure to achieve legitimacy and stakeholder approval generally drives large organisations to adopt more advanced and socially responsive talent management and HR practices. This could give them an advantage in recruitment, as potential employees often perceive highly legitimate organisations as more dependable and trustworthy than their counterparts. Furthermore, because SMEs invest less in labour market visibility compared to large organisations, they are less familiar to job seekers, who may have more difficulty accessing credible information about them (Williamson et al., 2002; Storey et al., 2010). This limited information could lead to a legitimacy disadvantage for SMEs in the job market.

Pocztowski et al. (2021) state that the general image of SMEs—as perceived by job candidates—is a significant factor, as candidates are more likely to gravitate toward large organisations that offer numerous benefits and career development opportunities. In contrast, SMEs may be seen as less valuable employers. Scullion and Collings (2011) argue that, unlike SMEs, MNCs must adopt global best practices as they compete for talent at regional and global levels, facing more pressure to maintain organisational legitimacy in the labour market. Thus, SMEs and large organisations may, in reality, be sourcing their talent from different labour markets. Moreover, while TM literature on large firms has outlined TM best practices in global MNCs (e.g., Cappelli, 2010; Hartmann et al., 2010; Iles et al., 2010), SMEs lack best practice leaders in TM or HR practices. Consulting firms that specialise in developing and disseminating HR best practices often do not primarily target SMEs, leading to the duplication of TM practices from large organisations to SMEs and resulting in the convergence of TM practices among large MNCs (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). The convergence of HR practices (recruitment, development, management of talented employees) in large MNCs indicates the similarity of challenges facing corporations globally (Capelli, 2010; Stahl et al., 2012; Farndale et al., 2014). Industry standards are mainly set by larger organisations, which tend to have more advanced management practices, explaining why firm growth leads to increased formalisation of HR practices.

Nevertheless, SMEs are inclined to create distinctive models tailored to their specific contexts.

The number of market competitors affects the demand for labour and the sophistication of HRM practices offered by employers. Organisations in highly competitive markets are driven to acquire talent that contributes to innovation and the development of sophisticated internal systems (Pocztowski et al., 2021). However, due to the associated costs, SMEs tend to focus more on tangible

sources of competitive advantage, such as machinery, assets, and infrastructure, rather than human capital. Economic theorists debate that the transaction costs associated with HR best practices imply that acceptable economies of scale must be achieved before sophisticated HR strategies can be implemented; in this regard, SMEs are disadvantaged compared to larger organisations due to fewer products and lower production (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). Although SMEs are diverse and their impact cannot be easily generalised, their limited visibility makes them vulnerable to intense competitive pressures, leading them to prioritise their budgets by using available resources sparingly, effectively, and efficiently (Stahl et al., 2012; Festing et al., 2013). Significant investment in sophisticated HR practices is required to achieve positive performance outcomes, which implies increased direct and indirect costs for the organisation (Festing et al., 2013).

SMEs often opt for informal management styles and centralised control to reduce costs while staying flexible. The high costs of implementing formal HR practices make informal management practices the only cost-effective option for many SMEs (Mayson & Barrett, 2006). For example, when implementing minimum wage policies in recent years led to increased costs for UK-based hotel owners, informal work practices were embraced, which in turn increased productivity. The informal structure of SMEs, coupled with their centralised control system, provides managers with greater overall control, encouraging flexibility in recruitment and employee deployment as the business grows (Cappelli, 2008; Festing et al., 2013; Scullion et al., 2010). Small organisations also tend to reduce costs and remain flexible by encouraging employees to take on multiple roles and adapt to the changing needs of the organisation, which is less common in large organisations (Festing et al., 2013; Scullion et al., 2010).

A cost advantage for SMEs is their limited staffing and flexible working arrangements (such as employing zero-hour contract staff, part-time workers, job-sharing, and contracting out), as well as their standard one-campus systems. Additionally, SMEs can partner with large organisations and government agencies to fund HR programs, thereby lowering cost implications. One external factor that influences TM practices in SMEs is employee availability—the number of individuals actively seeking employment and the level of skills and competencies of those in the labour market (Pocztowski et al., 2021). Organisations operating in areas with a skills shortage tend to focus more on developing their existing staff to boost retention, while those with access to a vast pool of talented candidates focus more on attracting the best-fit candidates from the labour market. A study conducted in Polish SMEs revealed that 57% of participants face extreme difficulties in filling specialist positions (Pocztowski et al., 2021). Pfeffer & Salancik's resource dependence theory reports that organisational behaviours are influenced by their dependence on specific external resources crucial to survival

(Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Therefore, the more an organisation relies on external partners, the higher the degree of uncertainty they encounter.

SMEs, having fewer resources than large organisations (which are more advantaged in their partnerships with external parties and have a greater chance of influencing environmental factors), face more significant challenges due to their smaller size (Festing, 2013; Valverde et al., 2013). Furthermore, access to top managerial talent is a prerequisite for organisational success. However, SMEs' inability to invest in costly staffing makes it nearly impossible to attract candidates from the same talent pool used by large firms or offer competitive pay and benefits (Festing, 2013; Valverde et al., 2013). Instead of focusing on TM and HR issues, factors like changing market and customer demands are seen as strategic priorities for top management in SMEs (Williamson et al., 2002; Valverde et al., 2013). However, SMEs can overcome these setbacks by providing an environment that encourages creativity, new ideas, and innovation, which could help attract valuable employees and boost retention. Other factors, such as perceptions of less bureaucracy, a better work environment, higher employee engagement, job quality and satisfaction, greater flexibility, and an informal atmosphere, could serve as advantages to SMEs if fully utilised (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017).

As demonstrated, organisational size plays a significant role in determining talent management practices, HRM, and overall management practices. While MNCs and large organisations tend to converge regarding HR best practices, SMEs are limited by the constraints outlined above. To better understand TM in SMEs, Poczowski, Pauli, and Mis developed a theoretical model in their book "Talent Management in Small and Medium Enterprises." This model, which is explored in the next section, reveals that context-specific factors influence TM practices alongside the owners' mindset, which in turn impacts organisational and HR outcomes.

3.7.2 Theoretical Model of TM in SMEs

Existing literature suggests that peculiar challenges characterise talent management (TM) in SMEs due to their lack of formalised processes, limited resources, and reactive organisational practices (Festing et al., 2017; Poczowski et al., 2021). For SMEs to successfully implement TM policies and practices, they must create conditions that allow employees' full potential to be identified, developed, and aligned with organisational needs to achieve strategic goals. These conditions are shaped by both external (e.g., general market conditions or industry-specific factors) and internal factors, as depicted in the theoretical model developed by Poczowski et al. (2021 below).

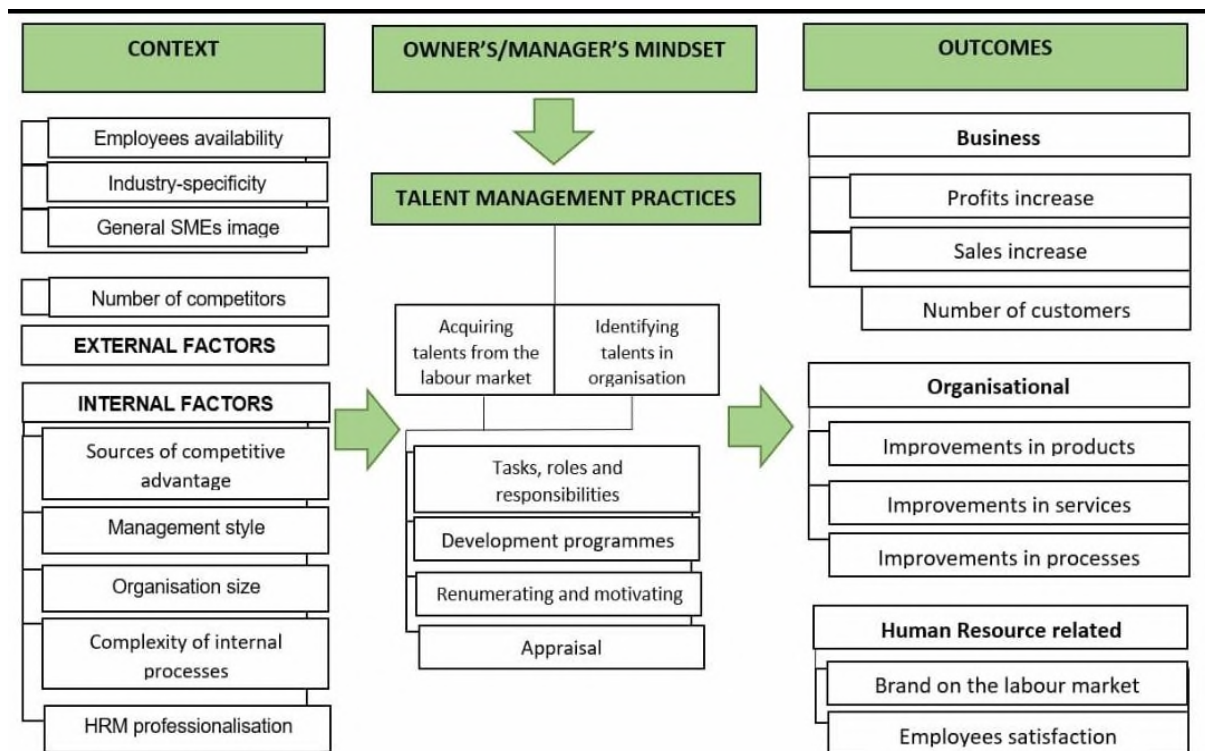


Figure 3.7 Theoretical Model of TM in SMEs. (Pocztowski, et al., 2013)

As shown in Figure 3.7, among the various external factors that can influence TM practices in SMEs, employee availability, industry specificity, the general image of SMEs, and the number of competitors are the most influential. On the other hand, sources of competitive advantage, management style, organisation size, complexity of internal processes, and the level of HRM professionalisation are identified as the most significant internal factors affecting TM in SMEs (Pocztowski et al., 2021). These factors have been discussed in Sections 3.6 and 3.7. The model also indicates that contextual factors impact owners' mindsets, values, and attitudes towards TM practices. These factors influence decisions on whether to identify and develop talent internally or source it externally, as well as determine the scope of employees' tasks, job roles, and responsibilities (Sheenan et al., 2018). Moreover, they contribute to the design and implementation of developmental programs, and they shape remuneration and motivation systems through strategic appraisal processes that aid in evaluating and assessing employee performance (Pocztowski et al., 2021).

According to this model, TM practices yield positive outcomes on three levels: business, organisational performance, and HR. At the business level, effectively implemented TM practices can maximise profit, sales, and customer acquisition (Pocztowski et al., 2021). Additionally, increased competencies and high levels of motivation enhance the value of human resources, potentially leading to innovation, the development of new or improved products and services, and improved internal systems for SMEs. The model advocates for a TM approach in SMEs that emphasises employee value proposition, employer

branding, increased retention rates, and the acquisition of high-potential individuals. However, TM activities will vary among SMEs depending on their specific contextual factors.

In summary, while SMEs face distinct challenges in talent management due to their size and resources, they are not isolated from the global trends that shape TM practices across the world. The need to attract, develop, and retain talent is universal, but SMEs must do so within the constraints of their specific contexts while also responding to global pressures. As a result, effective TM in SMEs requires a nuanced approach that balances global best practices with local realities, enabling them to compete successfully in the global talent market. The next section analyses talent management from a global perspective.

3.8 Global View of Talent Management

Most of the talent management (TM) research focuses on individual and organisational levels or compares TM practices in Western contexts, often overlooking the macro view (Al-Ariss, 2014; Farndale et al., 2014). The current global market uncertainty has heightened the need for organisations and nations to develop robust TM strategies to attract and retain top talent. Developed economies like the UK, Canada, Germany, the UAE, the USA, and Australia lead the global talent race by implementing immigration policies favourable to skilled individuals. In contrast, emerging economies such as China and India seek to repatriate highly skilled emigrants by reversing immigration policies. Meanwhile, countries like Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan have adopted "homegrown" policies, investing in education and human resource development to compete in the global talent war.

Globally, firms operate in an increasingly complex environment due to the forces, structures, and systems which dictate the composition, availability, and flow of human resources into, within and out of firms more volatile (King & Vaiman, 2019; Thunnissen & Gallardo- Gallardo, 2019). As firms expand across multiple regional and national settings, each context presents a unique macro talent management (MTM) system influenced by political, economic, regulatory, social, technological, and cultural factors (Khilji et al., 2015). These MTM systems can significantly impact an organisation's ability to attract, engage, and retain the talent needed to achieve competitive business objectives (Khilji et al., 2015; King & Vaiman, 2019; Thunnissen & Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019). However, organisations may underestimate the role of MTM systems in either complementing or constraining their TM strategies (King & Vaiman, 2019). This oversight can limit the effectiveness of organisational talent strategies and miss opportunities to leverage benefits or mitigate risks associated with varying macro talent contexts (Khilji et al., 20-15; King & Vaiman, 2019; Thunnissen & Gallardo- Gallardo, 2019).

Khilji and Schular (2017) outlined some macro-environmental factors, as shown in the figure below.

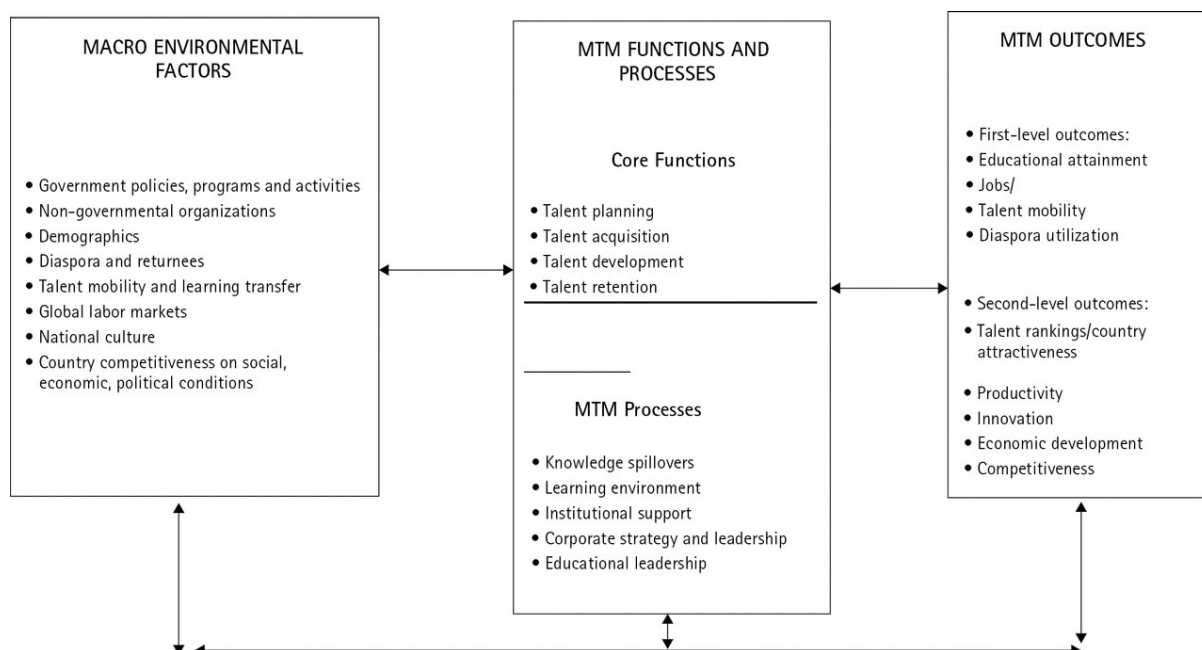


Figure 3.8 Talent Management in a Global Context: A Conceptual Framework of Macro Talent Management (MTM)

According to Khilji et al. (2015), macro-level TM involves integrating talent, government policies, and diaspora mobility to attract, train, develop, and retain talent that fosters innovation and competitiveness, thereby facilitating organisational TM practices. They define MTM as “activities and policies systematically designed and developed by governmental and nongovernmental organisations to promote the quality and quantity of talent across countries and regions to enhance the innovation and competitiveness of their citizens and corporations” (Khilji & Keilson, 2014; Khilji et al., 2015). The authors advocate for interdisciplinary research to provide a more holistic understanding of TM, which could lead to the development of nuanced theoretical frameworks. This broader knowledge of global talent management (GTM) would better inform both governmental and organisational policies, equipping them to manage talent more effectively in the increasingly competitive global labour market and enhance economic development through integrated national education, human resource development, and talent strategies. A global view of talent management shapes national human resource development by guiding policies, education, and training strategies to cultivate talent that meets both global demands and local economic needs. Therefore, the following sections analyse national human resource development, national education system and national culture in relation to TM.

3.8.1 National Human Resource Development

Research into the macro-level of TM highlights the impact of governmental and non-governmental policies, such as education, HRD planning, and societal issues, on the design and implementation of TM (Cooke et al. 2014). Martin (2015) argues that to attract and retain top talents internationally,

countries must implement TM policies that are targeted at education and Human Resource Development. Scholars like Lynham and Cunningham (2006) and Alagaraja and Githens (2016) have examined long-term opportunities and challenges that either support or obstruct national HRD. They found that HRD enhances economic development by promoting job growth through workforce development, fostering organisational training, and nurturing skills at national and regional levels, including training for both employed and unemployed individuals, as well as new labour market entrants.

Historically, HRD was defined as the process of developing humans to boost economic productivity and national wealth (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). Nevertheless, current definitions, particularly in developing countries, emphasise the human side of national human resource development (NHRD) (Paprock, 2006). HRD encompasses more than aiming to increase a country's economy; it assesses the extent to which a government provides its people's needs based on these variables: life expectancy, access to education, and adjusted real income (UNDP, 2000). These factors are interrelated, making it crucial for HRD to address all three components (Paprock, 2006) comprehensively.

Literature on NHRD identifies political and socio-cultural systems as critical in developing programmes, policies, and recommendations for policymakers (Cunningham et al. 2006; Lynham and Cunningham 2006). Comparative studies have focused on education-led systems (formal, informal, and vocational) and their interaction with other non-educational factors in countries like the U.S., UK, France, and Germany (Cunningham et al. 2006; Lynham & Cunningham 2006). Research has also explored the influence of culture on industry and educational systems in developed nations. Additionally, scholars have highlighted the connections between organisations, labour markets, public institutions, and work-based systems, such as educational institutions and public-private collaborations (Cunningham et al., 2006; Lynham & Cunningham, 2006). NHRD strategies are more effective when examining the socio-economic and socio-cultural systems' impact on stakeholder institutions (Cunningham et al., 2006; Lynham & Cunningham, 2006; Alagaraja & Githens, 2016). At the macro level, NHRD is best understood by examining the interdependence of political, economic, social, legal, and cultural systems in enhancing human resource capacities and fostering capacity building at national, organisational, and individual levels (Cunningham et al., 2006; Lynham & Cunningham, 2006).

The development of a highly qualified workforce is crucial to the national agenda. Nigeria's educational reform, which began in 2007, aimed to address significant issues in the nation's education sector (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2009). These reforms, driven by changing global and national contexts, led to the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in 2004, focusing on job creation, poverty eradication, and wealth creation (Obioma & Ajagun, 2006; Alabi & Okemakinde, 2010). The reforms included building new schools, updating curricula, and developing teacher training

programmes (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2009). However, despite these initiatives, Nigeria's education system remains misaligned with labour market needs, partly due to the lack of formal interaction between education, training programmes, stakeholders, and employers in curriculum development (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2009; Alabi & Okemakinde, 2010).

NEEDS outlined reform priorities to equip Nigerian youth with skills and qualifications for national, regional, and international competitiveness. However, a mismatch persists between the quality and quantity of graduates and labour market demands (Adesina, 2006; Yusuf & Yusuf, 2009; Alabi & Okemakinde, 2010). The labour market faces an oversupply of under-skilled labour and a severe shortage of skilled workers, contributing to a youth unemployment rate of 14.2% and one of the world's lowest workforce participation rates. Therefore, implementing a comprehensive, strategic HRD policy that is aligned with producing qualified graduates is essential. To build and engage a skilled youth workforce capable of driving growth, Nigeria must implement structural changes in HRD and education policies, redesign systems, and promote targeted training.

While much of the literature focuses on HRD in developed countries, and most HRD research emerges from Western contexts, limited studies address HRD in developing or underdeveloped countries (Paprock, 2006). Few publications compare NHRD in transitioning societies within emerging economies. The rapid growth of HRD literature in the U.S. and other Western countries has led to the dissemination of HRD concepts shaped by these developed contexts to less developed nations, which often adopt these external constructs rather than developing their own. This imposition of Western HRD models is exacerbated by the influence of multinational corporations and organisations from developed countries operating in less developed regions—a consequence of globalisation, capital democracy, and free-market systems (Paprock, 2006).

3.8.2 National Education System

As discussed in section 3.8.2 above, the interrelationship between education and development is undeniable, with education being a crucial factor in national development. Since the 20th century, development has depended on the quality and quantity of educated citizens (Okuneye & Adelowokan, 2014). Thus, education is a critical macro factor that determines the availability of talented individuals. However, tertiary enrolment rates in Nigeria remain low at 8.9%, compared to over 90% in OECD countries (OECD, 2018). Moreover, the growth rate of tertiary enrolment in Nigeria has been sluggish and inconsistent, with significant distortions between 1995 and 2004, the lowest growth occurring in 2004 (Okuneye & Adelowokan, 2014). This slow growth is attributed to political crises and industrial disputes in many parts of the country. Despite various governmental initiatives to encourage education at all levels, school-aged children's enrolment rates remain deplorable (Okuneye & Adelowokan, 2014). Additionally, despite efforts to improve literacy rates and the relevance and standard of

education, its practical applicability to labour market needs remains questionable. While employers acknowledge that many graduates possess strong technical knowledge, they express dissatisfaction with the lack of applied technical skills necessary for problem-solving and business productivity (Sodipo, 2014).

Most employers frequently criticise educational institutes for emphasising theory and concepts while neglecting practical training and marketable skills (Dabalen, Oni, & Adekola, 2000 in Pitan & Adedeji, 2012). This mismatch between the skills taught and those needed in the labour market has negatively impacted the relevance of university education and the employability and productivity of graduates (Pitan & Adedeji, 2012). There is widespread concern that the Nigerian education system fails to equip students with the technical and analytical skills needed for success in the competitive global market, relying instead on rote learning and memorisation to pass exams. A 2012 study revealed a significant skills mismatch among Nigerian graduates, with a discrepancy of approximately 60.6% between skills demand and supply (Pitan & Adedeji, 2012; Sodipo, 2014; Uzor & Nwabuikwu, 2016). The last available skills were communication (67.7%), ICT (66.3%), and decision-making (65.7%) (Uzor & Nwabuikwu, 2016). This aligns with a 2010 study on the labour market prospects of Nigerian graduates, which found that employers considered graduates poorly trained and unproductive in their roles (Sodipo, 2014; Uzor & Nwabuikwu, 2016). The essential skills lacking were applied technical skills, as well as analytical, oral, and written communication skills (Uzor & Nwabuikwu, 2016).

Various studies assert that academic standards have deteriorated over time, rendering a university degree insufficient for guaranteeing good communication or technical skills (Sodipo, 2014). Consequently, graduates are often labelled as "half-baked." Sodipo (2014) attributes these educational shortcomings to poor funding, unnecessary interference, inadequate staffing, overcrowding in institutions, and mismanagement. Similarly, Dabalen, Oni, and Adekola (2000) argue that the subpar performance of graduates in the Nigerian labour market is due to outdated curricula in higher education institutions, with many programmes losing relevance. Oyesiku (2010) and Ogwo (2010) also criticise higher education institutions for the decline in educational quality, citing deteriorating teaching facilities, inadequate funding, lack of government and private sector support, and poor curricula).

As demands for institutions to produce resourceful and competent graduates increase, it is crucial to identify the skills required to bridge the gap between unemployment and unemployability (Sodipo, 2014). A 2010 study by the Afterschool Graduate Development Centre involving 91 Human Resource Managers and Personnel revealed that 48% of employers rated Nigerian graduates poorly in conceptual and creative thinking, 44% in self-awareness, 39.6% in time management, 36% in global

and commercial awareness, 34.1% in career direction, 34.1% in emotional intelligence, and 31.9% in managing the transition from school to work (Ogwo, 2010; Sodipo, 2014). Ogwo (2010) recommends equipping students with the life skills necessary to navigate the challenges of life.

3.8.3 National Culture

Cooke et al. (2014) highlight the significant role of national culture in shaping Talent Management (TM) policies and programs, showing that TM practices in China are deeply influenced by cultural values emphasising long-term growth and learning. Similarly, TM practices in Russia reflect local cultural norms more than those of multinational corporations operating there (Latukha, 2015). Recognising this, global firms like Huawei and KFC adapt their TM strategies to fit both global and local (glocalisation) contexts, ensuring alignment with national cultures (Schuler, 2015). Cooke et al. (2014); Lanvin & Evans (2017). call for more research into how the alignment between national culture and company culture affects the success of TM practices.

Although the concept of culture has existed since prehistoric times, it has attracted numerous definitions over time (Stroh et al., 2002). A dominant and widely accepted definition of culture is provided by Hofstede (1983), who defined it as the shared norms, beliefs, behaviours, and values of a group that make them similar to or different from other groups. McFarlin and Sweeney (2018) defined culture as a system of values and rules of behaviour specific to a group, which shapes their national culture. Moreover, Hofstede (2001) explains national culture as the general mental programming of individuals in a particular country. He further states that national culture is pivotal in explaining various management phenomena, such as organisational structure and leadership style (Hofstede, 2001). Additionally, Dordevic (2016) and McFarlin and Sweeney (2018) suggest that national culture has the most significant influence on the content of HRM and employees' behaviours and attitudes within an organisation. They argue that employees in an organisation exist within a particular society and are influenced by a larger and more complex societal context. Thus, employees can develop shared beliefs within an organisation while also acquiring and introducing norms and values specific to their national culture.

Dordevic (2016) also mentioned that employees build their organisational values based on the national values they already possess and transfer these existing value systems and attitudes to their organisations. As Dordevic (2016) argues, in the event of a clash between national cultural values and managerial values, national culture has a more significant influence on employees' actions and beliefs than organisational behaviour. Therefore, national culture is universally prevalent within organisations. As national culture (a system of deeply rooted values, behaviours, and attitudes of people in a society) significantly determines the features of other national systems, such as legal, economic, political, and

social systems, it is undeniable that national culture is one of the most significant factors to consider by businesses in various contexts—particularly those entering unfamiliar territories (Dordevic, 2016).

Hofstede's 1980 study remains one of the most dominant cultural theories, indicating that cultural norms are embedded in the value systems of groups of people over extended periods. The Hofstede cultural model is widely used for cross-cultural comparisons and provides valid measures for the complex concept of culture (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2018). Critics argue that the model overlooks differences within countries in specific clusters, noting that despite similar scores, Australia and America may exhibit significant cultural differences. For example, while Australians may be motivated by extrinsic rewards like good pay and job security, Americans might be motivated by intrinsic rewards such as recognition and responsibility (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2018). Additionally, the model does not address regional subcultures within nations, as seen in Brazil, Canada, and Belgium (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2018). As national culture characteristics persist over time, the results of studies based on clusters of responses may not fully capture the underlying processes, questioning the model's accuracy (D'Iribarne, 1991; McSweeney, 2002; McFarlin & Sweeney, 2018). However, an advantage of this model is that it facilitates the analysis of cultural contexts by using a few sub-concepts, which allows for a high level of culture measurement. Moreover, the framework focuses on internal factors, potentially ignoring external factors that could influence behaviour.

The multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria has led to unhealthy rivalry among ethnic groups, making tribalism a common feature, as the Nigerian social system is largely based on tribalism and close kin relationships (Schwartz, 1966; Akindola & Ehinomen, 2017). One significant result of tribalism that impacts HRM practices in Nigeria is the term popularly known as "man know man." According to Akindola and Ehinomen (2017), "Favouritism, cronyism, nepotism, man-know-man, or whatever term you use to describe the practice of bestowing patronage on, or favouring, people you know or are related to over others, is not right." Arasli and Tumer (2008) state that nepotism and favouritism are common features of business life in Africa (Arasli & Tumer, 2008). "Man know man" in Nigeria is akin to Wasta in Arab countries, Guanxi in China, and blat in Russia (Loewe et al., 2007). In Nigeria, employment is largely based on "man know man," with vacancies filled through referrals and connections rather than skills and competence. This is particularly prevalent in government parastatals and small businesses (Akindola & Ehinomen, 2017). Fig 3.8 below is a theoretical framework that aims to investigate the link between national culture and TM.

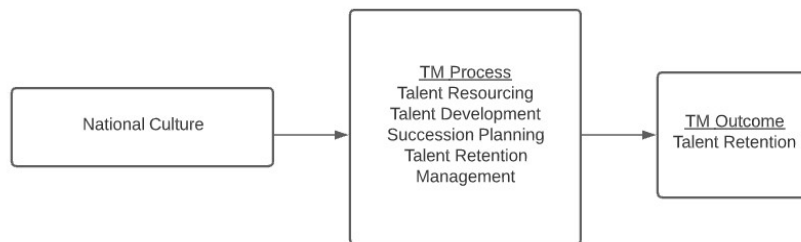


Figure 3.9 The Researcher

Although several studies have explored organisational culture and behaviour in developed countries like the UK and the USA, there is a lack of inquiry into culture in less developed nations (Alvesson, 2002; Gelfand et al., 2007). Consequently, there is a gap in the literature on TM practices in emerging economies and understanding how national culture impacts TM practices in Africa. With the rapid increase in the number of SMEs in Africa, researchers are encouraged to study the impact of national culture on the transfer and implementation of practices from Western countries.

Building on the previous discussion of macro talent management, it is pertinent to explore the theoretical foundations underpinning talent management. The following section delves into critical theories crucial for understanding talent management and retention, particularly in emerging economies. By examining these theoretical perspectives, we establish a framework for analysing the complex dynamics that shape talent practices, thereby providing a comprehensive and nuanced approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities within these evolving contexts.

3.9 Theoretical underpinnings of TM

This section critically examines theories pertinent to Talent Management (TM) in SMEs within emerging economies. By engaging with the Social Exchange Theory, Resource-Based View Theory, and Cultural and Institutional Theories, we develop a conceptual framework that elucidates how various factors influence the TM process and, ultimately, TM outcomes. This theoretical analysis provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play, offering insights into how these frameworks can guide effective TM practices in these unique contexts. One of the primary theoretical frameworks underpinning this study is the resource-based view (RBV) theory. The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory has significantly influenced talent management (TM) theory, emphasising the strategic value of human resources as sources of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). However, the RBV's application to TM is not without critique. Critics argue that it overemphasises internal resources while neglecting external factors such as market dynamics and institutional contexts (Oliver, 1997). Furthermore, the RBV's applicability may be limited in rapidly changing environments where the sustainability of

competitive advantage is questioned (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Therefore, while the RBV has provided a valuable lens for understanding talent as a strategic asset, its integration with TM theory should consider the balance between internal resource capabilities and external market influences. The section starts by critically evaluating the Resource-based view theory and its relevance to the TM concept.

3.9.1 Resource-based View (RBV) and Strategic Talent Management (STM) Outcome

As stated in previous sections, Resource-Based View (RBV) regards talent as valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources essential for organisations to attain and maintain a competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Specifically, “valuable” means that these resources contribute strategic value by enabling the exploration of market opportunities; “rare” indicates they are scarce among competitors; “inimitable” implies they are unique and cannot be replicated; and “non-substitutable” means they cannot be replaced by alternative resources (Barney 1991). The RBV has been widely adopted in studies of organisational performance (Innocent, 2015). It highlights how unique resources and capabilities can differentiate organisations from their competitors within an industry or market (Ahmed et al., 2018). The RBV addresses the ongoing question of how organisations can achieve and sustain competitive advantage while enhancing performance (Ahmed et al., 2018). Furthermore, it suggests that organisational performance largely depends on internal properties. Chuang & Lin (2017) and Teece et al. (1997) agree that a firm’s tangible and intangible assets, along with its capabilities (internal knowledge and competencies), constitute its internal properties. Similarly, Barney (1991) posits that organisations possess various resources, including assets, capabilities, processes, management competencies, technology, and knowledge, which enhance performance (Barney, 1991).

Upon analysing the role of human resources in achieving competitive advantage, Barney & Wright (1998) conclude that human resources must possess valuable, rare, inimitability and non-substitutable (VRIN) characteristics for sustained competitive advantage. However, their analysis revealed that not all human resources offer sustainable competitive advantages; some may be valuable in other ways but fail to enhance competitive advantage and may even lead to competitive disadvantage (Barney & Wright, 1998). Nevertheless, aspects of human resources that are valuable, rare, and inimitable can contribute to sustained competitive advantage if organisational management practices capitalise on them. Other scholars (Barney & Arikan 2001; Priem & Butler 2001; Sirmon et al. 2007) argue that RBT's predictive power is limited without considering managerial involvement, asserting that an organisation’s competitive advantage is influenced not only by resource characteristics but also by strategic management practices (Barney 1995). Moreover, Sirmon & Hitt (2003) state that effective integration and deployment of Human resources can further enhance their non-substitutability.

Organisations invest in strategic talent management (STM) processes to positively impact individual and organisational performance (Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). Boselie et al. (2005) differentiate between financial, organisational, and HR-related performance, emphasising that human resources most directly affect HR processes and practices.

Understanding the relationship between HR practices and outcomes, such as individual or group performance and turnover, is crucial for developing a working theory. Effective STM ensures successful talent identification and retention. Becker et al. (2001) highlight a strong link between advanced HRM practices and organisational outcomes like sales and turnover. They argue that talent management encompasses not only strategies and HR processes but also an elaborate process involving senior management, supervisors, line managers, HR managers, and employees (Becker et al., 2001). To better understand the effectiveness of a talent management system, it is essential to measure TM outcomes within the scope of strategic human resource management (SHRM). Despite criticisms of insufficient measurement criteria in HRM, variables such as job satisfaction, retention, turnover, employee engagement, organisational performance, succession management, and external talent market position have served as preliminary measurement tools (Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011). For this research, theoretical development follows a model that emphasises outcome-oriented measurements, as they more accurately reflect the value created compared to input-oriented measures.

The human aspect of RBV has been further developed by Human Capital (HC) theory, which underscores the importance of employee knowledge, competencies, skills, and abilities as key drivers of organisational performance when their contributions exceed labour costs (Becker, 1964; Becker, 2009; Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). Lepak and Snell (2002) and Tsui et al. (1997) advocate for a differentiated HC architecture that recognises the varying contributions of different HC pools to organisational performance (Kwon and Rupp 2013).

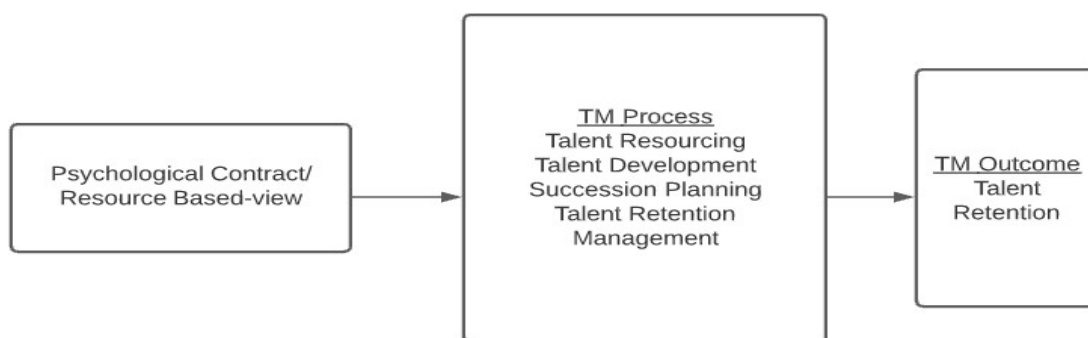


Figure 3.10 The Researcher

Although RBV emphasises human resource development, individuals are also influenced by broader socio-cultural forces. Dordevic (2016) and Sonja & Phillips (2004) suggest that employees, embedded in a complex society, transfer values, norms, and practices between organisational and national cultures. Organisations, as social systems within a broader society, are influenced by national culture despite variations in organisational cultures within a national context.

Following the discussion on the Resource-Based View (RBV), Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides additional insights into Talent Management (TM). SET posits that organisational investments in employees, such as training and development programs, are perceived as valuable and are likely to be reciprocated with increased employee commitment, performance, and loyalty. This reciprocal relationship underscores the strategic importance of human capital, aligning with the RBV's emphasis on leveraging internal resources for competitive advantage. By integrating SET, we can better understand how effective TM practices not only enhance employee engagement but also contribute to the organisation's overall success and competitive positioning (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The following section discusses the social exchange theory.

3.9.2 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) has foundational roots in economics, sociology, psychology, and, more recently, management (e.g., Björkman et al., 2013; Festing & Schafer, 2013; Khoreva et al., 2015). It rests on three main assumptions: (a) Human behaviour or social interaction involves exchange, (b) Social "Exchange" extends from economic exchanges, and (c) Power results from exchange relations (Zafirovski, 2005). Proponents of SET adopt three fundamental principles to explain the relationships between firms and their employees: (i) rationality, (ii) reciprocity, and (iii) specificity (Ahmed et al., 2018; Foa & Foa, 2012; Cheung, 2000; Blau, 1994). The principle of rationality suggests that employees will associate with organisations that can meet their needs and provide the rewards they seek. The principle of reciprocity implies that social relationships between firms and employees are often mutual, where both parties reciprocally exchange benefits and obligations (Cheung, 2000; Blau, 1994). SET defines social exchange as the exchange of activities, whether tangible or intangible, that may be rewarding or costly among individuals (Homans, 1961). Blau (1964) emphasised that these exchanges, driven by rationality, reciprocity, and specificity, create complex social structures and interactions (Blau, 1964; Björkman et al., 2013). According to SET, people are drawn to relationships that offer the most benefits with the least effort, reflecting a self-centred rather than equality-focused nature (Treviño, 2009).

Critics, such as Katherine Miller, argue that SET overly rationalises human interactions, limiting them to economic dimensions and neglecting the broader social context. Zafirovski (2005) and Stolte et al. (2001) echo this by noting that SET often reduces social exchanges to market-like transactions driven by extrinsic motivations. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) further critique SET's narrow focus on reciprocity, suggesting that it would be more comprehensive if it included a variety of exchange rules, such as altruism, group gain, and competition. Despite these criticisms, SET remains a valuable framework for understanding how employees interpret and react to organisational talent management practices, positing that organisations that invest in their employees are likely to receive reciprocal positive investment in return.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is widely utilised in talent management literature to explain the reciprocal relationships between employees and organisations. It posits that employees engage with organisations based on perceived mutual benefits, influencing their commitment, performance, and retention (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Blau, 1964). SET underpins concepts like the psychological contract, where employees' expectations of rewards and recognition drive their contributions (Guest & Conway, 2002). In talent management, SET is used to understand how effective talent practices, such as development opportunities and fair compensation, lead to positive employee behaviours, increased loyalty, and reduced turnover (Homans, 1961; Björkman et al., 2013).

Several scholars, including March & Simon (1958), have explored the employee-organisation relationship by examining the mutual obligations and expectations between employers and employees, often framed within the psychological contract concept.

3.9.2.1 Psychological Contract

Rousseau (1995) examined employees' views of the organisation–employee exchange relationship in the context of psychological contracts. His study, along with those of Conway & Briner (2005) and Guest (2004), focuses on individuals' perceptions of what the organisation offers and what employees are expected to contribute in return. Existing studies (e.g., Rousseau, 1990; Shaw et al., 2009; Shore & Barksdale, 1998) highlight a relationship between perceived organisational inducements and employees' obligations. These studies suggest that when employees perceive that organisations are committed to investing in their employment relationship, they feel obligated to reciprocate this investment (Cole et al., 2002; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010; Björkman et al., 2013). Additionally, the prevailing notion of reciprocity implies that talent management (TM) practices can affect how high potential individuals feel about and behave towards their employers through the psychological contracts they form (Rousseau, 1995). Eisenberg et al. (1990), supporting organisational support theory, examined employees' reactions to their perceptions of the value and care their organisations place on their contributions and well-being.

From a SET perspective, Björkman et al. (2013) argue that talent identification, which emphasises differential treatment of high-potential employees, is likely perceived by talent pool members as a sign of organisational commitment and support. In other words, inclusion in a talent pool is seen as an indication that an individual's contributions are valued, leading the organisation to fulfil its contract by investing in their future career. According to Lee et al. (2011) and Björkman et al. (2013), this can foster normative commitment to support organisational goals, as well as enhance job satisfaction, retention, and performance (Rousseau et al., 2011). Although scholars generally associate effective TM practices with positive attitudes from high-potential employees (Chang, 2005; Khoreva et al., 2015), the relationship may be more complex. "Talented" employees may perceive, value, approach, and react to TM practices differently. Research on psychological contract breaches shows that employees who feel excluded from talent pools often have different commitment levels and attitudes compared to those uncertain about their inclusion, with the latter generally showing more positive attitudes toward the organisation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Zhao et al., 2007). Thus, an effective TM practice may not guarantee reciprocity, as "talented" employees must not only view TM practices as effective but also align with their values, logic, and objectives regarding fairness and appropriateness (Chang, 2005; Khoreva et al., 2015).

Schafer et al. (2013) reinforce that individual perceptions are shaped by comparing organisational experiences, such as TM practices, with their psychological contracts. This comparison can result in outcomes such as contract fulfilment (where the employer meets expectations, thus retaining the contract) (Morrison & Robinson, 1997) or a breach (where employees perceive that the organisation has failed to meet its obligations) (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). In cases of breach, employees may perceive that organisational TM practices do not align with their beliefs regarding the employer's obligations to create opportunities for talent development (Schafer et al., 2013). Following the discussion on Social Exchange Theory (SET), national cultural theories provide a valuable perspective on Talent Management (TM). These theories, such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions, explore how national and organisational cultures influence employee expectations, behaviours, and interactions. They emphasise that cultural values and norms shape how employees perceive and respond to organisational investments and TM practices. By integrating cultural theories, organisations can tailor their TM strategies to align with diverse cultural contexts, enhancing their relevance and effectiveness. This alignment helps foster a supportive work environment, improving employee satisfaction and optimising performance across different cultural settings (Hofstede, 2001). Consequently, the next section will explore the impact of national culture on talent management processes.

3.9.3 Cultural Theories

In his 1989 study, Hofstede conceptualised culture as the "software of the mind," emphasising the shared meanings and interpretations of reality that facilitate coexistence and functionality within groups. For sustained coexistence, group members must comprehend the distribution of power, authority, and status, as well as their obligations, morals, values, beliefs, and worldviews. Similarly, House et al. (1999) describe societal culture as encompassing shared language, belief systems (such as religion and political beliefs), values, ethnic heritage, and history. They further define organisational culture as involving "commonly used nomenclature within an organisation, shared organisational values, and organisational history" (House et al., 1999, pp. 13-14). Despite the substantial attention this study has received, the GLOBE studies are increasingly prominent (see Papalexandris & Panayotopoulou, 2004; Javidan et al., 2006; Charles et al., 2013; Ashta et al., 2019; Nadeem & Sully de Luque, 2020). This section uses the GLOBE cultural dimensions to link national culture with talent management (TM) processes.

Cultural dimensions according to globe study

Globe Dimension	One Extreme	Other Extreme
Uncertainty avoidance	Need for established social norms, rituals, and practices	Comfortable with ambiguity and predictability
Power distance	Egalitarian and non-hierarchal	Hierarchy, authority, disparity in status and wealth
Institutional collectivism	Collective actions and sharing of resources encouraged	Individual actions and goals are encouraged
In-group collectivism	Expressions of pride, loyalty, and cohesion	Non-cohesiveness, loyal to oneself and one's needs
Gender egalitarianism	Nurture, care, relationships, sharing	Ambition, assertiveness, control
Assertiveness	Assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships	Timid, submissive, and tender in social relationships
Future orientation	Planning, investing, and delays of individual or collective gratification	Spontaneity, enjoying the present
Performance orientation	Encourages and rewards group performance and excellence	No rewards and encouragement for goals; more relaxed in terms of achievement
Humane orientation	Encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring	Concerns for self, not sensitive, not encouraging of social supports and community values

Table 3.3 Adapted from House et al. (2002) *The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Based on Hofstede's cultural theory, GLOBE researchers explored dimensions by which societal and organisational cultures can be measured. They identified nine cultural dimensions that differentiate societies and organisations, with five closely aligning with Hofstede's dimensions: uncertainty avoidance, power distance, future orientation, assertiveness orientation (masculinity), and gender egalitarianism (femininity), as well as institutional and societal collectivism versus individualism. GLOBE also introduced two unique dimensions: performance orientation (the emphasis on performance and achievement) and humane orientation (the importance of fairness, altruism, and care).

GLOBE addresses whether certain leadership traits are universally effective or obstructive and how these traits relate to cultural characteristics (House et al., 2002). They argue that cultures can be distinguished based on the leader's attributes and traits endorsed by their members. Trandis (1993) calls for further exploration of leadership and organisational theories beyond cultural contexts to understand what succeeds or fails in diverse settings. Doffman (1996), cited in House et al. (2002), suggests that cross-cultural research might uncover new relationships by incorporating a broader range of variables like religion, language, ethnic background, history, and political systems, which are often overlooked in contemporary leadership theories. House et al. (1997) note numerous crosscultural and country-specific comparative studies exploring the link between culture and management styles, proposing a strong connection between culture and leadership styles. GLOBE Study of Key Leadership Behaviours and Characteristics

Dimension	Behaviours
Charismatic/value-based leadership	Inspires others, motivates, expect high performance; visionary, self-sacrificing, trustworthy, decisive
Team-oriented leadership	Team building, common purpose, collaborative, integrative, diplomatic, not malevolent
Participative leadership	Participative and not autocratic; inclusive of others
Humane-oriented leadership	Supportive, considerate, compassionate, and generous; modesty and sensitivity
Autonomous leadership	Independent and individualistic; autonomous and unique
Self-protective leadership	Ensures the safety and security of the leader and the group; self-centred, status conscious, face-saving, conflict-inducing

Table 3.4 Adapted from House et al. (2002) The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

House et al. (2002) suggest that, although challenging, managers can influence organisational culture through techniques that explore the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and values of members. The following table shows the leadership behaviour profiles identified by the GLOBE study.

Leadership Behaviour Profiles for Clusters

Cluster	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th
Eastern Europe	Autonomous	Self-protective	Charismatic	Team Oriented	Humane	Participative
Latin America	Charismatic	Team	Self-protective	Participative	Humane	Autonomous
Latin Europe	Charismatic	Team	Participative	Self-protective	Humane	Autonomous
Confucian Asia	Self-protective	Team	Humane	Charismatic	Autonomous	Participative
Nordic Europe	Charismatic	Participative	Team	Autonomous	Humane	Self-protective
Anglo	Charismatic	Participative	Humane	Team	Autonomous	Self-protective
Sub-Sahara Africa	Humane	Charismatic	Team	Participative	Self-protective	Autonomous
Southern Asia	Self-protective	Charismatic	Humane	Team	Autonomous	Participative
Germanic Europe	Autonomous	Charismatic	Participative	Humane	Team	Self-protective
Middle East	Self-protective	Humane	Autonomous	Charismatic	Team	Participative

Table 3.5 Adapted from House et al. (2002) The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

The study reveals that the Sub-Saharan Africa cluster, which includes Namibia, Nigeria, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, is characterised by high-context cultures relying on contextual knowledge rather than explicit messages; polychronic time orientation, viewing time as cyclical; high in-group collectivism ("family collectivism"); moral principles that are culture-bound, with a greater emphasis

on collective harmony over individual truth; strong aversion to ambiguity; and low gender equality, where men receive more respect and higher social status than women (House et al., 2002).

A comparison between Hofstede and House et al. reveals differences in their cultural dimension measurements (Shi & Wang, 2010; Venaik & Brewer, 2010). Hofstede (2006) contrasts his cultural theory with the GLOBE theory on several points: old versus new data; US-inspired versus decentred approaches; single versus multiple researchers; employee versus management perspectives; action versus theory-driven methods; the similarity or difference between organisational and national culture; and the role of national wealth in culture. Hofstede and House et al. primarily debate the concept of culture and its implications in cross-cultural research, the definitions of organisational and societal culture, and the role of wealth in culture. Hofstede suggests that GLOBE's approach to defining cultural dimensions might not always make psychological sense, as culture is a collective phenomenon rather than an individual one (Hofstede, 2006, 2010). Gerhart (2008) emphasises the significant relationship between national culture and organisational culture, noting that organisations reflect their countries. Similarly, Johns (2006) argues that "national culture constrains variation in organisational cultures" (p. 396).

After exploring national culture, institutional theory provides further depth to Talent Management (TM) by examining how formal structures, norms, and regulations shape organisational practices. It emphasises that institutional pressures and legitimacy influence TM practices, guiding how organisations adopt and implement strategies to align with broader societal expectations and standards (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The next section examines existing literature on institutional theory.

3.9.4 Institutional Theory

Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Zucker (1977) published foundational papers on institutional theory in 1977. Meyer and Rowan approached institutions from a macro perspective, defining them as networks of cultural roles, whereas Zucker focused on the micro-foundations of institutions. Later, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Scott and Meyer (1983) emphasised macro-analytical views of organisations. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) introduced the concept of isomorphism (structural similarity), while Meyer and Scott (1983) argued that both technical and institutional factors shape organisations.

Despite being a prominent approach to organisational research (David & Bitektine, 2009; Greenwood et al., 2008; Henrich & Linda, 2015; Suddaby, 2010), institutional theory faces debates regarding the definitions of key concepts and the extent to which social norms and expectations influence organisations (David et al., 2019). Björkman et al. (2007) recognise institutional theory as a lens to understand the adoption of organisational forms and practices. Proponents argue that formal systems in organisations are more influenced by their institutional environment than by market pressures. This

suggests that organisations are embedded in a broader institutional context, and their culture and practices are shaped by existing rules, regulations, and systems (Paauwe & Boselie, 2006). Institutional structures can become so entrenched that non-compliance is deemed "irrational and negligent" (David et al., 2019; Suddaby, 2010). Consequently, organisations may adopt the structural forms dictated by the institutional environment, regardless of their impact on efficiency. Further exploration of institutional theory can enhance our understanding of how environmental structures influence organisational processes and forms (Meyer, 2008).

Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that organisations often adopt "institutional myths" superficially to gain or maintain legitimacy. Organisations tend to use the prevailing "vocabularies of structure" to preserve a facade of "good faith" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Since legitimacy is crucial for organisational survival, organisations and individuals seek approval within a context of traditions, norms, and habits (Amenta & Ramsey, 2010). Institutional theory highlights how organisational behaviour is socially constructed and compliant with social rules. Haak-Saheem et al. (2016) contend that institutions add value to the practices and structures of organisations. Meyer (2002) defines institutions as the social frameworks through which people share common meanings of their social environment. Consequently, the development and implementation of talent management processes and systems are influenced by their social and institutional context.

Despite its popularity, institutional theory is subject to various interpretations. Rational choice institutionalism views institutions as "shared patterns of action devised by economic agents to overcome uncertainty" (Hauptmeier & Morgan, 2014, p. 191). According to this view, organisations face similar external threats, and while new structures emerge, they incorporate elements of old regimes. Historical institutionalism, as discussed by Steinmo et al. (1992) and Peters et al. (2005), suggests that institutions are deeply rooted in historical preferences, making radical change unlikely. Conversely, sociological institutionalism sees organisations as entities seeking acceptance within socially constructed environments (Scott, 1987). This approach posits that societal normative expectations shape organisational behaviour, which becomes "rule-like" (Martinez & Dacin, 1999, p. 78). Haak-Saheem et al. (2016) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identify three dimensions of institutional rules: coercive (regulatory), where behaviours are imposed by national laws and regulations; mimetic (cultural-cognitive), where practices are emulated based on perceived superiority; and normative, where professional organisations disseminate practices through prescriptive measures.

Research on institutional frameworks has been more extensive in advanced economies (Björkman et al., 2007; Jukka-Pekka, 2013) compared to emerging economies. However, recent literature

(Gooderham et al., 2019; Paauwe & Boselie, 2006) has begun to explore and adapt institutional frameworks to national contexts. Meyer and Peng (2015) note that institutionalism is less explored in the unique context of African countries, and many theoretical frameworks do not account for the peculiarities of different economies (De Cieri & Dowling, 2012).

The theoretical frameworks—RBV, SET, cultural, and institutional offer critical insights into the diverse factors shaping TM practices. These theories are particularly relevant when exploring TM in emerging economies, where distinct socio-economic challenges, institutional voids, and cultural nuances require customised approaches. In these contexts, TM strategies must adapt to local conditions, balancing global best practices with the unique demands and opportunities presented by these rapidly evolving markets. The next section examines the status of TM in emerging economies, especially in Africa and Nigeria.

3.10 Talent Management in Emerging Economies

As emerging markets integrate into the global marketplace, numerous management practices from advanced countries are being adopted. However, some companies believe that localised management strategies tailored to country-specific conditions are more effective (Scullion & Collings, 2011). As Western companies expand into developing countries, they maintain a competitive advantage by leveraging their understanding of the relationship between TM and firm performance, leading to increased competition for talent in these markets (Burton et al., 2004 in Scullion & Collings, 2011). The growth of emerging economies significantly impacts TM strategies (Sparrow, Scullion & Tarique, 2014). With the rising importance of these markets, in-depth knowledge of how talent is educated and trained has become a top priority for business executives, policymakers, and academics globally (Ambrosius, 2016; Khalil & Nafhuko, 2018; Klaus & Xin, 2018). Sparrow, Scullion, and Tarique (2014) also suggest that the large talent pools in Latin America, Asia, and Africa result from the shift in economic power from developed to developing nations, particularly China and India, which have become the most dynamic BRIC nations.

Emerging markets are rapidly becoming significant labour and consumer markets, attracting foreign investment, experiencing rapid growth, resource acquisition, and the development of local solid industrial and service sectors (Sparrow, Scullion & Tarique, 2014; Khalil & Nafhuko, 2018). Economic development in these markets has led to an increased focus on factors that promote growth, such as regulatory policies, infrastructure, investment funding, and natural resources. Studies show that the availability of human capital is a critical differentiator for organisations globally (Florida et al., 2008 in Sparrow, Scullion & Tarique, 2014). Organisational success in these nations is primarily determined by the type and availability of talent. In China and India, rapid economic growth has increased both the

quality and quantity of available talent as these countries refine their production and services (Heckman & Yi, 2012; Sparrow, Scullion & Tarique, 2014). Thus, human capital will remain crucial to talent management, with attraction, development, retention, and people management continuing to be critical challenges for businesses and managers.

India's booming service sector, which has attracted significant Foreign Direct Investment, offers a rich context for empirical investigation into how employees share common understandings of expected and rewarded behaviours (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004 in Scullion & Collings, 2011). Research on TM in India reveals that HR practices from developed countries tend to be less structured, institutionalised, formal, and impactful (Yeung et al., 2008; Scullion & Collings, 2011), highlighting the need for effective TM practices. Despite advancements in global talent management, systematic studies on TM in emerging markets remain scarce, particularly regarding best practices for recruitment, onboarding, development, motivation, appraisal, and retention in SMEs (Scullion & Collings, 2011; Stokes et al., 2016). While TM challenges are global, research suggests that emerging markets face more severe challenges. Yet, there is a dearth of research on TM in less developed nations, apart from recent studies on India and China (e.g., Teagarden et al., 2008; Scullion & Collings, 2011; Sparrow, Scullion & Tarique, 2014; Illes et al., 2010).

However, research on TM in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries is sparse (Vaiman & Holden, 2011; Skuza et al., 2012). TM is a novel concept in the CEE region, with existing literature mainly limited to case studies of MNC subsidiaries or general global HR practices that only occasionally mention TM issues (Scullion & Collings, 2011). Vaiman and Holden (2011) argue that the region's evolving economic, social, and political systems pose challenges for researchers, resulting in a lack of knowledge about HRM, management practices, and work relationships. TM approaches in the CEE region are as diverse as the countries themselves, with nations like Poland, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic leading in HRM policy changes while others lag. In the Middle East, TM is in its infancy, with little attention paid to talent strategy despite the region's significant untapped talent (Scullion & Collings, 2011). However, the importance of TM is slowly being recognised, and it is expected to become a critical issue. The key question is whether Middle Eastern countries can collectively or individually allocate the necessary resources to engage and develop their human capital through effective TM strategies.

Similarly, research on TM in Africa is limited, with most studies focusing on more immediate management issues like motivation, leadership, conflict management, and teamwork rather than the broader strategic issues needed to advance the global debate on people management in diverse contexts (Kamoche, 2011; Mwila & Turay, 2018; Shrestha et al., 2008). Africa remains under researched in HRM, talent management, organisation studies, and international business, with more attention

given to foreign trade and economics, likely reflecting the continent's macro-environmental challenges (Kamoche, 2002; Kamoche, 2011). However, Africa's importance in the global community, particularly in terms of shifts in natural and human resources, presents a challenge for academics and organisations to develop contextually applicable ways to facilitate knowledge exchange, people management, and organisational design that allows employees to thrive (Kamoche, 2002; Kamoche, 2011). Horwitz et al. (2002) argue that the neglect of HRM in Africa may reflect the region's poor performance in the global economy.

Most management studies on SMEs in Nigeria lack empirical grounding (Nzewi et al., 2016; Agbaeze et al., 2017), making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of HRM strategies (Mary et al., 2015; Nzewi et al., 2016). Pam (2012) emphasises the need for Nigeria to strengthen its organisational and human resources in anticipation of future growth. HRM practices in Nigeria could improve more rapidly if HR practitioners understood the current state of their application (Edeh & Sunday, 2019). Similarly, Noah (2017) reports that effective HRM strategies can only be prioritised when Nigerian organisations recognise HRM's role in business structure. The scarcity of HRM literature in African countries, including Ghana, South Africa, and Tanzania, results in a lack of systematic reviews that could provide a deeper understanding of HRM in African organisations (Kamoche, 2011). HRM policies in Nigeria are heavily influenced by national values and culture, which are also evident in government policies and bureaucratic procedures (Edeh & Sunday, 2019). Additionally, there is no evidence that HR managers participate in strategic decision-making or policy implementation in Nigerian organisations (Noah, 2017). Consequently, SMEs in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, face critical challenges that will be discussed in the next section.

3.11 Talent Management Challenges in SMEs in Africa

According to existing research (Thomas & Bernice, 2009; Koketso & Rust, 2012; Mwila & Turay, 2018; Anlesinya et al., 2019), Africa faces significant challenges in talent management and HRM. These challenges include skills shortages, reliance on foreign workers for specialist positions, lack of investment in knowledge resources, and limited access to sophisticated HR practices. Despite these obstacles, African organisations have historically managed to survive due to effective integration into the global economy, GDP growth, and increased consumer spending power (Anlesinya et al., 2019). However, these dynamics have shifted due to economic downturns and reduced budget allocations following the impact of COVID-19 (McKinsey & Company, 2020). The McKinsey Group reports that African SMEs, already contending with a contracting economy, have faced additional pressures from the COVID-19 pandemic, further straining their operations. The strict lockdown measures implemented globally, and particularly in Africa, have led to significant revenue losses and productivity

declines, both domestically and internationally, severely affecting key growth sectors (McKinsey & Company, 2020; United Nations, 2020).

Given Africa's heavy reliance on international trade, particularly in oil exports, effective talent development and management will be crucial in shaping the continent's economic future and its role in the global market (United Nations, 2020). Significant revenue losses, such as the projected US\$113 billion by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and an estimated US\$65 billion loss among Africa's top fuel-exporting countries (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa), underscore the continent's vulnerability. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) forecasted a global trade decline of 13%-32% in 2020 due to COVID-19 disruptions to global value chains (United Nations, 2020). An unprecedented global recession, with a GDP slump between 0.5% and 3.8%, is expected, with Africa being particularly at risk due to its lack of economic resilience and diversification. This situation underscores the urgent need for prioritizing human capital empowerment and development (United Nations, 2020). SMEs can mitigate these challenges by investing in effective HRM and TM activities to enhance their competitiveness in the labour market.

Effective TM is crucial for maximising knowledge potential, sustaining SME performance, and contributing to the continent's economic growth (Mwila & Turay, 2018; Anlesinya et al., 2019). However, managing human resources effectively remains a significant challenge for African SMEs, mainly due to the underutilisation of skills, competencies, and knowledge resources (Mwila & Turay, 2018). While TM is often addressed at individual and organisational levels, there is a lack of focus on TM at a macro level, particularly in the African context (Grobler & Diedericks, 2009). It is imperative for organisations in emerging regions like Africa to investigate country- or regional-level factors to design and implement context-specific TM strategies. Concerns persist about Africa's ability to nurture, absorb, and fully utilise its talent, which has led to significant brain drain, particularly from subSaharan Africa to OECD countries. This trend could see the number of African migrants rise from 7 million in 2013 to approximately 34 million by 2050 (UNESCO, 2018). Compounding this issue is the continent's high youth unemployment rate, which poses a critical challenge for both organisations and governments (Baah-Boateng, 2016).

According to a report by the UN, Youths account for 60% of Africa's unemployed population, with Northern Africa experiencing a 25% youth unemployment rate and higher rates in Angola (56.4%), South Africa (56.2%), and Nigeria (36.6%) (Trading economics, 2020). The large number of economically active youth combined with their high unemployment rate presents a significant challenge for both organisations and governments in the continent (Baah-Boateng, 2016). The volatile external environment raises questions about how talent is managed to meet the strategic needs of

organisations. Despite substantial governmental investments in human capital development through education, learning, and research programs, there is limited evidence of these efforts translating into human empowerment or improved national talent performance. Africa's young population, estimated at 1.3 billion with 226 million individuals aged 15-24 as of 2015, and projected to double by 2055 (UNDP, 2017), presents a significant opportunity. If nurtured and developed, this demographic could drive the continent's economic growth. Africa, accounting for more than 7.5% of global oil reserves and 7.1% of gas reserves (UNDP, 2017), has seen rapid growth in tertiary education and attracted substantial Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) as multinational corporations compete for market dominance (Baah-Boateng, 2016).

SMEs in Africa face significant challenges, including skills shortages in specialised fields and high turnover rates. Turnover has been a persistent issue, exacerbated by economic decline, workforce mobility, and skilled labour shortages (Mercer, 2008). Moreover, significant drivers such as governmental investments in infrastructure, integration into the global economy, MNCs' increasing demand for qualified personnel, and rapid growth in higher education institutions necessitate confronting the complex challenges facing organisations (Scullion & Collings, 2011). For rapidly growing SMEs, particularly those whose founders remain actively involved in management, scaling up growth can be challenging. Prioritising capability building at the leadership level can enable top leaders to focus on growth strategies to ensure sustainability. SMEs must also transition from a limiting owner mindset to a more strategic approach, overcoming the lack of operational and performance management systems, key performance indicators (KPIs), and management structures with clearly defined job roles (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Despite efforts by African SMEs to address these challenges, country-specific issues persist. In Nigeria, TM is hindered by structural and governmental factors, including socioeconomic, institutional, educational, and organisational obstacles. For Nigerian SMEs, retention challenges remain a significant concern, warranting further investigation.

3.12 Talent Retention Challenges in Nigeria

A survey by Towers Perrin, Consultant Company (2009) identified that the most critical TM process for achieving results (and most challenging to implement) is integrating TM processes directly into business strategy and operations. Effective integration is expected to create more consistency in how talent is identified, developed, and moved throughout the organisation while giving business leaders greater ownership and accountability for building a talent pipeline. However, one of the biggest challenges facing organisations is how to build and sustain a strong talent pipeline (Stahl et al., 2012).

The demands of global competitiveness and changing consumer patterns have driven organisations worldwide to adopt new production methods and organisational structures. This shift has increased workforce mobility and employee turnover (Epie, 2014; Ohunakin, 2020), posing significant recruitment challenges in Nigeria. Employee commitment, productivity, and retention are emerging as critical issues for management (Anas et al., 2020). High employee turnover, driven by concerns over loyalty and competition for key talents, can negatively impact business plans and productivity (Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, 2012), particularly in the context of economic instability and corporate downsizing due to outsourcing and other production changes.

Globally, talent retention has become a major concern for organisations. Strategic measures for employee retention are crucial for maintaining a competitive advantage in a globalising economy like Nigeria's. This has led to changes in HR practices concerning the attraction, selection, and retention of skilled employees (Epie, 2014; Anas, 2020). Some organisations are beginning to adopt HR strategies aimed at retaining employees. Low investment in training and development has led to increased skills shortages and turnover (Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, 2012). Epie (2014) argues that retaining a talented employee is more cost-effective than recruiting and training new ones, considering the direct costs of advertisements, recruitment, and training.

Manpower (2018) reports that the cost of replacing an employee is 1.5 times their salary. Additionally, there are indirect costs associated with turnover, such as decreased morale and workflow disruptions (Manpower, 2018). Nigerian organisations often struggle to maintain a positive work environment conducive to employee retention. Various remuneration systems have been adopted to promote motivation and retention. Traditional HR policies, such as personnel management and payroll, have been increasingly replaced by competency-based management systems (Thomas & Bernice, 2009). However, extrinsic rewards remain a key factor influencing retention levels in Nigerian SMEs (Thomas & Bernice, 2009; Epie, 2014).

Failure to retain valuable talent can result in limited growth opportunities, a lack of sustainable development, and inefficiencies in managing business expansion (World Economic Forum, 2018). Organisations that offer a wide range of benefits, including learning and growth opportunities, tend to have higher retention rates. Therefore, talent retention strategies should focus on preventing the loss of talented individuals to other organisations. While the Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that human capital provides a competitive advantage due to its value, rarity, inimitability, and non-substitutability, isolated talent may not guarantee a sustainable competitive edge if not correctly managed (Sparrow, Scullion & Tarique, 2014). Without effective Strategic Talent Management (STM) systems,

organisations risk losing their talents to competitors. Most empirical studies on talent retention focus on organisational culture, employee motivation, and retention in emerging markets. Additionally, studies have predominantly been conducted in the US, UK, and other economies with ample resources. There is a lack of research on talent retention in Nigeria. The topic has not received substantial attention despite its importance (Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, 2012). Economic challenges, including poor pay, failing infrastructure, and high unemployment, contribute to a brain drain as individuals seek better opportunities abroad. Structural unemployment among Nigerian youths remains high, with many facing a mismatch between their education and job roles.

Given the importance of TM for organisational success, further investigation into TM, particularly as it pertains to SMEs in emerging economies, is essential. This research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of TM challenges faced by Nigerian SMEs. Talent retention, identified as a critical challenge, will be a crucial focus of this study, which seeks to contribute to the limited existing literature on talent retention in SMEs. The following section will discuss the importance of TM.

3.13 Importance of TM in SMEs

While some authors argue that Talent Management (TM) aims to address human capital needs and bridge the demand-supply gap (Thunnissen et al., 2013), Cappelli (2008) contends that TM's primary purpose is not to achieve tactical outcomes such as employee development, succession planning, or turnover reduction. Instead, TM is intended to support overarching business objectives, suggesting that it is not merely a subsystem of HR. This perspective is supported by much of the academic literature, which posits that TM should enhance overall firm performance and competitive advantage (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Mellahi & Collings, 2010; Schuler et al., 2011; Stahl et al., 2012).

Furthermore, effective TM has been indirectly linked to organisational performance through mechanisms such as work motivation, organisational commitment, and extra-role behaviour (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). According to CIPD cited in Clarke & Winkler (2006), over 90% of managers believe that TM positively impacts a firm's bottom line, and many are already engaged in TM activities. To enhance organisational performance, firms leverage TM practices to boost employee motivation and commitment. Thus, organisational commitment and alignment with organisational goals are seen as indirect outcomes of TM (Christensen et al., 2008). Talented employees who are highly committed contribute significantly to overall performance and retention (Christensen et al., 2008; Cheese et al., 2009). Consequently, the outcomes and significance of TM are extensive.

Thunnissen et al. (2013) conclude that TM practices foster personal development on an individual level, thereby enhancing organisational commitment. At the organisational level, the primary goal of

TM is to improve performance by increasing employees' well-being (Iles et al., 2010; Thunnissen et al., 2013). As previously noted, SMEs must design and implement tailored TM and HRM practices to navigate the evolving global market effectively. Thus, TM is crucial for SMEs aiming to enhance business success, retain employees, and maximise productivity.

3.14 Theoretical Gaps in TM in SMEs and Research Contribution

Talents are recognised as unique resources critical for achieving competitive advantage. Consequently, Talent Management (TM) is considered the most effective tool for capturing, developing, retaining, and protecting these resources (Dries, 2013; Sparrow & Makram, 2015). This underscores the need to address persistent questions in TM practice. However, current critiques of TM research highlight a lag in providing organisations with vision and direction in this field (Cascio & Prauwer, 2014; Cappelli & Keller, 2014). A decade after TM gained a reputation as one of the most popular and fastest-growing areas in the management field (Collings et al., 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2017; McDonnell et al., 2017), questions such as “What happens in practice and why” have remained unanswered (Thunnissen & Gallardo-Gallardo, 2017). Additionally, the conception, implementation, development, effectiveness, and results of TM within organisations have not been sufficiently reflected in the empirical literature (Thunnissen et al., 2013).

Several studies have investigated TM in smaller organisations. For instance, Festing et al. (2013) conducted a study on TM in German medium-sized organisations. They revealed that medium-sized organisations invest more in TM compared to their micro and small counterparts. They further stated that the effectiveness of TM and its outcomes for organisations have not been investigated in depth, as existing literature is restricted to certain national contexts (Festing et al., 2013). Similarly, Valverde et al. (2013) conducted a study of TM in the context of Spanish SMEs. The study analysed TM approaches, definitions, and practices adopted in Spanish medium-sized enterprises. They revealed that Spanish SMEs adopted a mix of inclusive and exclusive approaches to TM, suggesting that neither approach is generally the best fit, as their effectiveness would depend on the organisational setting. Thus, they concluded that TM practices in smaller organisations are peculiar, unique, and different from practices in large enterprises.

Research on TM has predominantly focused on European contexts, including Greece, Spain, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Finland. While interest in TM is increasing (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020; McDonnell et al., 2020; Farndale et al., 2019; Krishnan & Scullion, 2017; Morley et al., 2015; Nijs et al., 2014; Schiemann, 2014; Sonnenberg et al., 2014; Vaiman & Collings, 2013; Skuza et al., 2013; Collings et al., 2011; Scullion & Collings, 2010), only a few studies are empirical (Thunnissen et al., 2013). Recently, scholarly studies have been conducted in India, Greece, Tehran, and China (Hartmann

et al., 2010; Illes et al., 2010; Cooke et al., 2014; Chadee & Raman, 2012), Oman (Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014), Vietnam (Kim et al., 2012), Poland (Skruza et al., 2013), and France (Chabault et al., 2012).

Despite this, Thunnissen (2013) and Gallardo-Gallardo (2019) emphasise that although the literature on TM covers a range of Western contexts (and large organisations), little attention has been paid to the impact of contextual factors on the conceptualisation and implementation of TM in several countries. Additionally, there has been no progress in highlighting contextual challenges in empirical TM literature (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020).

This research aims to contribute to both the conceptual and empirical literature on TM by investigating TM practices in Nigerian SMEs, a hitherto unexplored area in the field. At the time of this research, no research on TM exists in the Nigerian SME context. The research seeks to contribute to the pressing need to understand the conceptualisation, implementation, and effectiveness of TM and to provide insight into how and why TM works in practice within Nigerian SMEs. An essential contribution of this research to the TM literature is the examination of TM practices in Nigerian SMEs, such as attraction, recruitment, talent development, and retention, based on contextual factors. Paauwe and Farndale (2017) argue that external and internal factors influence SHRM systems and organisational performance. Thus, the research will either support or counterclaim in line with this view, investigating the impact of socio-cultural and institutional factors on HRM and TM practices in SMEs, which Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2020) identified as a critical shortfall of TM literature. Given that the Nigerian business environment is highly volatile, unstable, and unpredictable (as discussed in Chapter Two of this study), this research will create a roadmap for managing one key aspect of organisational success—talent management—while addressing the urgent need for research into retention challenges faced by SMEs. Valverde et al. (2013) note that SMEs often do not adopt formal TM practices, further emphasising the need for this research.

In summary, this study contributes to TM research by observing Nigeria's national context. Additionally, it adds to the general knowledge of the conceptualisation of TM in the specific contexts of Nigerian SMEs by identifying organisational culture, principles, and HR/TM practices adopted by SMEs that may differ from those of their larger and multinational counterparts, as illustrated in the conceptual framework below.

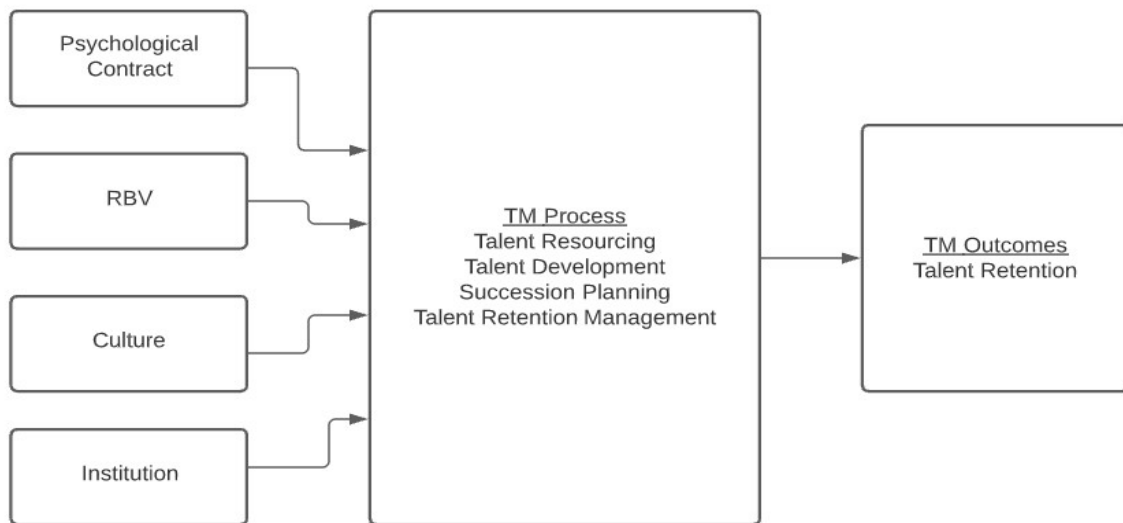


Figure 3.11 The researcher

3.15 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the key concepts of talent management (TM) and dominant theories within the TM literature. It covered the components of TM processes crucial for effective management and talent retention, including talent acquisition, talent development, succession management, and talent retention. The literature review briefly highlights the impact of COVID-19 on businesses in Africa, specifically SMEs, and reveals how this has exacerbated the already concerning rate of youth unemployment in the region. It also addresses the difficulties SMEs face in retaining talent due to the ongoing competition for talent among SMEs, larger organisations, and multinational enterprises (MNEs). In addition to limited resources, SMEs struggle with issues such as a lack of technical and managerial support that are readily available to larger organisations and government agencies in Nigeria. This situation makes training and developing high-potential individuals even more challenging, which affects SMEs' ability to retain these talents. The chapter reveals a tendency to view training and development as a cost rather than an investment. Additionally, the literature review highlights both cultural and institutional factors that can hinder human capital development. Significant socioeconomic challenges discussed include high unemployment rates, a poor education system, brain drain, and a rigorous social structure, all of which make it difficult for SMEs to attract and retain talent.

The chapter raises several important questions based on the literature review. What is the current state of TM in emerging economies, particularly in Africa? How do SMEs operating in these contexts understand and implement the concepts of talent and talent management? Are there notable differences between TM practices in large organisations and those in Western countries compared to those in Nigerian SMEs? These questions are crucial for understanding how TM can be adapted to

different environments and what strategies might be effective in overcoming the specific challenges faced by SMEs in emerging economies. In addressing these questions, subsequent chapters will aim to provide empirical insights and data-driven answers. This research seeks to fill the gaps identified in the existing literature and offer a comprehensive understanding of TM practices in Nigerian SMEs. Doing so will contribute valuable knowledge to the field of TM, particularly regarding the adaptation of TM strategies in contexts characterised by significant socioeconomic and institutional challenges.

In summary, this chapter has laid the groundwork for investigating TM practices in Nigerian SMEs, highlighting the importance of understanding both the theoretical underpinnings and practical implications of TM in emerging economies. It sets the stage for a detailed exploration of how SMEs can effectively manage and retain talent amidst the unique challenges they face. Having established a comprehensive understanding of Talent Management (TM) concepts, dominant theories, and the contextual challenges faced by SMEs in emerging economies, particularly in Nigeria, the Research Methodology chapter, which follows next, will detail the approach for investigating pertinent research questions. It will cover the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques used to study TM practices in Nigerian SMEs. Additionally, it will address ethical considerations and study limitations. This chapter provides a transparent account of the research process, ensuring that the findings are robust and reliable, thereby bridging the gap between theory and empirical investigation.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Although HR and TM are topical fields, researchers suggest that many practices adopted by subsidiaries in these fields are imported from MNCs in developed economies (Levenson, 2014; Lathuka, 2016). A question that needs to be addressed is whether SMEs in emerging economies formulate new talent management practices tailored to suit their specific sizes, business cultures, and external environments, given that they have different privileges than the aforementioned. This research (among others) explores the possibility of existing (or the potential for) alternative approaches to TM in SMEs, aside from the highly Westernized approaches being viewed as "best practice."

Social exchange theory, resource-based view, and institutional theory are the main bases on which this research operates. The literature review on talent management suggests that both STM practices and the availability of a talent pool are of strategic importance to the development and maintenance of a

sustainable competitive advantage within the RBV framework (Lado & Wilson, 1994; Wright et al., 1994; Barney & Wright, 1998). Nonetheless, the lack of consensus on the definition of talent begs the question: "Are all employees a source of competitive advantage to organisations?" To investigate this, the RBV serves as one of the main conceptual frameworks to strengthen the underlying arguments and support the research findings. Additionally, the literature review suggests that job candidates will only associate with organisations that exhibit the potential to meet their short-term or long-term desires and needs. It also reveals that employees will rationalise an employer's commitment to their well-being and reciprocate this in the form of commitment to organisational success (Björkman et al., 2013; Conway & Briner, 2005; Guest, 2004). In a bid to further determine if adopted TM practices can lead to job satisfaction, commitment, and retention performance in the reality of case study companies, the Social Exchange Theory forms a framework in this research.

Academics (King & Vaiman, 2020; Kravariti & Johnston, 2020; Thunnissen & Buttiens, 2017; Collings et al., 2014; Sydani & Al Ariss, 2014) have highlighted the influence of institutional factors on the organisational design and implementation of talent management practices, as analysed in the literature review. The conceptual framework for this research is designed with the intention of reviewing findings to investigate if this is the case with the case study companies using institutional theory. The table below provides a summary of the theoretical frameworks applied in this research.

Theoretical Framework	Proponent(s)/Year	Theoretical implications	Examples of existing studies
Resource-based view theory (RBV)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edith Penrose-1959 • Wernerfelt-1984 • Prahalad & Hamel-1990 • Barney- 1991 	Organisations possess different kinds of tangible and intangible assets, including people, knowledge, skills, experiences, information, technology, data, and processes. A combination of these assets leads to the development of "capabilities" that provide a sustainable competitive advantage to the firm. Human resources or talent are considered valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable assets.	Penrose, 1959; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt-1984; 1995; Boxall, 1996; Barney et al, 2001; Wright et al., 2001; Becker et al., 2001; Chuang & Lin, 2017
Social exchange theory (SET)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homans-1958 • Peter Blau-1964 	Human interaction is premised on the expectation of certain rewards that may arise from these interactions and the possibility of avoiding punishment through interaction. Thus, human relationships are premised on potential exchanges.	Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964; Ekeh, 1974 Cook et al., 1978; Cheung, 2000; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Zafirovski, 2005; Yang et al., 2012; cook et al., 2013; Festing & Schafer, 2013; Wu et al., 2014;

			Khoreva et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2020
Globe Cultural Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness1990s 	It addresses the emphasis placed on performance and achievement in societies, as well as the importance given to fairness, altruism, and care. Additionally, it explores the extent to which certain leadership traits are universally viewed as contributors or impediments to effective leadership and how specific traits and behaviours are linked to cultural characteristics.	House et al., 1999; House et al, 2002; Papalexandris &Panayotopoulou, 2004; Javidan et al., 2006; Charles et al., 2013; Ashta et al, 2019; Nadeem &Sully de Luque 2020
Hofstede's cultural theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geert Hofstede1980 	Cultures differ across the globe, and these differences influence organisational and management practices in various countries. Therefore, culture cannot be ignored, as doing so may result in ineffective policies. This highlights the importance of understanding inter-country cultural variations.	Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz 1999; Kamoche et al., 2004; Dragendijk & Slangen, 2006; Javidan et al., 2006; Fred 2013; Venaik & Brewer 2013; Reiche et al, 2019; Lui et al., 2021

Institutional theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Meyer & Brian Rowan 	Organisational cultures, policies, and practices are heavily influenced by their institutional environments. Institutional structures can become so legitimised that failure to adopt or	Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker (1977); DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Björkman et
		adhere to them is viewed as "irrational, negligent, and even illegal."	al. 2007; Meyer, 2008; Paauwe & Boselie, 2006.

Table 4.1 Theoretical Frameworks adopted in the study.

To achieve the aim of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the major talent management (TM) issues and challenges faced by SMEs globally?
 - a) Do SMEs adopt formal talent policies or TM practices?
2. What is the state of talent management conceptualisation in Nigerian SMEs?
 - a) How do Nigerian SMEs define, attract, develop, and retain talented employees?
 - b) What are the notable TM challenges faced, and to what degree do Nigerian SMEs have TM policies?

Three important details identified during the literature review in the previous chapter are:

1. Talent management has seen an influx of academic literature within the last two years. The works of renowned academics such as Collings, Vaiman & Scullion (2022); Kravariti, Scullion & Alali (2022); Lee, Yahiaoui & Lee (2022); Latukha, Michailova, Ott & Khasieva (2022); Fernandes et al. (2022); Chatterjee et al. (2022); Kumar (2022); Kamoche & Leigh (2022), among others, have significantly contributed to the field of TM.
2. Despite point 1 above, there is limited academic research on TM in SMEs, except for the works of Mudjijah et al. (2022), Shrivastava et al., Abid (2021); Deni (2021); Latukha et al. (2021); Dubey et al. (2021); Poczowski et al. (2021); Poczowski & Pauli (2021); Pauli & Poczowski (2019); Krishnan & Scullion (2017); Pauli & Poczowski (2017); Cui et al. (2016); Kaliannan et al. (2016); Yanbin & Latukha (2016); Collings et al. (2017); Festing et al. (2013); Valverde et al. (2013), and a few others.
3. The academic literature mentioned above focuses on SMEs in developed nations (Asia and Europe), apart from Hylton (2021) and a few others. There are very few studies on TM in African countries, except for the works of Jonathan et al. (2022); Nosike et al. (2022); Asoba & Mefi (2020); Anlesinya et al. (2021); Wandabwa & Makokha (2021); Theys & Schultz (2020); Biriow & Kalio (2020), and a few others.

Consequently, we agree that there is a significant void in the TM literature regarding SMEs in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. Although gaps in existing literature are beginning to receive attention with the influx of empirical works, Nigerian SMEs are not receiving this attention. Therefore, through the research questions listed above, the researcher aims to develop a more nuanced understanding of TM, taking into consideration the contextual differences and uniqueness of SMEs in the case study country. This understanding will aid the development of a holistic framework proposing how to develop a practical and balanced approach to TM (both theoretically and practically) in the Nigerian context.

As we have reiterated the difference between developed and emerging cultures, we cannot continue to study and understand TM solely from the perspective of the former. It is imperative to develop a

comprehensive understanding of TM from the viewpoint of smaller organisations. This chapter seeks to critically evaluate existing research methods and methodologies, as well as justify the choice of a qualitative study. Using the research approaches, philosophies, and design/strategy adopted in the study, methodological nuances such as ethics and the validity of sampling strategies are reviewed. Lastly, data collection and analysis techniques will be discussed in this section.

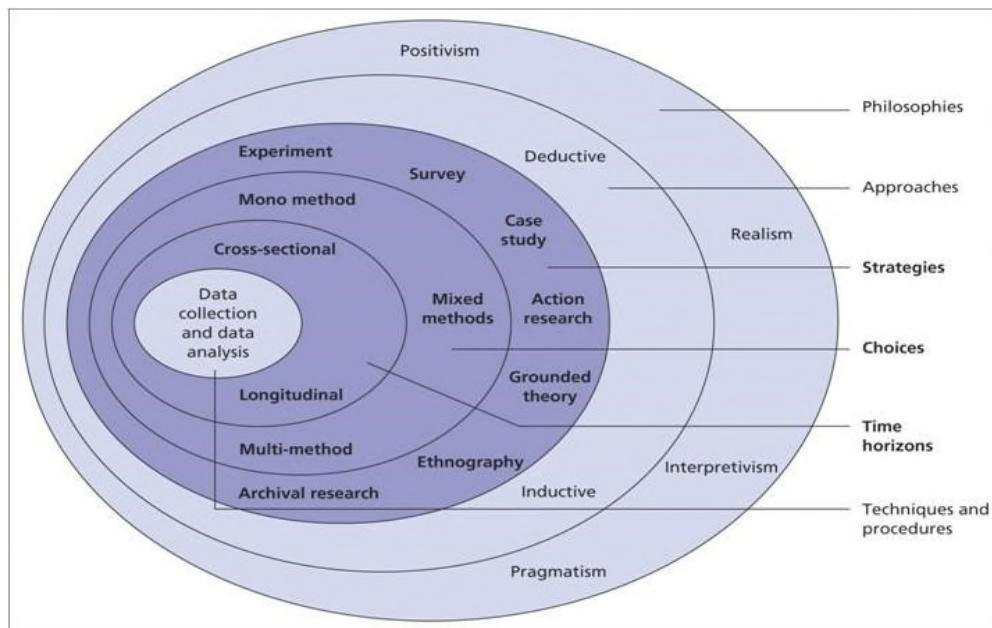
4.2 Research Methodology

Numerous definitions have been given for the concept of research methodology. Saunders et al. (2007:5) describe research methodology as "something that people undertake in order to find out things in a systematic way, thereby increasing their knowledge." In 2009, they defined it as "the theory of how research should be undertaken, including the theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the methods or methods adopted" (Saunders et al., 2010:4). Similarly, Kruger (2001) views research methodology as a summary of the process by which different methods and techniques are applied to develop knowledge. Consequently, to choose an appropriate research methodology or technique, research objectives must be explicit and concise. Methodology refers to the overall approach to research, starting from the identification of the research gap to data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009; Collis & Hussey, 2014).

For Valsiner et al. (2009) and Kumar (2014), the methodology is the relationship between a phenomenon, theory, data, and the methods applied. Conversely, Kothari (2008) describes the term as a means of systematically developing an explanation of the research problem, justifying the logic employed and the scientific way in which the research was conducted. Moreover, research methodology has been defined as the application of different systematic methods and approaches in collecting and scientifically creating knowledge. According to Collis and Hussey (2014), a research methodology must provide a general justification for the approach chosen by a researcher. Due to differing understandings of the term, it has often been confused with "research methods," as some authors use them interchangeably. Saunders et al. (2016) highlight the distinction, stating that while research methodology explains how research is conducted, research methods describe the techniques a researcher applies to data gathering and analysis. To choose an appropriate research strategy, it is important to understand relevant methods and methodologies.

Following Saunders et al.'s (2012) research onion, shown in Fig. 4.1 below, it is important to describe the research paradigms and philosophies employed in this study. For this study, the interpretivist research paradigm was adopted. The following section aims to discuss and justify the chosen philosophical approach through the popularly used research onion designed by Saunders et al.

Figure 4.1 The Research Onions



Source: Saunders et al., 2012

4.3 Research Philosophy

A research philosophy refers to the general idea behind a study. It is "a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge" (Saunders et al., 2016:124). They further state that these are the assumptions a researcher employs in their view of the world. Similarly, Deshpande (1983), as cited in Healy & Perry (2000:118), claims that scientific research is based on a conceptual framework; this framework is "a set of linked assumptions about the world which is shared by a community of scientists investigating that world." Additionally, Rossman & Rallis (2003) describe this scientific community's view of the world, or research paradigm, as a "shared understanding of reality," which comprises the following components:

1. The nature and existence of reality (ontology)
2. The relationship between researchers and reality; how researchers know the world (epistemology)
3. The techniques employed by researchers in their investigation of reality (axiology or methodology) (Saunders et al., 2016).

Thus, these three elements form the basis of the conceptual framework for scientific research. Collis and Hussey (2014) state that a research paradigm is the philosophy concerning the nature and reality of knowledge. "Philosophy is described as another term for research paradigm" (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Easterby-Smith et al. (2014) and Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008) argue that philosophical concepts aid researchers in constructing their research approach, design, strategy, and methods. Consequently, it is paramount for researchers to have an in-depth understanding of these philosophical concepts. Sobh & Perry (2006) emphasise that there is no right or wrong research paradigm, as choices should depend

on the researcher's assumptions and values. However, management and business researchers ought to consider the impact of their chosen philosophical approach on their study and ensure their choices are justifiably compared to alternative philosophies (Johnson & Clark, 2006).

As business and management research is based on a mix of theories from disciplines like sociology, economics, and psychology, which have led to overlaps in research philosophies, paradigms, approaches, and methodologies, it is essential to clarify the distinction between research assumptions (ontology and epistemology). The following section critically reviews these two assumptions in scientific research.

4.3.1 Ontology Vs Epistemology

Ontology concerns itself with the nature of reality that a researcher investigates (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Saunders et al., 2016). A researcher's ontological assumptions shape the way they view and study their research objects (in business and management, objects refer to organisations, individuals, organisational elements, management artefacts, and so on) (Saunders et al., 2016). Likewise, Hansen et al. (2005) convey that in social science research, ontology refers to the researcher's key principles related to the problem or phenomenon being studied; it is assumed that social behaviour and the natural world are the same. They further argue that ontology seeks to understand whether society is seen as a living entity and if social structures shape social behaviour (Hansen et al., 2005). Answering these questions frames the researcher's beliefs in their quest to understand the social world (Johnson et al., 2007). Two main aspects of ontological assumptions prevalent in business and management research are objectivism and subjectivism (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Objectivism posits that social entities exist in social realities that are external to the social actors concerned with their existence; thus, there is "one reality, and everyone has the same sense of reality" (Collis & Hussey, 2014: 47). Conversely, subjectivism argues that realities are socially constructed. Social realities are created from the viewpoints and actions of social actors; each actor has their sense of reality, leading to the existence of multiple realities (Saunders et al., 2016; Collis & Hussey, 2014).

Epistemology, on the other hand, concerns what is acceptable as valid and legitimate knowledge, as well as how this knowledge is communicated to others (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Collis & Hussey, 2014). Morsey (2003) describes this assumption as the type and degree of evidence required for knowledge to be viewed as true (evidence such as personal experience, empirical evidence, trust, logic, and faith). Clark et al. (2008) argue that epistemology is an aspect of philosophy that seeks to answer questions about how a researcher acquires knowledge or "what is the meaning of knowing." Positivism, realism, and interpretivism are perspectives of epistemology (Saunders et al., 2014). Positivists argue that to be regarded as valid knowledge, phenomena must be observable and measurable; their stances are usually independent and objective (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Because they prefer to work with observable realities, their findings resemble

law-like generalisations, as produced by physical and natural scientists (Remenyi et al., 1998). Realism, as a philosophical position, is like positivism in that it adopts a scientific approach to developing knowledge. It argues that reality is independent of human perceptions, constructs, and theories. By contrast, interpretivism, which is very much opposed to positivism, attempts to reduce the distance between researchers and what is being investigated (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Furthermore, they indicate that interpretivists believe a researcher ought to understand the difference between people who exist in a social reality while focusing on understanding those differences. Interpretivists prioritise understanding the experiences of people rather than treating them as mere "objects" (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Saunders et al., 2016). A tabular illustration of the ontological and epistemological components of interpretivist and positivist views can subsequently be found in Section 4.5.

While epistemology addresses the question of what knowledge is, axiology is a philosophical component that explores what is valuable and ethical in research (Killam, 2013; Lapan et al., 2012). Similarly, Saunders' (2009) research paradigm statement refers to axiology as a branch of philosophy that studies how value is judged. Human actions are guided by their values (Heron, 1996); thus, a researcher's ability to clearly communicate their decisions regarding what phenomenon to study and how to conduct that study demonstrates their axiological skills. Having an explicit value position aids a researcher in deciding what is ethically appropriate, providing them with strong arguments in support of their positions should questions arise concerning their choices. This research is value bound; it adopts an interpretivist orientation and argues that the nature of reality is subjective. This research employs a subjectivist view in its exploration of talent management in the context of Nigerian SMEs. This is because the research aims to investigate the talent management concept from the perceptions and actions of managers and employees in Nigerian SMEs. As Saunders et al. (2016) argue, to understand the actions of social actors, a researcher must first explore the subjective meanings that instigate those actions. Additionally, given that Nigerian SMEs are socially constructed entities, their talent management practices can only be understood from the viewpoint of the people who are directly involved in talent management activities. Hence, subjectivism is the most appropriate approach for this study.

To adequately understand the philosophical stance of this research, the following section explores the two main philosophical perspectives in social science research and discusses the researcher's choice of research philosophy.

4.3.2 Positivism

This philosophical stance, also referred to as "naïve realism," originated from the natural sciences and is assumed to be based on systematic or scientific methods (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Saunders et al. (2016) describe positivism as what is "posited" based on scientific empirical

methodology developed to generate accurate and factual data despite human interactions. Positivists seek to identify observable and measurable irregularities and look for causal relationships to construct universally accepted laws (Crotty, 1998). Through literature and research, positivists attempt to produce assumptions about the relationships between multiple variables, and through empirical study, positivism aims to give shape to a theory (Remenyi et al., 2002). Saunders et al. (2011) state that a positivist researcher seeks to create a new theory that may be tested by further research. They start their study based on an existing theory, develop a hypothesis, and subsequently test and confirm it. Thus, positivists are detached from the data collection process; they operate from a value-free perspective, minimising their influence on the subject matter. Researchers with this philosophical view believe that reality is free of context and that observation should be prioritised (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The main goal here is to discover new theories as well as to test and develop existing theories through empirical studies (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Schensul (2012) argues that researchers ought to avoid interaction with research objects and observe independently.

Healy and Perry (2000) depict that this approach usually employs quantitative methods, such as surveys, hypothesis verification, experiments, and questionnaires, as data collection techniques. One major strength of the positivist approach is its ability to provide broader coverage of various situations, as well as its efficiency and cost-effectiveness (Healy & Perry, 2000). The ability to utilise large sample sizes is seen as beneficial and informative for policy decisions (Amaratunga et al., 2002). Moreover, results are rarely influenced by biases and values; thus, findings are considered “rigorous,” “valid,” and “generalisable” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Saunders et al., 2016).

Even so, the methods linked to positivism have been criticised as artificial and inflexible. Amaratunga et al. (2002) suggest that these methods cannot effectively create an understanding of people’s actions and are thus not helpful in generating theories. Additionally, as social science research focuses on the real-life experiences of subjects, this approach may not be appropriate since positivists treat their participants independently and exclude themselves from what is being investigated. Rodwell (1987) argues that positivism is not suitable for analysing the complex and variable nature of socio-behavioural phenomena, as its focus on objectifying reality eliminates detailed and personal understanding of social reality from the individual perspective. The scientific approach proposed by positivism appears inefficient in the quest to learn about how people live, experience the world, adapt to it, and aspire to change it (Antonesa et al., 2006). Similarly, positivist techniques tend to promote the illusion that complex actions can be reduced to simple, replicable behaviour, regardless of contextual differences (Sayer, 1992).

Adopting the positivist paradigm for this research to explain the social reality of talent management (TM) in Nigeria may yield superficial information (Coffey, 1999). Numerous complexities characterise

the social reality of TM in the research context and cannot be theorised in terms of “generalised or definite laws,” as is the case in the physical sciences. For instance, organisational culture and TM policies are influenced by the cultural characteristics of the host country. However, the aspects of TM influenced by these external factors may prove challenging to theorise using quantitative methods and thus cannot be analysed through a definite “law.” Based on this, positivism and realism may not be appropriate for this research. The challenges of TM in the context of Nigerian SMEs involve a host of complex factors, and the opportunity to generate rich insights into such a complex, unexplored, and highly volatile environment may be lost if we adopt a philosophy grounded in a series of law-like generalisations. Therefore, we turn our attention to interpretivism below.

4.3.3 Interpretivism

Contrary to positivism, interpretivism—also referred to as constructivism or phenomenology—is concerned with the social world. Interpretivists argue that social reality is subjective rather than objective, as reality is shaped by our experiences (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Saunders et al., 2016). Researchers who adopt an interpretivist philosophical stance employ various techniques to study the social world to understand and explain reality (Bryman & Bell, 2007). As Denzin and Lincoln (2008:222) state, “Interpretivism believes that to understand the meaning of the world, one must interpret it.” This paradigm differs from positivism, which views reality as independent of humans. Interpretivists’ perspectives on knowledge generation are significant because they highlight the interconnectedness of the researcher and their research, emphasising that interaction and understanding are the primary principles of research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Remenyi et al. (2002:95) succinctly assert that “interpretivism is a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value; it sees behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective, and physically described reality.” Several authors (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Brotherton, 2008; Saunders et al., 2016) suggest that this philosophical stance is more appropriate for business management research, where the researcher aims to understand management, organisational issues, and interactions among people. This is because interpretivism allows the researcher to investigate the nature of a social phenomenon by addressing the “what?”, “how?” and “why?” questions (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Saunders et al., 2012). Interpretivism is a significant approach for researchers seeking to understand emerging fields in literature, as well as for investigating real-life problems in the world (Remenyi et al., 2002). The holistic nature of the interpretivist research stance enables the investigation of complex phenomena, with the context being the key focus (Denscombe, 2007). Based on the above discussion, a summary of the features of positivism and interpretivism is tabulated below.

Table 4.2 Features of The Two Main Research Paradigms

Positivism Tends to	Interpretivism Tends to
Use large samples	Use small samples
Have an artificial location.	Have a natural location.
Be concerned with hypothesis testing.	Be concerned with generating theories.
Produce precise, objective, quantitative data.	Produce rich, subjective, qualitative data.
Produce results with high reliability.	Produce findings with low reliability but high validity.
Allow resources to be generalised from the sample to the population	Allow findings to be generalised from one setting to another similar setting

Adapted from Collis and Hussey (2003)

Based on our discussion in the previous section, Table 4.3 below captures the philosophical components of positivism and interpretivism.

Table 4.3 The ontological and epistemological differences between Positivism and Interpretivism

Meta-theoretical Assumptions about Ontology	Positivism	Interpretivism
Ontology	Person (researcher) and reality are separate	Person (researcher and reality are inseparable (lifeworld)
Epistemology	Objective reality exists beyond the human mind.	Knowledge of the world is intentionally constituted through a person's lived experience.
Research Object	Research object has inherent qualities that exist independently of the researcher.	The research object is interpreted in light of the meaning structure of a person's (researcher's) lived experience.
Method	Statistics, content analysis	Hermeneutics, phenomenology, etc.
Theory of Truth	Correspondence theory of truth: one-to-one mapping between research statements and reality	Truth as intentional fulfilment: interpretations of research object match the lived experience of the object

Validity	Certainty: Data truly measures reality.	Defensible knowledge claims.
Reliability	Replicability: Research results can be reproduced	Interpretive awareness: Researchers recognise and address the implications of their subjectivity.

Adapted from Weber 2004:232

Easterby-Smith et al. (2003) highlight the ongoing debate among researchers regarding the appropriateness of philosophical underpinnings for specific studies. This underscores the necessity of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of different philosophies when adopted in various research contexts. Table 4.4 below illustrates these aspects.

Table 4.4 Strengths and weaknesses of research philosophies

Philosophies	Strengths	Weaknesses
Positivist	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. May provide broad coverage of the range of a situation 2. Can be economical and fast. 3. Where statistics are aggregated from large samples, they can be of considerable relevance to policy decisions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Methods employed tend to be somewhat artificial and inflexible. 5. Not very practical for understanding processes or the significance that people attach to actions 6. Not very helpful in generating theories 7. In having a focus on what is, or what has been recent, positivist approaches make it hard for policymakers to infer what actions and changes ought to take place in the future

Interpretivism	8.	Data-gathering methods are seen to be natural rather than artificial	13.	Collection can be tedious and require more resources.
	9.	Ability to look at change processes over time	14.	Analysis and interpretation of data may be more difficult It is harder to control the pace, progress and endpoints of the research process
	10.	Ability to understand people's meaning	15.	Policymakers may give low credibility to results emerging from a qualitative approach
	11.	Ability to adjust to new issues and ideas as they emerge	16.	
	12.	Contribute to theory generation		

Looking at both research paradigms, it is evident that they are not entirely antithesis of each other; therefore, researchers must understand both to make an informed decision about what best suits their research. This research adopts interpretivism and argues that reality is subjective. Thus, the research is value-bound. The researcher is a part of the research. The researcher applies qualitative methods (Small samples, in-depth investigations) to collect data. This orientation is most suitable for this research as it enables the researcher to develop an understanding of the fundamental meanings of organisational life. The interpretivist stance allows the research to investigate contextual influences.

From a methodological stance, this research employs the interpretivist view to its data collection. Given that through the understanding of existing TM literature, the research is exploring TM in the context of an emerging economy like Nigeria, exploring challenges faced by SMEs regarding the development and implementation of TM policies based on the experiences of managers and talent as well as how these TM practices are relevant to talent retention. Also, the researcher can identify the features of talents in Nigerian SMEs. As employees are viewed as social actors in Nigerian

SMEs, understanding these individuals and their roles is critical to this research. Adopting the interpretivist philosophy enabled the researcher to access the social world of Nigerian SMEs and gain an understanding of this world from a “talent” perspective. Besides, the researcher was able to understand the structure of TM and contribute to the TM literature within the research context. Further details on the researcher’s choice of qualitative research method as opposed to quantitative or mixed methods are provided in section 4.7. Meanwhile, the section below further details the rationale behind the researcher’s choice of interpretivism in this study.

4.4 Rationale for Research Philosophy

The chosen research philosophy encompasses critical assumptions regarding the perception of the research context, which subsequently dictate the research strategy and methods employed. The selection of a particular research philosophy is primarily influenced by the researcher's understanding of the subject matter being investigated (Saunders et al., 2011). There are no definitive rules mandating researchers to adopt one research method over another for varying research scenarios; somewhat, the choice of a specific philosophy is shaped by both technical and practical considerations (Jankowicz, 2000; Robson, 2002). Nevertheless, Saunders et al. (2012) suggest that the relationship between a researcher's epistemological stance and the development of knowledge significantly impacts their choice of research philosophy. Consequently, data collection and analysis techniques must be thoroughly understood to ensure that research questions are adequately addressed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

Collis and Hussey (2014) argue that researchers should perceive paradigms as existing on a continuum, emphasising that no single approach is inherently superior to others. Similarly, Saunders et al. (2007) caution against the misconception that one research method is "better" than others, as each approach possesses its strengths and weaknesses. Practically, research rarely conforms entirely to a single philosophical orientation (Saunders et al., 2016). The interpretivist philosophy underpinning this study has encountered various criticisms regarding its reliability and validity (Collis & Hussey, 2014). However, Saunders et al. (2016) assert that collecting data from individuals with diverse backgrounds and cultural experiences can yield a rich and valid data set. The rationale for adopting an interpretivist orientation is closely linked to the purpose of the research, the nature of the research problem, and the research questions:

- a) The study seeks to obtain knowledge based on the lived experiences of participants.
- b) The researcher engages with the research to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' social realities.
- c) The study aims to generate data concerning talent management (TM) from a small sample and to develop strategies that may enhance talent retention. This knowledge is intended to contribute to the TM literature and advance TM practices in Nigeria.

The following section discusses the two primary research approaches relevant to the study of management, providing justification and explanation for the methodological choices made in this research.

4.5 Research Approach

Saunders et al. (2016) depict that a research approach is determined by the research aims, objectives and questions in relation to the context of the study. Ghauri & Gronhaug (2005) and Saunders et al.

(2016) summarise that researchers follow either one of two main approaches (inductive and deductive) within business and management research. Induction is based on empirical evidence and is concerned with generating or building new theories; thus, it involves precise observation of specific phenomena and generalising about them to conclude the subject matter (Saunders et al., 2012). Contrarily, deduction is based on logic and involves the development or testing of existing theories by examining observations made during a study (Freser & Dowden, 2006). While the deductive approach is focused on gathering facts that may confirm or oppose the relationships amongst hypothetical variables based on the deduction of already existing knowledge, the inductive approach starts with the collection of empirical data, which is then followed by the development of models, theories, and concepts (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005; Torchim, 2006). A third approach to theory development is abductive reasoning: this approach adopts a pragmatist perspective and begins with a “surprising fact”; here, researchers seek to provide the “best” explanations among many to this “surprising fact” through observation (Saunders et al., 2016). Therefore, this “surprising fact” is a conclusion instead of a premise.

Rubin & Babbie (2009:39) described an inductive approach as “a research process based on inductive logic, in which the research begins with a review of extant literature, generation of research questions based on literature, observations, seeks patterns in those observations and generates tentative conclusions from those patterns. However, as stated in the previous section, conclusions are not generalisable beyond existing literature. A deductive approach is a research process based on deductive logic, in which the research begins with a theory, then derives a hypothesis, and ultimately collects observations to test the hypotheses”. See Fig 4.5 below.

Table 4.5 Differences between the two primary research approaches.

	Deduction	Induction
Logic	When premises are true, the conclusion must also be true	Known premises are used to generate untested conclusions
Generalisability	Generalising from the general to the specific	Generalising from the interaction between the specific and the general
Use of data	Data collection is used to evaluate propositions or hypotheses related to an existing theory.	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, locate those in a conceptual framework, test this through subsequent data collection, and so forth.

Theory	Theory falsification or verification	Theory generation or modification, incorporating existing theory where appropriate, to build new theory or modify existing theory
Other differences	17. Scientific principles 18. Moving from theory to data 19. The need to explain the causal relationship among variables 20. Collection of quantitative data 21. Application of controls to ensure data validity 22. Highly structural approach 23. Researcher's independence from research 24. The necessity to select samples of sufficient size in order to generate a conclusion	25. Gaining an understanding of the meaning humans attach to events 26. Close understanding of the research context 27. The collection of qualitative data 28. More flexible structure to permit changes of research emphasis as research progress 29. Researcher is part of the research process 30. Less concerned with the need to generalise

Table 4.5 Adapted from Saunders et al., 2003

The research adopts an inductive approach, as conclusions are drawn from empirical observations. The empirical evidence for this study is obtained by investigating four case study organisations. Based on the evidence collected, the researcher aims to determine the state and nature of talent management (TM) in Nigerian SMEs and examine TM's role in talent retention. Saunders et al. (2009) emphasise that inductive research is concerned with the contexts in which events occur, allowing the researcher to explore TM and retention specifically within the Nigerian context. Investigating four case study companies with a focus on context is deemed more appropriate for this study compared

to large-scale surveys typical of deductive approaches. The study focuses on TM and retention within this context. The inductive approach enables the researcher to understand how turnover may result from the way talents perceive their work experience. Additionally, Saunders et al. (2016) suggest that for research topics with limited empirical studies, ongoing debates, or unclear definitions, an inductive approach is more appropriate. This is because it involves generating data, analysing it, and reflecting upon emergent theoretical themes and patterns. This approach aligns well with the present study, as TM, although increasingly discussed by academics and practitioners, needs more consensus on key definitions and conceptual boundaries based on empirical research (Thunnissen et al., 2013). Furthermore, TM remains relatively unexplored in the Nigerian context.

The deductive approach was deemed unsuitable due to the absence of established frameworks or hypotheses specific to the Nigerian SME context. Additionally, the complex and unique characteristics of Nigerian SMEs suggest that HR practices and TM policies based on Western contexts may only partially apply. The inductive approach allows the researcher to account for cultural context and SME characteristics. As Miles et al. (2014) assert, qualitative data is well-suited to exploring the meanings individuals assign to events, processes, and structures in their lives and how these meanings connect to the broader social world.

Having discussed the research philosophy and approach, the next section will compare qualitative versus quantitative research and justify the choice of qualitative data collection and analysis techniques over quantitative methods.

4.6 Research Strategy- Case Study Strategy

A research strategy is described as “a logical plan for getting from here to there, where ‘here’ may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and ‘there’ is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions” (Yin, 2003: 20). Denzin & Lincoln (2011) suggest that a research strategy is a plan that illustrates how a researcher aims to answer the research question and satisfy research objectives. It shows the methodological approach by linking research philosophy to research methods.

Therefore, a researcher’s choice of strategy is determined by their research questions, aims and objectives, research approach, the availability of resources, and access to sources of data. Ethnography, grounded theory, action research, and narrative inquiry research strategies are connected to qualitative design, whereas surveys and experiments are linked to quantitative research design (Saunders et al., 2016; Collis & Hussey, 2014). Nonetheless, archival, narrative, documentary, and case study research strategies could follow a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method research design.

For this study, the case study strategy was adopted to investigate TM in the context of the study. A case study strategy “is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within

its real-life setting, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident" (Yin, 2014:143). Several phenomena cannot be understood if isolated from their social context; hence, a case study approach was appropriate for this study. Flyvbjerg (2011) reveals that a case could refer to an organisation, an event, an association, or a person, and, as such, choosing a case study and identifying limitations associated with it is an essential factor in defining a case study.

A case study strategy is best suited to understanding the nature of TM within the context and in a real-life setting. Understanding the research context is imperative and can aid the creation of rich and empirical insights to enable theory development. In line with the research topic and context, this study investigates the interactions between the identification, formulation, and implementation of the TM process and contextual factors for SMEs in Nigeria. Thus, the study is best carried out through case study investigations conducted in a cross-sectional time horizon, investigating the organisational events at a particular time rather than over some time (longitudinal study) (Armstrong, 2001; Saunders et al., 2016). As this strategy is restricted from producing generalisation, the research targets a small sample of SMEs across five industry sectors in Nigeria to generate trustworthy results. Multiple case studies comprising organisations that vary in size and life cycle will be studied. Ghauri and Grønhaug (2015) depict that a multiple case study method is beneficial to studies that look for general explanations even though they take an inductive approach. They further point out that evidence produced from multiple case studies is seen as more compelling, rich, and robust than that from a single case. Additionally, data collected from multiple case studies can be compared systematically and aid in the exploration of varying degrees of research issues (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). However, one main challenge identified with this strategy is gathering information from case study companies due to physical access restrictions and confidentiality issues.

As it is impossible to interview every HR manager and staff of SMEs in the national context, sampling was aimed at representing the main industry sectors. The next section details the sampling process employed in the research.

4.7 Qualitative Vs Quantitative Research

As stated in previous sections, qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering are the two main means of acquiring research data (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Creswell (2005) points out that researchers can, however, choose between three methodologies (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods). Whilst quantitative research uses numerical and quantifiable data, qualitative data is neither numerical nor quantifiable (Saunders et al., 2007). This study uses qualitative methods in its exploration of TM in Nigerian SMEs. Denizen & Lincoln (2003:13) state that "the word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or

measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency.” Creswell (2009) reports that qualitative research provides a means to explore and understand how people interpret a social problem by developing questions, collecting data from participants, analysing data, building from specific to general themes, and interpreting the analysed data.

Creswell (2009), Saunders et al. (2009), and Eisenhardt (1989) highlight three criteria to be considered when choosing a suitable research method, one of which is the research topic. They state that in instances where a voluminous amount of literature exists, a deductive/quantitative approach is best suited, whereas, when researching an under-researched area with little or no literature to aid the development of a theoretical framework and hypothesis, researchers are advised to adopt a qualitative or mixed-method approach. As TM is not quite popular amongst Nigerian SMEs (given the dearth of research in this context), finding numerous organisations with TM policies and practices to aid a quantitative study might be impossible. Thus, we opt for a qualitative one. Similarly, Morse (1991) reports that through qualitative methods, researchers can analyse phenomena that involve new concepts fraught with a lack of theory while addressing issues such as accuracy, bias, and the appropriateness of existing theories. On the other hand, quantitative research methods emphasise the establishment of a view of social reality that is independent of people’s lived experiences (Berman & Bell, 2007). Therefore, whilst emphasising the relationship between variables, quantitative research usually neglects how people define or interpret meaning (Blumer, 1954).

Arguments have been made both for and against qualitative and quantitative research methods. Franfort-Nachmias & Nachmias (1992) debate that as quantitative researchers focus on a specific phenomenon, findings tend to be more valid and reliable. Creswell (2014) explains that the high level of validity and reliability attributed to this type of research stems from its use of statistical measurement in the validation and testing of results for reliability. Additionally, Saunders et al. (2012) attribute the high validity and reliability to its use of a large sample size, which means that results can be generalised to similar studies.

Padlon (2010) highlights that a quantitative approach eliminates a researcher’s influence or bias on the problem being studied (Robson, 2002). Also, the use of straightforward and simple quantitative data collection methods enables the collection of a large amount of data from a large sample of participants (Patton, 2010; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Critics of the quantitative research method argue that it generates limited responses due to the use of close-ended questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Collis & Hussey (2009) also argue that as researchers are far from what is being studied, emerging information during the study cannot be supported. Robson (2002:23) critiques quantitative research, stating that this type of research limits itself: “First, by directing research to what is perceived by the senses, and second, by employing only standardised tools based on quantifiable data to test hypotheses.”

Furthermore, an all-around appreciation of a phenomenon could be neglected if emphasis is placed on testing hypotheses instead of generalisation of research hypotheses (Robson, 2002).

Even though this study adopts a qualitative method of data collection, it identifies some limitations or disadvantages of this method. Although this type of research demonstrates what is obtainable in real life (Amaratunga et al., 2002), critiques argue that data interpretation may reflect researcher bias (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which can lead to a lack of consistency and reliability (Myers & Allison, 1997). Proponents of qualitative research counter critiques by outlining the ability of qualitative researchers to develop an in-depth understanding of the research problem, investigate the issue in a holistic way, and thus develop a rich understanding of the research context (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Amaratunga et al., 2002). Furthermore, an advantage of this type of research is that it aids flexibility in data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2014; Hoepfl, 1997). One main criticism of qualitative research is its lack of generalisable results. The issue of generalizability in qualitative research remains a controversial topic, as interpretivists oppose the mandate of positivism in social science research (Carminati, 2018). As most qualitative studies are focused on specific phenomena within a particular context, the generalizability of research findings has not been a significant criterion for determining rigour and validity (Carminati, 2018). However, recent trends in research have led to considerations of the feasibility of generalisation in qualitative research (Leung, 2015; Carminati, 2018).

Denzin (1983:133) argues that “the interpretivist rejects generalisation as a goal and never aims to draw randomly selected samples of human experience. For the interpretivist, every stance of social interaction, if described in depth, represents a slice of the lived world that is the subject of interpretive inquiry. Every topic must be seen as carrying its own logic, sense of order, structure, and meaning.” Nonetheless, Groleau et al. (2009) view the possibility of generalizability in qualitative research as an illusion. Similarly, Morse (2008) states that generalizability is almost an impossibility in qualitative research. Schwandt (2001) defines generalizability as the ability to form general and broad statements that are applicable to other cases from specific cases. According to this definition, generalizability is neutral and does not have qualitative or quantitative attributes. However, the concept has become associated with quantitative research based on its dominance in social sciences (Delmar, 2010; Carminati, 2018). As a result of this, qualitative research has prioritised the provision of an in-depth understanding of scientific phenomena over the generalizability of findings (Ayres, 2003). The issues of generalizability, validity, and reliability will be discussed in detail in section 4.9.1.

To encapsulate previous discussions, Table 4.6 below illustrates the ontological and epistemological assumptions of qualitative and quantitative methodological choices.

Assumption	Questions	Quantitative	Qualitative
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Reality is objective and singular, apart from the researcher	Reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in a study
Epistemological	What is the relationship of the researcher to the researched?	The researcher is independent of that being researched	The researcher interacts with that being researched
Axiological	What is the role of values?	Value-free and unbiased	Value-laden and biased
Methodological	What is the process of research?	Deductive process Cause and effect Static design-categories isolated before study Context-free Generalisations leading to prediction, explanation and understanding	Inductive process Mutual simultaneous shaping of factors Context-bound Emerging design categories identified during the research process
		Accurate and reliable through validity and reliability	Patterns and theories developed for understanding Accurate and reliable through verification

Table 4.6 ontological and epistemological assumptions

Every researcher must have a research strategy to successfully investigate a phenomenon (Yin, 2003). Saunders et al. (2016) describe a research strategy as the general plan a researcher adopts to find answers to their research questions. The next section explains the research strategy employed in this study, considering the research problem and questions.

4.8 Sampling Strategy

A research population refers to elements (organisations or people) that are being studied, whilst sampling is the process of identifying the target participants, developing the sample frame, and deciding what sample size and technique to use (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Robson

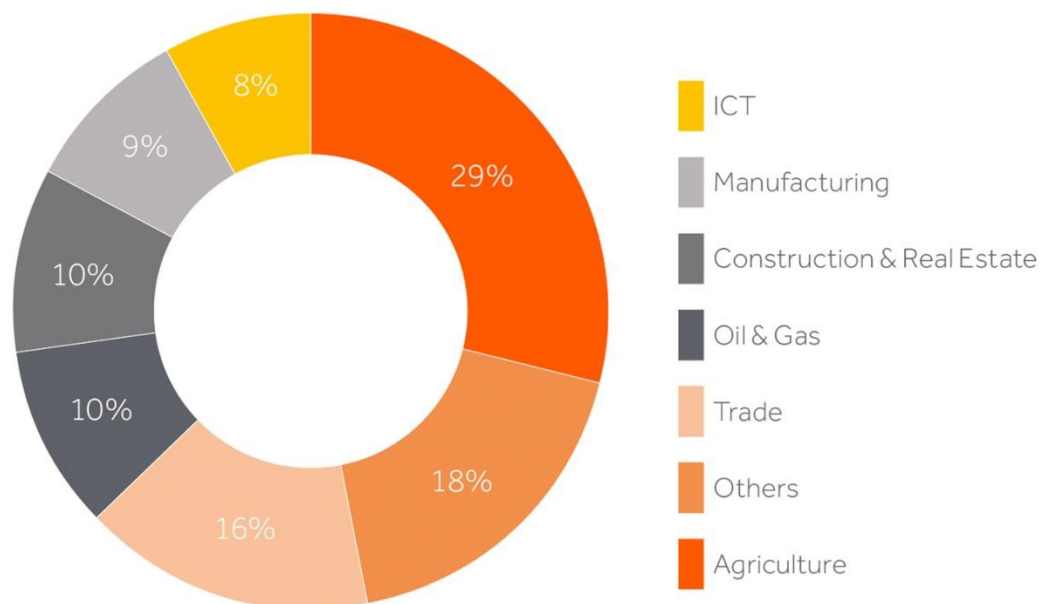
(2002:260) describes a sample as “a selection from the population” and sampling techniques as the process of providing a range of methods that aid in reducing the amount of data a researcher collects by accessing only data from a select group rather than generic elements.

Saunders et al. (2009) state that a researcher must adopt a sample strategy if:

1. Collecting data from the entire population incurs great costs
2. There is a tight timeline between data collection and analysis
3. The researcher only has permission to collect data from a specific sample.

This research investigates SMEs across the Oil and Gas, Finance, IT, Real Estate, and Manufacturing sectors. *Figure 4.2 Contribution of different sectors to the Nigerian GDP.*

Exhibit 1 Sectorial contribution to GDP



Source : NBS, KPMG

The study is focused on SMEs because, besides their contribution to the national GDP, as shown above, they play a significant role in job creation and are of strategic importance to the global economy. Thus, they are vital to the economic visions of most governments (Krishnan & Scullion, 2016) and cannot be overlooked (Apulu & Ige, 2011). Additionally, Okongu (2001) emphasises that SMEs have been recognised globally, as they have consistently championed economic competitiveness, local capital formation, high levels of productivity, and improved living standards across the globe. SMEDAN (2005) confirms that SMEs enhance the interconnectedness between socially, economically, and geographically diverse economies. Therefore, it is pertinent to agree that economic growth and development in Africa, and specifically Nigeria, have been facilitated through the emergence of SMEs

(Apulu & Ige, 2011). Not only do Nigerian SMEs provide employment and generate income for Nigerian citizens, but they are also breeding grounds for entrepreneurial capabilities, managerial competencies, technological innovations, and technical skills for private sector development (SMEDAN, 2005). Thus, the development and support of Nigerian SMEs must be prioritised. Given the unique and volatile business environment, this context must be investigated in depth to develop efficient strategies.

One grey area in this study is the definition of SMEs. PWC (2009) reveals the lack of a clear-cut definition of SMEs, as the terms “small” and “medium” are relative and vary in meaning across countries and even across industries. Holt (2009) stated that no single definition can adequately reflect the distinctions between organisations, sectors, and countries due to differences in their levels of development. IFC (2010) noted that the definition of SMEs largely depends on the size of the economy and local banking contexts. Whilst developing countries set high sales, assets, paid-up capital, and workforce thresholds for SMEs, national institutions in developed countries tend to do the opposite by lowering these thresholds for the classification of businesses.

The Central Bank of Nigeria defines SMEs as business enterprises with a turnover of less than NGN 100 million per annum or with fewer than 300 employees. They further state that 96% of Nigerian enterprises are SMEs, compared to 91% in South Africa, 65% in Europe, and 53% in the USA, representing 90% of the manufacturing and industrial sectors (CBN, 2007). However, the Bank of Industry Nigeria and SMEDAN have defined MSMEs based on their workforce, total assets, annual turnover, and total loan amounts. This is shown in Table 4.7 below.

Enterprise Category	Number of Employees	Total Asset (N'Million)	Annual Loan Turnover Amounts (N'Million)(N'Million)	
		≤5	≤20	≤10
Small	>11≤50	>5≤100	≤100	>10≤100
Medium	>51≤200	>100≤500	≤50	>100≤500

Table 4.7 Definition of SMEs: Source, Central Bank of Nigeria

For this study, we are adopting employee count as the defining factor in our identification of SMEs. The study was mainly conducted in the country's commercial hub, Lagos State. Lagos is Nigeria's largest and most populous city. Tagged as Africa's financial centre, the city has the fourth-highest GDP in Africa and hosts one of the busiest and largest seaports on the continent. Thus, it has the highest number of international and local businesses, with most indigenous companies being SMEs. Regarding the sampling frame, the study aimed to compile an up-to-date list of potential organisations to avoid

under-representation. As the study investigates TM in SMEs, the sampling frame eliminates public sector entities, multinationals, and large corporations.

The study explored qualitative sampling techniques to ensure that research questions were answered. Bryman and Bell (2011) identify probability and non-probability sampling as the two main sampling techniques in research. Probability sampling is a random selection of samples or subjects from a population that reflects the number of possible units, while non-probability sampling involves the selection of research subjects in a non-random way (Saunders et al., 2016). Figure 4.4 below shows Saunders et al.'s (2012) categorisation of sampling techniques.

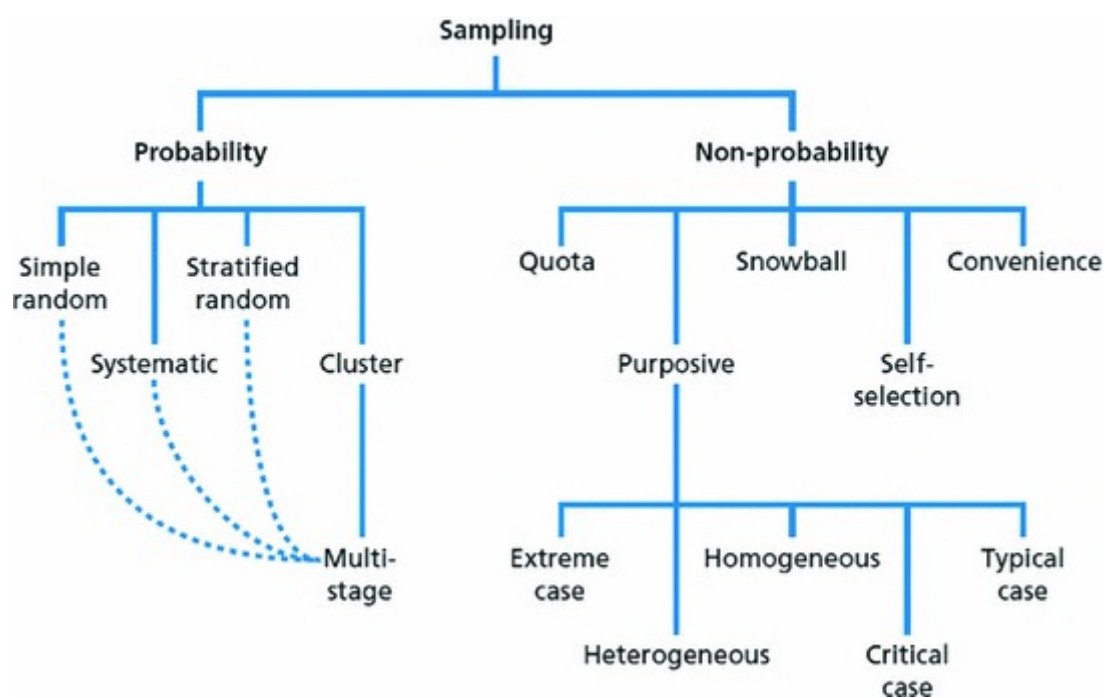


Figure 4.3 Sampling Techniques, Source: Saunders et al., (2012)

Bryman & Bell (2011) and Miles & Huberman (1994) highlight that research with qualitative samples tends to be purposive rather than random and will most likely evolve upon the commencement of fieldwork. Since this is qualitative research, it employed purposive sampling and snowballing techniques.

Case study companies in this research were purposefully chosen based on accessibility and their ability to provide rich and nuanced data on the research topic. Section 4.7 above notes that adopting a multiple case study strategy presents the researcher with the advantage of a rich understanding of the investigated phenomenon (Yin, 2009) and the opportunity to explore distinctions and similarities within and among cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). Also, following guidelines by Merkens (2004) and Patton

(2002), these diverse organisations were selected to ensure that the study has as many facets as possible. The case study context is restricted to the private sector because it is more likely for organisations in this sector to develop and implement talent management programs in a bid to achieve organisational success and maintain a competitive advantage, given the highly competitive nature of their sector (CIPD, 2013).

During fieldwork, snowball sampling was employed in cases where initial respondents (HR personnel) offered names of employees who met the eligibility criteria and were available to participate in the study. The criteria are that participants have access to the Internet and must have worked in case study organisations for a minimum of three years. This is based purely on the researcher's judgment that individuals would need to have been in an organisation for a minimum of three years to have a richer experience of management practices and policies. Thus, some participants who were not initially included in the purposive sample target were included later in interviews, and others who were selected earlier were replaced.

Even though sampling was done with the intent to purposively select participants that would provide robust and comprehensive information on TM practices from the perspectives of HR personnel and employees (regardless of their skill level, gender, and position), participants (in the employee category) were selected by HR personnel in the case study organisations. Ideally, to have richer and more unbiased access to employees' perspectives, the researcher would rather select random employees from each case. However, this was not practicable. This then begs the following questions: (1) How sincere were employees' responses— to what extent do they portray actual practices in case studies? (2) Were they appointed because they would naturally provide favourable views of TM practices? (3) Does the gender composition of the selected participants reflect the organisational workforce? About 90% of respondents were male—are all five organisations male-dominated? Would TM experiences between males and females be different in these organisations?

(4) Were participants objectively selected across the different employee levels? The researcher opines that most of the participants were highly skilled and occupied pivotal positions. There is no doubt that their TM experiences may be overwhelmingly or slightly different from those of 'lower-level employees.'

4.9 Data Collection Method

For this research, data was collected through semi-structured interviews (face-to-face and remotely) based on participants' preferences. The semi-structured interview process is detailed below.

4.9.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews play an important role in case study research (Yin, 2009). Stake (1995) states that interviews provide direct access to multiple realities and are known to promote flexibility, with the possibility of being used at any point in the research process (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). For social science researchers, interviews remain a vital technique for understanding, as they provide a means through which we can comprehend the world from the subjects' perspectives, offering an opportunity to unearth the meaning of subjects' lived experiences before any scientific explanation is given (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Interviews allow for the use of open-ended and investigative questions, helping the researcher clarify themes and achieve depth. Thus, interviews are advantageous over methods such as surveys and questionnaires because they aid the development of nuanced insights into participants' views (Saunders et al., 2007). Additionally, interviews facilitate the collection of valid and highly dependable data that effectively answer the research questions (Galletta, 2013).

This research uses semi-structured interviews for data collection, a technique widely used in case study research. In this case, the interviewer employs several open questions to gather information from interviewees who possess vital knowledge on the subject. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher has two main objectives:

1. To understand the interviewee's perspective on the issue.
2. To test whether the interviewee can substantiate insights established by other researchers or verify the information the researcher already possesses (Blumberg et al., 2014).

The flexibility associated with this method allows for a more natural conversation than a formal interview, which follows a strict structure (Holloway, 1997). The semi-structured interview technique enabled the researcher to be flexible and provided opportunities to ask follow-up questions outside of the interview guide based on the interviewees' responses. This approach produced rich data and gave interviewees the freedom to speak and assign meanings aligned with the broader research aims and objectives (Noaks & Wincup, 2004).

Additionally, this technique was used to adequately investigate issues identified and highlighted in previous chapters to enhance the targeted research outcomes. Thus, interview questions were designed to examine key themes in the study and to shed light on previously unidentified TM issues in the context of the study.

The following section briefly explains the design of interview questions.

4.9.2 Design of Interview Questions

Interview questions were designed on the premise that TM policies and practices might be different in SMEs in emerging economies, as established by the literature review. The main focus of this research is on the contextual features of TM in Nigerian SMEs. Bearing the overall research questions in mind, interview questions were designed to address the research questions. Previous chapters highlight the discrepancies among practitioners, scholars and researchers in their definitions of talent and talent management. Therefore, the interview prioritised collecting data on the definition of talent and talent management from the perspectives of HR personnel and employees. To answer this, we asked HR officers the following questions: To what extent do your talents make a difference to the success of your business? Who are considered to be talented employees in your organisation? How do you define talent? Do you operate with a formal TM policy? What do you understand by TM? To get employees' perspectives on this, we asked them these questions: In your own opinion, what does it take to be considered a talent? Do you feel talents in your company are being managed or treated differently compared to other employees?

Furthermore, as findings from the literature review chapter assert that SMEs are more disadvantaged than their larger counterparts regarding talent acquisition, development and retention, our interview questions sought to verify that claim by investigating the challenges faced by Nigerian SMEs and how these challenges affect talent retention as well as evaluate solutions. To generate data on this issue, we asked participants the following questions: Can you tell me how you attract the best talents? What are the challenges you face as an SME? What are the main talent challenges you see going forward? How does your approach to talent support business objectives? What is your strategy for the future supply of talent? Will you need to look at new sources of recruiting talent or new types of talent?

Questions were also designed to generate information on the role of organisational culture in TM implementation while trying to identify the link between institutional factors, national culture, and organisational culture. Can you briefly describe your organisational culture and how it impacts TM? Do you use an inclusive or exclusive approach? What would you say are the best aspects of working for this firm? What internal/external factors facilitate TM implementation in your organisation? What internal/external factors hinder TM implementation in your organisation?

To verify the initial claim that the RBV/psychological contract framework has a significant impact on employee satisfaction and, subsequently, talent retention, interviewees were asked about their expectations from their different organisations and whether these expectations have been met. The exact questions used in the interviews are outlined below: Why did you choose to join this organisation? To what extent have your original expectations been met? Can you think of any point

when you considered moving to another organisation? (If so, then what prompted that, and why did you stay? How do you see your future in this firm? To understand the significance of training and development on talent retention IN SMEs, we asked questions such as: Do you operate talent development practices? Can you outline these and whether the focus is on all employees or a more select group?

What would you say are the best aspects of working for this firm? To what extent do you feel the firm provides you with the opportunities to develop your career? What aspects of working here would improve your view of the firm?

Table 4.8 below summarises the relationship between the research objectives, research questions, semi-structured interview questions, and data collection methods.

Table 4.8 Relationship Between Research Objectives and Interview Questions

Research Objectives	Research Questions	Interview Questions
6 To critically review the literature about theories, concepts and models related to Talent Management, particularly in the SME context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do Nigerian SMEs define, Identify, attract, develop, and retain talented employees? • This research objective was addressed through an in-depth and critical review of existing academic and practitioner literature in the field of Talent Management • The interview questions were used to gather participant's opinions on the definition of talent. Thus aiding a comparison of our literature review definitions to what is obtainable in Nigerian SMEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you define talent? • Who are considered to be talented employees in your organisation? • To what extent do your talents make a difference to the success of your business? (Can you give examples) • Do you think some employees are considered by your company as talents? If so, why do you think that is the case? (In your own opinion, what does it take to be considered a talent?)

7	To analyse the current problems and challenges constraining the development of effective Talent Management in SMEs globally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This research objective was addressed through an in-depth and critical review of existing academic and practitioner literature in the field of Talent Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the main talent challenges you see going forward? Why do you think people leave SMEs for larger organisations?
8	To identify the main TM issues in Nigerian SMEs and to provide a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the state of Talent Management conceptualisation in Nigerian SMEs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is your assessment of talent supply and demand in Nigeria? (and specifically, in your sector)
	conceptual contribution to the area of study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the notable TM challenges faced, and to what degree do Nigerian SMEs have TM policies? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What challenges do you face in attracting and retaining employees with the skills you require? Do you see future challenges coming up, and what do you think these challenges would be? What is your strategy for future supply of talent? Will you need to look at new sources of recruiting talent or new types of talent? Can you think of any point when you considered moving to another organisation? (if so, then what prompted that, and why did you stay?) close.

<p>9 To critically identify and examine the role of talent management in the attraction, development and retention of employees and the overall growth objectives of SMEs in emerging markets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do Nigerian SMEs attract, develop, and retain talented employees? • To what degree do Nigerian SMEs have TM policies? (<i>Formal or informal TM in Nigeria</i>) 	<p>For Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me how you attract the best talents? (Examples of the challenges you face as an SME) • How do you recruit staff who are pivotal to your business? (Internally or externally)? • Do you operate talent development practices? Can you outline these and whether the focus is on all employees or a more select group? <p>For Employees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did you choose to join this organisation? • To what extent have your original expectations been met? (give examples) • How do you see your future in this firm?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you say are the best aspects of working for this firm? (give examples) • What aspects of working here would improve your view of the firm? (give examples) • To what extent do you feel the firm provides you with the opportunities to develop your career? (give examples)

Source: The Researcher

4.9.3 Pilot Study

A pilot study was crucial to this research as it helped assess the validity and reliability of the proposed interview questions in preparation for data collection (Saunders et al., 2016). According to Dillman et al. (2014), the number of participants in a pilot study should depend on the study's size, research questions, and available resources.

For this study, interview questions were developed, and a pilot study was conducted with five participants who shared characteristics similar to those of the target research population. Each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. The primary aim of the pilot study was to evaluate the feasibility of conducting virtual interviews (which was the original plan before incorporating a mix of telephone and face-to-face interviews). Additionally, the researcher sought to ensure that the questions were clear and simple enough for participants to understand in the intended manner and that they effectively addressed the research's aims and objectives.

One key advantage of the pilot study was that it identified unclear, unnecessary, overly direct, and sensitive questions that required rewording or removal from the interview guide. It also helped the researcher determine the time needed for each interview, revealing that participants quickly became disengaged during telephone interviews. As a result, the questions were filtered based on their relevance and importance, with the most critical questions placed at the beginning of the interview. For example, in the initial interview design, questions related to the definition of talent were placed toward the end of the list. However, these were moved to the top due to their importance to the overall research aims and objectives. Table 4.9 below provides a summary of the case study organisations and participants. The data has been anonymised and pseudonymised for data protection purposes.

Table 4.9 Case study organisations and participants

Company and main business	Ownership structure	Interviewee job role and interview process	Gender

delved into digital banking. 50 employees		3. Supervising officer (telephone interview) 4. Sales officer (telephone interview) 5. Front desk officer (face-to-face interview) 6. Accountant (face to face interview)	Male Male Female Male
Java.com ICT- Web development, cyber security and network engineering 250 employees	Family owned	1. HR Officer (face-to-face interview) 2. Developer (face to face interview) 3. Designer (face to face interview) IT 4. Officer (face-to-face interview) 5. Network engineer (face-to-face interview) 6. Graphics Designer (face-to-face interview)	Male Male Male Male Male

The Researcher

As previously mentioned, due to the geographical distance between the interviewer and participants, interviews were conducted both face-to-face and via telephone. This mixed approach allowed the researcher

to access participants who were either offshore or out of town. The table below provides details on the interview mediums used for each participant.

4.9.4 Face-to-Face Interview

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 20 out of the 30 participants. The researcher aimed to maximise face-to-face interactions because they facilitated the development of close rapport with participants, which helped maintain engagement and foster an interpersonal connection. In Nigeria, a collectivist and tactile society, people tend to build trust through direct contact. The face-to-face medium encouraged confidential, cordial—yet formal—open, and sincere communication with participants. Additionally, the researcher could observe participants' body language, identifying discomfort even when participants did not explicitly decline to answer certain questions. Further probing and requests for clarification were also easier during face-to-face interviews, as participants appeared more focused, relaxed, and willing to elaborate on their responses.

4.9.5 Telephone interview

Interviews with 10 participants were conducted via telephone, primarily due to its convenience for participants with highly tight schedules during the data collection period. The main advantage of telephone interviews was the flexibility they offered; the researcher could interview participants who were offshore or too busy to travel to a central location, making it convenient for both the researcher and participants (Quinlan, 2011). This method also allowed the interviewer to maintain some distance from the interviewee while preserving a degree of privacy and anonymity, as neither party could see the other. However, as Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest, this method can overlook the importance of visual cues. To mitigate this, the researcher fact-checked and clarified participants' responses through follow-up questions.

4.10 Data Analysis

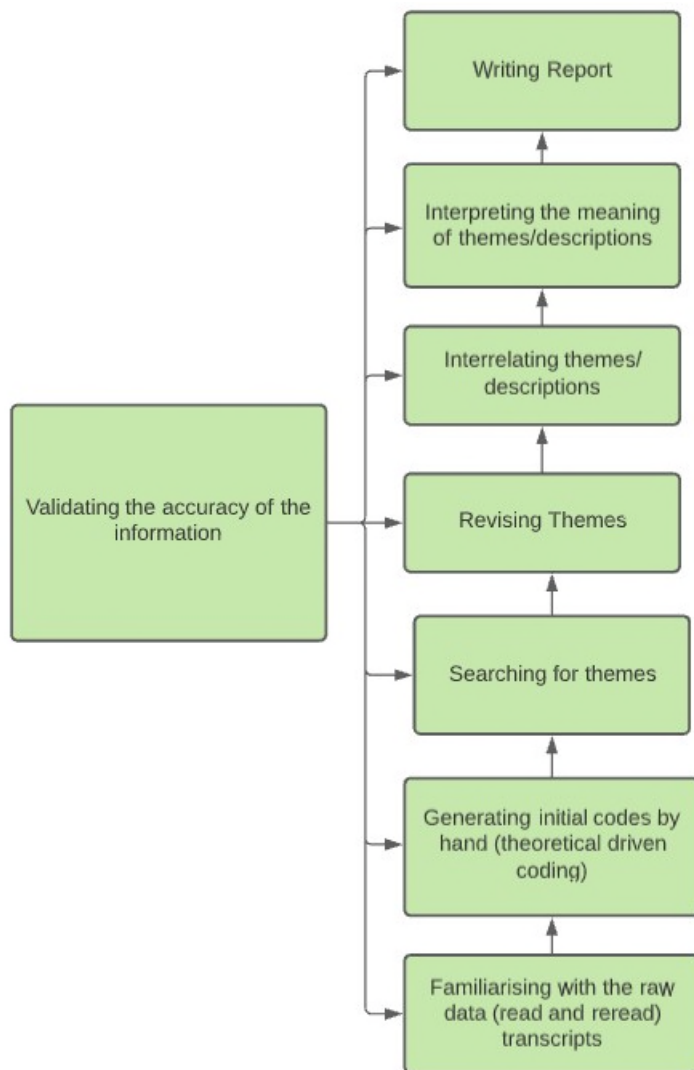
Data analysis involves systematically extracting meaning from the collected data to report a researcher's findings, making it a crucial and foundational part of the qualitative research process (Roberts et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through data analysis, qualitative researchers can identify patterns, establish links, highlight themes, and develop an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, ultimately contributing to theory generation (Brotherton, 2008; Hatch, 2002). Huberman & Mile (1994), as cited in Berg & Lune (2012: 54-55), outline key components of qualitative data analysis:

- **Data reduction:** Simplifying, focusing, and transforming raw data into manageable and interpretable forms.
- **Data display:** Organising and presenting data in a compressed form that allows for drawing analytical conclusions.

Berg & Lune (2012), Brotherton (2008), Creswell (2014), and Yin (2009) identify five common techniques for qualitative data analysis: content analysis, thematic analysis, grounded theory, narrative analysis, and pattern matching. Despite the widespread use of content analysis, this research adopts thematic analysis, a widely used tool for identifying, analysing, and reporting recurring patterns and themes in qualitative data (Robson, 2012). Joffe (2012:9) describes thematic analysis as a method of “identifying and analysing patterns of meaning in a data set” that illustrates themes significant to the phenomenon under study. The outcome of thematic analysis is to highlight the most salient constellations of meaning present in the data set.

For this research, thematic analysis will be used to extract meaning and develop concepts based on the central themes that emerge from the data. The choice of thematic analysis was motivated by the aim to develop themes across multiple interview datasets. Saunders et al. (2016) emphasise the usefulness of this method for analysing both large and small interview data sets. Similarly, Roberts et al. (2019) praise thematic analysis for aiding the comprehension of large volumes of qualitative data, making it suitable for this research, which will draw from numerous transcripts. Figure 4.4 below illustrates the data analysis process used in this study.

Figure 4.4 Thematic Data Analysis Process



Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006

Following Braun & Clarke's (2006) process (as shown in Figure 4.4), the recorded interviews and the researcher's notes were transcribed and subsequently cross-checked by participants to eliminate any misinterpretation. The transcripts were then reread multiple times to allow for thorough familiarisation with the raw data. Thematic analysis was employed to generate themes and subthemes, which were coded using NVivo10 software. This software facilitated the exploration of patterns, helping to explain the relationships between various variables and enabling efficient coding, recoding, linking, and grouping of codes.

While this research is firmly rooted in qualitative methods, involving both qualitative data collection and analysis, the question of whether the chosen methodology meets the research quality standards is important. The next section addresses this by examining the issue of research quality, considering

both quantitative and qualitative research standards. Several key terminologies are often employed to assess research quality, and these are critically reviewed in the following section.

4.10.1 Qualitative Versus Quantitative Data Analysis; Validity and Reliability Versus Rigor, Trustworthiness and Replicability

Muijs (2013) tags validity, reliability, and generalisability as key concepts in quantitative research. Golafshani (2003:2), citing Winter (2000), describes validity and reliability as “tools of an essentially positivist epistemology.” However, despite their position as important tests and measures of research quality, qualitative researchers continue to debate their relevance and applicability to qualitative research (Noble & Smith, 2015). However, authors emphasise the need to consider and address issues of data quality satisfactorily, regardless of the research approach (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Kvale, 1995). Also, Noble & Smith (2015) report that generally, the terms are applicable to qualitative research; however, given the difference between quantitative and qualitative research regarding philosophical positions and purpose, it is imperative to consider alternative frameworks for assessing research rigour. Joppe (2000:1) defines reliability as “the extent to which results are consistent over time; an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability, and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is reliable.” Bannigan & Watson (2009:3238) say reliability is “the extent to which a measure is the same each time it is performed by whoever performs it.” Reliability refers to repeating and achieving the same results at different times, under different conditions (Collis & Hussey, 2009).

Like reliability, validity is mainly used within the positivist domain (Golafshani, 2003). Joppe (2003:1) describes validity in quantitative research as “the extent to which research truly measures that which it is intended to measure or how truthful research results are. In other words, does the research instrument allow you to hit ‘the bull’s eye’ of your research object? Researchers determine validity by asking a series of questions and will often look for the answers in others’ research.” Similarly, Muijs (2013) states that validity addresses the question of whether a researcher adequately measures what they set out to measure. McDowell & Newell (1996:37) state that validity concerns itself with “error in measurement,” assessing how consistently a scale measures what it intends to measure. Based on the above definitions, we can say that in quantitative research, reliability addresses whether research is replicable, and validity addresses whether the measurement scales are accurate.

On the other hand, qualitative researchers view reliability and validity differently, as they consider these terms inadequate. Mason (1996) argues that for qualitative researchers, reliability and validity are diverse ways to measure rigour, quality, and the broader capability of research techniques to

address research issues based on established methodological standards and principles. He further states that validity is concerned with whether a qualitative researcher observes, identifies, or measures what they say they are (Mason, 1996).

Stanbecka (2001:551) supports the inapplicability of these concepts to qualitative research, arguing that while reliability assesses quality for the “purpose of explaining” in quantitative research, the concept of quality in qualitative research is aimed at “generating understanding.” They highlight that this salient difference indicates the irrelevance of reliability in qualitative research, as it is misleading. Healy and Perry (2000) opine that the quality of any given research should be determined by terminologies specific to its paradigms. Stanbecka (2001) outrightly argues against reliability in qualitative research, stating that as it concerns itself with measurement, it is irrelevant in ascertaining the quality of a qualitative study. Nonetheless, Patton (2001), cited in Golafshani (2003), urges qualitative researchers to concern themselves with reliability and validity while designing research, analysing findings, and assessing the quality of research.

Some researchers (Clont, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seal, 1999; Stanbecka, 2001) have adopted terminologies considered to be more appropriate to qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) specifically replaced the term “reliability” with “dependability” in qualitative research. Other terms like credibility, consistency, applicability, transferability, and neutrality have been used as quality checks in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Appleton (1995) highlights how unfortunate it is that authors still attempt to prove research credibility using synonyms for quantitative research. Likewise, Cavanagh (1997) points out that authors have lambasted the credibility of qualitative research using criteria associated with quantitative research. On the issue of validity, Golafshani (2003) and Gunawan (2015) state that while qualitative researchers debate the relevance of validity to their research paradigm, a number of them admit the importance of some quality check or measure for research. Note that Stanbecka (2001) was not as critical of validity as they were of reliability in qualitative research. She has instead called for the redefinition of the term to suit qualitative purposes. Thus, qualitative researchers have adopted more “appropriate” terms like rigour, quality, and trustworthiness that reflect interpretivist conceptions (Connelly, 2016; Gunawan, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seal, 1999; Stanbecka, 2001). Noble and Smith (2015) give a summary of the terminologies applicable to quantitative and qualitative research, which is subsequently captured in table 4.10.

In a bid to define rigour in research, Davies and Dodd (2002) found that rigour is mostly used in reference to reliability and validity due to the existing quantitative bias about the concept. Thus, they propose the

exploration of subjectivity, reflexivity, and social interaction as preconceptions of rigour. Also, Lincoln and Guba (1985) replace the idea that truth can only be revealed through reliability and validity with the idea of trustworthiness and confidence in findings. The issues of rigour, credibility, and trustworthiness in qualitative research in relation to data analysis in this research are further detailed in the subsection below.

4.10.2 Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

Qualitative research has often borne the brunt of criticism for its supposed lack of scientific rigour, inadequate justification of techniques adopted, little or no transparency, and the possibility of findings being subject to personal bias (Noble & Smith, 2015). Furthermore, Gunawan (2015) notes that the criticism is further fuelled by the fact that many qualitative researchers tend to underestimate the need to provide detailed descriptions of their research assumptions and methods regarding data analysis. It would be correct to admit the conundrum surrounding the appropriateness of qualitative techniques in generating theories (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999). Where quantitative researchers prove the validity and reliability of their study through statistical methods, qualitative researchers tend to develop methodological strategies to guarantee the trustworthiness of results.

Connelly (2016) states that trustworthiness or rigour in research relates to the extent of confidence in data collection, interpretation techniques, and methods employed to ensure research quality. Gunawan (2015) argues that the trustworthiness of a study can only be assessed based on the judgments of its readers. However, Guba and Lincoln (1994) outlined a number of criteria through which trustworthiness can be enhanced. These include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Noble & Smith capture these in their tabular illustration of the alternative terminologies associated with qualitative research, as seen in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.10 Alternative terminologies associated with qualitative research

Quantitative research terminology and application to qualitative research	Alternative terminology associated with the credibility of qualitative research
<p><i>Validity</i></p> <p>The precision with which findings accurately reflect the data</p>	<p><i>Truth Value/credibility</i></p> <p>The degree of confidence in the data, methods, interpretation, truth of the study and findings. Recognising that multiple realities exist, the researchers outlined personal experiences and</p>

	viewpoints that may have resulted in methodological bias and clearly and accurately presented participants' perspectives.
<p><i>Reliability</i></p> <p>The consistency of the analytical procedures, including accounting for personal and research method biases that may have influenced the findings</p>	<p><i>Consistency/dependability</i></p> <p>Relates to the “trustworthiness” of the methods undertaken and is dependent on the researcher maintaining a “decision trail;” that is, the researcher’s decisions are clear and transparent. Stability of findings over time.</p> <p>Ultimately, an independent researcher should be able to arrive at similar or comparable findings.</p> <p><i>Neutrality (or conformability)</i></p> <p>Conformability is the degree to which results are consistent and can be repeated.</p> <p>They are achieved when truth value, consistency and applicability have been addressed.</p>
<p><i>Generalisability</i></p> <p>The transferability of the findings to other settings and applicability in other contexts</p>	<p><i>Applicability/transferability</i></p> <p>Consideration is given to whether findings can be applied to other contexts, settings, or groups.</p>

Source: Noble &Smith (2015)

A number of strategies aimed at increasing the credibility of qualitative research have been adopted in this research, as seen below.

4.10.2.1 Truth value/Trustworthiness/credibility

Silverman (2006:287) suggests some ways to ensure the reliability of qualitative interviews:

1. Tape-recording face-to-face interviews.
2. Carefully transcribing interview recordings according to the needs of reliable analysis instead of handing the problem over to an audio-typist.
3. Present long extracts of data in the research report, including the questions that provoked any answers.

In this study, a reflective journal is maintained, and information will be appropriately documented. This research applies triangulation in collecting data. Silverman (2006) reports that triangulation can erase biases applicable to single perspectives. Data is collected from various sources, locations, and groups. This research studies five organisations of varied sizes within different industries. Also, participants are

from both managerial and operational levels of the organisations and belong to different departments. The researcher maintained detailed record-keeping, ensuring data transcription and interpretation were consistent and transparent. Semi-structured recorded interviews enabled repeated data scrutiny to check emerging themes and maintain an accurate account of participants' experiences. To avoid semantic distortion, the researcher used verbatim extracts from participants to help readers decide if the final themes reflect participants' accounts.

It is important to note that qualitative research provides for a systematic and rigorous process that can be accountable for its quality and claims (Mason, 2002) and that qualitative researchers can engage in such skills as reflexivity to render the qualitative research process credible (Symon & Cassell, 2012). According to Haynes (2012), reflexivity is an awareness of the researcher's role in the practice of research and the way this is influenced by the object of the research. Reflexivity enables the researcher to acknowledge the way in which he or she affects both the research processes and outcomes. Reflexivity was particularly important in this study to avoid potential ethical dilemmas. A reflexive summary is provided later in the thesis, where the researcher reflects on their experiences.

4.10.2.2 Neutrality/ Conformability

Neutrality centres on acknowledging the complexity of the prolonged engagement with participants, as well as noting that the methods undertaken and findings are not intrinsically linked to the researcher's philosophical position, experiences, and perspectives (Polit & Beck, 2014). As Ashworth (1997) reports, a researcher's interaction with the social world of the participants may establish research credibility, as meanings could be inferred, which may counter the researcher's natural/biased expectations. Repeated interactions with participants through interviews may create some constructive collaboration between the researcher's lived experiences and those of the participants. This could eliminate the possibility of the researcher misinterpreting the participant's reality or constructing their own reality.

For this study, the researcher acknowledges possible biases in sampling and will conduct a continuous critical reflection on methods to ensure sufficient depth and relevance of data collection and analysis. The researcher will maintain a transparent and clear description of the research process from the initial outline through the development of the methods and reporting of findings. In addition, the researcher will maintain a research diary that documents challenges and issues encountered. Emerging themes will be discussed with supervisors who are qualitative research experts. Although Cutliffe (1990) questions the technique of getting expert opinions by highlighting its associated philosophical and epistemological difficulties, arguing that as qualitative studies are usually associated with the absence

of existing relevant theory, what are the chances that "experts" or "experienced colleagues" will exist, and how do you establish that these individuals are "experts"?

4.10.2.3 Applicability/Transferability

Transferability aims to produce rich context details. However, transferability is dependent on the extent of similarity between the case study context and other contexts. The researcher will not guarantee the applicability or transferability of the findings but will only provide sufficient information that other scholars can then use to determine whether the findings are applicable to their specific contexts.

Notwithstanding the measures taken as detailed above, the researcher encountered some ethical issues worth consideration during the research, which are discussed in the section below.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

Saunders et al. (2012) point out that every research project is fraught with ethical concerns at various stages, be it planning, accessing subjects, gathering, analysing, or reporting data. Saunders et al. (2012: 226) further define research ethics as "...the standard of behaviour that guides your conduct in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work or are affected by it." In other words, when dealing with human subjects, researchers must remain conscious of their values and responsibilities to the subjects, as do medical researchers (Yin, 2014). Creswell (2014:95) suggests that "attention needs to be directed toward ethical issues prior to conducting a study; beginning a study; during data collection and data analysis; and in reporting, sharing, and storing the data." Similarly, Ryan (2011) and Silverman (2011) agree that when deciding the significance of a study, researchers must properly address and manage its associated risks, dangers, and ethical issues. Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) highlight several principles or ethical guidelines for researchers, which include:

1. Non-maleficence - ensure that no harm is done to participants.
2. Ensure the dignity of research participants is respected.
3. Ensure informed consent.
4. Ensure the privacy of research subjects is protected.
5. Confidentiality of data.
6. Maintain the anonymity of research subjects.
7. Transparency and honesty - avoid false or misleading information about the aims, nature of research, or research findings.

Ethical issues were prioritised throughout the research process, particularly during the research design, data collection, storage, and analysis, as well as report writing and sharing. Consequently, the following ethical guidelines were employed.

Before commencing contact with research subjects and data collection, the researcher followed ethical guidelines from the University of Hull and obtained approval for the study from the University of Hull Business School Research Ethics Committee. An application was made to the committee, which involved a detailed summary of the interview question guide, research information—including research aim and objectives—an information sheet for participants, a consent form, and data management and storage processes.

Before the interviews, the researcher sent invitations and information emails to the management of the eligible case study organisations and employees, seeking their consent to participate in the research. Informed consent was obtained from research participants in the study, which will be attached to the appendix section subsequently. Participants were informed about the nature of the research. The research aims, and objectives were explained in detail both in writing and at the start of each interview to ensure that participants fully understood each aspect of the research and how the data would be stored and used. Research participants were informed about the audio recording of interviews, and consent was given prior to recording.

The researcher ensured that the privacy and confidentiality of participants were always protected. There was no mention of names during interviews, data storage, access, and reporting of the research findings. Pseudonyms were used in addressing participants. Names were replaced with name codes that would not relate to their initials. An encrypted key file containing the link between participant codes and identities will be kept available during the project; however, it will be destroyed once the project is finalised.

As this research involves evaluating organisational practices in line with talent management, participants may be reluctant to let their guard down and be expressive. They may fear victimisation if they reveal details that could be unfavourable to the corporate brand of their organisation. Thus, they may become emotionally and physically uncomfortable. Only a few people would be daring enough to express themselves on camera, given the sensitivity of the research questions. Maximum effort will be made to ensure the participants are comfortable and feel secure during the interviews. Participants were informed of their right to dismiss any questions that unsettled them, as well as their right to withdraw from the interview if needed at any point.

Although this research could pose risks for participants in terms of how their disclosures are used and the level of anonymity they receive, I am confident the risks can be mitigated by maintaining a high ethical standard, adopting good practices, and creating a high level of trust. Ensuring that recordings are not shared, transcripts are anonymised, and peculiar details that can lead to easy identification of participants are removed from transcripts or concealed in the write-up. Where the risk of being

identified arises, participants will be shown the transcript to ensure that they are satisfied and that no unnecessary risks are being taken with their interview responses.

4.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter details the research design and methodology adopted in this study. It describes philosophical positions in research and highlights the underpinning philosophy in this study, providing justifications for the researcher's choice of research philosophy based on information gathered from existing literature on research methods and methodology while bearing in mind the contextual features of this research. We adopt a subjective ontological position, which entails that reality is created from the perspective of social actors (Saunders et al., 2016). Interpretivism, which embodies constructivist views that individual experiences shape our realities, was adopted as the epistemological position for this study. To complement the above choices, the study follows a qualitative research approach. This approach was adopted because it allowed for an in-depth investigation of participants' perspectives and understanding of talent management, which remains unexplored, with little or no empirical research in the context of the study. We detailed our use of multiple case studies in our exploration of the features of talent management practices between and within case study organisations and participants, with the aim of understanding how different people/organisations define talent and talent management, talent management activities (acquisition, development, and retention) in Nigerian SMEs, the role of organisational culture in the implementation of TM practices, as well as challenges faced by SMEs in the national context.

Additionally, this chapter describes the data collection and analysis techniques applied to the study. We used semi-structured interviews (which employed open-ended questions) to collect relevant information from participants. We adopted a qualitative data analysis method, which was detailed in this chapter. This chapter considers the concepts of generalizability, reliability, validity, and trustworthiness in qualitative research, outlining the measures taken by the researcher to ensure research credibility, validity, and reliability. Lastly, the chapter highlights the ethical considerations given during the data collection and analysis process, describing the measures undertaken to ensure the avoidance of ethical misconduct.

The next chapter presents empirical findings and analysis from case study organisations based on the themes that were developed from the data analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The study aimed to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive and sophisticated theoretical as well as empirical framework for Talent Management (TM) in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in emerging markets. Specifically, it involved a thorough exploration of the state of HR practices in terms of attraction, development, recruitment, and retention of employees within SMEs in emerging markets, with a focus on the Nigerian context. It mainly aimed to identify and understand the challenges that hinder the development of Talent Management and retention within SMEs in Nigeria. Furthermore, it sought to assess the importance and application of TM practices within Nigerian SMEs as well as how these practices are relevant to talent retention and the performance of the firm. Finally, it aimed to critically review existing literature, identifying and addressing gaps in empirical research relating to the concept of talent and talent management.

The data collection was aimed at determining the state of TM as well as the impact of micro and macro-level factors on TM activities in Nigerian SMEs. Using Nvivo, key themes were identified in the data and interpreted to reveal research results. The research findings assisted the researcher in achieving the research objectives as well as providing answers to research questions. Sections 2.8 (National Context Chapter), 3.8, 3.9, and 3.10 (Literature Review Chapter) have previously highlighted HRM and TM practices in Nigeria, focusing on challenges posed by micro- and macro-level factors. The conceptual framework for this study was formulated by linking the impact of organisational-level and macro-level factors on TM activities, focusing on the attraction, development, and retention of employees with high potential.

The literature review revealed a dearth of academic research on the impact of macro-level factors on TM and talent retention. This is because TM literature primarily focuses on internal factors and, thus, overlooks several macro-level factors which play a significant role in TM application in SMEs. The results of this study proved valuable in understanding the state of TM in Nigerian SMEs as well as the factors that influence the development and implementation of TM processes. The study targeted SMEs in the private sector, including organisations in the information technology, finance, real estate, renewable energy, oil, and gas sectors. It targeted employees at various levels, including HR Personnel.

This chapter begins by analysing the concepts of Talent and TM as defined by participants. It then looks at specific TM activities carried out by SMEs. Next, it discusses the identified challenges that affect TM processes and their implementation. Finally, it discusses the country- and organisation-level factors that influence TM implementation in Nigeria. By conducting a thematic analysis of the themes

generated through the NVIVO software, this chapter links the conceptual framework in previous chapters to the micro and macro-level challenges which hinder the successful implementation of effective TM. Additionally, the chapter presents an in-depth analysis of TM practices and challenges surrounding the implementation of TM in SMEs. The study measures the extent to which SMEs in Nigeria apply TM practices and how these practices impact talent retention. During the data collection, macro-level challenges that act as facilitators or impediments to effective talent management (an aspect of HRM called talent management) in Nigeria are identified. Factors affecting TM at the organisational level are categorised as internal or micro factors, whilst factors affecting TM at a societal or national level are categorised as external or macro-level factors. Hence, an analysis is done at both the country and organisational levels.

The findings presented in this chapter are based on data from the semi-structured interviews with participants. Thus, the relationships between the themes are explored here. Summarily, this chapter highlights the link between the definition and identification of talent and the qualities that the participants attributed to talent. Lastly, the research aimed to investigate how different organisations manage talent.

5.2 The Research Sample: Participants

As previously stated in Chapter 4 (Research Methodology), the research data was gathered through face-to-face and virtual semi-structured interviews with thirty participants (see Table 5.1 below).

The section below uses the conceptual framework developed in the literature review chapter to better understand the impact of macro factors on talent management processes and talent retention in SMEs. It identifies and explores TM practices and their challenges across five Nigerian SMEs. The table below summarises the participants' demographic composition.

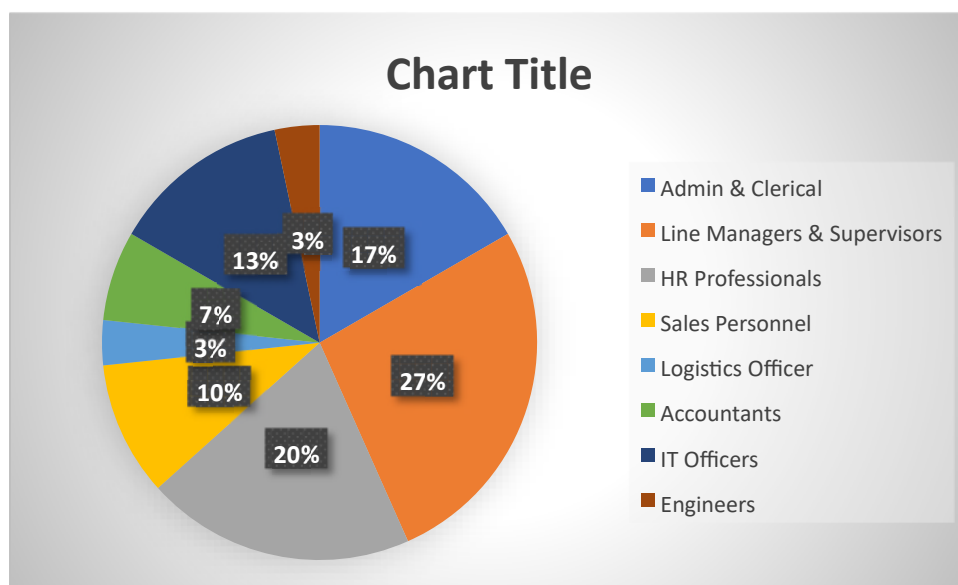
Table 5.1 Participant's Demography

Participants Demography			
Participant Name	Job Role	Years of Service in Org.	Gender
Planet safe	Regional Supervising Manager	9	Male
planet safe 1	Head of engineering Team	6	Male
planet safe2	Head of HR and corporate services	3	Female
planet safe3	Regional supervisor	6	Male
Planet safe4	Plant Manager	4	Male
Planet safe5	Admin Officer	2.5	Female
Petro.com	HR Officer	4	female
Petro.com1	Sales officer	5	female
Petro.com2	Contract administrator	4	female
Petro.com3	Logistics officer	4	male
Petro.com4	Front desk Officer	3	Female
Petro.com5	Accountant	6	Male
Homify.com	HR Assistant	7	female
Homify.com1	HR Business head	4	female
Homify.com2	Sales officer	6	male
Homify.com3	Administrative officer	4	female
Homify.com4	Operations manager	7	male
Homify.com5	Structural Engineer	4	male
Finco	Group HR officer	3	male
finco1	Head of operations	9	male
finco2	Supervising officer	8	male
finco3	Sales officer	4	male
finco4	Front desk officer	4	Female
finco5	Accountant	5	male
Java	HR Officer	6	male
Java1	Developer	4	male
Java2	Graphics Designer	4	male
Java3	IT Officer	5	male
Java4	Network engineer	3	male
Java5	Project Manager	4	male

Source: The Researcher

The distribution of respondents based on their roles is presented below: Admin and clerical (17%), Line Managers and supervisors (27%), HR professionals (20%), Sales Personnel (10%), Logistics Officers (3%), Accountants (7%), IT Officers (13%), and Junior Engineers (3%).

Figure 5.1 Percentage of participants based on Job role.



Source: The Researcher

As stated in the previous chapter, it was noted that the majority of the participants were male. The male participants dominated technical roles, whilst the female participants were primarily employed in administrative capacities. This disparity has been identified as a research gap and, if further researched, could provide evidence of gender disparities in technical and administrative roles and the resulting implications for training and development based on gender (see Blickenstaff, 2005; Hewlett et al., 2014). See Fig 5.2 below.

Figure 5.2 Number of participants by Gender



Source: The Researcher

Using Nvivo 12 software, the collated data were classed into general nodes, which were eventually used to create codes and themes that will be discussed subsequently. The following section provides a general summary of the research findings.

5.3 Trends in Talent Management Practices

Talent management and retention have become widely acknowledged as among the most critical factors for organisational success since the McKinsey Report coined the term 'the war for talent' in 1997 (Collings & Mellahi, 2009), given its popularity and strategic importance in the corporate world (Collings, Scullion & Vaiman, 2011; Festing & Schafer, 2014; PricewaterhouseCoopers [PWC], 2013). According to the Manpower Talent Shortage Survey (2015), different countries or regions have different demands on talent. In the Americas (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru and the United States), skilled trade workers, technicians, and sales representatives are the three most difficult positions to fill, while in Asia-Pacific (Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore and Taiwan) sales representatives, engineers and technicians are the top three positions. In Europe, Middle East and Africa (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK), skilled trade workers, engineers and sales representatives are in high demand.

The study identified some key trends amongst SMEs in Nigeria. It was noted that participants (both employees and management) unanimously defined talent as employees or any staff that can deliver on and exceed the set goals, objectives, and strategies both at individual and organisational levels. They

curated from Nvivo 12

Regarding talent attraction and retention, it was seen that HRM activities such as recruitment, learning and development (personal and technical), performance management, promotion and rewards for high performers and high potential employees are primarily adopted as TM. Consequently, it is established that HR personnel acknowledge the relationship between performance and financial rewards such as pay increases, bonuses, and promotions. In fact, pay increments and promotions are strictly based on individual performance. They also stated that high performers and high-potential employees were developed and encouraged through a fast-track promotion system. Additionally, the majority of the participants emphasised that some effective retention tools employed by their organisations in a bid to promote the attraction and retention of talented employees are the creation of the right working environment for talent to flourish and reach their ultimate potential, promoting an organisational culture in which everyone sees themselves as a family, promoting team working as well as provision of satisfactory pay and reward. This suggests that for Nigerian SMEs, retaining talented individuals was more challenging than attracting and recruiting them.

Table 5.2 HR Practices in Nigerian SMEs

HRM(TM) Activity	Activities in Practice
Attraction initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive Salary Based on Industry Standard • Employer Branding • incentives like flexible working • commissions
Recruitment and selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media (WhatsApp, Instagram, LinkedIn) • Print media. • Job sites (jobber man, • Recruitment agencies and head-hunters • Internship Programs • Internal talent <p>Creation/Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Orientation Camp <p>Specialised positions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outsourced • Contracted to Specialists • Internal Progression/ Recruitment <p>Referrals</p>

Training and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical Training and development • On-the-job training • Need-based training. • Position-based development
Performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance appraisals • promotion for high performers • Performance-based pay and bonuses • Rewards
Succession planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal succession plans • Mentoring and on-the-job training for understudies • Creation of second lieutenants
Pay and Reward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In line with market or industry standards • Offering incentives like flexible working • commissions
Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and development opportunities • Job enrichment, • on-the-job training
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reward and recognition. • Friendly organisational culture • Job security • A conducive work environment that creates opportunities for growth and development • Flexible working option • Training and development • Employee Engagement • Employee value proposition • Fulfilment of statutory obligations

Using the conceptual framework developed in the literature review chapter to create a better understanding of the impact of macro factors on talent management processes and talent retention in SMEs, TM practices and their challenges across five Nigerian SMEs are identified and explored in this chapter. However, the next section starts by answering the first part of our second research question, which addresses the status of TM activities in Nigerian SMEs and looks at talent definitions from their perspectives. This question is very crucial to the study as it is the basis on which the researcher aims

to contribute to the literature on TM. Hence, it was one of the main focuses of the semi-structured interview.

Research Question 2: What is the state of Talent Management conceptualisation in Nigerian SMEs

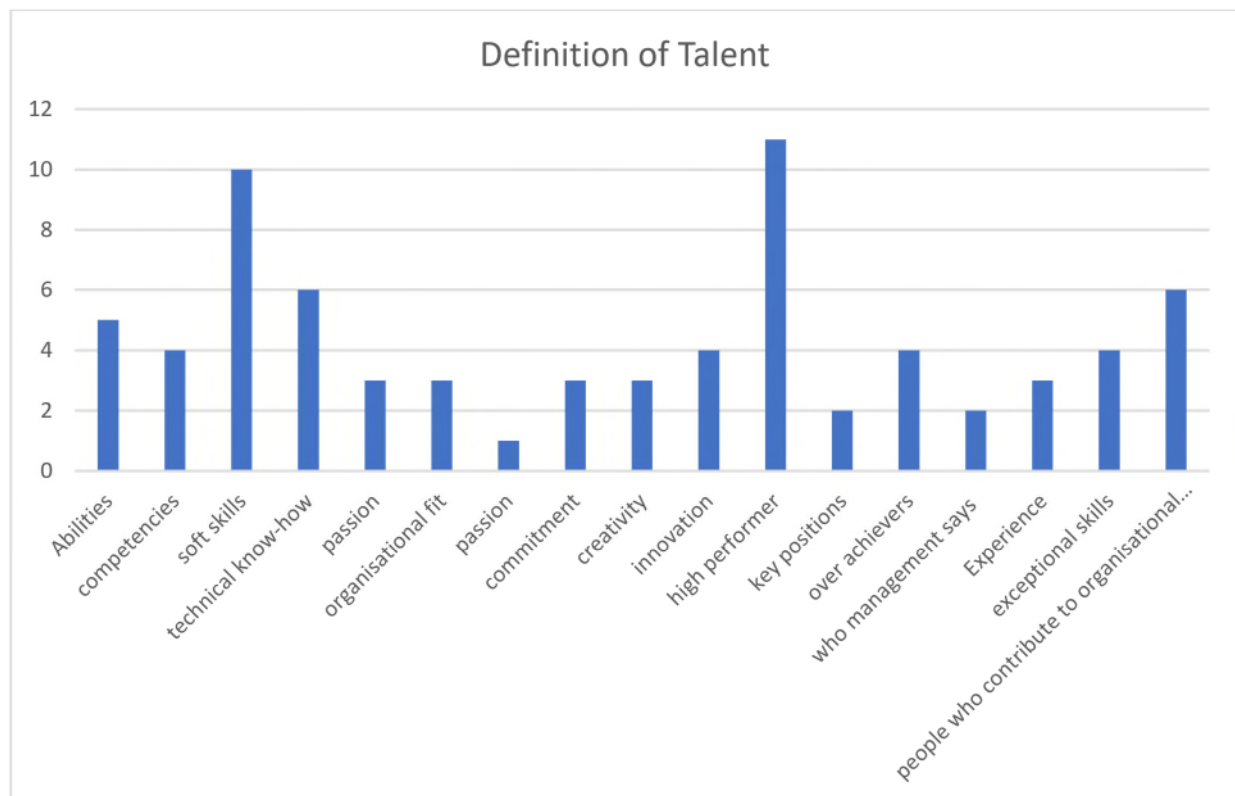
a) How do Nigerian SMEs define, attract, develop, and retain talented employees?

5.4 Talent Definition and Identification

Developing and agreeing on a definition of “talent” has been a key challenge in the field of TM (Collings et al., 2022). As outlined in previous chapters, there is no universally acceptable definition of talent as each individual and organisation has its understanding and perception of which employee(s) is seen as talent. Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) posit that for a long time, talent is not just been seen as inherent abilities or skills possessed by individuals in a specific field (talent as an "object"), but it is also seen as something inherent within talented individuals themselves (talent as "subject"). For Tansley (2011), Talent is commonly described as a natural aptitude or skill in a specific field or pursuit, enabling individuals who possess, develop, and apply it to achieve exceptional results. However, Stevenson (2010) says talent is often defined as a natural ability or proficiency in a particular area or activity, allowing individuals to excel and achieve outstanding outcomes through their ongoing development and application of these abilities. The nuances of the definition of talent desperately call for more research in this field. As the bedrock of this thesis is to develop a better understanding of TM in Nigerian SMEs, it must start by highlighting the meaning that is ascribed to the word “talent” by Nigerian SME employees and management alike. Hence, this section is dedicated to understanding the word “talent” through the lenses of Nigerian SMEs. The study finds that there is no apparent difference between talent definition and identification, as our participants used these two TM activities interchangeably. Therefore, this section will involve a joint discussion of our definitions of talent and talent identification in Nigerian SMEs.

This section explores how participants define and identify talent, which involves analyses of key themes that are related to talent definition. It further explores correlations between these perspectives and existing literature on talent definition and identification. The section starts with skills, competence, and position-based definitions of talent and then proceeds to look at talent from the perspective of passionate and committed employees. In addition, the section discusses the viewpoint of people who see talent as high performance and high potential. The last group of individuals highlight the influence of socio-cultural behaviours and suggests that talented employees are those who have a close rapport with management. The figure below is a summary of our findings regarding the definition of talent. This will be discussed in detail subsequently.

Figure 5.4 Illustration of participants' definition of talent



Source: The Researcher

5.4.1 Defining Talents as abilities, skills, technical know-how, and competencies.

According to Southwick et al. (2023), in all the ambiguity surrounding the definition of talent, the three most recurring words are “abilities”, “skills”, and “competence”. In essence, talent identification is inherently selective and subjective (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Therefore, academics must compile multiple views of the word to mitigate bias that may arise from relying solely on one view. Interviews with most of our participants suggested that being talented encompasses possessing and effectively utilising specific skills and competencies relevant to a particular role. This view mirrors Silzer & Dowell’s definition of talent as an individual’s skills and abilities and what they can contribute to their organisation (Silzer & Dowell, 2010). Similarly, Qazi et al. (2021) defined talent as the sum of a person’s cognitive skills, beliefs, and willingness to work and is viewed as a valuable resource within an organisation. This combination of factors is instrumental in providing sustainable advantages and facilitating exceptional performance. Moreover, participants report that talent is strongly associated with competencies, encompassing educational background, training, and experience tailored to meet business needs.

An HR practitioner in the Real Estate sector shares their opinion of talent below:

“Actually, for me, talent is linked to competencies, you know, if there is a role that I have to fill, I have to make sure that whoever gets in that role has the skills, the competencies, the experience, the qualifications, to see things through in that role and that is what makes the person talented. if someone has the competencies and is not able to perform in that role, then you would not say that that person has talent.” (Homify1).

Another HR practitioner in the finance sector stated that:

“A talented employee is a staff member who can deliver on the set goals, objectives, and strategies laid out by the organisation. He can meet and exceed those targets laid out by the organisation; he can exceed the expectations of the organisation. He is resourceful and can meet and exceed the expectations of the goals and objectives of the organisation.” (Finco).

The above definitions note that Skills and competencies alone do not make talent if they do not translate into performance. Thus, it can be said that a talented employee is one who excels in delivering on the set goals, objectives, and strategies outlined by the organisation, often surpassing expectations. In line with this view, CIPD (2007) states that talented individuals are those capable of making significant contributions to organisational performance, either through their immediate impact or by displaying exceptional potential for long-term success.

A manager in the finance sector described how they viewed talent:

“A talented employee is a staff member who can deliver on the set goals, objectives, and strategies laid out by the organisation. He can meet and exceed those targets laid out by the organisation; he can exceed the expectations of the organisation. He is resourceful and can meet and exceed the expectations of the goals and objectives of the organisation.” (Finco1).

A fourth participant in the real estate sector mirrors the “talent as fit” narrative postulated by Gallardo-Gallardo in Collings et al. (2019). She states that it is essential to note that the work environment, including the preferences and perspectives of those involved, influences an organisation's talent identification practices. This means that the organisation is more likely to recognise individuals as talented if they align with the organisation's definition of talent and fit well within its culture and values.

An HR practitioner in the real estate sector highlights their organisation's definition of talent thus:

“What we see as a talent is someone whose competence fits into the needs of the business. Any professional whose competence, and when I use the word competence, I am talking about

educational background, training, experience, etc. So, someone whose experience and training fits into the needs of the business and helps the business attain long-term competitive advantage” (Homify 1).

Whilst emphasising the need for talent to align with organisational needs, the above statement also implies that experience is an important dimension of talent. Some participants believed that talent must possess a certain level of practical knowledge gained through hands-on experience. This need for experience aligns with findings from McCall (1998), who concluded that individuals could acquire knowledge and skills through their experiences, gaining a broad understanding of various situations and learning to manage and cope with challenges.

Similarly, an employee mentioned that:

“I think what it takes to be considered a talent in a company setting just like ours has to do with the ability of personnel or staff to uphold the vision, the culture of that particular company while trying to perform in his or her role as the case may be” (planet safe 2).

The study highlighted the importance of soft skills, which was a theme that was seen as important by many participants. As all our case study organisations belong to the service industry, one can understand why skills such as interpersonal, communication, public and social relations ranked remarkably high on the qualities of talented employees. Communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal communication, were identified as vital by several participants. They emphasised talent's ability to communicate effectively with both clients and other colleagues. Koprowska (2014) asserts that the ability to communicate effectively, especially with customers and co-workers, is crucial for transferring information accurately and efficiently. Our participants stated that public and social relations skills are important as they help employees to effectively transfer and communicate organisational information both internally and externally.

A Manager in the IT industry stated.

“So those we call talent are those who are able to deliver on their technical skills and their soft skills as well. So, when I mean soft skills, I also mean interpersonal relationships. How do you relate with your colleagues and clients? This is very important” (Java.com 5)

Another HR manager in the renewable energy sector stated:

“Particularly, I mean employees must be able to represent the company until the person whose role it is to Give full feedback on a particular question is available. So, summarily,

being a high performer, being able to take the initiative and work without supervision, and having good interpersonal skills are what make an individual talented” (Planet Safe 4).

Some participants introduced the technical dimension of talents in their talent definitions, which regarded talents as individuals who can manage technical requirements, understand work demands, and effectively communicate with clients to demonstrate talent in their roles. Overall, they believe that talent is demonstrated by leveraging technical know-how to achieve strategic objectives. Kim et al. (2014) discussed the concept of “technical talents” and linked this to knowledge workers. The term technical talent is often used in reference to engineers, technical, scientific, and professional workers whose work requires specialised skills, training, and knowledge (Kim et al., 2014). However, several interviewees in both the IT, renewable energy, and oil and gas sectors have included their ideas of talented employees in the above class.

One engineer’s view of talent is described below:

“If I say an individual is talented, it means that the individual in question possesses certain technical skills that are especially useful to a particular space. Do not just possess these skills, but also make use of them in that space. I would like to use the word technical skills, maybe because I am a technical person. Then there are also certain abstract qualities that complement the Innate abilities of the person, like thoroughness and commitment” (Petro.com 4).

A manager in the IT industry stated that:

“As for me, I would say a talented person is an employee who has technical skills and implements them to get efficient results. Talented people are People who can cope with the technical requirements of the job, who are able to understand the nature of the work Requirements and can communicate that to the clients, and who are able to manage their workload as well as management expectations.” (Java.com 1)

Drawing on Gallardo-Gallardo's “object” and “subject classification of talent definitions, it can be argued that in the context of Nigerian SMEs, talent encompasses more than just skills, abilities, and competencies. While these elements are essential, talent is strongly associated with performance. The next section will further explore alternative perspectives on talent in subsequent sections.

5.4.2 Talent as passion, commitment, and creativity

Some researchers (Mayer & Holms, 2015; Weiss & Mackay, 2009; Ulrich, 2007) have defined talent based on “soft” competencies such as motivation, perseverance, commitment, and passion. For example, Weiss and Mackay (2009) assert that talent is often associated with qualities such as perseverance, motivation, and passion. These attributes play a significant role in shaping an individual's ability to excel and achieve exceptional results in their work performance. In addition, Ulrich & Smallwood (2012) and Michaels et al. (2001) proposed a definition of talent as "competence x commitment x contribution," highlighting the importance of considering multiple factors such as competency, dedication, and impact when identifying and fostering talent within an organisation. This comprehensive approach recognises that excellence in one aspect cannot fully compensate for deficiencies in others, emphasising the need for a balanced assessment of talent.

Based on the responses from participants, the study suggests that the attitude with which employees approach their work is a critical dimension of talent identification strategy. The participants in the study generally identified talent as individuals who possess a blend of capability, commitment, loyalty, and contribution. They emphasised the importance of both soft skills (behaviour) and hard skills in developing the best talent. This corresponds with Hesketh's (2013) definition of talent. Some participants imply that talent is characterised by passion and a genuine enthusiasm for one's work.

An employee in the finance sector said:

“It takes passion to be a talent. You must be passionate about what you do. Secondly, for me to see you as a talent, I think about how creative and open-minded You can be when in an organisation” (Finco4)

It was also noted that commitment is another quality that was used to define and identify talent among the participating SMEs, which emphasised the relationship between commitment to work for the organisation and being talented. Additionally, it is pertinent to note that in their views, talent encompasses possessing the necessary skills and technical know-how, coupled with a solid commitment to successfully completing assigned tasks.

An employee in the finance sector spoke about employee commitment below:

“Yeah, these are abstract qualities, but they tend to make an individual stand out. And uhm, I think uhm, commitment yeah commitment to, uhm commitment to responsibilities. How do I put this down? I feel like those two things can be separated. Now accountability and then commitment to Uhm, duties, tasks, responsibilities” (Finco 3)

This view aligns with the person-environment fit (PE) proposed by Shein (1978). According to the PE model, career decision-making is influenced by several factors, such as self-perceived competency,

motives and needs, values, self-reliance, and opportunities for development. Individuals who lack commitment and engagement may not be willing to utilise their knowledge and abilities effectively within their work environment. Also, research by Greguras and Diefendorff (2009) revealed that a strong fit between individuals and their environment (such as person-organisation fit) directly influences commitment. Thus, assigning individuals to roles that align with their knowledge and skills (person-job fit) is important for ensuring that they feel comfortable and are able to perform well in their roles. This suggests that a Person-organisation fit is a valuable addition to the talent literature, as most research typically focuses on person-job fit as a determinant of commitment (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Kristof, 1996). The study recommends that further research into the person-industry fit is required and will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

A manager in the Oil and gas industry reported that:

"I think a talented person is someone who has the skills and technical know-how and is willing and committed to carrying out their assigned tasks" (petrocom 3)

One then wonders if this view can serve as a reflection of the concepts of psychological contract and Social Exchange Theory as it would seem that based on these definitions, only committed employees who fulfil their tasks are rewarded with the title of "talent"? Can it also be concluded that employees would only be committed to work if they are seen as talented individuals?

Regardless of how competent an individual may seem in terms of job fit, without commitment, they are unlikely to experience any job satisfaction and, thus, may not perform optimally (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2012). Al-Ahmadi (2009), Greguras & Diefendorff (2009), and Kristof-Brown et al. (2009) reveal that commitment is positively linked to employees' performance. Commitment is highly valued by participants.

Several participants regarded being talented as being creative, open-minded, and able to foster innovative thinking within an organisation. Most participants in the study agree that thinking creatively could be a hallmark of talent, as it demonstrates the ability to approach challenges from new and unconventional angles. Some employees felt that talent could manifest itself in various forms, often involving the development of unique solutions that enhance service delivery and efficiency and expressed their views as below:

"To me, talent comes in different ways and different forms. Personally, I see talent as skills, unique skills which enable someone to develop something out of the dust, out of the ordinary or out of the conventional ways of doing things, which helps in delivering service, maybe better or much more efficient way" (Planet safe1)

Another employee said:

"I see talent as someone who thinks out of the box" (Java.com 4)

Contribution to organisational success was another important feature of talented employees, according to our participants. While a majority emphasised the importance of skills, commitment, and loyalty, they also highlighted the importance of delivering on tasks. The research highlighted the growing recognition of the importance of employees' output and contribution to the achievement of organisational goals and objectives. Therefore, it can be concluded that the definition of talent within case study organisations is a blend of input qualities (such as skills, competence, commitment, and loyalty) and output qualities (contribution to the success of the organisation, team members, and clients). Both these dimensions were important for understanding the meaning of talent within the context of Nigerian SMEs.

The last category of participants essentially sees talent as overachievers. For them, talent is mainly associated with exceptional performance in a specific area, surpassing expectations, and outperforming others in that domain. This exceptional ability is evidenced by consistently achieving outstanding results and leaving a lasting positive impression. The following section looks at talent as highflyers/high performers.

5.4.3 Talent as High Performers/ Achievers

TM scholars highlight the various meanings associated with the term "talent." While there is no agreed definition of talent (Wiblen & McDonnell, 2019), Definitions of the term in organisational contexts predominantly focus on high performers and high potentials (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; McDonnell et al., 2017). Firms often assess talent using two dimensions: performance and potential (Jooss et al., 2019; Schuler, 2015). Thus, talent is frequently defined as "those individuals who are currently or have the potential to contribute differentially to firm performance" (Cappelli & Keller, 2017, p. 28). Note that this definition mirrors the human capital theory, which emphasises capacities for creating outcomes rather than solely focusing on knowledge, skills, and abilities (Ployhart et al., 2014). A few of our participants share this definition of talent. They believe that a talented individual excels in a particular field, gaining recognition and appreciation from others for their remarkable achievements. In addition, they view talent as characterised by the effective utilisation of acquired skills and knowledge to accomplish tasks and the exceeding of expectations with skilfulness and precision.

An employee in a case study SME shared their view below:

“Someone is a talent when they are exceptionally good at a particular thing, like when you are performing that particular thing or doing anything that has to do with that particular thing, perform above and beyond expectation or above and beyond the performance of other people, so it is more like you are talented in whatever that is” (Homify 2).

Similarly, an HR personnel in the renewable energy industry shares:

“So, summarily, being talented means being a high performer, being able to take the initiative and work without supervision, having a good interpersonal skill” (Planet Safe 2).

Moreover, a third participant who is an employee in a case study SME expressed the meaning of talent as below:

“Talents are described as any personnel who meets and exceeds expectations” (Planet Safe 3)

For this group, talent encompasses being a high performer, taking initiative, working autonomously, and possessing strong interpersonal skills. They see talents as those employees who consistently meet and exceed expectations, demonstrating both technical expertise and adeptness in interpersonal relationships. Thus, talented employees are not only proficient in their own roles but also excel in leading and inspiring others to achieve shared goals.

One employee expressed the view of talent as below:

“Uhm, well, we have talented employees. We have people like our business development manager and our global manager who are talented in the sense that they do not just sell; they manage people. They are not just High performing in their jobs. As I said, everyone has a target, but they are able to carry those that are under them along in the business of making sales” (Petrocom 2).

Only a small number of participants felt that talent referred to individuals in key roles, such as managers and supervisors. For this group, talent is typically expected to uphold high standards, serve as mentors for subordinates, and motivate them to perform better. The definition provided by Michaels et al. (2001) closely aligns with this perspective, highlighting the strategic mindset, leadership ability, emotional maturity, and communication skills possessed by talented individuals.

Similarly, academics like Lepak and Snell (1999) suggest that organisations ought to implement commitment-based HR strategies for personnel who are unique and of high strategic value (typically measured by performance indicators with strategic targets, as opposed to abstract indicators of potential such as career orientation). Cope (1998) recommends that this approach is applicable to high

performers who demonstrate high leadership potential, often referred to as "high potentials", or those with pivotal technical expertise, known as "key experts" (Rothwell & Poduch, 2004).

Dries et al. (2012) study of the careers of high potentials (2012) reported that employees identified as high potentials and those recognised as key experts enjoyed higher job security and salary increases compared to average performers. In addition, they observed that high potentials received more organisational support and more promotions and exhibited higher levels of organisational commitment (Dries et al., 2012).

Regarding talent being identified based on how pivotal their position is, the study finds that for some organisations, Individuals in vital strategic positions are often perceived as talented due to their pivotal roles in driving success. A participant who works within the finance sector states that as the organisation thrives on profit-taking, employees (such as marketers, sales, and business development personnel) who directly contribute to their profit-making goals are seen as highly pivotal to the organisation. Hence, they are seen as exceptionally talented. This is captured in the statement below:

"I think my organisation considers some people more talented because they occupy vital positions and are in more strategic positions" (petrocom 1).

A manager in the finance sector stated that:

"Our marketers are essential to the business. Most of the time, they set targets for those marketers. When they meet those targets or are able to exceed their target, the organisation often sees such employees as talented and skilful. For staff occupying operational positions, talent is identified based on efficiency" (Finco1).

This participant's view fits with the exclusive view of TM as it is based on potential and performance. Those adopting the exclusive approach generally refer to talents as "A" players in key positions, as described by Huselid et al. (2005). These categories of staff comprise the top 10-20% of performers within an organisation who display high motivation levels and possess the ability to motivate others. This categorisation aligns with the McKinsey Company's categorisation of employees as: "A players" (top 10-20%), "B players" (competent 60-70%), and "C players" (bottom 10-20%) (Michaels et al., 2001). While this view of talent refers to a minority of elite employees rather than the entirety of the organisation's workforce, existing literature suggests that tagging only a select pool of employees as "talent" could yield unintended consequences (Silzer & Church, 2010). They highlight that focusing development efforts on a small subset of employees may result in most employees being demotivated and feeling less valued by the organisation, potentially leading to reduced engagement and turnover.

Moreover, focusing on specific employees with high potential often conflicts with other goals, such as promoting teamwork, and could result in a lack of commitment and engagement by the majority of employees. It is not a recipe for enhancing performance overall, and some may decide to leave the organisation for better recognition and growth opportunities elsewhere (Silzer & Church, 2010).

5.4.4 Talent as who management says is talented.

Two employees in the finance sector claimed that despite the existence of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that offer more objective assessments, talent recognition often relies on subjective evaluations from superiors. In most cases, being labelled as talented depends on receiving an endorsement from one's line manager, even where individual performance consistently exceeds KPIs. Unfortunately, this subjective nature of talent recognition leads to the perception that the definition of talent depends on personal relationships with superiors. In practice, only a small percentage of individuals, approximately 20%, are considered talented within organisations (Swales 2013). The majority, comprising around 80% of employees, are not in the talent pool, and they are tasked with executing their duties without being recognised for their potential or contributions beyond fulfilling immediate job responsibilities.

One employee emphatically reported that:

"You are only seen as a talent based on recommendation. Well, even though they are KPIs that are more scientific than those recommendations. I find that people say you are talented only when your boss says you are talented, even though you are smashing your KPIs" (Finco2)

Another employee shared their view below:

"To be very honest with you, I think 80% of people are not seen as talented. Apparently, 80% in most organisations are just figureheads, being told to do whatever they have to do, not thinking, not actually seen as talent, they are but just as placeholders until the management says they are talent" (Finco 3)

The above statements reflect an important socio-cultural aspect of life in Nigeria. Chapter 3, section 3.6.3, had previously highlighted the effect of favouritism (or man-know-man as it is called in Nigeria) on HRM practices in Nigeria. This act of giving preferential treatment to employees based on their social connections acts as a barrier to performance and commitment to work and makes implementation of TM much more challenging. Lasisi et al. (2022) emphasised that motivated and engaged employees are essential for the success of organisations and suggested that paying little attention to the principles of meritocracy and equity could negatively impact organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction, motivated employees, employee retention, productivity, and achievement of

organisational goals. In addition, HR practices which ignore the need to address favouritism breaches the principles of the psychological contract whilst undermining employees' perceptions of organisational justice and fairness, which are fundamental to the work exchange relationship (Arasli et al., 2009; Arabiya et al., 2022; Lasisi et al., 2022). However, Rotanna (2023) argues that in some circumstances, favouritism could yield positive results if used as a non-financial incentive, as it could boost some employee's motivation and performance. Whilst this can be true for employees at the receiving end, the same cannot be said for other employees, as evident in the responses from participants (see section 5.4.2).

5.4.4.1 Inclusive vs. Exclusive Approaches to Talent Definition and Management in Nigerian SMEs the study acknowledges the impact of macro-contextual policies and practices—including labour market policies, educational programs, economic development strategies, and CSR, on the effectiveness of talent management approaches. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for Nigerian SMEs to align their talent management strategies with broader societal and economic objectives. This study identifies two main talent management approaches among case study SMEs. While most participants reported that their organisations view every employee as talented, their definitions and understanding of talent are notably exclusive. Section 3.4.2.1 explains that an inclusive approach to talent management values every employee, emphasising broad participation and the integration of diverse talent pools. In contrast, an exclusive approach targets highly specialised or niche talent.

The study finds that the inclusive talent management approach in Nigerian SMEs involves a broad definition of talent, aiming to integrate diverse skills, experiences, and backgrounds into the workforce. SMEs adopting this approach create environments where all individuals can contribute and grow. A significant advantage of inclusive talent management is its potential to boost organisational creativity and innovation. Diverse teams offer varied perspectives, leading to more creative problem-solving and better decision-making (Page, 2007). In Nigeria, where SMEs face a complex and diverse market, leveraging a range of viewpoints can be a significant competitive advantage. Inclusive approaches also improve employee engagement and retention. Research by Roberson (2006) shows that inclusive environments often lead to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover rates. This is especially relevant in Nigeria, where SMEs face high employee turnover due to economic instability and a competitive job market. By fostering an inclusive culture, Nigerian SMEs can enhance job satisfaction and loyalty, mitigating challenges associated with employee retention.

Additionally, inclusive talent management strengthens the employer brand. A commitment to inclusion enhances an organisation's reputation as a progressive and equitable employer, attracting a broader talent pool (Shen et al., 2009). In Nigeria's labour market, characterised by significant skill variability,

an inclusive approach helps SMEs stand out and attract high-quality candidates from diverse backgrounds. Conversely, exclusive talent management focuses on acquiring and retaining highly specialised talent, defining it narrowly to meet specific strategic needs. This approach attracts specialised individuals who can drive performance in key areas. For Nigerian SMEs in niche markets like technology or finance, specialised expertise can enhance operational efficiency and maintain a competitive edge (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Exclusive approaches can streamline recruitment and training by targeting a well-defined talent pool, reducing costs and time associated with broad-based recruitment (Pfeffer, 2007).

However, implementing inclusive talent management poses challenges. A significant drawback is the resource intensity required for effective diversity initiatives. Comprehensive diversity programs demand substantial investments in training, policy development, and management commitment (Kramar, 2014). For Nigerian SMEs with limited financial resources, these costs can be prohibitive. Continuous effort is needed to ensure inclusivity is genuinely integrated into organisational practices rather than being a token gesture. Tokenism is another risk; without genuine commitment, inclusivity efforts may seem superficial, leading to employee disillusionment and undermining intended benefits (Kalev et al., 2006). Overcoming this challenge requires a strategic approach to integrate inclusivity into organisational culture. Resistance to change is also a potential barrier. In Nigerian SMEs, where traditional practices may be entrenched, introducing inclusive practices can face resistance from management and staff. Effective change management strategies are essential to address this resistance and foster a culture that supports diversity and inclusion (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). A primary drawback of the exclusive approach is the limitation of the talent pool. By focusing narrowly on specific skills, Nigerian SMEs restrict their ability to attract a diverse range of candidates, limiting innovation and adaptability in a dynamic market. This approach can result in a homogeneous workforce, potentially stifling creativity and limiting the diversity of ideas (Miller et al., 2007). Additionally, as Nigerian SMEs grow, the focus on highly specialised talent may need to be broadened, challenging existing talent management strategies to accommodate a more diverse workforce (Barney, 1991).

The study also highlights the significant impact of macro-contextual policies and practices on SMEs' choice of talent management approach in Nigeria. Inclusive talent management aligns with broader labour market policies promoting diversity and equal opportunity. National policies supporting diversity encourage SMEs to adopt inclusive practices. For example, regulations in the Oil and Gas sector require businesses to ensure staff training and certification to meet national standards. Aligning with such policies enhances the SME's reputation and contributes to the societal goals of equity and inclusion (Kalev et al., 2006).

Educational and training policies intersect with talent management strategies. Exclusive approaches can influence educational program design, necessitating targeted initiatives to address skill gaps (Beinecke, 2014). In Nigeria, aligning educational outputs with market demands is crucial to support SMEs' talent needs. Economic development strategies are also affected by talent management practices. Inclusive approaches can support broader economic development goals by fostering a diverse and innovative workforce and enhancing regional economic development and competitiveness (Florida, 2002). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is another relevant factor. Inclusive talent management often aligns with CSR and ethical standards, promoting fair treatment and equal opportunity. In Nigeria, where CSR is gaining importance, SMEs adopting inclusive practices may benefit from improved stakeholder relationships and a stronger reputation (Carroll, 1999). For example, the local content policy mandates businesses to prioritise recruitment slots for individuals from host communities, regardless of their academic qualifications.

5.5 Concluding Comments on Talent Conceptualization in Nigerian SMEs

Although the empirical study suggests a comprehensive understanding of the term “talent” among the participating SMEs, it also suggests a lack of TM policies. This is in line with the main findings of research on SMEs, which highlights minimal adoption of formal TM policies in SMEs (e.g. Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). In addition, the study reveals differing interpretations and definitions of talent across different organisational contexts. This difference in perspectives is common and is consistent with existing literature highlighting that talent can mean different things to different people, organisations, and industries (Iles et al., 2010a; Davies et al., 2007; Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunissen and Scullion, 2020). The various definitions of talent suggested by the case study organisations are influenced by numerous factors, including organisational characteristics, strategy, customer base, competition dynamics, and organisational culture. It is noteworthy that organisations often choose to formulate their own definitions of talent rather than follow universal definitions, highlighting the importance of aligning the concept of talent with the organisation's unique strategy and values. (CIPD, 2007; Iles et al., 2010; Tansley et al., 2007).

Despite the disparity in definitions, there is a common thread underlining the importance of capability, commitment, loyalty, and contribution to organisational success in defining talent, particularly in the SME context. Talent is often linked to individuals who demonstrate high potential or performance, possess extensive knowledge, abilities, and skills, and show dedication and motivation to exceed expectations in their roles. In line with Stahl et al. (2012), the findings suggest that talent management practices should be in alignment with the organisation's strategy and values, with a focus on recognising and developing individuals who align with these principles. Furthermore, early identification of talent and strategic investment in their development are seen as critical aspects of

talent management, enabling organisations to maintain their competitiveness and sustain long-term success.

In summary, while there may be various interpretations of talent within SMEs in the national context, the main emphasis highlights individuals who possess a combination of skills, commitment, and contributions that align with the organisation's strategic objectives and values. Therefore, the study suggests that case study SMEs define a talented employee as an employee who possesses exceptional skills and abilities, is committed to the organisation, and contributes to organisational success. Although formal Talent Management policies may be rare in SMEs, often informal talent management practices are vital for organisations to successfully harness the potential of their workforce and maintain a competitive edge in industry sectors where a high degree of flexibility and agility are required (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017)

Following the discussion of definitions and descriptions of talent, the following section addresses the critical issue of talent shortage as experienced by most of the case study organisations.

5.5.1 The Issue of Talent Shortage in the Nigerian Labour Market

Despite being the most populous Black country in the world, with a young population compared to the ageing population of most Western countries, Nigerian employers are faced with the challenge of acute talent shortages. The research data reveals that although the Nigerian labour market is saturated with job seekers, finding talented people with the skills and competencies required by employers is particularly challenging for several reasons. The study highlighted that acute shortages of leaders and technical specialists were of particular concern and impacted negatively on organisational performance.

An employee in the IT sector commented:

“We feel that there is a talent shortage, and the supply of talent is actually low compared to the demand. There is a very high shortage of talent, or I will put it this way: there is a shortage of experienced technical talent. But when it comes to entry-level staff, we still have enough pool to pick from” (Java.com 3)

Likewise, an HR business head highlighted the challenge of filling roles that require specialised skills. It was argued that an organisation's access to talent is heavily dependent on the industry it operates in, as talent shortages are more acute in specific industries (such as shipping, aviation, IT, Health care, and so on) than in others (such as agriculture, real estate, law, oil & gas, hospitality, and so on).

“There are certain aspects or arms of the business that do not find it difficult to get key talents, and others find it really difficult to find skilled talents. We have been trying to fill a few roles, but for almost six months, we have not been able to fill that role because the industry is not widely populated. There is limited talent in the area of shipping. It is not as popular as it was. Now, for our oil and gas. It is not difficult to get key talent because a lot of people have key talents in those areas, in the market” (Petrocom 1)

Another HR Manager in the real estate sector agreed with the above concerns. He highlighted the challenges their organisation faced in trying to fill a role for the position of General Manager, a very senior position requiring a lot of work experience, leadership, and management skills, as well as technical skills. However, their efforts in talent attraction, in this case, were far from successful and difficulties in recruiting leadership talent were an important reason the majority of senior or specialised positions are either outsourced or contracted to expatriates. In addition, finding competent and committed people for even lower-skilled roles has become increasingly challenging due to the problems in the Nigerian Labour Market.

“Currently in Nigeria, the talent market is really tough because to fill each role is a huge task., there is a current role I am trying to fill, the role of GM, and I have been trying to fill that role for two months. It is not easy to find a good fit, especially for highly skilled roles. But even for lower-skilled people, it is difficult to find competent people; it is difficult to find people who are committed as well. I think the major challenge we are having now is high potential employees” (Homify).

For a participant in the financial sector, the challenge lies in filling top positions, as they stated that the labour market has a greater supply of lower-level job seekers than is demanded. They stated that:

“In the financial services sector, I think that there is more supply than demand. As you move up the ladder, the talent pool decreases (Finco 1)

Perhaps this is because it is typical of organisations in the Nigerian finance industry to fill entry-level positions with graduates from various fields of study. In contrast, top positions can only be filled with people who have majored in a finance-related course and have a wealth of knowledge and experience in the finance sector. While talent shortages were an increasing problem for large employers, the situation was even more challenging in the SME sector. While larger organisations have the financial capability to explore options beyond the Nigerian labour market, the same cannot be said for smaller organisations.

A supervisor in the Oil and gas sector expressed their views on talent shortage:

“We really do not have as much talent as we need. The demand for talent is more than the supply. We are short of talented people compared to other bigger and more developed organisations due to our financial restrictions” (Petrocom 3).

A HR Manager in the finance sector warned about the possibility of an even greater talent shortage crisis due to mass migration as well as dwindling education institutions:

“I first of all foresee shortage in talent, and then I also foresee that even the ones that will remain would not be giving their very best.” (Finco 1)

According to a 2024 report by the Manpower group, organisations employing between 50-249 staff reported a 76% difficulty in filling roles. Similarly, Korn Ferry reports that by the year 2030, 85 million jobs worldwide may remain vacant due to an acute shortage of skilled personnel. This forecast warns of the implications for global labour markets, organisational operations, and socioeconomic dynamics. Talent shortage resonates throughout various sectors and regions, presenting significant challenges for businesses, governments, and educational institutions alike, and this has worsened post-pandemic (Jeffrey & Sposato, 2023). Enterprises contend with intensified competition for limited skills, hindering productivity, innovation, and growth prospects. Additionally, societal well-being and economic performance are at risk as vital industries continue to be unsuccessful in filling key positions (Franzino &Guarino).

In summary, Nigeria, despite its promising potential, still grapples with a significant challenge: scarcity of talent. Despite an abundance of bright minds and skilled individuals, organisations spanning various sectors frequently encounter difficulties in both sourcing and retaining top-tier talent. This shortage of talent presents a formidable barrier to economic expansion, innovation, and overall progress (Epie, 2014). Educational System: While Nigeria has made strides in enhancing educational access, significant gaps persist in terms of quality and relevance. Many graduates lack the practical skills sought by employers, resulting in a mismatch between educational qualifications and job requirements. Brain Drain: Talented Nigerians often seek opportunities abroad, enticed by better prospects and working conditions. The departure of skilled professionals due to brain drain further exacerbates the talent shortage within the country; skills Mismatch: There exists a notable disparity between the skill sets possessed by job seekers and those demanded by employers. Addressing this gap is imperative to foster a more efficient labour market (Howe-Walsh et al., 2023).

Employees play a pivotal role within organisations, and the ability to secure and maintain an innovative and engaged workforce is paramount to organisational sustainability and advancement (Knott, 2016). Retaining key talents is a key strategic HR challenge that directly influences both individual and

collective performance metrics, thereby shaping organisational profitability and competitiveness (Wade et al., 2012).

5.5.2 Relevance of existing theoretical frameworks to TM conceptualisation in Nigerian SMEs the discussion on talent management (TM) and talent shortages within Nigerian SMEs can be analysed using Hofstede's cultural dimensions, institutional theory, and the resource-based view to provide a comprehensive understanding. Hofstede's framework helps contextualise the interpretation of "talent" and TM practices within the Nigerian cultural setting. In Nigeria, a collectivist culture may influence talent definitions to emphasise relational qualities like commitment and loyalty rather than individual achievements. Employees who align with organisational values and exhibit loyalty might be prioritised as "talented." Similarly, the hierarchical nature of Nigerian organisational culture, as reflected in high power distance, could impact the formalisation of TM policies. Centralised decision making, as evidenced in the Nigerian culture, may lead to informal TM practices driven by leadership discretion rather than structured policies. Furthermore, a moderate approach to uncertainty explains the lack of standardised TM frameworks, as SMEs often rely on agile, context-specific strategies to adapt to dynamic labour market conditions.

Institutional constraints and enablers heavily influence TM in Nigerian SMEs. The mismatch between educational outputs and employer needs reflects weaknesses in the formal institutional structures of education and training. This institutional gap creates a persistent challenge in aligning talent supply with demand. Cultural norms around career aspirations and migration (brain drain) play a significant role in shaping TM outcomes. High-skilled professionals frequently pursue opportunities abroad, reflecting cultural and institutional failures to retain local talent. Institutional environments also vary by sector, as highlighted in the study. For example, while acute shortages exist in IT and shipping, the oil and gas sector experiences relative talent abundance. These sectoral variations underscore how institutional dynamics influence labour market conditions.

The RBV emphasises the strategic importance of talent as a critical resource for achieving competitive advantage. Talented employees, those with high skills, commitment, and contributions, are perceived as rare and valuable, especially in specialised roles. SMEs, with their limited financial capacity, face significant challenges in acquiring these resources compared to larger organisations. Talented employees with sector-specific expertise, such as those in IT or shipping, are difficult to replicate or substitute, making the shortage of such talent a critical impediment to organisational success. Despite financial constraints, SMEs attempt to leverage their workforce by emphasising alignment with organisational values and investing in early talent identification and development. These practices reflect efforts to build internal resources that competitors find challenging to replicate. SMEs may rely

on informal TM practices to identify and nurture talent, aligning with their need for flexibility and fostering unique internal resources that enhance competitiveness.

The intersection of cultural, institutional, and resource-based perspectives provides a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by Nigerian SMEs. The informal TM practices observed in SMEs reflect an adaptation to the cultural emphasis on relationships and the institutional shortcomings in talent development infrastructure. Despite financial constraints, SMEs strive to utilise their workforce strategically by fostering alignment with organisational values and emphasising early talent development. External constraints, such as brain drain, skills mismatch, and poor educational quality, present significant barriers to acquiring and sustaining valuable resources. However, SMEs can mitigate these challenges by developing internal training programs, fostering a culture of continuous learning, and leveraging institutional collaboration to address skill gaps. These efforts, when aligned with cultural, institutional, and strategic considerations, offer a pathway for SMEs to address talent shortages and maintain a competitive edge in the Nigerian labour market.

The next section will examine how talents are sourced and attracted in Nigerian SMEs.

5.6 Talent Sourcing

The study highlighted that Nigerian SMEs adopt different strategies in the sourcing of talent. Trends indicate that medium-sized companies with larger recruitment budgets increasingly employ the services of head-hunters, recruitment agencies and Job sites such as Jobber Man, internship programmes, or training and development programmes aimed at the internal development of talent through coaching and mentorship. Most medium-sized SMEs have increasingly adopted informal TM practices, which enhance flexibility and help the firm to adapt more effectively to volatile product markets. In practice, many specialised positions are outsourced, particularly in the Finance, oil, and gas, as well as the ICT industry. The study suggests that organisations in these sectors increasingly partner with approved bodies for sourcing, training and development of highly skilled experts and consultants. In addition, the National Youth Service Orientation Camp (which is a one-year mandatory requirement for all Nigerian graduates to serve in whatever parts of the country they are assigned to) has more frequently been used by industries to attract the best graduating student talents or corps members right from the campgrounds as part of their primary places of assignment. Interview data revealed that specialised roles are mainly outsourced to experts or contracted to specialists, as this is seen as more cost-effective than directly hiring industry specialists who remain in short supply. However, smaller SMEs faced with stricter budgets and greater resource constraints find it challenging

to outsource experts and specialists, which requires them to rely more on internal development and internal recruitment to fill top positions.

Recent research has paid increasing attention to understanding how firms source their human capital, given the widely recognised value of employees as assets that organisations can utilise for survival and competitive advantage (Adeosun & Ohtani, 2020). Nonetheless, firms encounter numerous talent challenges in fulfilling their organisational goals (Deakins & Bensemann, 2019; Fowowe, 2017). Additionally, the sub-Saharan African region has a rapidly rising unemployment rate (Abraham & Nosa, 2018; Ihensekhien & Aisien, 2019), with a particular challenge being the need to advance decent employment (Moen et al., 2020). Increasingly, there is a need to explore the contributions of all stakeholders in the labour market. However, the exploration of matching patterns and factors influencing the attraction of high-quality talents remains an underexplored area, particularly from the perspective of differing organisations (Ghavidel et al., 2019). As organisations endeavour to secure skilled and capable employees, investigating their strategies for overcoming recruitment hurdles and attracting top-tier talent can yield valuable insights for enhancing workforce management strategies and addressing labour market dynamics (Adeosun & Ohtani, 2020). Fig 5.3 illustrates the responses of HR Practitioners regarding talent recruitment methods.



Figure 5.5 Talent sourcing methods. The Researcher

The next section will examine talent sourcing and attraction methods in more detail.

5.6.1 E-Platforms (social media, company websites, and Job sites) for Talent sourcing.

Between 2018 and 2022, internet user penetration in Nigeria experienced a modest rise, climbing from approximately 26 per cent to over 38 per cent. By 2022, the estimated number of internet users in the

country will exceed 83 million. Projections suggest that the share of the Nigerian population using the internet will continue to grow, reaching around 48 per cent by 2027. This is shown in the figure below.

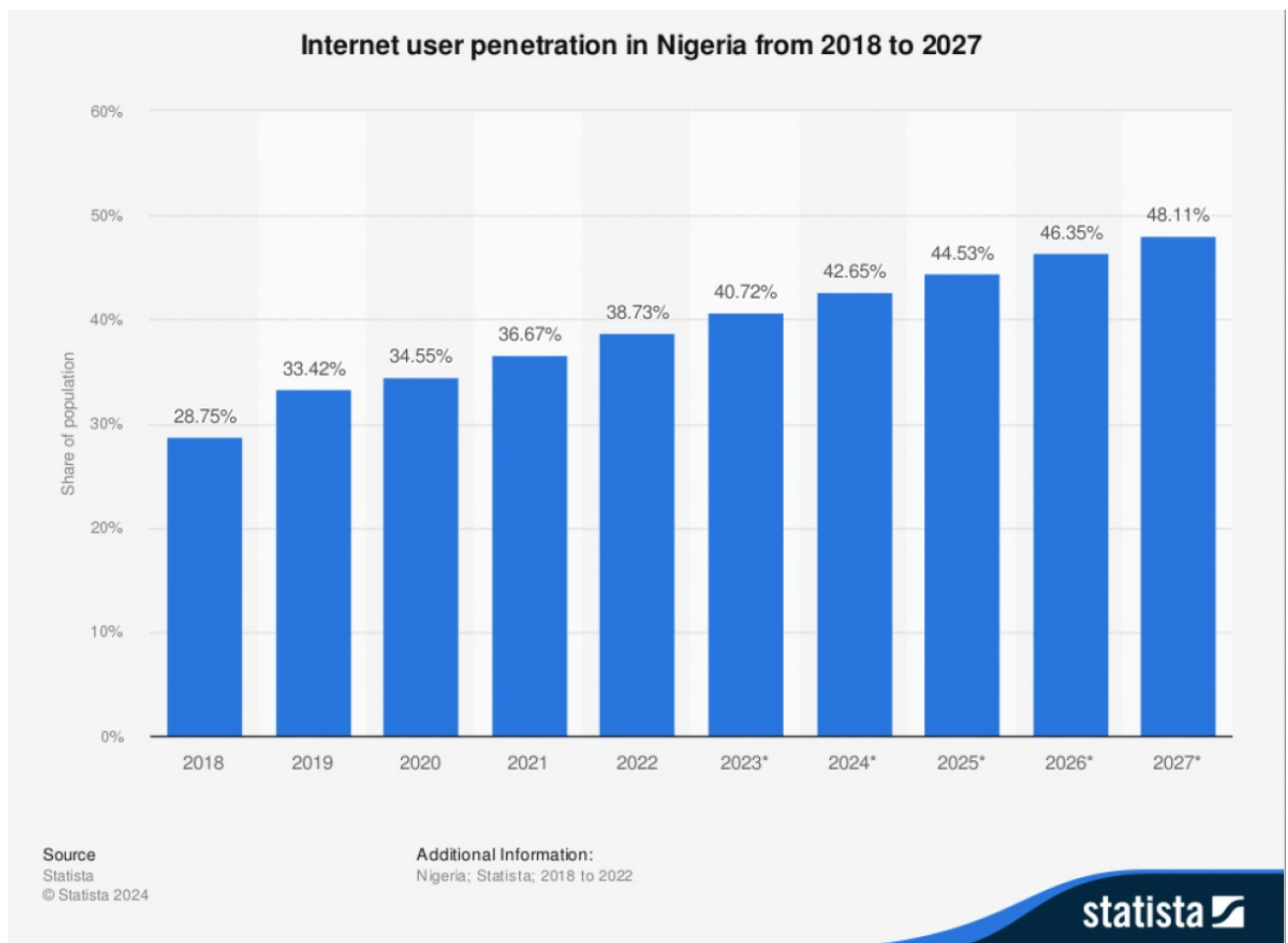


Figure 5.6 Source: Nigeria Internet user penetration 2027 | Statista

The data provided above helps to explain why SMEs in Nigeria have switched to take advantage of the massive reach provided by e-platforms. This trend is not just limited to Nigerian SMEs; e-recruitment has become a global trend.

In recent years, several key factors have driven changes in the labour market and influenced the demand for skills within occupations (Romanko & O'Mahony, 2022). Factors such as digitisation and the increasing integration of digital technologies into various aspects of work have led to a growing demand for workers with digital skills. Globalisation greatly influences the distribution of jobs and skills, with companies operating across borders and seeking workers with international experience and cross-cultural skills; environmental changes and demographic shifts, such as ageing populations, have impacted the labour market in many unimaginable ways (Romanko & O'Mahony, 2022) In summary the majority of recruiters have embraced the use of the internet for recruitment purposes(data from the study suggests that Nigerian SMEs have joined the trend of recruitment via the internet).

Today, various forms of job sites exist, ranging from simple 'careers' sections on company websites to job aggregator platforms that consolidate data from multiple sources for job seekers. Manyika et al. (2015) indicate that the proportion of jobs posted online has steadily increased over time.

An Interviewee (HR Assistant) highlighted the use of job sites to fill job vacancies:

“We mostly outsource recruitment to large job sites like jobberman and some other recruitment agencies. We try to ensure that the salary is competitive based on industry standards, too, and this has worked for us. In cases where we still struggle to fill high-level roles, we contract them out to specialists for a contractual period” (Homify.com).

An HR Business Lead in the real estate industry highlighted the budgetary challenge they encountered during their use of job sites:

“I also tried using other job agencies, such as job advertising agencies like Jobberman in Nigeria, for key talents. I realised that whenever I told them about the budget for the role, the candidates they would send to me were not who they said they were on their CVs. These were people who were not fit. It felt like my budget could only get me low-quality candidates from job sites who did not measure up to my expectations” (Homify 1).

The HR Lead suggested that the expense incurred with using the main job sites in Nigeria is typically well above the recruitment budget for SMEs, coupled with the strenuous task of sieving hundreds of CVs. Thus, they resort to using social media platforms for recruitment, limiting the need to increase their recruitment budgets. Figure 5.7 below represents how Nigerian graduates learned about their prospective employment.

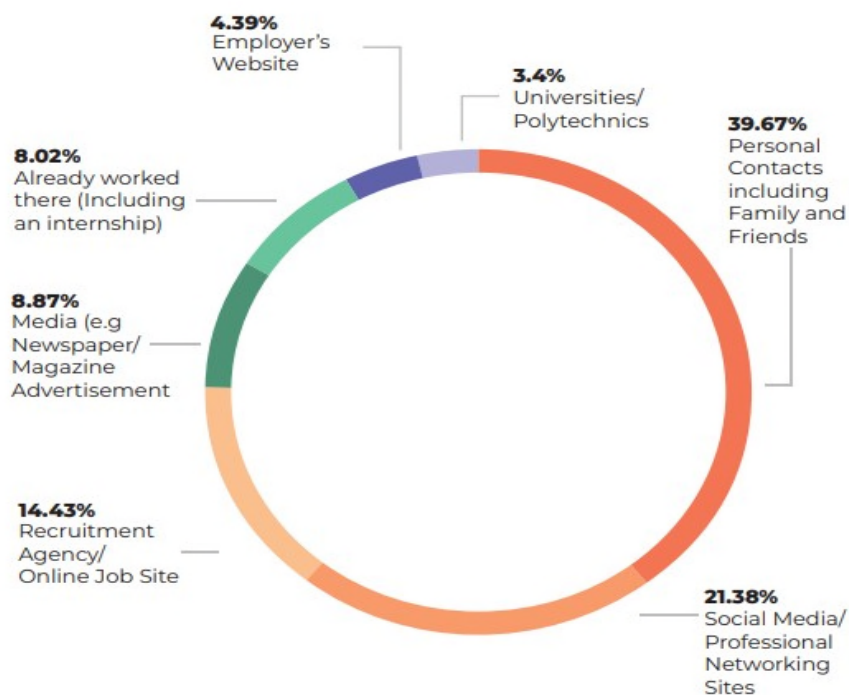


Figure 5.7 Recruitment sources. Source: *TNGR Final Draft-LW (amazonaws.com)*

The above figure highlights that social media platforms have been a significant source of talent for Nigerian businesses.

According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), social media refers to internet-based platforms enabling users to create and exchange ideas, content, and values. Consequently, social media has become increasingly pivotal in human resources management, particularly in hiring quality talent (Landers & Schmidt, 2016). Landers & Schmidt (2016) assert that social network sites usually offer three primary features: the ability to create a public personal profile, establish connections with others on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and LinkedIn, and view and interact with content from others and their connections to achieve specific goals.

One participant (an employee in the Oil and gas sector) highlighted the benefits of LinkedIn for talent sourcing purposes:

"We as employers go to social media platforms, such as LinkedIn or Facebook, and there's this one, they call job careers or different apps, or should I call it platforms on the Internet that suit us for CVS. We go there, and then we request CVs, which we sieve through to find matching candidates" (Petrocom1).

The adoption of social media platforms for recruitment presents both benefits and challenges. Much of the discourse surrounding social media-assisted employee hiring is informal, lacking clarity, and

often relies on unreliable evidence (Bondarouk et al., 2013; Landers & Schmidt, 2016). Nevertheless, social media recruitment approaches can provide speed, efficiency, and the capacity to target and attract suitable candidates and offer valuable additional information about potential candidates (Emanuela, 2018). Furthermore, the Internet has provided many companies with the opportunity to streamline their recruitment processes, alleviating the burden of administration involved with more traditional recruitment (Mindia & Hoque, 2018). Software tools have become vital assets in the screening of applicants, particularly given the significant time and resources required to sift through large applicant pools (Omolawal, 2015).

A Head of Operations in the finance sector explained the advantage of reaching a broad audience:

“Whenever I want to recruit, I use social media a lot. I post vacancies on my WhatsApp. Posts like these just spread like wildfire because everybody knows somebody who needs a job, so you do not need to look far. We also use our website, which I noticed was very effective. We also make our employees post on their social media if they don't mind, and they usually post. The people in our organisation really post on their social media, and I think that helps a lot. So, I think social media is the best means of recruiting talent for me. Social media right now is what I think has been effective for SMEs to source talent” (Finco1).

Another participant (employee) said:

“We have been recruiting, not just through the papers or through online job sites. We also recruit on LinkedIn. We started recruiting on LinkedIn. We have an account with LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook, and we have seen massive turnouts” (petrocom 2)

The development and increasing use of databases allow job seekers to upload their resumes and provide recruiters with a platform to search for candidates fitting vacant roles, enabling passive job seekers to apply without actively searching for jobs (Fiandrino et al., 2016; Leach et al., 2017). Various software tools, including HR software, Application Tracking Systems (ATS), and Web 2.0 Artificial Intelligence (AI), are commonly employed for this purpose (Albert, 2019). Using the Internet for the purpose of talent attraction further enhances the corporate image and profile of firms while reducing recruitment costs and administrative burdens (Fred & Kinange, 2018). Nevertheless, Jeske and Shultz (2015) argue that the use of online platforms for recruitment purposes must be treated with caution as there are numerous ethical, legal, and practical issues that need to be addressed.

Similarly, Brown & Vaughn (2011) suggest that the debate surrounding employer screening of social media for employment purposes often overlooks concerns regarding data protection, access, and security. A further concern arises from the potential discrimination by employers against individuals without a social network profile (Thomas et al., 2014), particularly considering that not all demographic groups may be equally

represented online (Klein & Pappas, 2010). Exchange theory, as outlined by Blau (1964), also encompasses information sharing and suggests that some individuals share information about themselves with the hope of receiving a potential job offer. However, it is important to recognise that the power dynamics involved mean that there is the risk that the prospective applicant has no control over who can access this information once it has been shared.

5.6.2 Internal Talent Sourcing for Specialised Roles

Three case study companies suggest that internal talent sourcing, which could be seen as a form of succession planning, a key aspect of STM, plays a significant role in their recruitment practices as most of their top position vacancies are filled with employees who have been put on reserve, pending the exit of a talented employee. Formal approaches to succession planning are much more limited in SMEs compared to larger firms (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; however, the study highlighted the emergence of informal aspects of succession planning in SMEs, which were more limited and more fragmented. The lack of formal TM policies in SMEs limited the development of sophisticated approaches to succession planning in SMEs. However, the study concludes that case study organisations adopt informal talent management policies in a bid to maintain their competitive advantage in the labour market. Informality in human resource management (HRM) practices is often considered a key feature of SMEs (Dundon & Wilkinson, 2009; Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). This informality is evident in both their overall HRM approaches and specific HR practices; this informality, according to scholars (Bacon et al., 1996; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2009), could become a potential source of competitive advantage for SMEs. Krishnan and Scullion (2017) maintain that formal HRM approaches could potentially interrupt the collaborative and close-knit nature of SMEs, as well as weaken the morale of employees who may not be identified as having high potential.

The study highlighted that internal talent sourcing was applied for specialised or top roles, reflecting the preference of the case study SMEs to look inwards for talents who already had a good understanding of the business needs, culture, and goals of the organisation, which involve lower onboarding costs than searching externally. The above finding is supported by academic literature highlighting several strategic advantages of internal recruitment, such as internal candidates' knowledge of the company's culture, processes, and strategic goals, leading to smoother transitions and better performance (Bidwell, 2011). In addition, Cascio & Aguinis (2019) and Cascio (2014) suggest that internal hiring reduces onboarding costs, as these candidates require less time to become productive and pose a lower turnover risk. Furthermore, SMEs often need specialised knowledge that internal candidates are more likely to possess due to their experience within the company (DeVaro &

Morita, 2013). Therefore, internal recruitment is a cost-effective and efficient strategy for filling specialised and top roles.

A third HR practitioner in the IT sector highlighted the organisation's strategy of internal talent sourcing, stating that for them, recruitment for job vacancies always begins internally:

"Yeah. Well, it depends on what the organisation wants. You know, when you come in to recruit for a client, one of the things you do is ask if there are people within the organisation that the client thinks can fill the vacant position. Most times, they would say no, but as a consultant, you have to take a closer look because, for me, recruiting from within is usually the best because the individuals already understand the culture of the organisation, and they can grow within the organisation, and that is also motivation for them you know to stay and to grow within the system. But sometimes it's difficult to find a good fit, and then you go out to recruit externally" (Java.com 1).

Another HR professional in the finance sector stated that:

"Right, so when we have top vacancies, we open them internally to our people first and then externally. If it's a really high-up position, we start internally, and then if we do not find any internal candidate, we use a head-hunter to get somebody for us. So yeah, we used to do that if it was a really high position, like a management position. To fill roles like managers or assistant managers, we will start from within to promote them before we take it Out there (Finco 1).

For one case study organisation in the finance sector, a significant challenge was finding the right fit for specialised roles. This highlighted the low supply of specialists in key positions within the finance sector. For example, the demand for specialist roles like Actuaries, insurance brokers, investment bankers, and risk managers was increasing, but they were in short supply, which limited the implementation of TM strategies. Case companies increasingly use executive research, recruitment agencies, and contractors to source these key positions.

A head of Operations in a financial service firm reported that:

"In the financial services sector, I think that there is more supply than demand. I only face challenges when I am recruiting for specialised roles, As I said before. Those kinds of roles are few in my organisation, and the supply is very low. We mostly outsource the recruitment to large job sites like jobberman and some other recruitment agencies. We try to ensure that the salary is competitive based on industry standards, too, and this has worked for us. In cases

where we still struggle to fill high-level roles, we contract them out to specialists for a contractual period” (Finco 1).

In summary, the case companies in the study suggested that elements of informal succession planning were emerging within the resource constraints facing SME organisations. The next section examines succession planning and talent pipelines more fully in the Nigerian SME context.

5.6.2.1 Talent Pipelines and succession planning in Case study SMEs.

Considering that Nigerian SMEs, like most SMEs across the globe, are disadvantaged in the war for talent, this section will examine the implementation of effective talent pipeline and succession management strategies to address the negative effect of employee turnover. An important finding of the study was that most of the case study companies had no formal succession plan in place. In addition, the SMEs who had introduced a form of informal succession planning had, at best, very mixed results, and overall, there was little impact on improving retention rates. Similarly, a second SME organisation reported their inability to implement effective succession planning due to staff shortages, limited resources and short-term business pressures. In practice, sometimes minimal attention was paid to the development and the career progression of talents.

In addition, the literature highlights the limited recognition of crucial or strategic pivotal positions in the SME context due to the inclusive approach to TM in SMEs, which sees all employees as potential talents. Flexibility, teamwork and willingness to cover more than one position and the egalitarian culture of SMEs mean that critical positions may be less relevant in the SME context (Jooss et al., 2022; Krishnan and Scullion, 2017.). This impacts the implementation of TM in the SME context and suggests that some highly competent employees are unable to reach their full potential or attain the level of career progression required to fill critical positions.

Although one of our case study organisations in the finance sector did not have any formal talent management policy, they had introduced an informal talent practice, and a form of limited succession planning was introduced. According to an HR Manager in the finance sector,

“We had a succession plan, but funny enough, there was not any formal talent management policy. In fact, I have not seen a talent management policy anywhere in Nigeria” (Finco.com).

Another HR practitioner in the finance industry stated that they only started the process of creating a talent pipeline after a key staff member left the organisation when the need for a replacement was urgent.

The view of the HR manager is outlined below:

“Basically, so something had happened. I think we had lost one of our really, really good employees who was scarcely talented. So, my manager said we needed a succession plan as it could happen again, so that kind of kickstarted the succession planning process. You know, we started talking to people in the pipeline and making sure we had replacements for key positions. We were stuck for a long time without that person and could not fill that position, and it was kind of disastrous for us. So it was because of that disaster that we kick-started the succession plan, but before that, we didn't actually have anything” (Finco.com).

In this case, succession planning was not primarily aimed at the development of staff or the promotion of career development opportunities for staff. One HR manager advised that in practice, the main aim of developing a “succession plan” was to avoid having a vacant position, reflecting the short-term perspective of the SMEs and the lack of strategic talent management planning. This contradicts Horwitz et al.'s (2003) report, which identified a positive link between opportunities for career progression, promotion, and talent's willingness to stay loyal to their organisations. Their study suggests that providing clear career advancement pathways can contribute to talent retention in larger organisations, but its limitations in the SME context are outlined above.

When asked if succession planning was a general organisational strategy to promote growth and progression, Various HR Managers responded as shown below.

A HR head in the finance sector:

“It is only for positions that cannot afford to be vacant at any point in the business lifecycle” (Finco).

An HR Assistant in the Real Estate industry outlined:

“We are now using an on-the-job training platform to upgrade their second lieutenants- who are assisting them; we aim to upgrade them to the point where we are certain that should the main post holder decide to leave, the understudies will be able to fit in the role” (Homify.com).

An HR Manager in the Renewable Energy sector outlined the organisation's succession planning practice:

“We have a succession plan. We look at each team to see if there are people who might leave the organisation. We try to plan to ensure that there is a successor. We also try to develop the candidate. We try to develop and train them. To ensure that they're what the organisation needs. We try to make sure that there's a training program for entry-level employees. So, with

that, we have a pool of human resources That can take responsibility for the team. So, uh yeah, that's one of the strategies we're adopting" (Planet Safe 2).

Research highlights that having a talent pipeline enables an organisation to create a “pool” of talent that can readily fill vacancies as they arise. A key advantage of this approach is that a pool of talent is already familiar with the organisation's ethos and culture, hence ensuring a smoother transition into new roles (CIPD, 2007; Stahl et al., 2012). Stahl et al. (2012) highlight that providing continuous opportunities for advancement and growth contributes to talent motivation, commitment, and, ultimately, retention. By supporting the growth and development of talent, organisations can foster a sense of recognition and empowerment among employees, which enhances their commitment to the business (Walsh & Taylor, 2007).

McKinsey Consultants report that “talented people are inclined to leave if they feel they are not growing and stretching” (Michaels et al., 2001, p. 14). Also, Walsh and Taylor (2007) showed the need for organisations to provide talented individuals with authority and flexibility in decision-making processes, especially in managerial roles. However, this authority must be commensurate with the individual's position and accompanied by appropriate training. Trusting employees with responsibilities and giving them the leeway to implement their own ideas not only promotes employee engagement but also contributes to their professional growth and satisfaction. However, the study found that most of our case study organisations adopt the gap development approach to training (providing training based on organisational needs) rather than the appropriate development approach (training based on individuals' own developmental needs). Govaerts' study shows that an appropriate development approach to training drives and motivates talent, leading to commitment and increasing talent retention (Govaerts et al., 2011).

An HR Manager in the renewable energy sector explained their workforce planning strategy: “OK, to fill top positions, we have Manpower planning already in place, and this is a thorough process. We put down where we have departmental heads and other key stuff. You know, sit and then write down processes or procedures to guide their recruitment process. By doing so, we don't have any gap in the sense that before we recruit, we already have a laid down procedure. We know the kind of skill we want. We know the kind of behaviour, skills, and attitudes. We know the technicalities and all other aspects of the role. So, for my organisation, we have a laid down principle in place (Planet Safe 2)

HR personnel from the IT sector outrightly said:

“We have a succession plan. Whereby we look within each team if there are people that might probably leave the organisation, and we try and plan to ensure that there is a successor.” (Java 1).

An HR Assistant in the real estate sector said:

“We are now using an on-the-job training platform to upgrade their second lieutenants- who are assisting them you, to upgrade them to the point where we are certain that should the main post holder decide to leave, the understudies will be able to fit in the role” (homify.com).

The direct quotes from HR personnel cited above reveal that organisations are more focused on filling vacant positions than putting in measures that organically reduce employee turnover. In addition, management was more concerned about having employees who were readily available to fill vacant positions than recruiting employees who required significant development to contribute to achieving organisational goals. The focus was on development to meet organisational needs rather than developing employees for their own personal benefits. The need to consider individual and organisational goals has been identified in the literature as the key to effective TM implementation (Farndale et al., 2014).

As succession management is a recent development in Nigerian SMEs, only a few organisations have been able to incorporate it into their HR practices, and even fewer organisations have been able to effectively utilise it to develop high-potential talents (Ugoani, 2020). Previously, it was highlighted that Nigerian SMEs seek to create a work environment which allows employees to attain their full potential. However, findings suggest that the above assertion is solely because the work environment is described as friendly, warm, close-knit and so on. It must be noted that to reach their full potential, employees need much more than a cordial environment. The next section will discuss in more depth the findings on talent attraction in the case study organisations.

5.6.3 Talent Attraction in the Case Study Organisations

Our study highlights several challenges in talent management within the research context and identifies talent attraction and retention as the key TM challenges. These challenges have become even more significant due to several factors, including more intense competition within the Nigerian labour market, acute shortages of skilled talents, financial restrictions, managerial challenges, and other macro factors, which will be discussed below. The study suggests that SMEs have begun to prioritise talent attraction, motivation, and retention and have adopted various strategies, ranging from offering competitive pay and benefits (based on industry rate) to flexible working and a conducive work environment. Also, the study shows that fostering a friendly organisational culture and providing learning and development opportunities are essential for effective talent attraction. Some of the case

study organisations sought to develop a positive employer brand as a key talent attraction and motivation method. Recognising and appreciating talent's contributions, promoting the organisation's visions, and cultivating cordial relationships amongst colleagues were further highlighted as effective TM practices within the SME organisations in the study. Research by Gibbons (2006) highlighted the importance of several factors such as trust and integrity in the organisation, nature of the job, career progression, pride in the organisation, supportive colleagues, teamwork and development opportunities (Gibbons, 2008).

However, Uygulamasi (2014) suggested that talent retention is linked to employees' trust in the organisation, alignment of individual objectives with organisational goals, career development opportunities, and a reasonable reward system. In addition, Scott (2012) identified two main reasons for employee turnover: concerns about pay (77%) and lack of career growth opportunities (67%). Whilst it was agreed that better pay was a key determinant of talent attraction and retention, participants highlighted that organisational culture and work environments were significant factors regarding their decision to stay with case study organisations. Fig 5.8 Below illustrates participants' views about case study organisations' talent attraction techniques.

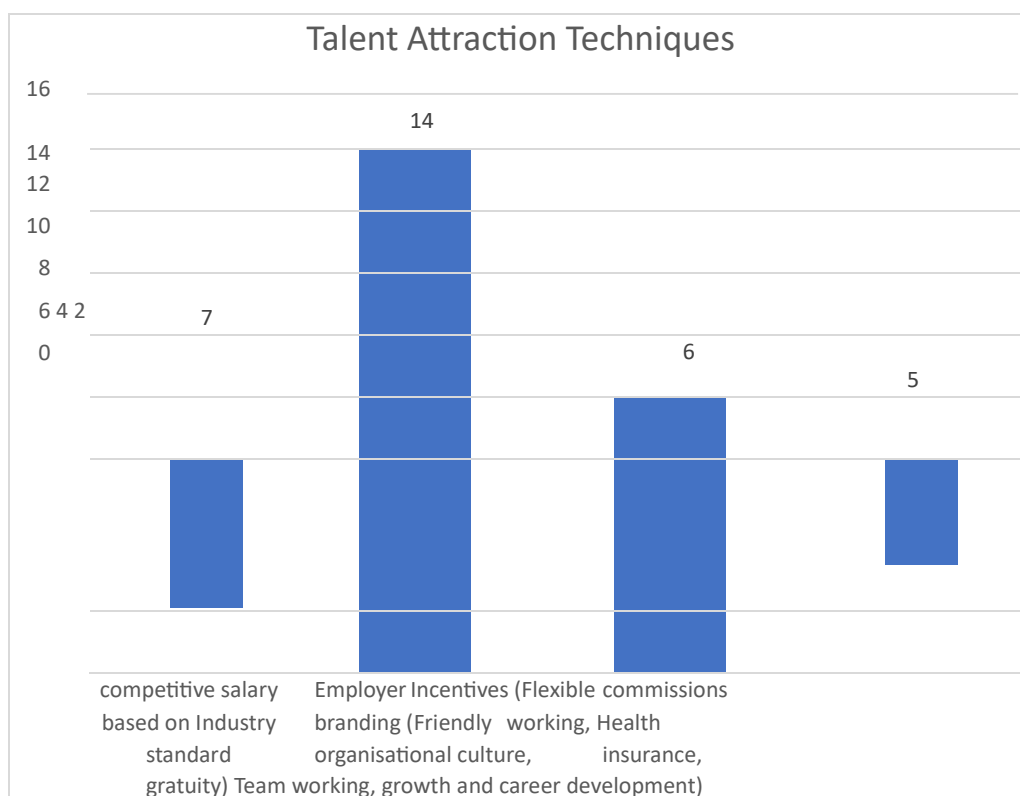


Figure 5.8 Talent Attraction Techniques. The Researcher

The following section examines the role of employer branding in talent attraction and retention in case study organisations.

5.6.3.1 The Role of Employer Branding in Talent Attraction

The term 'employer branding' describes how an organisation markets what it has to offer to potential and existing employees (CIPD, 2009; Mandhanya & Shah, 2010). It characterises the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing organisation (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) as a means to differentiate itself in the competitive labour market. Employer branding is derived from the field of marketing, where branding helps to attract customers (talent recruitment in our case), communicate with them effectively (talent engagement) and maintain their loyalty (talent retention). Organisations are increasingly looking to capitalise on their brand equity to successfully attract and retain talent, applying branding principles to people management (Backhaus & Tickoo, 2004).

Considering the constantly changing business landscape, increased competition, and the impact of globalisation, employee and talent management continue to pose significant challenges for organisations; thus, more businesses seek to establish a strong employer brand (Azhar, 2024; Elegbe, 2018b) which enhances their organisation's reputation and fosters employee commitment and loyalty and impacts positively on retention (Donkor et al., 2021a; Gilani & Cunningham, 2017). As the war for talent has become an increasing challenge for many organisations, employer branding has emerged as a key strategy in attracting professionals and leadership talent (Jonsen et al., 2021; Tumasjan et al., 2020; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Theurer et al., 2018). Employer branding seeks to influence applicants' intentions and decisions, such as applying for a job, attending interviews, accepting job offers, and recommending employers to their contacts (Gardner et al., 2011).

When asked about how they attract talent given the stiff competition in the labour markets, our case study SMEs shared the view highlighted below.

An HR Officer in the oil and gas sector explained:

"We try to ensure that our organisation stands out in the job market. So our employer brand is important in attracting talent. So, when we start at the recruitment process stage, we sell ourselves as a company. What we do, how we treat employees, and what packages we have for our people. So that is one of the ways we attract talent. Our employer brand is important" (Petrocom).

Another Manager in IT shared:

"We attract candidates through our branding. For us, we believe that attracting the best talents should start from within. We try to ensure that we improve our employer branding. We are keen on communication. When we probably put out an ad, we ensure that potential candidates see our branding and are eager to apply for jobs. We try as much as possible to improve our

employer branding and all that. We also ensure that the employee experience is a candid experience. It's top-notch. So even if they leave us or are not successful as a job candidate, they can be confident with themselves that they went through a good experience with this particular organisation. They can actually recommend some friends and colleagues and say this organisation is actually good to work with, has a family culture, promotes training and development, grows, adds value to employees and tries as much as possible to issue good rewards based on industry standards. The more we try to achieve it, the more our branding gets popularised" (Java.com 5)

A third participant (HR Manager) in the renewable energy sector stated that:

"On the reason why Talents join our company? Being pioneers in the industry puts us in an advantageous position when it comes to attracting and retaining talents. We have worked hard to create an impressive employer brand. We also provide a learning environment where talents can develop themselves using our career development plan and implementation strategies" (Planet Safe 2)

Researchers (Ahmed et al., 2022; Azhar et al., 2024; Deepa & Baral, 2019; Gilani & Cunningham, 2017; Singh & Rokade, 2014; Theurer et al., 2018) argue that employer branding serves a dual purpose: it serves as a magnet for potential talents and enhances loyalty to the organisation. Chhabra and Sharma (2014) identified organisational culture, brand reputation, and compensation as key features of employee branding. Moreover, Jain & Bhatt (2015) emphasised the significant role of organisational support and infrastructure in the attraction and retention of employees, with organisational culture playing a pivotal role, which suggests that organisational culture and identity are important internal determinants of employer brand image (Saraswathy & Balakrishnan 2017; Davies et al., (2018). Therefore, employer branding encompasses various dimensions, including organisational culture, interpersonal relationships, systems, and values (Beck & Kenning, 2015; Davies et al., 2018; Singh & Rokade, 2014; Sharma & Prasad, 2018;).

Carpentier et al. (2017) identified six factors influencing employer branding: pay, career advancement, task variety, work environment, meaningful work, and work-life balance. The work environment, encompassing factors like collaboration, mutual respect, and access to technology, significantly influences employees' preferences (Barrow and Mosley, 2007; Priyadarshi, 2011), while Sharma and Prasad (2018) highlighted compensation and benefits, work-life balance, work environment, brand strength, and organisational culture as key constituents of employer branding. Brand strength, training and development opportunities, and organisational culture are also seen as significant predictors of employer brand image in several studies (e.g. Martin et al., 2016; Urde and Greyser, 2016; Astrachan

et al., 2018). Overall, research indicates that a positive employer brand image is important for attracting and retaining top talent in today's competitive job market and can help organisations keep their employees engaged. It has been argued that employee engagement is of particular importance for service brands to deliver better customer service and maintain a motivated workforce. An engaged workforce is also more committed towards the organisation, which also leads to desirable outcomes such as organisational commitment (Yousf & Khurshid, 2021). Beck & Kenning, 2015; Davies et al., 2018

The present study found that organisational branding was of key importance to a few of our case study companies. This involves several key aspects, such as fulfilling the organisation's part of the psychological contract and promoting and selling the organisation's vision and values to new and current workers. The study highlighted the importance of organisations upholding the promises made during the recruitment process to avoid breaches of the psychological contract, which can lead to dissatisfaction among employees and increased staff turnover. Through employer branding efforts, some Nigerian SMEs seek to emphasise their presence in the minds of potential talent, making their brand name recognisable and appealing. This approach is intended to facilitate recruitment and retention efforts by enhancing the organisation's attractiveness to prospective employees. However, the study finds that the concept of employer branding is still evolving in the case study context, as there is no evidence of formal strategies set in place to promote the concept in case study organisations. Much academic focus has been on employer branding and its ability to attract talent, with the assumption that recruits attracted by a company's brand equity will more likely stay with the organisation (Supornpraditchai, Miller, Lings & Jonmundsson, 2007). However, employees differ in their responses to employer branding and brand equity. Jiang and Iles (2011) found that national and cultural differences exist in rating the brand equity of organisations. Likewise, differences exist between the age and gender of employees (Alniacik & Alniacik, 2012).

While the literature highlights the growing significance of employer branding in large organisations, Szegedi et al. (2023) report that the concept may have less relevance and may be more challenging in the SME context in large part due to their limited a resource. Likewise, Barrow & Mosley (2005) argue that employer branding presents both opportunities and challenges for SMEs; while it can enhance talent attraction, retention, and a firm's overall reputation, SMEs often face constraints in resources, expertise, and consistency that can impede the successful implementation of employer branding strategies. Theurer et al. (2018) suggest that by fostering a positive organisational identity, SMEs can enhance employee loyalty and reduce turnover rates, as employer branding helps in creating a sense of belonging and pride among employees. Nevertheless, developing an effective employer brand requires specific skills and knowledge that may not be readily available within an SME; this may lead to poorly executed branding efforts that fail to resonate with the desired audience (Krake, 2005).

Tavassoli et al. (2014) highlight the lack of clear metrics and analytics to assess the return on investment (ROI) of branding initiatives as a challenge SMEs face when it comes to employer branding. In addition, maintaining a consistent employer brand can be challenging for SMEs, especially during periods of rapid growth or change, and these inconsistencies can undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the employer brand (Martin et al., 2011). Although effective employer branding can lead to cost savings in recruitment and training by attracting better-fit candidates who are more likely to stay longer and contribute positively to the organisation (Collins & Stevens, 2002), SMEs often face financial and human resource limitations that hinder the development and implementation of comprehensive employer branding strategies (Rao, 2017). Unlike large organisations, SMEs may lack dedicated marketing and HR departments. Similarly, Obiekwe (2018) reports that despite its importance, several challenges impede the effective implementation of employer branding in Nigerian SMEs; one significant challenge is the limited financial and human resources available to develop and maintain a strong employer brand. The study found that SMEs operate on tight budgets, which restricts their ability to invest in extensive branding campaigns or hire specialised HR professionals.

There is very little literature on the applicability or practice of employer branding in SMEs. Sokro's (2012) study of the banking sector in Ghana revealed that 70% of surveyed bank employees valued their company image as an incentive to stay, closely followed by job security (71%) and opportunities for growth (74%). Similarly, a significant relationship was found between employer branding and employee retention in a survey of academics in Indian management institutes (Mchta & Sharma, 2013). While a study by Sivertzen et al. (2013) on Norwegian SMEs found that a strong employer brand positively influenced job seekers' perception and application intentions, another study by Berthon et al. (2005) highlighted that the lack of strategic alignment and clear branding objectives often resulted in suboptimal outcomes for many SMEs. Moreover, Martins & Martins (2011) argue that many Nigerian SMEs fail to recognise the long-term benefits of a coherent employer branding strategy, focusing instead on immediate operational concerns.

In addition to highlighting the strategies employed by Nigerian SMEs to attract, motivate, and retain talent, the study also identified how talent development plays a key role in employee retention.

Employee retention is a key concern for SMEs as it is difficult to compete with larger companies that offer greater benefits, job security, and rewards. The next section discusses the role of organisational culture in Talent management in Nigerian SMEs.

5.6.3.2 The Role of Organisational Culture in Talent Management

Responses from participants in the study indicated the presence of a very cordial and relaxed organisational culture. This family culture is mostly built by developing a solid internal relationship between management and employees, building rapport amongst staff, emphasising teamwork and ‘surrounding talent with good co-workers.’ Organisational culture serves as the bedrock for shaping employee behaviour within an organisation, posing as the fundamental principle that guides employees’ actions and decisions toward achieving common goals (McLaughlin, 2014). Extensive research, such as that conducted by Dwivedi et al. (2013), further highlighted the interrelationship between organisational culture and employee retention. Research suggests that a positive organisational culture correlates strongly with employee retention, whereas a negative culture typically results in higher turnover rates (Habib et al., 2014). Likewise, observations by Iqbal et al. (2017) and Gleeson (2017) indicate that organisations that promote a positive organisational culture tend to experience higher employee retention rates, thus maintaining a competitive advantage in their respective industries. The present study also highlights the importance of cultivating a supportive and conducive work environment which promotes employee satisfaction and loyalty.

A participant (HR Business Lead) highlights the reason behind their decision to remain with a case study company:

“We have a family-oriented culture here. And I want to believe that that has impacted on our talent acquisition and retention.” One of the things that helps us here is that there's this sense of comradeship; we are relaxed in terms of Interpersonal relationships, and we encourage colleagues to be kind and respectful to one another” (Homify 1).

Similarly, another participant (an employee in a case study organisation) states:

“This organisation is actually good to work with, has a family culture, promotes training and development and growth, adds value to employees, and tries as much as possible to issue good rewards based on industry standards. Our culture placed lots of value on having a relaxed environment, and although we are a very hierarchical company and have various management levels, we try to make sure we are egalitarian in decision making” (Java.com 3).

The case study organisations were largely successful in creating relatively good working environments in which employees feel comfortable around management and colleagues. The existence of a strong internal relationship between staff has a very strong impact on employee motivation and, ultimately, talent retention. De Cieri and Kramar (2008) propose that organisations can boost their competitive

advantage through cordial internal relationships. Gibbons (2006) revealed that employees are more likely to remain in an organisation if they have strong ties with colleagues.

Valizadeh and Ghahremani (2012) examine the relationship between organisational culture and quality of work life, revealing the impact of culture on employees' overall work experiences. An employee in a case study SME stated that a strong relationship between employees contributes to a healthy workplace environment, stating that they are happy with their employment as they have managed to build a good understanding with their co-workers. They speak about their rapport below: Rapport: *"I have a good rapport with my colleagues here, so it is enjoyable working here"* (Planet Safe 3).

Another employee in a case study firm speaks about the impact of the friendly work culture on his decision to remain with a case study company below.

"Friendliness ("I stay back here because the staff here, yeah, are very friendly" (Java.com 2)

Strong interpersonal relationships have been linked to work commitment (Tymon Jr et al., 2010). Tymon Jr et al. (2010) contended that cultivating strong relationships produces better outcomes than relying solely on tangible rewards. This approach offers the advantage of fostering a collaborative work environment where talent can thrive and learn from management as well as from proficient coworkers. The study reveals that this approach is very prevalent in Nigerian SMEs and underscores the important role of talent management in effectively nurturing talent.

5.6.3.3 The Role of Rewards and Compensation in TM

Data from our participants reveal that Nigerian SMEs employ the use of appropriate pay, rewards, benefits, compensation, and recognition of talent's performance as an attraction and retention technique. Although participating staff suggested that they would leave their current employers for better pay and career development opportunities, HR practitioners emphasised the inability of their organisations to compete with their larger counterparts on the issue of higher pay and financial motivation. While the idea of tangible rewards and benefits (provision of health insurance, financial bonuses, and allowances) is advanced as the most important approach to talent attraction and motivation, the present study highlighted the importance of intangible benefits such as flexible working, friendly work environment, family culture, recognition and so on as talent attraction and retention techniques, as highlighted in the statement below:

"When we recruit people externally, we have, uhm, our Incentives that we apply. So, if we want to pick somebody up from somewhere to fill in a gap or a vacant gap, we try to motivate the person by adding some allowances to their salary; maybe it could be something as small as mobile data. This is aimed at motivating the person to be able to go that extra mile. So, most of the time, it is cash or a kind of incentive. We could say the salary is attractive, and there is an attractive commission, which is negotiable. Everybody knows that in Nigeria here when it

comes to marketing, commissions are like 10% between 10-12%, so we do let them know it is attractive and negotiable and that is what people want” (Manager in a case study company-Petroco 3).

Another person (A head of operations) said:

“We try to ensure that the salary is competitive based on industry-standard too, and this has worked for us.” (Finco 1)

The study highlighted that the case study organisations endeavoured to ensure that their employees’ salaries were up to industry standards, even though they may not come with additional benefits. It is, thus, not surprising as it has long been suggested that employment is a reciprocal relationship where employees give their inputs in expectation of tangible rewards, such as pay and benefits, along with socio-emotional benefits, such as appreciation and esteem. The use of appropriate pay and benefits by these SMEs, despite their financial constraints, reflects findings from De Cieri and Kramar (2008), who highlighted that offering higher pay and benefits relative to competitors can attract and retain high-quality employees.

Research by Chan and Kuok (2011) supports the important role of pay and benefits in talent retention and highlights that salary concerns are a major reason for employee turnover. This is consistent with the discrepancy theory, which suggests that job satisfaction is influenced by the perceived alignment between the income an employee believes they deserve and what they receive, compared to their peers. However, it is important to note that while pay and benefits are key, they alone may not suffice to reduce employee turnover, as indicated by Lehman (2009). Therefore, organisations must consider other talent practices, alongside monetary rewards, to effectively attract, motivate, and retain talent. Recognising and valuing talent’s performance through awards and certificates was one technique respondents mentioned. Although not as highly emphasised as monetary rewards, a broader approach is also important in enhancing employee engagement and reducing turnover intention, as suggested by Bethke-Langenegger (2012).

An HR personnel in the oil and gas sector reports that most of their staff turnover is due to the country’s economic situation. The cost-of-living crisis has led to an increased desire to earn more in terms of salary.

“We have had instances of large turnover, and that’s primarily because of the environment that we are in, so many people are particularly interested in their take-home pay rather than whatever welfare package you offer to them.” (Petrocom).

An employee explained that they considered leaving for a different organisation because of the possibility of better pay:

“The pay was better in the other organisation. They offered me more in terms of income, benefits, and rewards. I will keep looking for better opportunities. My stay here is dependent on whether there is a better opportunity elsewhere or if this is the best I can get. Yes. Better pay, better benefits, and of course better career development opportunities but most importantly, better pay” (Java.com2).

Similarly, another interviewee (an employee in the IT industry) stated that.

“I had goals for the year, and you know, I, I knew that what I earn currently may not be able to fund them, you understand, so I considered moving to another organisation” (Java.com4)

According to a BBC (2024) report, “Nigeria’s overall annual inflation is now close to 30%, making it the highest figure in nearly three decades. The cost of food has risen even more - by 35%. However, the monthly minimum wage, set by the government and which all employers are supposed to observe, has not changed since 2019, when it was put at 30,000 naira - this is worth just \$19 (£15) at current exchange rates” (BBC, 2024). According to this report, it is not surprising that talents are more interested in financial benefits and incentives than intrinsic rewards.

In practice, Nigerian SMEs are severely limited in their ability to provide the financial rewards desired by employees, which is related to the socioeconomic challenges facing the country. This will be examined in more detail below. An HR Business Lead illustrated their organisation’s difficulty in filling a top role below:

“ Let me give you an illustration. We wanted someone who would be an Assistant General Manager for the business. And we searched and searched and searched. Part of our policy on employee benefits did not include accommodation for such a role. So, in view of the difficulty we had in getting someone to fill that position, one of the demands of that particular candidate is that the company had to provide accommodation and pay for his annual rent, even though that role or level did not come with such benefits. It was not in our policy. We had to readjust to be able to accommodate that to win the talent. We ensure that we fulfil all our statutory obligations like pension, tax, and the rest of them; we do HMO and health insurance. We ensure that we do what we call a leave allowance payment year and then observe our thirteenth month annually. Beyond that, we ensure that as much as we can, as much as budgets and cash flow can handle, we expose staff to training. Another thing we do that is also unique, which I don't see in many SMEs, is what we call ex gratia or gratuity payment. We use this to encourage long service in the system. So, what that means is that beyond the pension the company pays, which is an 8% contribution from the staff and 10% from the company, there is a certain amount of money that is paid to the staff if they stay up to five years in the system, so it

encourages long service. And if you stay up to 10 years, it is a higher amount and goes up till 15 years. It is not very common in most privately owned companies. So, that has become our unique value proposition to candidates. Then, for our businesses that have field Locations, we also provide site accommodations to make sure that they are comfortable” (Homify 1)

This suggests that some case study organisations have gone the extra mile by adding some incentives (like health insurance, gratuity payments and so on) to attract and retain talent, encourage long-term employment and project themselves as responsible and caring employers of labour. However, the study highlighted that case study SMEs were only willing to make financial adjustments (salary, commissions, allowances and so on) for key positions of shortage in the organisation.

Lehman (2009) and Tymon Jr et al. (2010) emphasise that employers must ensure the transparency, authenticity, genuineness and trustworthiness of their reward and recognition programs, ensuring that a combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives are readily available to all their staff. This is because whilst some people may be impressed by extrinsic motivation, such as accommodation benefits, others may be impressed by intrinsic motivational factors, such as recognition, praise for excellent work, positive feedback, and assignment of more responsibilities. (Lehmann, 2009; Tymon Jr et al., 2010). Maslow's needs hierarchy theory postulates that people crave self-respect and self-esteem. Thus, they look forward to being recognised and applauded for their contributions to work (Prentice, 2013).

In the words of an HR manager:

“We have discretionary bonuses, and we have recognition plans, so all those things really well”
(Petrocom 1)

Another participant spoke about recognition, stating that:

“If these are the backbone of the organisation, they should get the recognition they deserve; otherwise, they will go find that somewhere else” (Petrocom 3).

As noted above, organisations need other supporting talent practices to supplement the monetary rewards to attract, motivate and retain talent effectively (Horwitz, Heng, & Quazi, 2003). One crucial aspect used in conjunction with monetary rewards was recognising and valuing talent's performance by giving awards and certificates. However, given the low pay in the SMEs, this was not as highly valued as monetary rewards. However, Bethke-Langenegger (2012, p. 1) argued that “employees” beliefs of a positive talent status reduce the intentions to leave and raise the engagement level.” This was also contrary to the findings of Solnet, Kralj, and Kandampully (2012), who found that ‘recognition’ is perceived to be very important to the ‘Gen Y’ talents. The impact of non-financial benefits has also been investigated in retaining talent in developing countries to counter the brain drain of professional, leadership and technical talent (Willis-Shattuck et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2011). A significant factor

contributing to the loss of talent was the high levels of emigration to more developed countries. In the absence of financial benefits, retention initiatives have focused on housing subsidies, continuing education and the provision of food (Gow et al., 2013; Taylor et al., & Daulaire, 2011; Willis-Shattuck et al., 2008).

Therefore, it is imperative that organisations recognise the importance of context and that one-size fits-all approaches to talent attraction and retention have significant limitations, suggesting that a combination of different strategies will be more likely to yield positive results. Beyond the challenge of attracting suitable talent, our respondents highlight the dire challenge of retaining their talent. Although our respondents highlight several strategies put in place for the attraction and retention of talent, none of these strategies were identified as the most effective. To paint a better picture of the retention situation in Nigerian SMEs, the next section briefly discusses the research findings below.

5.6.4 Talent Retention – the key TM issue

Whilst TM literature has extensively explored the causes and consequences of high employee turnover, there has been less interest in the more positive aspects of talent retention. The distinction between motivating factors and hygiene factors, as proposed by Herzberg in 1959, could be relevant in this context. Simply addressing the causes of employee resignations might not be adequate to retain the most talented and high-performing individuals. In addition, most of the research in this area has been focused on advanced Western countries, with little attention paid to developing countries and emerging markets. This study seeks to contribute to our understanding of the factors that influence talent retention in developing countries. This is important for several reasons: a)

Globalisation has led to a significant increase in the presence of MNEs in developing countries, which need to have a better understanding of the characteristics of their local workforce; b) The issue of skills shortage is much more pronounced in developing countries than in developed counterparts, and talent retention is a vital issue for organisations based in developing countries (Epie 2014).

While attracting and motivating staff were significant challenges, the HR managers in the present study indicated that their primary focus was talent retention, and they attempted to ensure that their recruitment and selection process reflected this objective. Increasingly, many organisations have realised that talent retention starts at the hiring process, and the window of opportunity to impact and impress new recruits comes within the first six months of employment (Gilmore & Turner, 2010; Lundberg & Young, 1997; Verlander & Evans, 2007). According to one HR consultancy, the Lyndhurst Group, new employees decide whether they feel at home or not in the first three weeks on the job, 4% of new employees leave after a disastrous first day, and 22% of staff turnovers occur within the first 45 days (cited in Cacla, 2007). Some SMEs seek to create an effective talent pipeline through the

provision of training and talent development opportunities alongside opportunities for career growth and progression. However, there is growing recognition of the need for internal cohesion of internal talent practices for effective TM and for TM practices to be closely linked (e.g. Stahl et al., 2012; Iles et al., 2010).

Most of the case study companies identified talent retention management as one of the most urgent HR challenges besides talent attraction. As reported by HR personnel in the finance sector,

‘one challenge would be retention, in terms of, you find that you are trying to engage your staff, trying to improve on welfare, reward, learning and development, which are things that are best practices and actually fit our strategy and our culture in order to add value to employees but even at that human beings, you cannot read humans, they end up leaving’ (Finco).

Another person (a Manager) in the renewable energy sector commented:

“I am highlighting the attractiveness of larger companies like SHELL, which may offer better employee benefits compared to smaller businesses. For example, working for these companies might afford you more personal time or additional perks that make the job more appealing. While smaller SMEs may not have the financial resources to match these extensive benefits, individuals often prioritise their own needs and preferences before considering the company's interests. Therefore, it is not uncommon for people to prioritise compensation and personal reasons when deciding to switch jobs” (Planet Safe 4).

The study highlighted that some of the case study companies have attempted to retain employees and maintain motivation levels by creating an enabling environment that supports employees to attain their full potential. As reported by an HR executive:

“Because it’s um, the war for talent is on, and in order to retain your high potential employees, your productive employees, you must give them something that they are not going to get elsewhere, it’s not just about money, it’s not just about ermm giving flexible work and all of that. It’s about making them feel that they’re part of the business” (Homify).

Kaliannan et al. (2015) identify some factors that contribute to employees’ decision to continue working for their employers. They listed factors like opportunities for career growth, empowerment, engagement, positive work environment and good pay, stating that factors like work environment and working conditions are very vital in ensuring employee satisfaction and commitment (Kaliannan et al., 2015). Likewise, Bhatnagar (2007) identifies challenging work, career growth, and work relationships as three main factors that influence talent retention, followed by pay and supportive management behaviours. However, the above two authors made no distinction between talent retention and employee retention, as they used both terms interchangeably. Ovadje & Muogboh (2009) conducted a

study with a sample of 62 Nigerian middle managers and concluded that the top three motives to stay in employment were opportunity for advancement, satisfaction with work content, and affiliation, with satisfaction with pay ranking fourth. Similarly, Masibigiri & Niedaber (2011), in their study, listed factors affecting staff retention as work content, skill utilisation, career advancement, work-life balance, pay, security needs, and leadership behaviour. Another survey of five Indian organisations concluded that employee retention was improved by a good compensation package, a rigorous selection process, and training opportunities (Mahal, 2012).

However, the study highlighted that case study companies' attempts to boost talent retention were not fully effective due to the significant challenges in retaining high-potential and high-performing employees. HR managers identified the lack of ability to increase pay significantly as the major constraint on retaining talent, which highlights the importance of extrinsic rewards,

An HR Manager in the IT sector stated that.

"As you can imagine, once we have selected the right candidate, which we have been quite successful in. We embark on training them. There is a lot of training that goes into our staff because of the nature of work once we recruit them. Therefore, we ensure that we train them and that they are actually capable. After all of that, you now have a case where you have a genuine star, a genuine potential asset. And the competition out there is vast because even the much bigger companies are looking for such people to recruit. So sometimes they offer very competitive pay. In many cases, we have had to match quite a few of those packages to retain our staff. In some cases, we just have not been able to match offers from large companies, so we had to let our talent go. Those are the challenges in retaining talent for a firm of our sort of size." (Java.com 1)

Kickul (2001) suggested that talent retention can be improved by taking measures to avoid a breach of the psychological contract. In contrast, Graham et al. (2002) concluded that the critical factors in talent retention were compensation and reward schemes. Wagar & Rondeau (2006) suggested that a range of human resource practices, like employee assistance programs, formal training, and good compensation packages, in addition to an extensive selection process, can improve talent retention. Also, Chan & Kuok (2011) found that for many employees, changing jobs was a major opportunity to achieve better pay and benefits, and they must provide competitive pay benefits to attract and motivate talent to stay with them. This approach is considered the most effective tool for attracting, motivating, and retaining valuable employees (Bergmann & Bergmann, 1994).

The study highlighted that a critical issue in talent retention was the need to provide learning, development and training opportunities, which was an important factor in employees' decision to stay

with their employer. All the case study organisations claimed to provide training opportunities for employees as part of a staff retention strategy, but the study suggests that access to training opportunities was limited due to a scarcity of resources. The following section examines talent development and its relation to talent retention.

5.6.5 Relationship Between Strategic Talent Development and Talent Retention

Despite its increasing popularity in recent years, the term "talent development" remains ambiguous, with unclear boundaries and scope. Like TM, talent development lacks clarity in its definition. While some research has been conducted on the topic, many scholars in human resource development (HRD) are not explicit about the precise meaning of talent development (Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016). As Talent Development garners increased attention from organisations and HR professionals, academia has begun to focus on talent from a developmental perspective (Caplan, 2013; Cappelli, 2008; Garavan et al., 2012). Kim and McLean (2012) argue that the developmental aspect of human resource development (HRD) is a crucial component of TM, an idea increasingly emphasised in HRM literature (Collings & Mellahi, 2009)

Interview data from our participants consistently highlighted the important role of talent development and career growth in talent management. Talent development was seen as significant and positively influenced SMEs' efforts to retain their talent. Academics (Stahl et al., 2012, p.25) had previously asserted that one of the most significant challenges encountered by companies globally is the establishment and maintenance of a strong talent pipeline. This study agrees with their report that the most reliable method for building such pipelines is through internal talent development initiatives. A higher earnings case study organisation has been able to successfully implement training and development activities for individuals with high potential in the form of internships. Thus, they have not only overcome the war for talent but have also created their pool of talent with improved technical skills. As a result, they have been able to prepare interns to better utilise their acquired skills in highly advanced roles.

Their representative said:

"We are implementing what we call an internship program. So instead of just looking out for those who are qualified already, we are looking at also getting young who may have interests or are even inspired to be part of it through the provision of incentives like a stipend payment, you, providing accommodation and then, uh, on the job training that they are not paying for. You, so if we get these young in, uh, they will be part of the workshop, and by the time the person is a part of this workshop for two, three years, you, you have got someone who is also good enough to handle responsibilities in that space" (Java 1).

According to Garavan et al. (2012), focusing on acquiring talent from external sources is often not a successful long-term strategy; instead, it is suggested that organisations should pursue a strategy of developing talent from within to ensure that employees possess the essential skills and competencies to deploy business strategies. Internal talent development is achievable through training, developing, and preparing employees for higher positions and more critical tasks (Joyce, 2010). Govaerts et al. (2011) found that talent development creates opportunities for employees to learn and do more of what they are good at, which encourages them to stay in the organisation.

Several responses from participants indicate that our case study organisations pay serious attention to the training needs of their employees. See some statements from participants below:

“For most persons, because the culture here is, at the beginning of each calendar year, each department gets to submit their training calendar for the year, and of course, the human resources department gets to look at how they can ensure that everybody, given their work schedule, has an opportunity to attend those training” (An employee in the Real Estate Industry-Homify 3).

A Head of Operations in the finance sector attested that:

“There is actually a budget for every single member of the organisation. There might be different amounts for different levels, but everybody must go to one or two trainings per year, so it's for everybody. Every core staff has to make use of the training allocations.” (Finco 1)

However, some HR Personnel highlighted the difficulties associated with the implementation of developmental programmes, which in turn has adverse effects on staff retention. According to an HR Manager, SME organisations were cautious about investing their scarce funds into training and development due to the risk of staff turnover and limited resources, which required SMEs to use cost effective ways to implement HR practices. With regards to training and development, a pressing question at the back of every manager is, “Will the employee” stay with us long term, or will they leave shortly after we have invested so much finance in their development?

An HR Business Lead in the real estate industry highlighted:

“Financial restriction: We are not always able to carry out as much training and development as we would like due to a lack of adequate funds. We do not have much talent in that space if you're going to train from within. To do that, it is going to cost a lot of training and exposure, meaning that you also need to have patience for the person to learn the ropes and learn

gradually. So, that is a challenge when you train someone. You expect that they're going to stay with you, but they may decide to tell you that they are going elsewhere for the next three months. So, what do you do? You start all over again. Which is a very big concern for talent management here” (Homify 1).

Research suggests that employers are increasingly placing greater emphasis on individuals taking responsibility for managing their own careers (Sturges et al., 2005). Career needs, as defined by Chen and colleagues (2004), encompass personal requirements for goals (such as achieving career milestones), tasks (opportunities for development to attain career objectives), and challenges (future career needs stemming from developmental opportunities). Thus, employees cannot be entirely held responsible for their career development, as there needs to be some collaboration between employers and employees. A statement from an HR practitioner supports the argument above.

“I think there is that thing from talent management being driven by the organisation to now being driven by individuals. I know that in the past, it used to be a lot better. Organisations were willing to sponsor training, get people to go abroad for training, you know, bring in consultants and train all their employees and all of that. But these days, your own growth and career management are pretty much in your hands. You are encouraged to improve yourself; you are encouraged to attend courses. Yes, the organisation will encourage you, but they are not so keen on spending on training due to financial restraints. Of course, you have to improve yourself if you want to stay, if you want to be retained, if you want to aspire to go into different positions if you want a promotion, you should improve yourself” (Homify 2).

Although several participants welcome the opportunity for growth and development provided by their employers, there is no substantial evidence that companies that offer employee development activities stand a greater chance of improving their talent retention even though they invest in improving the skills of their talented employees. Haines et al. (2010) conclude that while many employees appreciate development opportunities, there is no substantial evidence to suggest that such practices significantly improve retention rates. Similarly, Sung & Choi (2014) argue that while employee development can enhance skills and competencies, the direct impact on retention rates is less clear and not as significant as other factors, such as organisational culture and job satisfaction. However, participants' views are shown below.

“I found out that for me to be the best, I must learn from various experiences. I will say that for someone to get a lot and learn, you must go through the rough part. It is not going to be all rosy all the time. So, I will say that I considered leaving because, at some point, I felt that

my salary wasn't what I wanted it to be. I had to look beyond that and start weighing other options, like, if I cannot get a higher salary, can I get more training here? Can I get more experience here? Can I get a good footing in the gas industry in Nigeria? Partly, that's why I stayed. Because I knew I could get more opportunities, more training, and more experience" (An employee in the renewable energy industry- Planet Safe 3).

When asked why they remained with their current place of employment, an interviewee responded by saying:

"If I want to do any course or whatever, of course I put it in. The company also provides financial support because the knowledge acquired is not wasted. You know, we put in these certifications and all these things when we are building our company's profile. It is an added advantage to the company that their staff receive the required training" (petrocom 2).

A second employee supported the claims by the HR Officer, stating that:

"I have, um, an opportunity to grow within the system". "Everyone has the opportunity, you have every opportunity to develop yourself despite your position because the time is there, the space is there, I don't know about the finance, but you have every opportunity to develop yourself" (Homify 5).

A further employee in the Oil and gas sector stated that,

"I have access to training. It gave me the opportunity to manage people. I learned how to manage personnel and human resources under my control, and it has given me the privilege to be able to play around with different skill sets and learn from them and then build capacity" (Planets Safe 1).

An interviewee in the renewable energy sector attributed their preference for their current place of work to the provision of career development opportunities alongside training.

"Develop career. Yes, they're really trying with that to a very large extent, training me and giving me access to information, as I said earlier on, to develop my career. Of course, they're really trying with that. So not only do they help you develop your already existing skills, there's also room for you to learn new skills and build new experiences" (Planet Safe).

Providing opportunities for further educational and career development plays a significant role in talent retention (Zhang & Stewart, 2017). Failure to offer adequate career development programs tailored to employees' career needs can result in decreased job satisfaction, performance, and morale, along with an increased intention to leave the job (Chang et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2004; Hayes et al.,

2012). However, even when training programs are available, it is important to acknowledge that these opportunities are not perceived equally across all levels and types of employees. Some employees may find the offerings insufficient or lack organisational support to pursue their development, leading to diminished engagement and heightened turnover intentions (Shuck et al., 2014).

It was also noted that the organisations employed more 'gap approaches' (used when there is a lack of skills related to the work) than 'appropriate approaches' (offering more room to grow/add and develop more strength and talent) to develop talent. Although this approach increases talent's motivation, organisations should allow more 'appropriate approaches' to the talent.

An employee in the Real Estate Industry explains:

"We have trainings that are generic just to kind of upgrade everyone as it were generally, but most of the trainings are need-based and individual based because when we do the appraisal, the needs of the are itemise and those needs inform training for them, you, the training or competency gaps that are observed will be put into consideration when designing training plans for the individual, and that helps us to now plan for the person's training for the year and then we now ask for the necessary budget to support it and then it's implemented"(Homify 2).

Creating opportunities for growth and development is seen as an effective retention strategy even for smaller organisations, and offering career development is seen as one major element in an effective retention strategy, as employees are more likely to stay in an organisation if they foresee career progression into leadership roles. In practice, however, the effective implementation of retention strategies was limited for the reasons outlined above. The next section examines the specific barriers to successful TM implementation in Nigerian SMEs.

5.7 Specific Challenges to TM in Nigerian SMEs

This section outlines the specific challenges to the implementation of TM in the specific Nigerian SME context and how talent is managed in this context. Recognising talent as a vital resource for organisational success and competitive sustainability. Scholars (Phillips & Roper, 2009; Huselid et al., 2010; Aina & Atan, 2020; Hongal & Kinange, 2020) have highlighted the importance of effective talent management to deliver on strategic objectives (Collings et al., 2022). While effective talent management practices can enhance employee performance, reduce turnover rates, and improve customer satisfaction, implementation challenges are significant, particularly in the Nigerian SME context. This corroborates Jauhari et al. (2012), who asserted that recruitment and retention remain primary challenges in human resource management, especially for talented workers.

Similarly, a study by Deloitte (2005) involving 1,396 human resource practitioners highlighted attracting and retaining talent as the most critical organisational issue (Hughes & Rog, 2008). Furthermore, Ochouko & Olumola (2020) emphasised that businesses in Nigeria struggle with talent turnover, which poses significant challenges. Studies (Adeoye & Egwakhe, 2019; Anas et al., 2020; Nwoke & Iyiola, 2021) have attempted to investigate the heightened turnover and retention rates of talent within Nigerian firms. Some studies attribute poor talent retention to failings in organisational reward systems [Amadi et al., 2021], while others point to weaknesses in talent management practices in others (Bamigboye & Abdulazeez, 2023). This is not a surprising trend for Nigerian businesses as the difficulties of attracting, recruiting, and retaining workers have long persisted. The findings of Olusa & Bolaji [2020] also supported the above claim by proving that high turnover rates have negatively impacted bank operations, which in turn has affected service delivery to customers.

Likewise, Igweh & Kifordu (2022) discussed the talent retention issues in Nigerian Health sector and identified the challenges associated with talent recruitment and retention under two broad umbrellas: Internal challenges (absence of formal HR/tm Policies, Management's hesitance to invest in HC) and external or Macro challenges (increasing labour market competition, the "Y" generation's attitude and mobility, skills and talent mismatch, lack of interest in Training and vocational Training). The findings of the study are consistent with those of Beechler & Woodward (2009), who likened the global labour market to a "war for talent" and reported that factors such as global demographic and economic trends, increased labour mobility due to relaxed immigration and emigration barriers, transformative changes in business environments, skills and culture contribute to the severity of the global war for talent. Allen (2008) indicated that the challenges in hiring and retaining talent stem from several factors such as an ageing population, globalisation, insufficient educational programs, and a mismatch between labour skills and the needs of the labour market. Some participants pointed out barriers such as a lack of management acceptance and commitment to proposed strategies, budget constraints and resistance to change. The study posits that a significant hindrance to hiring and retaining talented workers is the lack of financial resources, as discussed in succeeding sections.

5.7.1 Absence of Formal HR/TM Policy

Interviews with HR managers in the study highlighted the lack of knowledge of the significance of strategic HR. However, informal approaches to talent management (TM) and practices related to succession planning, training, and development were implemented in line with their operational goals rather than strategic ones. Most HR experts argue that for the successful implementation of Talent Management (TM) processes and practices, the HR function must adopt a strategic approach. This involves supporting long-term objectives that aim to align business goals and outcomes with a strategic framework centred on competency development. However, research suggests that SME organisations

rarely operated with formal TM policies, but they relied on informal TM practices for achieving organisational goals (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). In the case study, companies, in line with the literature, SMEs operated without formal TM policies, but informal TM policies were necessary for Nigerian SMEs for flexibility and for responding effectively to volatile product market conditions.

An HR manager in the finance sector stated that.

“We had a succession plan, but funny enough, there was no formal talent management policy. In fact, I have not seen a talent management policy anywhere in Nigeria. I don't have any specific strategy in place because we have not sat down to draw up one. We just got with the flow” (Finco).

An interview with another HR Manager supports the above assertion that some SMEs in Nigeria unknowingly adopt certain strategic TM activities.

They reported that,

“Although there are no formal talent management policies, you have some practices, informal practices, that are actually representative of talent management. Like, we have a succession plan. We look at each team to see if there is anybody who might leave the organisation. And try and plan to ensure that there is a successor” (Petroco 3).

Both quotes above resonate with the existing assertion that SMEs have a high level of informality in their overall approach to HRM and their approach to specific HR activities (Dundon & Wilkinson, 2009). They further argue that this informality could be a source of competitive advantage (Bacon et al., 1996; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2009), not necessarily a shortfall, as it indicates a personalised management style, which in turn indicates a positive organisational culture, which is of more importance to SMEs than the adoption of formal Talent management strategies (Valverde et al., 2013). Also, Marlow and Patton (1993) noted that SMEs do not develop a competitive advantage over their rivals by implementing strategic HRM processes. Nonetheless, Oladipo and Abdulkadir (2011) highlighted the importance of aligning HRM practices with organisational objectives in SMEs, citing the growing evidence showing a relationship between HRM practices and organisational performance in large organisations, although the same may not apply to SMEs. A study on Sierra Leonean SMEs by Kanu (2015) revealed the existence of a positive and significant relationship between HRM practices and performance in SMEs. He found that extensive use of HRM practices led to an increase in employment and sales; thus, SMEs do indeed follow HRM practices, although these practices are informal and extremely diverse.

Overall, there was no evidence that SME organisations operated with a strategic HRM policy. Although a manager stated thus:

“Our strategy covers our processes, from recruitment to training to succession planning, to development, to welfare to health policies and so on” (Java.com3).

Likewise, one HR Officer in the IT industry asserted that their organisation’s TM policy covers recruitment, training and development and performance management. However, no formal TM policy existed, and TM was not seen as a strategic function, and there was a lack of attention paid to the implementation of TM processes. One significant barrier to effective TM in the case study organisations was the existence of cronyism, management interference, nepotism, and centralised decision-making. The study also identified the lack of adequate performance appraisal and rewards metrics, which limited the effectiveness of TM and HR approaches in talent retention.

A Supervisor in the Oil and Gas sector observed:

“There must be a better reward system. They should put more effort into rewarding and recognising hard work. That one is number one. Followed by promotions, then acknowledgement. It could be verbal, Like, hi, hey, how are you? I see what you are doing. Keep up the good work; give you words of encouragement.” (Petroco 3)

The lack of formal HRM practices led to inconsistencies in the promotion processes in one of our case study organisations. An employee in the finance sector highlighted the unique challenge in the sector. They stated that organisations in this sector mostly value and reward employees who directly contribute to revenue generation. He stated that:

“The rate at which promotion and the staff are promoted is not really encouraging; you spend five to six years on the same levels and wait for official promotions. I think marketers are favoured more based on how many business transactions they bring. (INAUDIBLE) You will be surprised that within the five years, they have stayed on the job, they have moved farther away than you. It is really depressing; we have even seen some people stay seven to eight years on a level without promotions. There has to be a system in place to regulate these things” (Finco 2).

A comparison of the responses from HR Personnel in case study companies revealed that a centralised decision-making set-up prevents SMEs (especially the smaller ones) from developing sophisticated HR practices aimed at engaging and retaining high performers. It was suggested that managers impede

the implementation of training and development strategies as well as retention initiatives. Thus, HR Personnel retain traditional practices, where priority is given to organisational needs rather than individual needs. As a result, talented individuals are prevented from attaining their full potential. Existing research on the connection between HRM practices and performance in SMEs primarily revolves around studies examining managers' perceptions of the significance and effectiveness of HR practices (Gbolahan, 2012; Gebregiorgis & Karsten, 2006). They agree that although owners/managers recognise the importance of HR practices as a prerequisite to achieving firm objectives, they fail to translate their awareness into action (Kamoche et al., 2004; Webster & Wood, 2005). Note that the absence of formal TM practices in Nigerian SMEs stands in contrast to the growing concern over TM among large businesses. This supports the argument of Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2020) that talent management is very different in different contexts. While talent management remains crucial for large firms, it is not as prevalent among SMEs, contributing to the lack of formal implementation of TM policies and practices within these organisations.

Based on the above findings, our next section explores managers'/owners' responses to the significance of HRM practices and their inclination to invest in their employees.

5.7.2 Management's influence on HRM practices and hesitancy to invest in Human Capital There is a consensus amongst participant HR personnel that Nigerian managers are opposed to training and development and that managers see employee training as an avoidable expense rather than a positive investment in human capital. Furthermore, managers fail to recognise that employees are the bedrock of their business and must be properly developed to maintain a competitive advantage over their larger rivals. In other words, most managers do not see employees (both high performers) as assets that determine the success or failure of their SMEs. Hence, human capital investment is not prioritised. These views are directly in opposition to the Resource-based View, which refers to talent as rare, valuable, inimitable, and irreplaceable resources that organisations must possess in order to obtain and maintain competitive advantage. The study identifies the lack of specific reward schemes or training and development initiatives for employees and, specifically, high performers, save for the SMEs in the finance sector.

A Supervisor in the renewable energy sector stated that:

“While you are trying to build your skill set, most of the time, you are limited to the available funds. Management agrees that this is something that we want to spend money or spend resources on. Management has to decide if the funds are available for disposal. Then, at times, the organisation might not be that supportive in encouraging you because what you are trying to do might not have an immediate impact on the company. Management has a huge influence or impact on what we do with talent management” (Plant Safe 1).

An HR Manager in the real estate industry stated that:

“Well, I know that in the past, it used to be a lot better, you know, organisations were willing to sponsor training, get people to go abroad, you know, bring in consultants and train all their employees and all of that but these days, basically your growth, your career management is pretty much in your hand. You know, you are encouraged to improve yourself; you are encouraged to attend courses to do all of that. Yes, the organisation will encourage you, but they are not so keen on spending on training due to financial restraints, and of course, you have to improve yourself if you want to stay, if you want to be retained, if you want to aspire to go into different positions, if you want a promotion, you should improve yourself” (Homify1)

One of our interviewees, a HR professional, stated that:

“I had an MD who did not see the value in the HR department. We would make recommendations, and he would always shut it down and come back to say do it like this, do it like this.” (Finco2)

Interviewees also highlighted the impact of nepotism on TM in their organisations. It was suggested that rewards, recognitions, and promotions were mainly influenced by employee's relationships with top management. Hence, high performers are sidelined in place of employees who are chummy with management. One might attribute the hesitancy of management to follow formal TM practices to their preference to hand-pick who gets promoted or rewarded. An interviewee suggests that:

“The problems that come with nepotism are trying to reward talent and rewarding peoples' contributions to the organisation, which would always be a problem. I think in the long run, it'll make people not even want to bother to try. So, people with talent would not want to give their best because they know that it is pointless. Eventually, we will be promoted or not. Management also thinks we will eventually reward those we feel like rewarding” (HR Manager-Finco 1).

The study highlighted that top management in Nigerian SMEs did not relate to the concept of HR and, as such, paid little attention to TM. When asked about their understanding of TM implementation practices, responses from HR personnel revealed top management's lack of interest in TM. During an interview with a head of the HR department, they cited the lack of efficient leadership, leadership that is open to change and innovation. They implied that organisational leadership was sort of autocratic and traditional as management was opposed to advanced methods of managing people.

HR Head in the real estate sector:

"I would say management can sometimes display unprofessionalism with their influence because, as much as we still try to insist that we must get things right, sometimes you have this overbearing influence from the executive management to do their bidding." (Homify 1)

However, another interviewee in the same organisation was optimistic about top management's approach by stating that:

"Yes, there's this hierarchy, but we can relate and talk freely with one another. The electrician can talk with uhm, the Chief Operations Officer; I can talk with the MD. He can ask for my opinions on certain matters and my thoughts on strategies, [INAUDIBLE]. And he's the MD. He has his management team. I am not in the management team, and the same thing applies to my colleagues. So, we hold town hall meetings, and everybody's opinion is valid. So, you do not have to work with this mindset of, oh my oga my Oga, you know, that Nigerian thing. Summarily, although we are a very hierarchical company and have various management levels, we try to make sure we are egalitarian in decision-making" (Homify 2).

Furthermore, HR personnel's responses indicate an extreme absence of strategic perspectives among top managers and founders to ensure that organisational strategies align with HR strategies. Top leaders lacked the desire and will to adopt necessary changes to ensure that their HR procedures are designed to promote the attraction and development of high-potential individuals and ensure that high performers are rewarded and consequently retained. Additionally, none of the interviewed HR personnel attested to the existence of leadership that is open to adopting sophisticated HR and TM practices.

A head of HR stated that there is a huge discrepancy between HR developmental plans and management's vision for organisational success. They highlighted recurring clashes between certain technicalities and TM implementation, stating that there had been instances where an employee's training and development plan had been rejected by management simply because they would rather have the said employee focus on their work-related tasks as these are deemed to be more important than their developmental needs. This comes as no surprise, considering the profit-making goal of the majority of organisations. It can, however, be said that this comes at the expense of building highly skilled, efficient, and high-performing staff.

The hesitancy of Nigerian SME management to invest in human capital development and associated HRM practices can be examined through Hofstede's cultural dimensions, institutional theory, and the resource-based view (RBV). From Hofstede's perspective, the reluctance to prioritise training and development reflects Nigeria's high power distance culture, where hierarchical structures inhibit participatory decision-making in talent management (Hofstede, 2011). The study finds that managers

often view HR functions as secondary and fail to recognise employees as central to organisational success. This mindset, coupled with a cultural tendency to prioritise immediate financial returns over long-term strategic investments, aligns with low uncertainty avoidance in resource allocation for non-essential expenses (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012). The influence of management on HRM practices is evident in the reliance on traditional and autocratic leadership styles. As highlighted by participants, organisational leaders often reject innovative HR strategies and instead prioritise short-term operational needs over long-term talent development. This leadership approach stifles the alignment of HR and organisational strategy, making it difficult for HR personnel to advocate for and implement effective TM practices (Knott, 2016). Instances of management overriding HR recommendations or rejecting developmental plans underscore the lack of strategic integration between HR and top management visions.

Moreover, the occasional egalitarian approach mentioned by some interviewees contrasts sharply with broader cultural and institutional realities in Nigerian SMEs. While inclusivity fosters collaboration, such practices remain exceptions rather than the norm. The profit-centric focus of management often overrides the need for comprehensive TM frameworks, further exacerbating the challenges of building a highly skilled workforce.

Despite the internal challenges faced by Nigerian SMEs, the study identified a few external factors that negatively impact TM and its implementation in our case study organisations. These are broadly categorised as macro-level challenges and range from a mismatch between skills and talent to limited finance, poor training facilities, socio-economic issues, and socio-cultural issues. These macro challenges are discussed in the section below.

5.8 Macro-Level Challenges- Institutional Factors

Meyer (2008) posits that the institutional approach provides insights into how environmental models influence the structure and processes of organisational practices in modern systems. Thus, this study emphasises the development of strategic talent management (TM), framing challenges and factors within an institutional framework that addresses macro-level factors and their impact on strategic TM performance. Furthermore, challenges identified in sectors targeted by this study primarily exist at a macro level, focusing on socio-economic and socio-cultural issues. Socio-economic challenges included a significant emigration of talented individuals to developed countries for better economic prospects, leading to talent gaps and difficulty in replacing senior-level staff. SMEs, lacking financial resources, struggle to compete for talent nationally and regionally, exacerbated by low perceptions of the HR function, contributing to nepotism and favouritism.

Over the years, Nigerian businesses have faced significant challenges (Ikanyon et al., 2020). One of the primary obstacles to domestic investment is the instability of monetary policies, particularly fluctuations in exchange and inflation rates (Umar et al., 2022). Since September 1986, the substantial depreciation of the Naira, coupled with price instability, has drastically increased production costs in the country (Udegbonam, 2002). However, fiscal policies such as tax holidays have spurred the growth of some major Nigerian corporations, including the Dangote and Honeywell groups (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013). Despite these supportive policies, many Nigerian businesses struggle with the burden of Value Added Tax (VAT), a crucial revenue source for the government (Umar et al., 2022). To mitigate this burden, companies often opt for tax benefits and transfer the VAT costs to their customers (Ogbonna & Appah, 2012). Consequently, the study suggests that government policies can significantly impact Nigerian SMEs' competitiveness, profitability, and employee performance, either positively or negatively. The study highlights the impact of the institutional environment on pensions, wages and benefits, as seen in the section below.

5.8.1 Pension, Wages and Benefits

Nigeria's pension program began with the Pension Ordinance issued by the British Colonial Administration in 1951. Since then, several enabling Acts have been passed, including the Pension (Special Pensions) Act of 1961, the Pension (Statutory Corporation Service) Act of 1961, and the Pensions Act (Decree No. 102) of 1979. A key feature of these pension schemes was the exclusion of civil officials from participating in pension provisions. Public organisations were mandated to operate a Defined Benefit (Pay-As-You-Go) Pension Plan, where service time and final emoluments determined eventual entitlements. However, this framework faced numerous issues, including large pension expenditures, insufficient reserves, poor record-keeping, chaotic administration, delayed payments, misuse of funds, and payments to ineligible individuals (Edogbanya, 2013; Ayegba, James & Odor, 2013). In response to these failures, the 2004 Pension Reform Act was introduced, which established a Contributory Pension Scheme. Unlike previous schemes, the 2004 Act required both employees and employers to contribute a minimum of 15% (7.5% each) of the employee's monthly emoluments, including base salary, housing, and transportation allowances. These contributions are deposited into the employee's Retirement Savings Account (RSA), managed by the Pension Fund Custodian (PFC) and overseen by the Pension Fund Administrator (PFA) under the supervision of the National Pension Commission, the statutory body responsible for regulating Nigeria's Contributory Pension Scheme (National Pension Commission, 2014). The primary objective of the Contributory Pension Scheme is to ensure timely pension payments for everyone who has worked in the public service or private sector, thereby encouraging active employees to improve their performance. According to Sule and Ezugwu (2009), a robust pension program fosters employee comfort and loyalty to the organisation. Conversely,

a defective pension plan can lead to low morale, lack of commitment, retirement anxiety, age fraud, bureaucratic corruption, and high labour turnover (Agba, Ikoh, Ushie & Agba, 2008).

The study suggests that case study organisations adhere to the stipulated government policy regarding pensions, which was described as one of the incentives used in talent attraction.

A manager in the real estate industry explains how they use pensions, among other incentives, to attract talent.

“So, in terms of winning talent, we are doing key things. One is to make sure that employee value proposition is top-notch, and it is unique in the industry we ensure that we fulfil all our statutory obligations like pension, tax and the rest of them” (Homify 1)

Findings from the study suggest that higher compensation is linked to greater risk, time commitment, skill requirements, and experience, making jobs with high occupational hazards among the highest paid. Based on findings from the study, Nigerian SMEs have increasingly recognised the importance of employee training. Such trainings are intended to inspire innovation and provide benefits to employers and employees (although training may be more beneficial to employers). Responsibility for effective training falls on managers, supervisors, and HR professionals. The study shows that some organisations offer educational subsidies for job-related training while others incorporate training subsidies into their wage structures. However, this training is usually restricted to job-related skills, potentially limiting employees' ability to acquire unrelated skills. Despite this, it was revealed that most organisations understand the necessity of training and designing programs to meet specific needs, ensuring a workforce of qualified, competent, and versatile professionals.

5.8.2 Trade Unions

In Nigeria, unionisation is high in the public sector. Both employees and employers organise to safeguard their interests. Until March 2005, the government encouraged mandatory union membership in the workplace, resulting in a unionisation rate of nearly 60%. For example, oil industry workers are divided into unions by occupational category, with white-collar workers in the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN) and production workers in the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG). Some industry-specific trade unions affiliate with national bodies such as the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) and the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). In contrast, union participation in the private sector is lower, where employers and employees often form common forums to address issues, identify problems, and strategies for better working relationships. Trade unions exert a significant influence on HRM practices within Nigerian organisations, particularly concerning employee participation and rewards. Advocates argue that trade

unionism can contribute to achieving decent work, fair compensation, and national development in developing countries like Nigeria (Fajana, 2008). In contrast to the public sector, where trade unions wield considerable influence over HRM practices such as employee participation and rewards, trade unionism in Nigeria's private sector is generally weak across multiple industries. Informants from the public sector emphasise the importance of trade unions and the necessity of consulting them in workplace decisions to uphold industry harmony. Despite the recognition of freedom of association as a fundamental human right in modern democracies, this right is often not respected in many private organisations concerning workers' rights to join trade unions (Adewumi, 2012). Even in cases where trade unions exist, the significant level of unemployment may undermine their capacity to advocate for improved working conditions (Fajana, 2008; Adewumi, 2012).

During interviews, it was generally affirmed that organisations adhere to labour laws in their HRM practices. However, when specifically inquired about compliance with the minimum wage law, it was discovered that not all organisations adhere to its provisions. In environments where labour enforcement agencies are weak and competition is intense, irresponsible employers are inclined to exploit workers (Webster and Wood, 2005). Moreover, the high unemployment rates in many African contexts grant employers undue leverage over employees, who may endure substandard employment conditions due to limited alternative job opportunities (Wood et al., 2011). In Nigeria specifically, corruption may hinder the stringent enforcement of labour laws (Okpara and Wynn, 2008). Despite these challenges, evidence suggests that HRM practices in the public sector are more likely to be influenced by labour laws than those in the private sector. This observation aligns with the notion, as highlighted by others (Dibben and Wood, 2013), that the public sector often sets a precedent for providing better employment conditions.

Socio-cultural issues highlighted in this research underscore institutional challenges affecting TM practices in internal and external contexts. According to institutional theory, organisations seek social legitimacy for their practices within a socially constructed environment. For instance, large MNEs may adhere to legal standards and regulations to gain legitimacy and establish trustworthiness (De Kok and Uhlaner, 2001). This theory emphasises considering the institutional context, including laws, regulations, social structures, norms, values, and beliefs, in both internal and external environments. Institutional theories view organisations as social entities striving for the validation of their procedures and practices in a socially constructed environment. (Jackson & Schuler 1995). This theory emphasises the importance of considering the institutional environments (including the laws, regulations, social structure, norms, values, and beliefs) in which businesses exist.

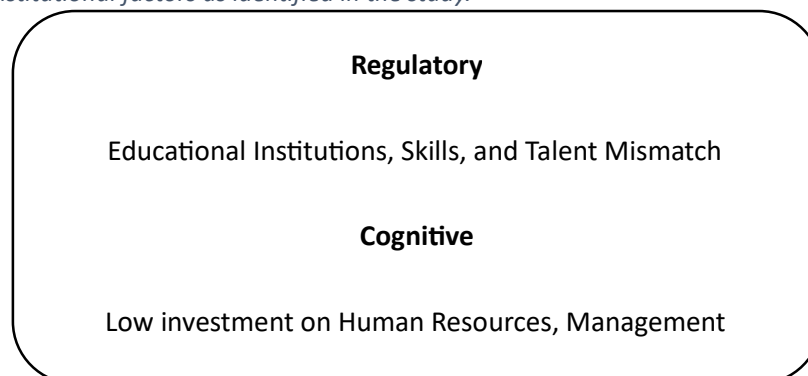
Comparative institutional theory posits that the societal context, including culture, religion, and ethnic and linguistic diversity, significantly impacts organisational decisions related to resource management

and HRM. These societal differences influence organisations' ability to attract and select candidates, develop favourable working conditions, and establish internal relations (Aksom et al., 2020; Glover et al., 2014).

For instance, Nigeria's political and economic systems, heavily influenced by colonial and post-colonial structures, impact HRM practices. The interdependence of political, economic, and educational systems means that changes in one institution affect others, highlighting the mutual influence of these systems on organisational decisions (Dessler et al., 2007; Zhai & Su, 2019). The strength of national institutions also plays a crucial role in shaping HRM practices. Strong institutions enforce legal systems and ensure the durability of their structures, while weak institutions, like those in many emerging economies, including Nigeria, exhibit less stability and effectiveness (Uzonwanne, 2012). The variations in institutional strength impact the internationalisation of management practices and the overall business environment (Carlsson, 2017). In Nigeria, weak social and political institutions undermine governmental policies and economic growth (Uzonwanne, 2012). These weaknesses affect HRM practices, making it challenging for organisations to adopt and implement effective HR strategies. The perpetually weakened institutions in Nigeria necessitate a context-specific approach to HRM that considers these limitations.

The institutional context of the case study revealed some critical challenges, such as socio-economic and socio-cultural issues, such as low-skilled graduates, political instability, corruption, inflation, and endemic poverty. This study highlights key factors that affect SMEs in Nigeria and addresses a gap in the literature which largely ignores TM in SMEs in the context of developing countries. Kostova (1999) interprets country-level impacts with a focus on institutional rather than cultural context. However, this study emphasised both country-level and cultural factors. Elements within the institutional context encompass laws, regulations, social knowledge, values, beliefs, and norms. The succeeding sections look at the main contextual challenges SMEs face in Nigeria.

Fig 5.7 Summary of institutional factors as identified in the study.



Source: *The Researcher*

Most of the prominent macro-level challenges faced by SMEs in Nigeria can be linked to overall increased competition in the Nigerian labour market. Nigeria is no exception to the ongoing ‘war for talent.’ The competition for talent is expected to intensify in future years due to increased emigration and increased internal competition for talent. While the Nigerian labour market is seen as saturated with job seekers, this study finds that there are acute shortages of high-quality candidates; this makes it even harder for SMEs to recruit and retain talent. The study highlights the problem of talent and skills mismatch among job seekers. It is suggested that job seekers often lack the skills required by employers and that many job seekers lack the basic skills required for most job roles. Academics (Hudoyo, 2014; Minbaeva & Colling, 2013; Siow, 2013) blame the ‘war for talent’ in developing countries on the shortage of high quality, while the ‘war for talent’ in developed countries is blamed on demographic factors. The next section looks at the skills and talent mismatch in the labour market.

5.8.3 Skills Gap, Skills, and Talent Mismatch

The lack of essential skills among Nigerian graduates is a significant issue. The lack of essential skills among job seekers and graduates in the Nigerian Labour market is frequently related to weaknesses in the Nigerian education system, leading to an exponential talent gap between the skills possessed by candidates and the skills needed by organisations to compete across a variety of sectors (Ayonmike et al., 2015; Ekundayo et al., 2012; Okolie et al., 2019; Oye et al., 2011). Many candidates and graduates were seen to lack essential communication, IT, interpersonal and analytical skills.

A HR manager in the finance sector (Finco) expressed concerns about the low quality of candidates.

“Can you imagine that only three out of 10 candidates actually match what you are looking for? And I think it reflects the kind of universities we have in Nigeria. Most times, when I hire qualified people, they were actually people who schooled abroad” (finco1).

HR personnel identified the lack of basic soft skills among job seekers and attributed this to the fact that educational institutions do not teach or aid students in acquiring soft skills.

“On a few occasions where we rank CVs, when you see the guys on top, with first-class grades and great academic performances, and you interview them, their personal skills as well as their soft skills are lacking. This is the norm in a lot of cases in Nigeria” -(Java.com 1).

The lack of personal and soft skills is seen as a barrier to the growth and development of high potential. Skills such as interpersonal communication skills, teamwork abilities, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills are increasingly seen as crucial to an organisation's success.

An HR Manager highlighted the lack of work ethic among job seekers. She questioned Job seeker's approach to work, wondering if they are determined to work or what their philosophy to work is.

Additionally, she expressed the difficulty in finding people who matched the organisational needs in terms of competency. Statistics show that Nigerian educational institutes produce an average of 1.8 million graduates yearly. However, only a fraction of these graduates are employable. This has left the Nigerian labour market saturated with unemployed/unemployable graduates. Our participants established that alongside the economic recession faced by the country, job seekers' lack of basic skills or competencies results in a high level of unemployment. This is particularly detrimental to SMEs who do not have the financial capabilities or resources to train and invest in talent, should they decide to make do with the available pool of candidates. Two HR Practitioners in the oil and gas and renewable energy sectors, respectively, explained that getting graduates or job seekers is not so much a problem. However, getting skilled or talented workers based on organisational requirements is almost impossible:

“There is a dichotomy between the demand and supply of talent. Generally, there seems to be a lot of job seekers, but when it comes to talent, the demand is way higher than the supply” (Petrocom)

And for the renewable energy sector:

“The supply of talent is way less than the demand. The labour market is overly populated with graduates, but when we speak about talent, there are only a handful of them” (Planet Safe 2)

Based on participants' views, the main challenge of the skills and talent mismatch presents itself in the fact that the requirements of human capital are constantly evolving in line with global trends. The implication of this global evolution on recruitment and selection is significant in the sense that talent must possess new, current, and evolving sets of skills and knowledge to meet the needs of employers, including analytical thinking and problem-solving skills, for example.

A recruitment Officer in the IT sector highlighted the theoretical focus of learning in the Nigerian education system. When asked why they find it difficult to get competent staff, she stated that.

“Um, I think it has to do with education. Um, education in Nigeria is basically theoretical. So, when people graduate and come out of school, it is difficult to adapt what they have learnt to the work environment. They come with a lot of theoretical knowledge and no practical knowledge of how they should implement what they are supposed to do day to day. You find that candidates lack simple skills like analytical or problem-solving skills” -(Java.com 1).

Other participants warn of an impending worse shortage of quality workers due to the state of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. They stated that:

“The education system is dwindling. Universities are constantly on strike; the quality of graduates will probably drop even lower than it is at the moment” (Java.com3).

Another HR Head in the Finance sector commented:

“The shortage of competent talent will only get worse as the educational system in Nigeria gets worse” (Planet Safe 2).

Looking at the above findings, it can be concluded that a pressing challenge in talent management is the skills gap, which leads to difficulties in filling job vacancies because there is a shortage of talent possessing the required skills to succeed (Makarius & Srinivasan, 2017). As shown above, during the interviews, most HR personnel and team leaders reported a heavy mismatch between Job Seekers in the Nigerian Labour Market and Essential skills required by SMEs (Vandeplas & Thum-Thysen, 2019 refer to this concept as macro-economic skills match).

It must be noted that although the skills gap has been attributed to several factors, particularly in the education system (Makarius & Srinivasan, 2017), the flawed nature of the education systems shows the need for educational entities to ensure that their curriculums and teaching styles are designed in a way that they reflect future needs of the global market, other factors like the volatile, uncertain and rapidly changing global environment makes it hard for learning institutes to remain up to date with the specific skills required by employers of labour and the labour market in general (Bessen, 2014). Likewise, Puckett et al. (2020) highlight a lack of communication between the private sector and educational institutes, leading to enormous gaps between business needs and the goals of educational bodies. They further blame the struggle to find quality staff on the mismatch between the knowledge and skills possessed by individuals and the requirements of available jobs as opposed to blaming it on a shortage of potential employees (Puckett et al., 2020).

Skills mismatch, as problematic as it is for SMEs in developing economies, is even more problematic for Nigerian SMEs. According to the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment (FMLE, 2017), employers of labour in Nigeria have incessantly complained about the amount of time it takes to train and bring their recruits up to industry standards. They further claim that the increase in joblessness highlights the challenges of the mismatch between the skills provided by educational institutions and those demanded by industries, which are crucial for fostering growth. On the other hand, job seekers have criticised employers’ unrealistic expectations of work experience while at the same time not creating mentoring opportunities at the start of a new job (ILO, 2019). A study by Aminu (2019)

indicates that the likelihood of unemployment resulting from skills mismatch varies depending on the graduates' field of expertise. Specifically, graduates with backgrounds in medical sciences, engineering, social sciences, and business have a lower probability of unemployment in Nigeria. However, graduates specialising in arts, science, law, and education face a higher probability of unemployment. This indicates the importance of aligning educational programs with industry requirements to curb skill mismatch and reduce unemployment rates (Kayode, 2023).

5.9 Socio-economic issues -Lack of interest in Training and Vocational Education and Training

One critical challenge faced in Nigeria is the underdevelopment and undersupply of a competent workforce (Inyiagu, 2014). The study identifies a lack of interest in promoting Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

A Manager highlighted the impact of societal standards on young people and their career choices, stating that:

“it's difficult to get very good, qualified truck mechanics. So, you will discover that there are a lot of breakdowns and repairs to our trucks. They told me that in a few years to come, we will only be able to get skills from other neighbouring African countries to fill roles in areas like tailoring and mechanics- basically in vocational areas. Nigerian youths would rather strive for white-collar careers that provide a greater chance of being employed by MNCs and Western countries” (Planet Safe 4).

Due to society's view of TVET, many young people only see it as their last option, which contributes to a limited supply of technicians and craftsmen; this, in turn, leads to an increase in low skills, unemployment, and poverty. Subsequently, the labour market becomes saturated with too many graduates (albeit mostly of low quality) compared to the sparse number of employment opportunities. Thus, many young people are faced with the decision to emigrate in search of greater employment and career opportunities. Research data revealed that the private sector is experiencing increasing acute shortages of people with technical.

According to Egwu (2009), through strategically implemented education and training initiatives, HRD can make a significant contribution to the promotion of the interests of individuals, businesses, the economy, and society within a nation (Egwu, 2009). It is established that a properly planned TVET system will aid productivity, improve competitiveness, and encourage entrepreneurship (Inyiagu, 2014). One cannot overemphasise the importance of TVET programmes as they are skill-based programmes structured to prepare trainees/students for direct entry into specific occupations or trades. Owodunmi (2008) reports that TVET implementation systems are highly suited to assist young

people in acquiring the skills and capabilities needed to create wealth and reduce Nigeria's poverty rate. Research suggests (Inyiagu, 2014; Egwu, 2009; Owodunmi, 2008 and so on) that TVET promotes the acquisition and development of skills, attitudes and abilities which help people to engage in several legitimate income generation activities. Through the acquisition of these skills, people are equipped with the ability to structure their lives as well as work situations. The neglect of TVET over the years has contributed to the high unemployment and poverty rate amongst Nigerian youths, as many of them lack the basic job skills required by employers. Egwu (2009) emphasised that the mediocre quality of graduates is a barrier to economic development in Nigeria, and to promote sustainable job creation and the competitive ability of Youths, the entire TVET system must be designed according to the labour market and the employment needs (Eberhard, 2006).

This suggests that to meet the evolving demands of industries and the current challenges of the global economic environment, countries need to invest more in TVET programmes. UNESCO's (1999) report stated that greater emphasis needs to be placed on the integration of education and the workplace and that changes in training and education are essential to economic development. In a report by ILO (2019), it was anticipated that the Nigerian government would consider the establishment of a functional education and skills training system by aligning different sectors (education, industry, and ICT) and improving the TVET system in Nigeria, thereby increasing the overall skills levels and technical competences of Nigerian youths. The Federal Government of Nigeria has initiated certain reforms aimed at improving the development of skills and technical competencies amongst young people; reforms such as the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF)- a system aimed at facilitating the comparison and understanding of qualifications, both formal and informal, • Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs) and Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs)- privately-owned but government approved institutions aimed at equipping secondary school leavers and workers with the professional, technical and vocational skills based on industry needs, • National Occupational Standards (NOS)- whose sole aim is to assist managers in workforce planning, quality control, identification of skills gaps and improving productivity, • Open, distance and flexible e-learning (ODFEL)-aimed at creating access to knowledge and skills acquisition (ILO, 2019). Despite all of these attempts at overhauling the skills acquisition system in Nigeria, discontinuity, triggered by political instability, continues to act as an impediment to the actualisation of the intended aims. Another factor that continues to disrupt the implementation of skills acquisition plans is the highly unstable and dwindling state of the Nigerian economy.

Comparative institutional theory underscores the importance of societal contexts, such as culture, religion, and ethnicity in shaping organisational HR decisions (Glover et al., 2014). These societal factors significantly influence an organisation's ability to attract and select talent, develop effective working

conditions, and manage internal relationships (Aksom et al., 2020). Nigeria's political and economic structures, deeply influenced by its colonial past, further complicate HRM practices. The interdependence of Nigeria's political, financial, and educational systems means that changes in one institution inevitably affect others, with repercussions for organisational decision-making (Zhai & Su, 2019). In this context, HRM practices are heavily influenced by the country's weak institutional environment, which limits the effectiveness of HR strategies and complicates the implementation of best practices (Uzonwanne, 2012). Consequently, firms operating in Nigeria must adopt context specific approaches that account for the limitations of the institutional environment, particularly in addressing the talent management challenges that arise from these constraints.

The next section identifies the impact of the Nigerian economy on Talent acquisition and Talent management in general.

5.9.1 Impact of the Current State of the Nigerian Economy on Talent Management

SMEs, as with larger organisations, are affected by contextual factors, ranging from political, social, and cultural to economic factors. HRM practices are carried out within a social, political, legal, and economic, social, political environment. Therefore, the need to develop considerable insight into local conditions in order to understand the processes and problems of national HRM models cannot be overemphasised (Hofstede, 1993). As the most populous Black country, Nigeria possesses an abundance of human resources, making it attractive to businesses. Thus, as organisations increase their presence in Nigeria, the knowledge of HRM practices and, more importantly, the factors that affect HRM in Nigeria have become crucial to their success. During our interviews, participants highlighted the impact of the national economy on the performance of their organisations.

An HR Manager in the real estate sector expressed their organisation's inability to invest as much finance as they would love to into their talents due to the economic situation of the nation:

"The current economic state of the country does not leave room for enough profit making, so we are hardly able to spend as much as we would need to on our talents" (Homify 1).

Many SMEs prioritise their finances and immediate and direct Return on investment (ROI) in the form of profit-making. According to participants, small and medium businesses hardly make enough profits to cover employees' wages, let alone invest in talents—whose ROI is long-term. Although human resources are the bedrock of organisations, when faced with a choice between spending their already scarce resources on their personnel's development and spending on other avenues of profit-making, these businesses are forced to do the latter.

Another participant stated that their organisation had resorted to an all-around cost-cutting spree due to the state of the Nigerian economy. They said:

“The national economy at any given time determines how much we can spend on our employees. We are forced to spend less in all aspects of our business because the Nigerian economy has not been favourable to small businesses” (HR Manager-Petrocom).

As all case study organisations are in the service industry, it is understandable that the reduction in the spending power of the Nigerian population would impact their profit-making and, ultimately, their spending. A participant corroborated the above quotes by stating that their organisation had revised their yearly budget in a bid to cut down on financial excesses. They also cited that mass migration, as witnessed in Nigeria, is also a direct repercussion of the poor economic state of the nation. They said: *“The economy in Nigeria is not encouraging. The urge to migrate is at an all-time high. I think the economy would get worse, and SMEs would probably face more financial troubles. Take this year, for instance; inflation has become even worse. Our executives have just finished our strategy outlook for 2022. And it is obvious that they need to adjust our budget as we cannot afford most of the items that we would usually include in our budget.” (Java.com 1)*

From 2000 to 2014, Nigeria’s economy witnessed a wide and sustained growth of over 7% annually. This growth was attributed to favourable global conditions and macroeconomic and structural reforms. However, between 2015-2022, growth rates plummeted, and GDP per capita fell flat due to monetary and exchange rate policy distortions, increased fiscal deficits and unforeseen circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Nigeria’s inflation reached 31.7% in February 2024 (World Bank, 2024). This, in combination with sluggish growth, has sent millions of Nigerians into poverty. The World Bank advises that the poverty rate is expected to increase between 2024 and 2025 before stabilising in 2026. World Bank (2018a) highlights the lack of economic diversification and an ineffective social redistribution system as significant contributors to the increasing level of poverty in Nigeria. As of 2017, an estimated 49.1 per cent of Nigerians lived below the poverty line, highlighting the pervasive nature of poverty in the country. This situation has led to numerous vulnerabilities and weak human development outcomes (IMF, 2019, cited in ILO, 2019).

As deduced from participants’ statements, the impact of the economic decline on SMEs cannot be overemphasised. In its 2021 report, the SMEDAN stated that the majority of Nigerian SMEs die before their fifth anniversary. They further blamed this low performance and high failure rate amongst SMEs on certain factors in Nigeria's business environment: legal, regulatory pressures, limited access to

funding, government policies, lack of infrastructure, heavy tax and regulatory burdens and a host of others plague the Nigerian business environment (Ugwu et al., 2023). The Nigerian economic environment encompasses all the external economic factors that influence the purchasing behaviour of both consumers and businesses, thereby impacting the performance of an organisation (Akingunola, 2019). These are usually beyond an organisation's control and may either occur on a large scale or a small scale. The change in the Nigerian economic environment has been extremely rapid, unpredictable, and complex in its form and its impact on the activities of a business in Nigeria and, most significantly, on SMEs (Gberevbie & Isiaewe-Ogbari, 2017). Consumers and clients have exhibited complex behaviours both in local and global markets. Larger Competitors have applied various strategies to help them adapt to the ever-changing and uncertain nature of their business environment. Although the dynamicity of a business environment sometimes provides opportunities for growth, development, creation of value and wealth, it can also pose severe threats (Ugwu, 2023). A 2021 study by Emeh investigated the inflation rate and entrepreneurship development in developing economies. The study only identified a negative effect of inflation on the job-creating capabilities of Nigerian SMEs (Emeh, 2021).

It must be noted that whilst economic factors impact SMEs' ability to effectively manage their scarce talents, socio-cultural factors also have a significant influence on how Nigerian businesses manage their human resources. The next section briefly looks at how socio-cultural factors affect TM in Nigerian SMEs.

5.10 Socio-cultural issues

Nigeria is a diverse nation with a plethora of subcultures—however, the general Nigerian public exhibits extremely similar characteristics regarding cultural values and so on. Chapters 2 (pages 21-23) and 3(Pages 113-116) discuss the national culture as it is in Nigeria. It was highlighted that Nigeria scores high on the masculinity dimension. A score of 60 indicates that Nigerian society is driven by competition, achievement, and success (Hofstede, 1980). Success is defined by the winner or best in any field. This is the direct opposite of a feminine society whose dominant societal values are care and quality of life, where success is determined by the quality of life. The chapters also highlight Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension, which describes the degree to which members of a society feel threatened by unknown or uncertain situations (Hofstede, 1980; Fred, 2013; Reiche et al., 2019). Hofstede's cultural tool does not specify where Nigeria lies on this dimension. However, with a score of 55, one can say the country gravitates more towards a high level of uncertainty avoidance than a low one.

5.10.1 The Nigerian Youth's attitude to work and Mobility.

The Y generation (millennials) and Generation Z (Post-millennials) have indeed transformed the dynamics of the job market with their unique attitudes and preferences. It was identified that Nigerian youths' attitudes and mobility were significant factors affecting talent management. Below are some key insights regarding the "Y" and "Z" generation's impact:

- **Less Loyalty and Increased Job Mobility:** Our participants perceived millennials as less loyal compared to previous generations, with a greater tendency to switch jobs more frequently if certain criteria are not met. These criteria extend beyond financial incentives and may include opportunities for career advancement or a better work-life balance. This is reflected in a manager's response below:

"A lot of good talent has left, young people leaving for greener pastures. That is not really primarily because organisations are doing so badly to retain their staff; it's generally because of the environment (Homify).

- **Higher Expectations:** Younger generations have been raised in environments where they received substantial praise and recognition from their parents and guardians. This upbringing has instilled in them a sense of independence and lofty expectations, both in terms of work and life. They seek fulfilling careers that align with their personal values and offer opportunities for growth and development.

"Another vital challenge is brain drain. Everyone has plans to leave Nigeria as soon as possible to search for greener pastures abroad. I am in the process of getting a job abroad" (Employee in the Oil and Gas industry-Petrocom 1).

- **Desire for Work-Life Balance:** Unlike previous generations, younger generations prioritise work-life balance and value flexibility in their work arrangements. They are more inclined to seek employers who offer flexible working hours and environments that accommodate their lifestyle preferences.

"The way everybody around me has left the country. Everybody I used to talk to in the last year, I mean like 50% of them, have left Nigeria. The way it is going at the moment, we will not be able to fill in some specialised roles. We already struggle to fill these roles" (Employee in the Finance sector-Finco2).

- **Different Perspectives on Career Stability:** Younger generations have distinct perspectives on career stability compared to previous generations. They are less likely to remain with the same

organisation for an extended period and may prioritise personal fulfilment and growth over long-term tenure with a single employer. Understanding and effectively managing the expectations and preferences of millennials is crucial for organisations seeking to attract, retain, and engage top talent in today's competitive job market. Adjusting talent management strategies to accommodate the unique needs of this generation can help organisations build a motivated and loyal workforce.

Participants agree that this age group is inclined to explore new, better opportunities and are less tolerant and patient. They further argue that this generation of job seekers is attracted and motivated by better pay offers, better work environments, better development opportunities, and more responsibility. An HR Manager stated that better pay and financial benefits are the main reasons behind the mass migration of young, skilled job seekers overseas. They stated that:

“We can see that people are leaving the country. Six out of seven of our colleagues have all left. Four went to Canada; the remaining ones went to the UK. Talent is depressing out of Nigeria for so many reasons. Of course, the economy is not helping. Some people, out of frustration, are forced to travel abroad. If you also compare what you are earning in Naira to what non-graduates in the UK earn, you will be frustrated, and you will think about why you are wasting your time (Finco 1).

Another Manager concurred with the above statement, highlighting the alarming rate of migration and brain drain in the country. They reported that:

“We have a lower supply of qualified employees because of brain drain. This avalanche is happening with moving to north Canada, Australia, the UK, the USA, and all that. It is mostly technical talent that is leaving, so it’s an issue and a challenge for organisations within the IT space to retain and acquire talent” (Java.com 3).

Between 1990 and 2013, the population of Nigerians residing outside the country more than doubled, from 465,932 to 1,030,322. By 2013, approximately 61.4% of these emigrants were living in more developed regions, representing a notable shift from previous years. This trend is primarily driven by employment opportunities, particularly attracting educated, skilled, and professional individuals to these economically prosperous regions. Conversely, there has been a decline in the number of Nigerians relocating to less developed areas, attributed to economic challenges and social unrest in various countries. Emigration to less developed regions in Africa and Asia typically consists of individuals engaged in business, trade, and construction, with many being short-term migrants. Despite recent increases in migration to China, India, and other Asian countries, the overall number of Nigerian emigrants to these regions remains relatively low.

In 2013, 35.6% of Nigerian emigrants lived in African countries, 34.2% in Europe, and 26.4% in North America, with the remaining residing in Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania. Nigerian migrants in Africa predominantly settle in West Africa and Middle Africa, with destinations such as Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana being among the most preferred. In Europe, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Germany, and Ireland are the top destinations for Nigerian emigrants. Notably, the United States continues to be the most sought-after destination for Nigerian migrants, with approximately 25% of all emigrants relocating there. This preference underscores the attractive employment opportunities, educational prospects, and social and cultural integration offered by the United States compared to other countries.

The number of Nigerian asylum-seekers has seen a significant increase, rising from 8,294 in 2006 to 15,022 in 2008. European countries remain the primary destinations for Nigerian asylum-seekers, with Italy, Ireland, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Spain being the most favoured destinations. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) revealed that in 2013, Nigeria had over 17,000 asylum-seekers in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. This notable increase in asylum-seekers was primarily attributed to the ongoing crisis in Nigeria's northeastern region. The conflict, mainly driven by the activities of groups like Boko Haram, has led to widespread displacement and forced many individuals to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, where they hope to find safety and assistance from international humanitarian organisations such as the UNHCR.

In conclusion, labour migration and brain drain pose significant challenges for many developing countries like Nigeria in the era of globalisation. Nigerian students often have opportunities to pursue their studies abroad, but upon completion, many do not return home. This results in the loss of talented citizens for the country and its institutions (Bonga & Dafiaghor, 2014).

In less developed countries, the adverse effects of brain drain include losing high-skilled labour and human capital to foreign labour markets. These effects can manifest in several ways:

- Insufficient workforce assets to support institutions within the country.
- Loss of investment in the education of migrated individuals.
- Expenditure on employing expatriates to replace the migrated workforce.
- Production of graduates with inadequate skills from higher institutions.
- High lecturer-to-student ratios in tertiary institutions nationwide.
- Elevated levels of illiteracy.

Several participants pointed to the overwhelming presence of favouritism and nepotism (Man-know-man) in their organisations. This has been described as an ingrained aspect of the Nigerian culture as people are hired and promoted based on their connections to top management. According to HR practitioners, this poses a significant interference in their bid for credible recruitment, which in turn impacts talent management. This is because, in most cases, there is little regard for qualifications, competence or even commitment to the job. They report that this has massively affected the ability of organisations to build up and develop a talent pool consisting of high-potential and high-performing individuals.

Summarily, In the Nigerian workplace, socio-cultural diversity significantly influences the selection of HRM practices (Fajana et al., 2011; Fajana & Ige, 2009; Owoyemi et al., 2011). Factors such as culture, language, religion, and gender differences are crucial considerations in the recruitment and utilisation of employees (Owoyemi et al., 2011). Additionally, Nigeria's high-power distance is evident in its cultural context (Owoyemi et al., 2011). Nigerian culture is deeply rooted in family orientation, which extends to workplace relationships, emphasising the significance of familial ties (Wayar, 2015). Consequently, Nigeria's high-contact culture emphasises greetings, friendship, and love as essential aspects of interpersonal interactions. The concept of seniority is ingrained in Nigerian culture, leading to employees often refraining from expressing disagreement with their managers' opinions out of respect for elders, age, and status (Owoyemi et al., 2011). Furthermore, the prevailing masculinity of Nigerian culture influences the locus of control and dimensions of work, shaping the work models and approaches to people management within Nigerian organisations (Adegboye, 2013).

5.11 Socio-Political Issues and Their Effect on TM in Nigerian SMEs

Nigeria has suffered from political instability and a lack of continuity of government initiatives due to heightened political opposition and rivalry. This sort of uncertainty is even worse every eight years (when there is a planned change in government both at national and state levels).

An employee expressed heightened concern about the 2023 presidential election and its effect on business revenue, which in turn affects the organisations' ability to compete against larger organisations that are not dependent on the national economic state for their profit. They stated that:

“There is a political factor. For instance, 2023 is just around the corner. Elections are fast approaching, and when they are fast approaching, there is a lot of tension and uncertainty. Especially in a country like Nigeria, there is always the element of political instability, and people tend to leave Nigeria due to this instability. This instability also leads to financial hardships in the country. Spending power reduces, and businesses suffer” (Java.com3).

Several publications (Abdullahi et al., 2023; Aluko, 2021; Folarin, 2021; Obiora et al., 2022; Kano, 2020; Osoba, 1996; Ugbudu, 2020, and many more) have confirmed the high level of corruption witnessed in Nigeria. A report by the PWC states that corruption is a pressing issue affecting public finances, business investment and the standard of living in Nigeria, warning that if not dealt with as a matter of urgency, corruption could cost up to 37% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2030. An interviewee highlights how their organisation is affected by corrupt practices as business owners are obliged to engage in bribery and corruption in order to get business contracts and other favors from government parastatals.

They stated that:

“Government policies also play a huge role and are a major challenge; I don’t know if it’s because Nigeria is in a bad place politically and economically. So, I think it has to do with policies around what you can and cannot do, such as brown envelopes (if you want to get business opportunities, you have to “do something”). So that’s the corruption in our system. So, I think it’s one of the external factors, government policies, and corruption, which are very high. It hinders businesses from progressing.” (Finco 2)

An interviewee highlighted their organisation’s struggle with attracting and retaining talent due to their location in the Northern part of the country. As this region has faced multiple attacks from the Boko Haram insurgents and other violent groups, it is quite understandable that employees are very sceptical about work-related visits to the affected regions. They reported that:

“Our sites are mostly located in the northern parts of Nigeria. Getting Talents to do interstate trips, especially because of the long-standing security situation in the country, hasn’t been easy” (Planet Safe 2).

Political instability is a recurrent challenge in Nigeria, significantly impacting national unity and peaceful coexistence. Rooted in social injustices and government ineffectiveness, political instability leads to destructive consequences such as loss of lives, property, and government revenue. Despite Nigeria's status as the "giant of Africa," the country grapples with persistent conflict and violence stemming from historical injustices inherited from colonial rule. Weak institutional structures and power struggles exacerbate instability, hindering national development despite abundant resources. Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has struggled to achieve political stability and economic prosperity, plagued by poverty, corruption, and societal indiscipline. Political instability has persisted since independence, exacerbated by sporadic violence and regional tensions, leading to bombings, killings, and political uncertainty. This ongoing instability undermines Nigeria's social and economic

progress, necessitating concerted efforts to address underlying grievances and promote peace and stability. Nigeria, characterised by its diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural composition, is prone to conflicts (Agagu, 2004).

Since gaining independence, the nation has grappled with numerous crises and violence, undermining its unity and stability despite its wealth in human and natural resources. Political instability has been a persistent challenge, manifesting in various forms such as military coups, electoral disputes, religious and ethnic conflicts, militant uprisings, kidnapping, corruption, and ongoing Boko Haram insurgency. The aftermath of the prevalence of political crises reflects troubling trends in the nation's political landscape, driven by widespread frustration, unemployment, and corruption. Electoral violence, often involving weapons and intimidation tactics, further exacerbates instability, with politicians resorting to thuggery and coercion to advance their interests at every stage of the electoral process. The ramifications of political instability in Nigeria are profound and multifaceted. Continuous violent conflicts over several decades have left the nation grappling with significant challenges. Firstly, there is a notable underutilisation of both natural and human resources, exacerbating issues such as poverty and hunger. This inefficiency hampers economic development and perpetuates socioeconomic disparities within the country. Additionally, political instability invariably results in loss of life. Major conflicts like the Nigerian Civil War have claimed the lives of millions, while ongoing insurgencies continue to take a toll on the populace. The loss of skilled and talented individuals further undermines economic productivity and growth, particularly in vital sectors such as the oil industry.

Furthermore, political unrest disrupts government revenue generation, primarily through industrial strikes that halt economic activities and commerce. These strikes, such as the 1993 national strike and the 2012 strike over petroleum price increases, severely impact revenue streams, exacerbating fiscal challenges for the government. Moreover, political instability deters foreign investment, as prospective investors are deterred by the risk associated with an unstable environment. Stability and security are essential prerequisites for attracting foreign capital and fostering economic growth. Conversely, persistent conflict and insecurity deter investors, hindering the country's economic progress. Additionally, religious, ethnic, and political conflicts contribute to the displacement of populations, leading to an influx of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The Nigerian political and economic landscape poses significant challenges to the survival and growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These challenges include reluctance among commercial banks to extend credit, inadequate managerial skills among entrepreneurs, poor infrastructure (such as roads, electricity, and water supply), ongoing political and ethnoreligious conflicts, multiple taxation, insecure foreign exchange, corruption, and unfavourable government

policies (Etuk et al., 2014; Osotimehin et al., 2012). Moreover, the prospect of political shifts and alterations to state-owned enterprises, along with ambiguous legal regulations, influences the distinctive management approach adopted by Nigerian organisations. It is widely acknowledged that a nation facing recurring crises annually cannot be deemed politically stable. The crisis, which led to a division within the country's Police Forces, was cited as the cause of the Abuja Police Headquarters bombing, resulting in the deaths of six individuals, including police officers and civilians. Essentially, this crisis fosters governmental instability, which is detrimental to sustainable political development (The Nation News, 2011).

5.12 Linking Relevant Theories to Talent Management Challenges in Nigeria

Hofstede's cultural dimensions highlight key societal traits influencing the workplace. Nigeria's high masculinity score reflects a competitive, achievement-driven society where success is often equated with material wealth and status. This cultural trait devalues vocational and technical roles in favour of white-collar jobs, exacerbating brain drain as individuals seek opportunities abroad that align with societal definitions of success. The relatively moderate uncertainty avoidance score reveals a cultural aversion to unpredictable or unstable circumstances, pushing many Nigerians to migrate to countries with greater political stability and economic opportunities (Hofstede, 1980; Fred, 2013; Reiche et al., 2019).

The GLOBE framework, with its focus on cultural practices, offers additional insights. Nigeria's high-power distance reinforces hierarchical structures where dissent is discouraged, limiting opportunities for innovation and collaboration. Collectivist cultural traits further perpetuate favouritism and nepotism, as familial and social obligations often outweigh professional merit. These cultural factors contribute to inefficiencies in talent acquisition and management (House et al., 2004; Dickson et al., 2003).

Social exchange theory (SET) posits that reciprocal exchanges between employers and employees govern workplace relationships. In Nigerian SMEs, the lack of investment in training and development disrupts this exchange, as employees do not perceive a fair return for their contributions. The absence of reward schemes, development opportunities, and clear career pathways reduces employee commitment and discourages high performance (Blau, 1964). Interviewees highlighted instances where talented individuals chose to disengage because they observed that rewards were tied to personal relationships rather than merit. This lack of reciprocity undermines employee trust and organisational loyalty, resulting in disengagement and turnover (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

The institutional theory highlights how external pressures shape organisational behaviour. In Nigeria, weak formal institutions and socio-economic instability constrain SME investments in structured HR practices. These constraints reinforce reliance on informal, hierarchical systems that neglect employee development, perpetuating misalignment between organisational and HR strategies (North, 1990). Nepotism and resource constraints reflect institutional weaknesses that discourage adherence to meritocratic principles in TM. Institutional theory sheds light on these practices by emphasising the influence of formal and informal norms on organisational behaviour. The study reveals that Nigerian SMEs lack adequate institutional frameworks to support structured talent management (TM) practices, creating an environment where HR initiatives are undervalued (North, 1990). The absence of incentives, industry standards, or government support for HR capacity building leads to management viewing training as a cost rather than an investment. Furthermore, socio-cultural practices such as nepotism, where promotions and rewards are based on personal relationships rather than merit, reflect informal institutional norms that undermine formal HR processes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This discourages high performers from fully committing to their roles, knowing that performance might not be the basis for recognition (Howe-Walsh et al., 2023).

From a resource-based view (RBV), employees represent valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) assets. However, Nigerian SMEs often fail to view their workforce as a strategic resource, focusing instead on short-term operational efficiency over long-term human capital development (Barney, 1991). The cultural reluctance to invest in employees' growth undermines their potential as a competitive advantage. This misalignment with RBV principles limits SMEs' ability to retain high-performing talent and foster innovation (Collings, 2021). The RBV highlights the strategic significance of human capital as a source of competitive advantage. From the perspective of the resource-based view, Nigeria's human capital is a critical but underutilised resource. Brain drain depletes the availability of skilled professionals, weakening the competitive advantage of local organisations. SMEs, already constrained by poor infrastructure and limited financial resources, struggle to attract and retain talent, diminishing their capacity for innovation and growth. The loss of investment in education and reliance on expatriates to fill technical roles increase costs, undermining the development of a sustainable workforce (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). Employees with rare, valuable, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) qualities are crucial for organisational success (Barney, 1991). However, Nigerian SMEs often fail to adopt this perspective, as demonstrated by their reluctance to allocate resources for training and development. This neglect impedes their ability to build and sustain a skilled workforce, directly impacting their capacity to compete with larger, resource-rich rivals (Collings, 2021). By sidelining formal TM practices, SMEs miss opportunities to nurture internal talent as a resource that aligns with strategic goals. Additionally, the failure to establish

rewards and recognition mechanisms for high performers limits their ability to retain key talent, further weakening their resource base (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017).

Social Exchange Theory (SET) explains the migration trends and job mobility of Nigerian youth. Millennials and Generation Z, who prioritise career advancement, work-life balance, and fulfilment, often perceive a lack of reciprocity in Nigeria's labour market. Poor financial incentives, limited career growth opportunities, and socio-political instability create an imbalance between the effort expended and rewards received, pushing many to seek greener pastures abroad (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). Psychological contracts, or the unwritten expectations between employees and employers, are frequently violated in Nigeria. Many youths feel that promises of stability and opportunity are unmet due to widespread corruption, economic challenges, and political uncertainties. This breach fosters distrust, low morale, and high turnover rates. Employers' inability to provide clear paths for development and security exacerbates this breach, making it harder to retain skilled professionals (Rousseau, 1995; Conway & Briner, 2005).

In summary, Nigeria's socio-cultural and socio-political dynamics significantly impact talent management, labour migration, and workforce development. The interplay between cultural dimensions, institutional weaknesses, and RBV misalignment creates significant barriers to effective HRM and TM practices in Nigerian SMEs. Addressing these challenges requires cultural shifts and systemic reforms to strengthen institutions, reduce corruption, and align organisational practices with evolving generational values. Cultural reorientation efforts, such as promoting meritocracy and valuing technical skills, coupled with political stability and economic investments to recognise the strategic value of employees (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012), institutional reforms to support HR capacity building (North, 1990), and a commitment to leveraging human capital as a core resource for competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). These shifts can help Nigerian SMEs overcome internal and external challenges, thereby enhancing their organisational performance and sustainability.

5.13 Summary of TM in Case Study Organisations

Case 1 Finco

Finco is a medium-sized financial institution that operates a cooperative bank and a financial services business, including insurance and digital banking. The firm was established to meet the high demand for cooperative loans from individuals and entrepreneurs. Among the three medium-sized companies in our case study, Finco is the largest, employing 250 individuals.

Participants from Finco suggest that a talented employee is one who can meet and exceed the goals, objectives, and strategies laid out by the organisation. This perspective is shaped by the management's focus on profit-making and financial success. Despite having a corporate HR department, findings

indicate that talent management (TM) practices within Finco are predominantly informal, lacking proper documentation and implementation plans. Unlike other case study organisations, Finco does not experience significant labour shortages, except for top-level and specialised positions. According to a manager, this is because the Nigerian labour market is saturated with graduate marketers and cashiers, who are readily available to fill entry- and low-level positions.

To address difficulties in filling top-level positions, the company promotes internal recruitment. When suitable candidates cannot be found within the organisation, positions are contracted out, or head-hunters are employed. Training is primarily conducted on the job and is aimed at all employees, with particular emphasis on those who contribute to organisational success in terms of profit-making. The organisation's familial atmosphere, positive working environment, and industry-standard salaries are considered essential factors for attracting and retaining talented employees. Performance evaluations are conducted formally, and promotion and career progression heavily depend on individual results and the ability to contribute to the company's profit-making goals.

Drawing on Tasoulis et al. (2024), the study suggests that Finco's talent management approach represents a blend of resource creation and a profit-making focus. This aligns with Oluyombo's (2014) report on TM in Nigerian banks, which states that effective talent management is crucial, as internal recruitment is generally more cost-effective and beneficial compared to hiring external candidates who may lack familiarity with the bank's core values. Optimal talent managers can identify and utilise strong internal candidates for critical roles, whereas less effective managers might have to resort to second-tier internal talent or external candidates, a practice that is often more costly and risky for banks (Oluyombo, 2014)

Case 2 Petrocom

For the purposes of this study, the second case study company, Petrocom, is classified as a medium sized business according to SMEDAN's definition of SMEs, employing 150 individuals. HR personnel and employees interviewed view talent as individuals who demonstrate commitment, dedication, and hard work, both within and beyond their job descriptions. They emphasised that talented individuals possess special skills and technical know-how, can show initiative, and are committed to upholding the organisation's vision and mission.

Talent management (TM) practices at Petrocom are generally informal. Although management acknowledges the importance of the HR function, there is no documented TM policy or implementation plan. To establish and maintain a competitive edge in Nigeria's dynamic and competitive oil and gas market, Petrocom aims to attract and retain qualified graduates through training and development programs. These training initiatives serve two strategic purposes: enhancing

talent acquisition and acting as a long-term employee retention strategy. Graduates recruited for middle and senior management roles through trainee programs receive comprehensive management development training to equip them with the necessary competencies for current and future roles. Findings indicate that employees not recruited for long-term careers in these positions do not receive the same level of training.

The study also highlights that legislation significantly influences recruitment and training practices in the industry. Following the discovery of oil in Nigeria in 1956, most activities in the oil and gas sector were conducted by foreign companies and personnel due to the country's insufficient educational infrastructure to produce a capable workforce at all levels (Monday, 2015). To increase local ownership and control, the Nigerian government introduced the Local Content Policy Act of 2000. This Act requires companies in the oil and gas industry to employ 75% of Nigerians in managerial and professional roles within ten years of receiving their operating license. Consequently, oil and gas companies are committed to developing local skills and expertise. A major challenge identified was access to qualified and highly talented individuals with the right skill set. However, once talent is acquired, retention seems to be more easily achieved. Employees commented on the positive impact of the company's familial culture, job security, and career development opportunities on their decisions to remain with the organisation. Based on Tasoulis et al. (2024), the organisation's values are categorised as a resource-maker.

Case 3 Java.com

The third medium-sized organisation operates within the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industry, providing digital IT services such as software design, branding, IT consultancy, IT training, and digital marketing. This organisation is highly dependent on talent, as the success of its business relies entirely on the quality of its workforce. Talent is essential across all positions, with senior software engineers occupying particularly critical roles.

The study revealed that similar to many industries requiring advanced technical skills, Java.com struggles to find high-quality talent. Both management and staff define talent as individuals who possess exceptional technical skills and abilities, demonstrate commitment to organisational goals, exhibit innovation, and have strong customer relations skills. Management emphasised the necessity for talent to develop and sustain amicable relationships with clients, as a core component of the organisation's mission is to align customer expectations with their deliverables. Consequently, identifying and attracting talented software engineers is a significant talent management (TM) challenge.

Another major challenge identified by the organisation is talent retention. According to the HR Manager, the global increase in demand for talented IT staff has further exacerbated the organisation's ability to retain its skilled employees, with at least one talent leaving the company each month. To address these challenges, the organisation promotes training and development among its staff. This indicates that although they do not have formalised TM policies, their TM practices are quite informal. Key attraction techniques include offering training and development opportunities, maintaining a friendly working environment, providing flexible working conditions, and fostering a good working relationship with the CEO. Thus, the organisation is highly reliant on intrinsic motivational factors such as talent attraction and retention techniques.

Case 4 Planet safe

Planet Safe is a small organisation with approximately 60 staff members. Participants from this organisation indicated that management perceived and treated all employees as talent. However, when asked to define talent, their responses suggested that talent is viewed as individuals with high potential who show initiative, can assume leadership roles, when necessary, demonstrate a significant passion for their job, possess exceptional skills, are team players, and have strong interpersonal skills. Individuals fitting this description, mostly highly experienced engineers, were more valued and had access to more training than the rest of the staff.

The main motivational factors for these individuals included access to need-based training, a familial working environment, and flexible working conditions. Nonetheless, the study could not ascertain the effectiveness of these factors in terms of talent retention. When employees were asked if they had plans to leave the organisation, they responded affirmatively. The study suggests that while a good working environment and access to training may serve as temporary retention strategies, their long-term effectiveness cannot be verified. There were no clearly stipulated or documented talent management (TM) policies governing activities such as talent attraction, recruitment, training and development, and performance appraisals. The study suggests that recruitment was primarily based on connections, with job roles often offered to individuals based on their relationship with managers.

In theory, the company's HR practitioner claimed that they had a TM policy but, when probed further, could not provide any documents to support this claim. Thus, despite being familiar with HR buzzwords, the study suggests that TM in the organisation is not only informal but also a very vague concept in practice.

Case 5 Homify

Homify is a small family-owned business operating in the real estate sector. The Nigerian real estate market is highly customer oriented. In this case study, a key characteristic of talent within the

organisation includes possessing strong communication skills, excellent interpersonal abilities, and exceptional sales expertise. As the industry does not require a high level of technical skill, the study does not indicate a significant shortage of quality talent. HR professionals from the organisation report that they have a wide range of graduates to choose from in the labour market. However, they struggle with identifying and sourcing individuals who possess essential soft skills, such as communication abilities.

The study did not identify any formal talent management (TM) practices within the organisation. Drawing from Tasoulis et al. (2024), the organisation is categorised as a cost minimiser. This classification arises from the management's lack of resources to invest in TM practices and the apparent absence of TM bundles, indicating a lack of a straightforward approach to talent management.

5.14 Summary of Chapter

This chapter analysed and discussed the application of the concept of talent and talent management in Nigerian SMEs. The chapter specifically investigated how participating SMEs define and identify talent within the Nigerian business environment. Additionally, the chapter discusses how our case study organisations manage talent, particularly talent retention and the issues that hinder effective talent management. In order to make meaning of the collected data, the findings from the research are presented, analysed, and discussed in this chapter. The chapter commences with a recap of our research sample, highlighting its demographic composition. It then proceeds to link research questions to the semi-structured interview questions to ensure that interview questions addressed the critical research questions. The chapter further summarises the trends identified from the collected data.

Concerning the definition and identification of talent, the study finds that the concept of talent is commonly understood and extensively used to refer to individuals demonstrating exceptional potential and performance. This characterisation aligns closely with other interpretations of the talent concept and its definition. Nonetheless, upon closer examination of the specific attributes sought in talent, it becomes evident that the interviewees emphasise unique qualities. Therefore, it is concluded that the participants identified the qualities of talented employees as individuals who possess exceptional capabilities, are committed and loyal, and contribute to organisational success. Emphasis was mainly focused on both soft and technical skills.

Furthermore, the study notes that talent is defined and identified based on acquired skills rather than innate abilities. It also notes that talent refers to some workers/ positions rather than all workers. This is contradictory as interviewees state that everyone is treated as talented. However, as the interview

went on, responses indicated that only high-potential/high-performing individuals are seen as talented, as indicated in the direct quotes from participants. The study revealed that the participating SMEs adopt different strategies in a bid to cope with the most pressing TM challenge, which is talent retention. Likewise, in a report by Kroon & Paauwe (2022), When queried about their employee management strategies, small business owners stated that their approach involved a connected sequence of activities rather than isolated practices. Participating SMEs prioritise extrinsic methods of talent attraction, such as competitive pay and benefits according to industry standards. This aligns with previous research by Horwitz et al. (2003), which found that competitive pay packages are particularly effective for attracting and retaining talent. However, intrinsic motivators like building relationships, encouraging a friendly work atmosphere and familial organisational culture are also key strategies employed by case study SMEs.

Effective talent retention is achieved through a combination of efforts, including offering competitive pay, providing development opportunities, offering challenging work, and management support (Horwitz et al., 2003; Tymon Jr et al., 2010). Speaking to employees reveals that as SMEs cannot compete with larger organisations in terms of financial reward, they tend to try and make up for this disadvantage by ensuring a conducive working environment for all employees. It was also noted that crucial HR activities are focused on increasing talent retention. The study found that the definition and management of talent amongst Nigerian SMEs are influenced mainly by the experiences of the individual (the individual perception) and the perception of the organisation (value, goal, culture).

Regarding talent sourcing, it is quite disheartening that there was no identification of any potential new methods of talent sourcing amongst Nigerian SMEs. Given the stiff competition in the labour market, it is expected that SMEs will get creative and innovate new but cost-effective methods of sourcing talent as opposed to traditional recruitment methods. The study reveals that Creating a reputation for the organisation and offering management support fosters long-term motivation and encourages employees to contribute and remain in the organisation (Tymon Jr et al., 2010). Recruitment and retention of talent are identified as primary challenges for case study SMEs, with the goal being to retain the most efficient employees. Talent recruitment and development are closely linked with retention efforts. The study emphasises the importance of internal consistency in talent management, with investments needed across all HR functions (Stahl et al., 2012). Investing in developing and retaining talent is crucial for short-term and long-term success. Developing internal talent pools ensures employees are aligned with the organisation's direction and culture, leading to greater motivation to remain with the organisation. The choice of talent attraction, motivation, and

retention techniques depends on the organisation's culture, strategies, goals, and economic circumstances.

Finally, the study reveals the impact of institutional factors on Talent Management in Nigerian SMEs, highlighting serious challenges such as the rot in the Nigerian educational system, inflation, starvation, poverty, mass migration, and so on. The study discusses how all the factors mentioned above have impacted SMEs' ability to attract and retain quality employees at a time when the world at large is grappling with this dire talent shortage.

The next chapter concludes the thesis and offers recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research by summarising its findings and presenting recommendations. It outlines the research's contributions to literature, practice, policy, and methodology. The conclusions drawn from this research highlight critical insights into the topic based on comprehensive data analysis and interpretation, emphasising the significance and implications of the findings. The study responds to calls for TM to be studied in a wider range of environments and contexts (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020), which is essential as there continues to be little recognition of the impact of distinctive SMEs' characteristics on talent practice in SMEs (Jooss et al., 2022). In terms of contributions to the literature, this research offers new insights and extends existing knowledge on the subject. By building on prior studies, it enriches theoretical discourse and provides valuable additions to the academic community. Methodologically, the research is distinguished by its rigorous application of methods and techniques, which bolster the credibility and validity of the findings. This rigour not only strengthens the current methodological framework but also sets a precedent for future research in the field.

Additionally, the research addresses policymakers and stakeholders by identifying pertinent issues and challenges, guiding the development of effective policies and strategies. By highlighting areas for improvement and suggesting actionable measures, this study significantly contributes to policy discourse and the decision-making process. Furthermore, it offers practical implications by providing actionable insights and recommendations for practitioners in relevant fields, aiding informed decision making and enhancing organisational effectiveness.

Finally, the chapter acknowledges the limitations of the research methodology and scope, offering a balanced perspective on the findings and their applicability. These limitations, including constraints related to sample size, data collection methods, and external validity, may affect the generalizability of the results. The following sections summarise the research findings, which explore the conceptualisation of talent and talent management within Nigerian SMEs. The conclusions drawn are directly linked to the research objectives. While the first research objective addressed existing literature, this chapter primarily focuses on objectives 2, 3, and 4. The subsequent section will align the researcher's findings with these objectives.

6.1.1 Conclusion of Objective 2: To Critically examine how the concept of talent is applied in Nigerian SMEs.

To address this research objective, participants were asked the following questions: (a) How do you define talent? (b) Who are considered talented employees in your organisation? (c) To what extent do your talents impact the success of your business? (Please provide examples.) (d) Does your company consider some employees to be talented? If so, why do you think that is the case? (In your opinion, what does it take to be considered a talent?).

The study concludes that the concept of talent is applied variably among participating SMEs. Participants generally view 'talent' as high performers or key contributors to organisational success, aligning with their organisations' values and objectives. Emphasis is placed on soft skills, technical expertise, and abilities. This finding reflects Stahl et al. (2012), who observed that organisations adapt best practices to fit their specific strategies rather than adopting universal standards. Similarly, CIPD (2007) suggests that organisations benefit more from tailored interpretations of talent. The results also support Al Ariss et al. (2014), who argue that businesses should align talent management practices with their unique strategies and values. For most SMEs, talent is defined by an individual's exceptional skills and high performance, crucial for contributing to success in the competitive Nigerian market. SMEs need innovative and committed employees who fit the organisational culture and are willing to grow with the firm despite the challenges of working in smaller enterprises.

The main findings on talent definition are summarised below:

- Talent is context-dependent; it is a widely and ambiguously used concept in Nigerian SMEs (See section 5.4).
- Talent is the combination of acquired skills, abilities, competencies, and technical know-how (See Section 5.4.1).
- Talent is defined as the sum of passion, commitment, loyalty, and creativity (See section 5.4.2).
- In larger SMEs within the finance and oil and gas sectors, talent is identified as high performers or key contributors to organisational success (See section 5.4.3).

In summary, the participating SMEs define and identify talent based on their business needs and strategies.

6.2 Conclusion of Objective 3 - To identify the main TM (Talent Management) issues in Nigerian SMEs and to provide a conceptual contribution to the area of study.

The third research objective addressed the following questions: (a) What is the state of Talent Management (TM) conceptualisation in Nigerian SMEs? (b) What distinctive TM challenges do Nigerian SMEs face, and to what extent do they have TM policies?

To answer these questions, the study employed 12 semi-structured interview questions (see Section 5.2 for details).

The study reveals significant challenges in the Nigerian labour market due to severe talent shortages across various industries. Despite Nigeria's large, youthful population, finding skilled professionals remains challenging, particularly for senior positions requiring extensive experience and technical expertise. The shortage is especially pronounced in technical roles, contrasted with a relative abundance of entry-level staff. SMEs are disproportionately affected due to their limited resources, restricting their ability to explore talent beyond the local market. Industry-specific disparities are also noted, with sectors like shipping experiencing prolonged vacancies while the oil and gas industry faces fewer difficulties. Consequently, many organisations resort to outsourcing or hiring expatriates to fill critical roles.

In particular, the financial sector struggles with acute talent shortages and an imbalance between the supply and demand of qualified candidates for senior roles, reflecting a preference for specialised skills. Existing research (Agbai & Okechukwu, 2024; Cooke, 2021; Igwe & Kifordu, 2022) supports these findings, highlighting recruitment and retention challenges, especially in the IT sector. Key factors include heightened competition, scarcity of skilled workers, and the mobility of younger generations, who frequently change jobs for better opportunities. This "war for talent" (McKinsey, 2015) primarily arises from the scarcity of high-quality talent and SMEs' inability to compete with larger firms in compensation.

Several factors contribute to Nigeria's talent shortage, including educational deficiencies, brain drain, and a skills mismatch. This study demonstrates that an institutional approach to talent management (TM) in SMEs offers insights into how macro-level socio-economic and socio-cultural factors influence organisational practices, particularly strategic TM.

6.2. Conclusion of Objective 4: To critically examine the role of talent management in the attraction, development, and retention of employees in emerging markets.

This section summarises the findings on talent management practices within the participating SMEs, addressing two key research questions:

- a. Do SMEs adopt formal talent management (TM) policies or practices? b. How do Nigerian SMEs define, attract, develop, and retain talented employees?

As discussed in Sections 5.5–5.7, the research identified two main challenges in talent management within the case study companies: these include attraction, recruitment, and retention of talent (external factors) and Internal factors such as management’s approach to HRM and TM.

The study reveals that five out of six case study SMEs in Nigeria lack formal HRM or TM policies, yet they actively engage in informal TM practices. These SMEs rely on head-hunters, recruitment agencies, job sites, internships, and training for talent acquisition. Specialised roles, particularly in finance and oil and gas, are often outsourced. While formal policies are uncommon, informal practices such as social media recruitment, internal talent development, and digital platforms are prevalent, though formal succession planning remains limited. To address TM challenges, Nigerian SMEs adopt strategies such as competitive pay and benefits, flexible work arrangements, and fostering positive organisational cultures (Adeleye, 2018; Okeke, 2020). Employer branding is essential for recruitment and retention, helping SMEs stand out in a competitive labour market (Adeyemi, 2017). Positive organisational cultures emphasising respect, teamwork, and employee satisfaction correlate with higher retention rates (Oyejide & Akindele, 2021). SMEs focus on intangible benefits like performance recognition and a supportive work environment, which are crucial given their financial constraints (Ifeanyi & Nwachukwu, 2021).

The study suggests that SMEs prefer intrinsic rewards—such as recognition and growth opportunities—over extrinsic ones due to limited resources (Bloom et al., 2020). However, it also acknowledges the necessity of extrinsic motivators, like pay and benefits, to attract and retain talent despite economic and socio-cultural challenges. The integration of informal HRM activities with talent retention strategies underscores the importance of a supportive work environment in maintaining valuable employees.

6.3 Theoretical Contribution

This research offers significant theoretical contributions to talent management (TM) within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in emerging economies like Nigeria. While existing TM literature often focuses on larger organisations, it neglects the unique challenges faced by SMEs, where resources and formal structures differ considerably. This study addresses these gaps, providing both empirical and theoretical insights into talent identification, attraction, retention, and development in resource-constrained environments.

Another significant contribution is the focus on informal TM practices in SMEs. Previous research indicates that many SMEs lack formal TM policies, and this study confirms this within the Nigerian context (Festing & Schäfer, 2014). It further explores informal mechanisms such as relationship building, intrinsic motivation, and performance recognition, which play crucial roles in talent retention when formal structures and high financial rewards are limited (Sparrow et al., 2014). SMEs align these informal practices with their business strategies, finding that intrinsic motivators like strong interpersonal relationships and a positive work environment are more important than financial compensation in the SME context (Storey et al., 2010, 2009). The study highlights the importance of informality in developing flexible and adaptable TM strategies in SMEs (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017), which allows SMEs to respond effectively to volatile market conditions.

The study also fills a gap in TM literature by focusing on emerging economies, where TM challenges differ from those in developed economies. Nigerian SMEs face unique institutional and socioeconomic challenges, including infrastructural deficiencies and limited financial resources (Hoskisson et al., 2000). These constraints necessitate a TM approach that prioritises adaptability over rigid policies (Collings et al., 2017). Additionally, the research highlights the role of national culture in shaping TM practices. In Nigeria, strong collectivist values make relationship-building essential for talent retention (Hofstede, 1980). This finding contributes to the literature on cultural factors affecting TM, particularly in non-Western contexts (Reiche et al., 2019).

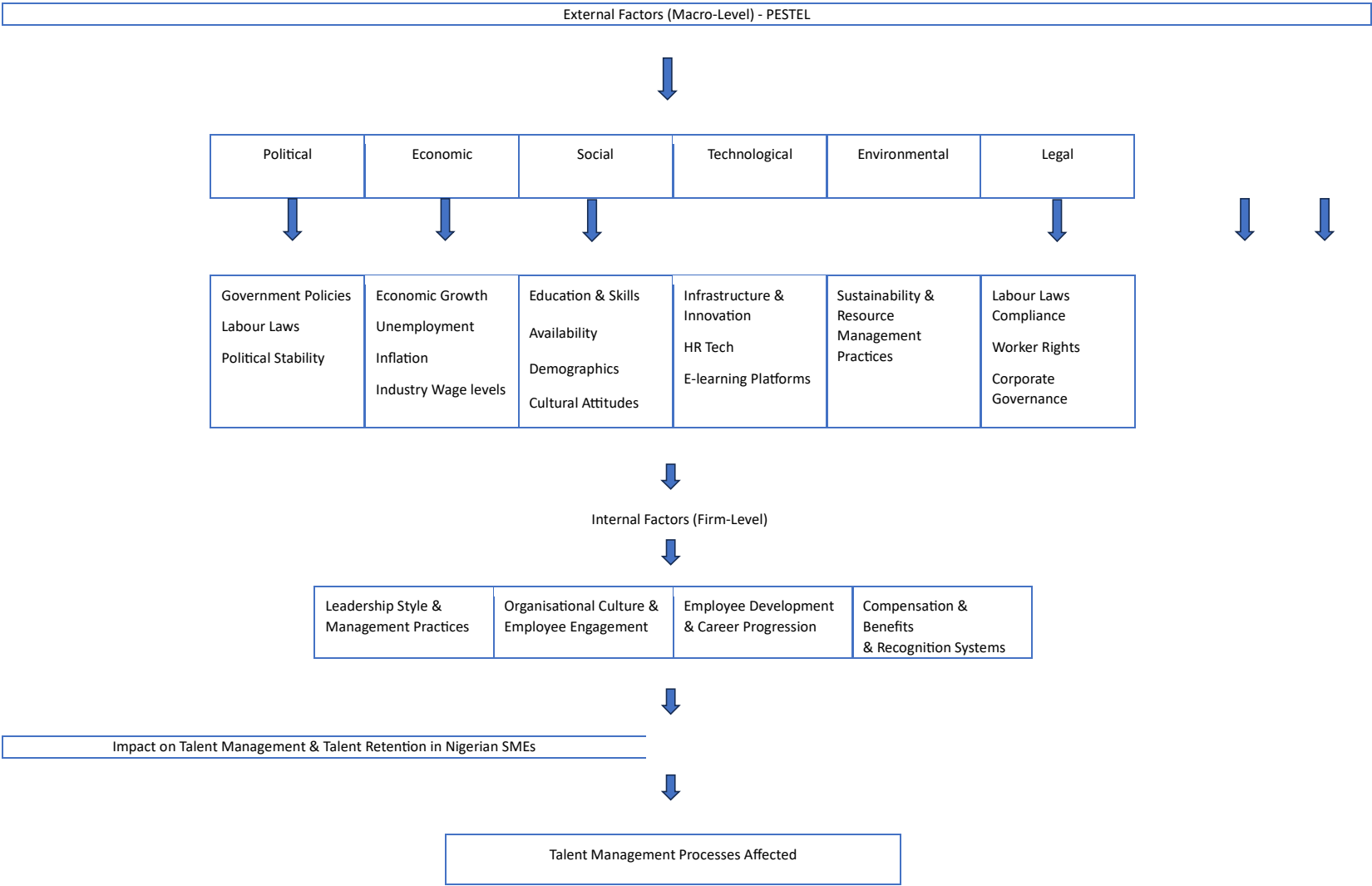
The study engages with the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Social Exchange Theory (SET). The RBV, emphasising unique and inimitable resources, has traditionally justified focusing on high-potential individuals (Barney, 1991). This research critiques the RBV's applicability in SMEs, where resources are scarce, suggesting that a more inclusive TM approach, where developing all employees is more common and reflecting the more egalitarian organisational culture and teamwork, is seen as essential to maintaining a competitive advantage (Viverde et al., 2013). Additionally, social exchange theory (SET), which focuses on reciprocal exchanges between employer and employee (Blau, 1964), is applied

in Nigerian SMEs, where non-monetary rewards such as recognition and personal growth opportunities are significant (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Methodologically, the research employs a qualitative approach and in-depth case studies of Nigerian SMEs, providing rich, context-specific insights often missing in quantitative studies (Yin, 2014). Semi structured interviews capture nuanced TM practices, offering a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by these organisations. This framework integrates **macro-level external factors** and **internal firm-specific factors** to show how they jointly influence **talent management** and **talent retention** in Nigerian SMEs. The framework highlights the interconnectedness of external and internal environments, demonstrating that SMEs must manage both to improve their talent strategies and organisational performance.

Figure 6.1 Theoretical Framework. Source: The Researcher

Theoretical Framework: Impact of Internal and Macro Factors on Talent Management and Retention in Nigerian SMEs



Recruitment	Development
Retention	Employee Motivation
Performance Management	Career Progression
Training & Learning	Employee Satisfaction



Organizational Outcomes for Nigerian SMEs	
Increased Employee Retention	Enhanced Organizational Growth
Improved Performance	Competitive Advantage
Reduced Turnover Costs	Positive Employer Branding

6.4 Conceptual Contribution

While some literature exists on talent management in large Nigerian organisations—such as financial institutions (Nzewi et al., 2015; Agbaeze et al., 2017; Ugwu & Osisioma, 2017; Kadiri et al., 2017; Nosike & Okeke, 2020; Oluyombo, 2014), tertiary institutions (Adejarebabarinde, 2022; Azotani et al., 2020; Wobodo et al., 2020; Praise & Kah, 2020), and the public sector (Adim & Leonard, 2022; Anas et al., 2020; Mary et al., 2015; Wurim, 2012; Onwuka et al., 2015; Ojogiwa & Qwabe, 2021; Omotunde et al., 2021)—a consensus on the definition of talent remains elusive. This reflects ongoing complexity and variability in how talent is perceived and managed. In the private sector, especially within SMEs in developing economies like Nigeria, which rely on both skilled and unskilled labour (Charoenrat & Harvie, 2014; Aremu & Adeyemi, 2011; Etuk et al., 2014; Robertson, 2003), understanding and applying the concept of talent is a key challenge highlighting the need to explore how talent is defined and identified in these contexts, and to determine which definitions are most relevant to such industries. This highlights the necessity for empirical research and theoretical development in talent management practices.

A significant contribution of this research is its contextual examination of TM practices in Nigerian SMEs. The study shows that Nigeria's economic, cultural, and institutional environment significantly influences how talent is defined, attracted, developed, and retained (Kamoche et al., 2004). For instance, Nigeria's collectivist culture requires different approaches to employee engagement compared to individualistic cultures prevalent in Western TM theories (Hofstede, 1980). By highlighting these cultural nuances, the study enriches the theoretical discourse on TM and offers practical implications for organisations in similar cultural contexts. Unlike large MNEs with ample resources for sophisticated TM practices, SMEs often operate with limited resources, leading to informal and ad-hoc TM practices (Cappelli, 2010). This study reveals that SMEs in Nigeria rely on these informal practices, challenging the assumption that TM best practices are universally applicable. Instead, TM strategies must be tailored to the specific needs and capabilities of SMEs in different national contexts (Festing & Schäfer, 2014). This calls for a more flexible and context-sensitive approach to TM.

The study also addresses the ambiguity surrounding the definition of "talent" in TM literature (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, & González-Cruz, 2013). In Nigerian SMEs, talent encompasses technical skills, loyalty, adaptability, and cultural fit, reflecting the unique challenges of high turnover rates and scarce skilled labour (Tansley, 2011). This broader conceptualisation of talent provides a more inclusive and culturally informed definition, challenging the narrow, Western-centric views prevalent in existing TM theories (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). By exploring TM in Nigerian SMEs, the study expands

the theoretical boundaries of TM literature, challenging Western-centric paradigms and providing insights grounded in emerging market realities (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). The findings highlight the need for a more pluralistic approach to TM theory, which accommodates diverse organisational types and national contexts. The study also contributes to the debate on universal versus context-specific TM practices, demonstrating that TM strategies must be adapted to fit specific cultural, economic, and organisational contexts (Jooss et al., 2021).

For practitioners, the study offers practical recommendations for improving TM in SMEs, emphasising cultural sensitivity, flexibility, and tailored strategies (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017; Harney & Alkhalar, 2021). As the global economy evolves, effective talent management across diverse contexts becomes increasingly essential. This research provides valuable insights for developing TM strategies in SMEs in emerging markets, bridging a critical gap in the literature and advancing both theoretical and empirical knowledge in the specific SME context.

Summarising this section, this study advances TM literature by broadening the definition of talent, emphasising the role of informal practices, and integrating cultural and institutional factors. In addition, it offers new perspectives on TM in Nigerian SMEs, setting the stage for future research and practical applications in diverse organisational and cultural settings. Further conceptual contributions are discussed in more detail below.

6.4.1 Contribution to Policy-Setting

SMEs are a vital component of Nigeria's economy, accounting for 48% of the country's GDP and employing approximately 84% of the workforce. Given their key role in driving economic development, the Nigerian government has implemented a range of policies aimed at fostering SME growth. However, despite these efforts, SMEs continue to face significant challenges that hinder the achievement of their full potential. Key among these challenges are limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, poor market access, and often a far from positive business environment. Securing financial support remains particularly problematic for SMEs in the Nigerian context, as high interest rates and stringent collateral requirements imposed by banks make it difficult for many SMEs to obtain the necessary funding to support their growth objectives. In addition, infrastructural deficiencies, such as poor road networks and unreliable power supply, impose further constraints on SMEs in achieving their growth objectives.

The current difficult economic conditions in Nigeria further constrain the growth potential and profitability of SMEs, which requires them to depend more heavily on the quality of staff they can attract to sustain their competitiveness. Attracting and retaining key talents is therefore even more critical, as SMES IN NIGERIA strive to build reliable and sustainable businesses despite the adverse economic environment. However, much of the existing research on talent management (TM) has been conducted in developed countries, with seminal studies like those by McKinsey in the U.S. coining terms such as the "war for talent." (Scullion et al., 2020). These studies identified key strategies for managing talent, which have since been adopted globally. This research seeks to adapt these concepts to the West African context, particularly within Nigerian SMEs, to enhance the understanding of talent management in this unique setting.

The findings from this research have significant implications for both businesses and policymakers. By offering insights into the definition, identification, and application of talent within SMEs, the study informs the development of educational policies and programs that better align graduate skills with the needs of the industry. This alignment is important for bridging the gap between the skills that job seekers possess and the competencies that employers demand. Moreover, the research findings could help guide national and local governments in reforming education curricula to improve graduate employability. While soft skills are critical, the global market also demands the development of hard competencies such as Data analysis, Software Development, Digital Marketing, Project management, foreign languages, and technical writing skills. Therefore, it is essential that the Nigerian government focuses on integrating both sets of skills into the academic curriculum.

National and local educational bodies, including the National Universities Commission (NUC), the Federal Ministry of Education (FME), and State Ministries of Education, play a pivotal role in curriculum development. These institutions must work together to create programmes that meet the evolving demands of key industries, ensuring that the workforce is equipped with the necessary skills to be flexible and adaptable to maintain competitiveness in volatile market conditions. This research contributes significantly to the concept of talent management in the SME context and provides guidance for the Nigerian government in preparing a workforce that aligns more closely with industry requirements.

6.4.2 Contribution to Practice

As global competition intensifies, the need for SMEs to meet the more demanding needs of key stakeholders becomes increasingly important. Identifying, developing and retaining 'talented workers' is a key challenge for SMEs as these individuals are important to enhance organisational performance and drive sustainable competitive advantage (Festing et al., 2013). In summary, this section discusses how research findings contribute to talent identification and management in the specific Nigerian SME context and advances knowledge which can help SME leaders enhance talent management practices.

Contributions to practice are outlined below:

6.4.2.1 Improve Talent Recruitment Options

The research findings underscore the importance of effective recruitment strategies in attracting and retaining key talent within SME organisations. It highlights that utilising appropriate approaches not only enhances an organisation's attractiveness to potential candidates but also ensures timely and suitable placements for vacant positions, whether through external hiring or internal development of talent. As traditional recruitment methods such as newspapers and job magazines are becoming obsolete, the study highlights the increasing importance of the integration of nontraditional channels like social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Instagram) and organisation websites to effectively reach desired talent pools.

The role of social media emerges as particularly significant in today's digital landscape, serving as a dual-purpose tool for both customer engagement and recruitment of skilled personnel. By leveraging social media, SME organisations can enhance their brand presence and appeal to potential talents. This research underscores the evolving nature of recruitment practices in Nigerian SMEs in response to technological advancements and emphasises the strategic use of social media as a pivotal component in organisational branding and talent acquisition efforts. It

also highlights the importance of internal talent development within SME organisations (Storey et al., 2010)

6.4.2.2 Developing talent pipelines

The study highlights the significance of talent in driving organisational success, emphasising the need for competencies that align with organisational culture and business requirements. The study also highlights the potential drawbacks and costs associated with hiring external talent who may not fit seamlessly with the organisation's values, culture and goals. To minimise these risks, the study advocates for the development of talent pipelines in SMEs through succession planning, enabling employees to learn and grow within the organisation, a topic which is often ignored in previous studies of TM in SMEs. The study also emphasises the importance of fostering two-way communication where employees can contribute their input in the planning and design of training needs to cover both their developmental needs and organisational goals.

This approach can help SMEs develop their skills, enhancing overall organisational effectiveness.

A key recommendation from the study is for SME organisations to prioritize the development of their internal talent pool across all levels as limited resources limits the ability of SMEs to compete for talent relative to SMEs, and the study supports previous research which shows that SMEs often compete in different labour markets than larger organisations (Kravariti et al, 2021; Krishnan and Scullion, 2017).

By focusing on what contributes to building talent internally, SME organisations can better align workforce capabilities with evolving business needs for long-term organisational success.

6.4.2.3 Improving Talent Motivation Approaches

The research findings highlight the importance of talent engagement and motivation of employees for SMEs to enhance performance and compete more effectively in volatile market conditions (Harney, 2021). While competitive pay and benefits remain prominent within large organisations, fostering positive interpersonal relationships among employees is key for talent retention in SMEs. SME leaders can enhance the motivation of employees by creating a supportive and friendly environment that encourages informal interactions and team-building activities. Recognising employee performance and providing positive informal feedback strengthens internal relationships and enhances employee morale (Dundon and Wilkinson, 2009). The study highlighted the importance of informal recognition for employees when receiving positive feedback from SME leaders. This is increasingly important in the current economic situation in Nigeria, where limited resources constrain the ability to recruit in the external market, and retention becomes a critical challenge for Nigerian SMEs as talent migrates

to organisations that offer better pay and financial benefits as HIGH inflation means that people are no longer able to live on meagre salaries. Enhancing job satisfaction by providing opportunities for career advancement and personal growth is recognised as an effective motivator, but the study highlights the limited application of these approaches in Nigerian SMEs due to limited resources and very challenging current market conditions in Nigeria.

6.4.2.4 Build talent management mindsets for leaders at all levels

To remain competitive in the era of economic globalisation, organisations must develop talent management capabilities across all levels of management. The study finds that the shortage of quality candidates in the Nigerian job market will intensify the competition for talent in the next few years, which the increasing trend of migration will exacerbate (see section 5.5.1), which makes effective talent management increasingly important for organisational success. While informal talent management practices are currently recognised as a key element in the success of Nigerian SMEs, the study suggests that Nigerian SMEs would benefit from a more formal approach to TM to address acute talent shortages in the future. Formal policies provide a structured approach to managing human capital, which is becoming of increasing importance for SMEs operating with limited resources. The study suggests that enhanced productivity, innovation, and retention would result from clearly defining procedures for identifying, developing, and retaining key employees (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Similarly, Vaiman, Scullion, and Collings (2012) report that formal talent management policies create an attractive work environment by outlining clear career development paths, performance incentives, and a supportive culture, which are significant factors in reducing turnover and enhancing employee engagement. Importantly, Cappelli (2008) supports the implementation of formal TM policies, stating that they ensure alignment between workforce capabilities and business objectives, enabling SMEs to respond swiftly to market changes and maintain strategic agility.

However, the research findings (Sections 5.6 and 5.6.4) reveal distinctive challenges for SMEs in talent sourcing and talent retention. Most of the participating SMEs in the study lacked a clear and dedicated strategy for talent management, and the lack of integration with other organisational strategies was noted. Section 5.4 highlights management's influence on HRM practices as well as their hesitance to invest in formal TM practices. Some participants in the Finance and real estate SMEs highlighted the issue of nepotism and unfairness in the recruitment and appraisal processes in their organisations. The study suggests that as SMEs evolve, more formalised talent management practices would enhance fairness and transparency and would improve employee morale and motivation, which are essential for maintaining high levels of employee satisfaction and organisational loyalty (Festing et al., 2017).

6.5 Conclusion

While recognising that having a clear identification and definition of talent is essential for organisations to develop effective strategies for recruitment, development, and retention, it is important to emphasise that SME organisations in Nigeria mainly operate with informal TM practices and that formal TM policies are generally absent in Nigerian SMEs. The study showed that talent management can be effective in SME organisations even in the absence of formal TM policies (Viverde et al., 2013; Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). However, SMEs are not a homogeneous group, and the choice of talent attraction and retention strategy is largely dependent on organisational profiles and policies, profit margin, and labour market conditions (Harney and Alkhalaf 2021). For instance, the approach to utilising industry-standard wages, compensation, and rewards is dependent on the organisation's capacity and budget constraints, which is why it is more prevalent among larger SMEs.

The study highlights the importance of both short-term and long-term investments in talent development and retention. Developing internal talent ensures employees possess a comprehensive understanding of the organisation's direction and style, fostering greater motivation to remain. The study finds that for SMEs, a blend of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational approaches is important, with extrinsic factors like pay and compensation being predominant may yield better results for case study SMEs given the current inflation and cost of living crisis, highlighting the impact of institutional factors like economic growth and culture on talent management and employee behaviours within Nigerian SMEs. However, fostering strong internal relationships and developing talent pipelines are also important in SME organisations. A prominent theme that emerged in the study was the necessity of building good relationships among employees and creating an organisational environment that reflected the collectivist nature of Nigerian society.

6.6 Limitations

This study has several limitations. The use of semi-structured interviews, while valuable for gaining in-depth insights, posed challenges. This method, despite its benefits, is labour-intensive and time-consuming, especially for transcription and translation. The COVID-19 lockdown and subsequent anxiety impacted data collection; face-to-face interviews became impractical, and some participants preferred virtual meetings, which led to issues with recording and network disruptions. These interruptions often required rescheduling, causing additional delays and

affecting interview quality. Moreover, participants' busy schedules sometimes limited their time and focus, impacting the flow of interviews.

The study employed purposive and snowball sampling techniques. While purposive sampling was appropriate, the researcher questioned the effectiveness of snowball sampling due to concerns about the authenticity of responses from referred participants. There was a risk that responses might reflect the views of the referring manager rather than the participants' accurate opinions, with some participants potentially censoring their answers out of fear of retaliation. Transcription was manually done due to inaccuracies with transcription software, which struggled with Nigerian accents and unclear recordings. This process was time-consuming and highlighted a need for improved transcription tools that accommodate diverse accents.

The study was limited to the study of talent in six Nigerian SMEs, and the findings may not be generalisable across all Nigerian SMEs or globally as there is a wide variety of SMEs in practice (Krishnan and Scullion). Future research could study a wider range of sectors in different national settings where different institutional and cultural conditions apply. Further conceptual and empirical work is required to provide deeper insights into the key factors influencing TM decision-making. Future research could pay more attention to the dynamic nature of TM in SMEs and more attention to the evolving structural forms of SMEs and the links between talent and the organisational life cycle of SMEs (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; Jooss et al., 2021)

In conclusion, while the study offers valuable insights into talent management within Nigerian SMEs, its context-specific nature limits broader applicability. To ensure the wide applicability of these findings, further research encompassing a more comprehensive range of industries and respondents would be beneficial before generalising the results across other sectors. Future research should include a broader range of industries and countries to enhance the generalizability and depth of understanding of talent management practices across different cultural and organisational settings.

6.7 Gaps for Future Research

The concept of talent management has emerged as a pivotal tool for organisations aiming to enhance their performance and maintain a competitive edge in an increasingly dynamic global market. Talent management encompasses a range of practices designed to attract, develop, and retain employees who possess the skills and potential to drive organisational success. By focusing on Nigerian SMEs, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of talent management in a non-Western context and offers practical insights for organisations seeking to optimise their human resource practices in similar settings. It also aims to expand the theoretical framework of talent management by incorporating cultural and industry-specific variables, thereby enriching the existing body of knowledge and providing a foundation for further research in this critical area. Despite its growing importance, there remains a significant gap in the empirical research addressing the application and effectiveness of talent management strategies, particularly within specific industry contexts and cultural settings. These gaps are addressed below:

- Academics have long debated the transferability of talented individuals' abilities across different contexts (Nijs et al., 2014). While transferability and context dependency are complementary, talent is often more context dependent. This study aligns with previous literature, which asserts that talented individuals must fit within their organisation's context (Calo, 2008; Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009; Groysberg et al., 2008; Huckman & Pisano, 2006; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Stahl et al., 2012). Existing studies on talent management focus on general organisational settings or specific high-skilled sectors, often overlooking smaller organisations that operate under different labour dynamics. Moreover, much of the research has been conducted in large organisations and MNEs in Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how talent management practices can be effectively applied and adapted in non-Western settings, such as the emerging economies of Nigeria. This lack of context-specific research limits the applicability of current talent management theories and practices in diverse cultural and economic environments
- Majority of SMEs rely on both high-skilled and low-skilled labour for their day-to-day activities. Therefore, operational demands and competitive pressures require tailored talent management practices that are currently underexplored in existing literature. Furthermore, the context of Nigerian SMEs presents additional complexities due to cultural and economic factors. There is a scarcity of empirical studies that explore the

unique cultural, economic, and social contexts of talent management practices in Nigeria. Many existing studies tend to adopt Western models without considering local nuances. This study calls for further research into the link between institutional factors and talent management strategies within Nigerian SMEs and businesses operating in the Nigerian national context. Furthermore, there is a need for more research on the impact of government policies and regulations on talent management practices.

- The issue of talent motivation remains relatively unexplored in the SME context. Some authors have argued in favour of intrinsic motivational factors, whereas others emphasise the importance of extrinsic factors, and some studies emphasise the importance of both (Storey et al., 2010; Kravariti et al., 2021). This study finds that a combination of both motivational strategies will be more effective in the context of Nigerian SMEs. It is recommended that more comprehensive research covering a broader range of industries should be conducted in this area to ascertain the effectiveness of a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational strategies in the SME context.
- Finally, the study calls for further research on talent recruitment and selection policies and practices in SMEs in the emerging market context. The study highlights the limitations of recruitment and selection practices in SMEs, with the focus being on cost-effective recruitment techniques. Further research is required to assess the extent to which SMEs utilise approaches such as employer branding and more sophisticated strategies to attract key talents (Jooss et al., 2021).

6.8 Final Reflections

Reflecting on the journey of writing this thesis, the researcher has gained significant theoretical and practical knowledge in the relatively unexplored context of talent management within Nigerian SMEs. Both the critical literature review and fieldwork contributed to a deeper understanding of this topic, and several vital learnings and experiences have emerged.

Firstly, a key lesson was the recognition of the limitations of the study. New research continually builds upon, confirms, rejects, or expands existing knowledge. This study has identified numerous gaps in the understanding of talent and talent management that warrant further investigation. Secondly, this research has underscored the importance of understanding and correctly utilising the concepts of talent and talent management. There is no one-size-fits-all definition applicable across all situations and industries, and a lack of awareness regarding this can lead to the misuse and ineffectiveness of these concepts. This point is emphasised by Iles et al. (2010), who criticised the superficial application of "trendy talent management" ideas, likening it to "old wine in new bottles." This critique suggests that the perception of "nothing new" in human resource management arises when the concepts are not clearly defined or adequately understood.

Additionally, working on this project has significantly contributed to the researcher's personal development. The skills acquired throughout this process, such as conducting ethical qualitative research, have been invaluable. The researcher has learned the importance of patience and confidence in independently conducting research, which is crucial for her future career in talent management.

In summary, the research journey provided a wealth of knowledge and experiences that highlighted the complexities and nuances of talent management, particularly within Nigerian SMEs. It emphasised the need for further studies to address existing research gaps. The researcher's growth in knowledge and skills through this process will enhance her personal and career development as well as address a significant research gap in the literature.

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Useful Weblinks

- <https://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/nigeria/history>
- <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/> GDP UNEMPLOYMENT
- <https://smedan.gov.ng/smedan-calls-for-sustainable-positive-business-environment/>
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IC.BUS.EASE.XQ>
- [Nigeria Overview: Development news, research, data | World Bank](#)
- <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/overview>
- [SMEDAN \(2014\), Guide to NEDEP on OLOP Opportunities in Nigeria Volume 1. February 2014](#) •
<https://smedan.gov.ng/41-5m-msmes-registered-in-2017-nbs-smedan-national-survey/>
- <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-rethinkingskills-to-tackle-the-uks-looming-talent-shortage>
- [https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/corruption-rank 2020](https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/corruption-rank-2020)
- <https://go.manpowergroup.com/talent-shortage>
- <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/articles/talent-crunch-future-of-work>
- <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/resourcing/talent-factsheet>
<https://hbr.org/2008/03/talent-management-for-the-twenty-first-century>
- <https://www.manpowergroup.com/media-center/news-releases/global-talent-shortages-hitrecord-high>
- <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/people/recruitment/factsheet>
- <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/development/factsheet>
- <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/resourcing/succession-planning-factsheet#7314>

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- <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/resourcing/turnover-retention-factsheet>
- <https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/business-confidence>
- [Nigeria Government Debt \(tradingeconomics.com\)](https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/government-debt)

Appendix 1- Ethics Approval Form

<p style="text-align: center;">RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE FORM D – Staff, Post Graduate Students, and UG Dissertations (Involving human participants)</p>

Applications by members of Staff, by Post-Graduate students, and by UG students who write Dissertations.
This form should be filled only if they are conducting research that involves human participants and/or animals:

SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

I have completed the [Research Integrity module on the e learning portal](https://hull.learnupon.com/dashboard) Yes/No
<https://hull.learnupon.com/dashboard>

Indicate with 'X' the documents that have been included with this application.

Fully completed application form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Completed risk assessment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Recruitment materials – with date and version number (e.g. poster or email used to invite people to participate)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consent form(s) – with date and version number (different version for each group of participants)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Letter or email seeking permission from gatekeeper/host	<input type="checkbox"/>
Questionnaire(s) – with date and version number	<input type="checkbox"/>
If conducting a student survey, confirm that it fits with University policy https://share.hull.ac.uk/Services/Governance/PolicyDocuments/Policy on Student Surveys.docx	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interview questions / topic guide – with date and version number	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Data management plan (see section F2)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Ethics reference number (for office use):	
WorkTribe project URL	

PART A: SUMMARY

A.1 Title of the research

Talent Management and talent retention in emerging economies: A case study of Nigeria

A.2 Principal investigator's contact details

2. I take full responsibility for the information I have supplied in this document.
3. I undertake to abide by the University's ethical and health and safety guidelines, and the ethical principles underlying good practice guidelines appropriate to my discipline.
4. I will seek the relevant School Risk assessment/COSHH approval if required.
5. If the research is approved, I undertake to adhere to the project protocol, the terms of this application and any conditions set out by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee.
6. Before implementing substantial amendments to the protocol, I will submit an amendment request to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee seeking approval.
7. If requested, I will submit progress reports.
8. I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of participants or other personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer.
9. I understand that research records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes if required in future.
10. I take full responsibility for the actions of the research team and individuals supporting this study, thus all those involved will be given training relevant to their role in the study.
11. By signing the validation I agree that the Faculty Research Ethics Committee, on behalf of the University of Hull, will hold personal data in this application and this will be managed according to the principles established in the Data protection Act (1998).

Sharing information for training purposes: Optional – please mark with X as appropriate:

☐ I would be content for members of other Research Ethics Committees to have access to the information in the application in confidence for training purposes. All personal identifiers and references to researchers, funders and research units would be removed.

Principal Investigator

Signature of Principal Investigator:

(This needs to be an actual signature rather than just typed. Electronic signatures are acceptable)

Print name: MARILYN C NWAIGWE Date: (12/02/2021):

Reviewer

Signature of Reviewer

(This needs to be an actual signature rather than just typed. Electronic signatures are acceptable)

Print name: Date: (dd/mm/yyyy):

Supervisor of UG and PG student research: I have read, edited and agree with the form above.

Supervisor's signature:

(This needs to be an actual signature rather than just typed. Electronic signatures are acceptable)

Print name: HUGO SCULION Date: (dd/mm/yyyy):

Remember to include any supporting material such as your participant information sheet, consent form, interview questions and recruitment material with your application. Version control should be adopted to include the version number and date on relevant documents in the appendices. **These should be pasted as Appendices to this form.**

One copy of the form should be kept by the researcher, one copy should be retained by the Ethics Officer and one copy should be sent by email to

fbfp-researchadmin@hull.ac.uk

Appendix 2- Consent Form



CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

**RESEARCH TITLE: Talent Management and Talent Retention in SMEs in Emerging Markets:
A case study of The Nigerian Context**

Researcher: Marilyn Chinwe Nwaigwe

Thank you for reading the information sheet about the interview sub-study. If you are happy to participate then please complete and sign the form below. Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY

I have read and understood the study information dated [DD/MM/YY], or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	YES / NO
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.	YES / NO
I agree to the interview being audio recorded, I understand that the audio recording made of this interview will be used only for analysis and that extracts from the interview, from which I would not be personally identified, may be used in any conference presentation, report or journal article developed because of the research. I understand that no other use will be made of the recording without my written permission, and that no one outside the research team will be allowed access to the original recording.	YES / NO
I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, and received satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.	YES/NO
I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.	YES / NO
I understand that the information I provide will be used for my research thesis and that the information will be anonymised.	YES / NO
I agree that my (anonymised) information can be quoted in research outputs.	YES / NO
I agree to waive copyright and other intellectual property rights in the material I contribute to the project.	YES / NO

I understand that any personal information that can identify me, such as my name, address, will be kept confidential and not shared with anyone.	YES / NO
I give permission for the (anonymised) information I provide to be deposited in a data archive so that it may be used for future research.	YES / NO

Please retain a copy of this consent form.

Participant name:

Signature: _____ Date _____

Researcher's name:

Signature: _____ Date _____

For information please contact: Marilyn Chinwe Nwaigwe

MOBILE PHONE NUMBER: +447399867015

EMAIL : M.c.Nwaigwe-2018@hull.ac.uk

Appendix 3-Interview Questions

Interview plan

I have divided the interview questions with the first part aimed at management- HR personnel or owners as the case maybe. The second part is aimed at employees. The questions have also been formulated based on themes from research questions.

Research questions

RQ 1 What are the major Talent Management issues and challenges faced by SMEs globally?

- a) Do SMEs adopt formal talent policies or TM practices?

RQ 2 What is the state of Talent Management conceptualisation in Nigerian SMEs

- a) How do Nigerian SMEs define, attract, develop, and retain talented employees?
- b) What are the notable TM challenges faced, and to what degree do Nigerian SMEs have TM policies?

Research objectives

- 1 To critically review the literature about theories, concepts and models related to Talent Management, particularly in the SME context.
- 2 To investigate the meaning of talent and understand how talent is defined, attracted, developed, and retained in Nigerian SMEs.
- 3 To identify and analyse notable TM issues and challenges faced by Nigerian SMEs and to provide a conceptual contribution to the area of study.
- 4 To critically examine the role of talent management in the attraction, development and retention of employees and the overall growth objectives of SMEs in Nigerian SMEs
- 5 To make recommendations based on the findings of this study, which seek to increase our understanding of the factors impacting effective TM in SMEs.

Questions for Management

Initial questions

1. How long have you worked in the firm? What is your key role
2. What is the firm's core business?
 - a. What is the size of the firm? How many people work here?
 - b. When was the firm established?

- c. What is the ownership structure? (Is it family owned? (2 or more family members involved in the ownership & majority of control
- 3. To what extent do your employees make a difference to the success of your business? (can you give examples)
- 4. How do you make sure that you have the best skills and talents in your business? (can you give examples)
- 5. What challenges do you face in attracting and retaining employees with the skills you require? (can you give examples)
- 6. How do you deal with these challenges? (give examples)
- 7. How do you identify the skills and capabilities the business needs both now and in the future? (give examples)
- 8. To what extent do you identify either people or roles that are critical to the success of your business? (give examples)
- 9. How do you ensure that you have the right employees to help the business succeed? (give examples)

Wrap-up questions

- 10. Could you please indicate 8 people in your team that I can talk to? (why did you choose them?)
- 11. Is there something that I should have asked, and I did not?

