

A DECADE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES, A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF A DEVELOPING FIELD

Barrington GRAHAM*

Babes Bolyai University, Romania

Abstract: Talent management (TM) is a relatively new management discipline that has generated considerable interest among scholars and practitioners within the past decade. It has been studied extensively among large enterprises and global organizations, but the practices have received limited investigation among Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs). This research paper uses a systematic review of the existing literature from 55 papers to present some insights into how TM is defined, conceptualized, and practised. An agenda for future research of SMEs TM is presented to spur further study. The paper uses the PRISMA methodology recommended by (Moher et al., (2009) to search the databases of Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar for papers published within the last ten years between 2011-21. The findings confirm that the study of TM in SMEs is a developing field, and while there has been an encouraging increase in the number of publications in the past 10 years, it still lags behind other fields. Thus, there is a need for researchers and academics to accelerate the pace of research.

JEL classification: M5, M12.

Keywords: talent management; small and medium sized enterprises; systemic literature review

1. Introduction

Talent management has been gaining popularity in businesses as a means of accelerating growth and expanding operations. Many scholars regard it as an integrated process for attracting, integrating and developing, and retaining workers with the requisite skills, knowledge, and competencies required by an organization (Ansar & Baloch, 2018). While TM is a fairly new management discipline, numerous studies acknowledged that it is essential to the survival of an organization and well as a useful tool to enhance its competitiveness in the market (Serban & Andanut, 2014).

* Corresponding author. Address: Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Babeș-Bolyai University, 58-60, Theodor Mihaly Street, 400591, Cluj-Napoca, România, E-mail: graham.barrington@econ.ubbcluj.ro

Through TM, organizations can more effectively manage their workforce to boost output, increase efficiency, and enhance workers' output in a more positive way (Bibi, 2019). Based on findings from several studies, an organization as a whole and its employees are favourably impacted by the implementation of TM practices.

There have been many studies that support the positive impact of TM on companies, but most have been done on large enterprises and global companies, with limited investigations on Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) (Festings, 2017). This has prompted researchers like Krishnan and Scullion (2017) to note that despite the significance of SMEs, there is a dearth of studies of TM research on this sector (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). According to the literature, SMEs are significant drivers of employment and contribute to commerce and economic activities in most countries (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). They foster entrepreneurship and innovation in many countries (Olusegun, 2012). But, like many other organizations, they face challenges in attracting, developing, and retaining the talents they need (Kuratko et al., 1990).

Scholars have cited a number of differences for SMEs that set them apart from larger firms. SMEs, unlike many large enterprises, are hindered by factors relating to insufficient financial resources, lack of managerial skills, equipment, and technology as well as regulatory issues, and market access (Joshua & Quartey, 2010). The literature further asserts that SMEs tend to be simple entities often lacking the complexity and hierarchical structures that are characteristics of their larger counterparts (Unger et al., 2011). Hanks and Chandler (1994) highlight their structural and managerial differences (Chandler & Hanks, 1994). Dundon and Wilkinson (2009) point to the high degree of informality in regard to their HR practices and the challenges they experience in attracting talents (Redman & Wilkinson, 2009). The takeaway from these studies is that TM practices in SMEs are challenged by several obstacles relating to the contextual setting of SMEs. As such, more investigation is needed to shed light on how TM is defined, conceptualized, and practiced in SMEs.

At the same time, research has shown that when properly implemented, TM can lead to increase organizational efficiency and better employees' outcomes in terms of turnover intention and job satisfaction (Mensah, 2019). A number of reasons have been cited in the literature to explain why TM practices in SMEs are different from their larger counterparts.

The first is that given the different contextual setting of SMEs, their understanding, and use of TM is more likely to be dissimilar to those of large organizations and multinational corporations. It can thus be inferred that for SMEs the contextual setting is integral to their operations and practice of TM (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020). The second consideration is that SMEs have distinct institutional and structural features that differentiate them from large companies and this also influences how they regard and manage talents (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). A third consideration is the scarcity of financial resources which can cause SMEs to redirect funds away from areas such as staff development and training, leading to issues of low productivity and high staff turnover (Abor & Biekpe, 2006). Added to this is the inability of many SMEs to afford the high cost of training and when this is added to the scarcity of management talent, has created skills and talent gaps in the SME sector (Kayanula & Quartey, 2000). These issues have not only put significant constraints on the development of SMEs but have also

tempered their ability to embrace and benefit fully from TM. What the literature has revealed is that matters relating to talent and challenges with HR were identified as one of the most acute issues for many SME owners and managers (Tocher & Rutherford, 2009).

2. Research objectives

The purpose of this systematic literature review is to explore the factors that constrain TM in SMEs. We will do this by examining the findings from past studies on SMEs to better understand how they define, practice TM, the strategies they employed, and the results they obtained. If scholars and HR practitioners in SMEs are to fully grasp the issues that dogged how TM is conceptualized and operationalized, then it is helpful to look at what past findings have revealed. This study is useful in several ways.

First, it is important to know precisely which aspects of TM were investigated or overlooked in prior studies (Shahi et al., 2020). The relative areas of interest linked to various components of TM are better understood by HR practitioners and researchers as a result (e.g., talent identification, talent attraction, talent development, and talent retention). Second, to better understand the themes and issues that appeared to cut across the different contextual settings (SMEs compared to global companies) as well as those aspects of TM practices that appear to be contextually dependent. Third, and lastly, by critically analyzing the body of past works, researchers may be able to identify several crucial areas that were overlooked and suggest others for further investigation in SMEs (Shahi et al., 2020).

Thus, this study aims to fill this gap by addressing this understudied area of TM scholarship. Specifically, we will seek to review what aspect of TM practices predominates in the SMEs and assess whether the emphasis was on organizational or individual performance. The study will also seek to identify other relevant gaps in the literature on TM in SMEs and suggest some areas for future research focus.

This systematic literature review will focus specifically on talent management in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises and will span all aspects of TM that are practiced in any SME. By doing this, it aids in fostering a better understanding of TM impact in SMEs by HR practitioners and scholars. The rest of this paper is arranged as follows. First, we explain the methodology used in our review. Second, we present the results and findings, Third, we discuss the key highlights from the findings, and lastly, we provide our conclusion and recommendations for future studies.

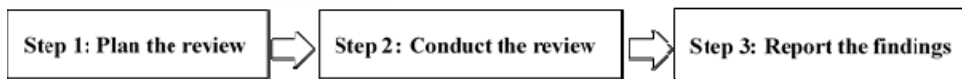
3. Methodology

3.1 Search Strategy

The study was conducted using a systematic literature review and a qualitative content analysis of the relevant literature. A systematic literature review provides researchers with a protocol to review relevant literature in a thorough, methodical, and objective way that is both transparent and replicable (Xiao & Watson, 2019). The choice of this method was deemed appropriate as not only is it widely used in the literature, but it also allows for the quantitative assessment of the information collected in the review.

The study focused on papers that were published between January 1, 2011, and December 31, 2021, and which dealt with the subject of TM in SMEs. The 10-year period was selected to provide an extensive body of papers including more recent publications on the subject. The study followed the guidelines recommended in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) principles (Moher et al., 2009). The PRISMA guidelines were used to determine the eligibility criteria that were used, information sources that were accessed, data items, and the collection process to collect and synthesize the results. The review process also followed the three-steps approach proposed by Kitchenham and Charters (2007), that is, planning, conducting, and reporting the systematic review, as set out below in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Steps in the Review



3.2 Database search and search terms

The search started with the two major databases where the largest pool of peer-reviewed articles is found. The two major databases used were Web of Science and Scopus. In addition to these two databases, additional searches were conducted in Google Scholar. Guided by the approach recommended by Shulga and Busser (2019), this strategy was undertaken to expand the pool of available papers with the first 10 pages of the results being examined (Shulga & Busser, 2019). The combination of keywords and search terms was Talent Management AND SMEs OR Talent Management in SMEs. As an additional step, we identified more papers using a snowballing technique, where references to other relevant papers were considered for inclusion (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016).

3.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

To select the relevant papers for inclusion in our review, the titles and abstracts of these papers were examined, and three inclusion criteria were used to decide whether to include them. Included papers had to meet the following criteria (1) be published between January 1, 2011, and December 31, 2021, (2) focus on talent management in the SMEs, and (3) explicitly examine all or some aspects of TM in the SMEs. Any empirical studies, book reviews or papers not covering any of the stated criteria were excluded from the review.

3.4 The selection process

The initial search of the databases resulted in 102 papers. From this number, 12 papers were deleted due to duplication. A thorough screening of the remaining 90 papers was performed to decide which were not relevant and could be rejected based on the inclusion criteria that were set for reviewing the title and abstract. This exercise resulted in the exclusion of 25 additional papers. Full copies of the remaining 65 papers were obtained, and a detailed second screening was done using the same inclusion criteria. Each paper was evaluated at least two times to determine whether it met the criteria. This second screening resulted in another 10 papers being excluded after a review of the full paper, thus leaving a final count of 55 papers. This systematic review process followed the PRISMA protocols and is represented in Figure 2 with the exclusion criteria outlined in Figure 3. A spreadsheet was used to collect and organize the information for analysis.

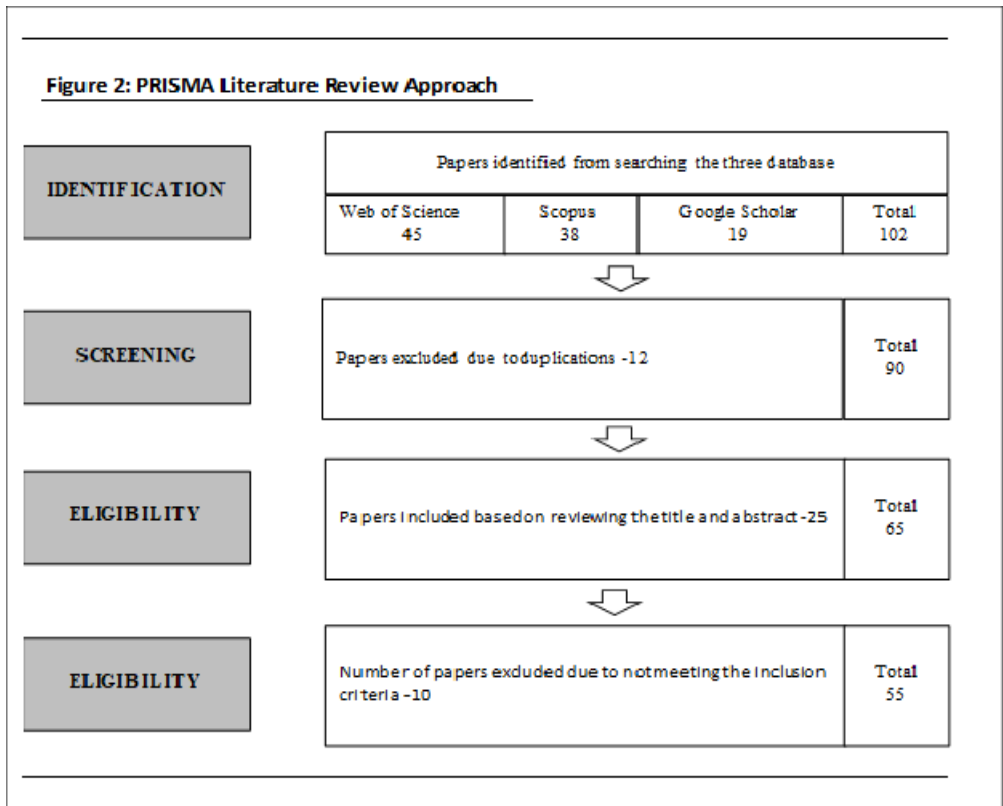


Figure 3: Inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Detailed argument
1. The papers are written in English.	The English language is the main research language in business and management research. The use of English ensures easier comparability of the results.
2. The papers published in or after 2011	While talent management has been around since the 1990s, serious investigation of the construct within the SME sector started much later, so the last 10 years is a good point from which to start the review
3. Type of publication: scientific article, review, or early access paper	This review focuses only on quality, peer-reviewed scientific papers available from industry recognized-publications inclusive of conference papers or book chapters that were deemed applicable.
4. Journals from Business, Management, Human Resources and Personnel Management	This review focused on the impact of talent management on both the employees and SMEs for which they worked.
5. The papers were all relevant industries	Since SMEs operate in sectors of a country's economy, papers from all industries were included.
6. The paper focused on the impact of TM in SME	This was managed by setting the restriction through search keywords to identify relevant results germane to the research questions.

4. Literature review findings

The summary findings from the research are shown in Figure 4 and detailed finds are outlined thereafter.

Authors	Article Title	Country	Industry	Methodology	Theme	Theory
1 Baharin & Hanafi, 2018	Effects of TM on employee retention: A case study of hospitality industry	Malaysia	Hospitality	Quan	TR	SET
2 Baporikar, 2021	Post-Pandemic Restorative TM Strategy for SME Development. In <i>Cases on Small Business Economics and Development During Economic Crises</i>	India	Mixed	Qual	TDCO	NS
3 Bender, 2021	TM IN GERMAN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED COMPANIES (SMES) PART I-A CRITICAL ANALYSIS.	Germany	Mixed	Qual	TDCO	PAA
4 Bish & Jorgensen, 2016	Employee perceptions of the TM message: Case analyses in Danish SMEs	Denmark	Mixed	Qual	TA, TRc	PC
5 Chang & Werther, 2021	TM innovations in the hospitality industry: Insights from the winners of the hospitality HR Award. In: TM innovations in the international hospitality industry.	NS	NS	Qual	TI	NS
6 Chaudhuri et al., 2018	Borrow or Grow: An Overview of Talent Development/Management Practices in Indian IT Organizations	India	IT	Qual	TDCO, TD	NS
7 Chung & D'Annunzio-Green, 2018	TM practices in small- and medium-sized enterprises in the hospitality sector: An entrepreneurial owner-manager perspective	UK	Hospitality	Qual	TDCO	AMO
8 Crowley-Henry et al., 2021	What goes around comes around: Exploring how skilled migrant founder-managers of SMEs recruit and retain international talent	Ireland	Mixed	Qual	TRc, TR	KYT
9 Cui et al., 2018	Strategic TM in service SMEs of China.	China	Mixed	Qual	TA, TR	NS
10 Dabić et al., 2021	Embodiment of TM within entrepreneurship: a bibliometric approach. In <i>Contemporary TM</i>	Global	Mixed	Quan	TDCO	NS
11 Darcy et al., 2014	A consideration of organizational sustainability in the sme context a resource-based view and composite model	Global	NS	CP	Sustainability	RBV
12 Deeba, 2020	The Role of Data Analytics in Talent Acquisition and Retention with Special Reference to SMEs in India: A Conceptual Study.	India	NS	CP	TA, TRc	NS
13 Domi & Domi, 2021	The interplay effects of skill-enhancing human resources practices, customer orientation and tourism SMEs performance	Albania	Hospitality	Qual	TRc, TS, TT	NS
14 Egerová et al., 2015	Perspectives of TM: Evidence from Czech and Slovak business organizations.	Czech & Slovenia	NS	Quan	TDCO	NS
15 Epie, 2014	Improving talent retention in an SME in the Nigerian environment: Reflections on a case study	Nigeria	Media	Qual	TR	NS
16 Festing et al., 2013	TM in medium-sized German companies: an explorative study and agenda for future research	Germany	Mixed	Quan	TR	IT
17 Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020	TM: context matters	Global	Mixed	CP	TDCO	NS
18 Ghosh et al., 2021	Examining collective creative self-efficacy as a competency indicator of group TM: a study of SMEs in an emerging economy.	India	Mixed	Qual	TR	PC
19 Harney & Alkhalaf, 2020	A quarter-century review of HRIM in small and medium-sized enterprises: Capturing what we know, exploring where we need to go	Global	Mixed	Qual	TDCO	NS
20 Hasan & Saufie, 2021	THE CURVILINEAR EFFECT OF TM ON FINANCIAL AND INNOVATION PERFORMANCE OF SMES	Malaysia	Mixed	Quan	JP	RBV
21 Heuri, 2018	Effects Of TM On Small and Medium Enterprises (SMES) In Nairobi	Kenya	Mixed	Quan	TRc, TC, TR, TD	NS
22 Ismail et al., 2021	Effect of TM practices at SMEs in Malaysia.	Malaysia	Food, Beverage	Qual	TE, TR	NS
23 Kallianan et al., 2016	Effective TM in Malaysian SMEs: A proposed framework.	Malaysia	Mixed	Qual	JS, Org Culture	NS
24 Kaur et al., 2015	Using social media for employer branding and TM: An experiential study.	India	IT	CP	TA	NS
25 Kohnová & Papula, 2020	WHO drives innovation activities? Evidence from innovative European countries	DACH	Mixed	Quan	TDCO	NS
26 Kravarit et al., 2021	Weathering the storm: TM in internationally oriented Greek small and medium-sized enterprises.	Greece	Mixed	Qual	TRc, TD, TR	IT
27 Krishnan et al., 2020	TM practices impact on Malaysian SMIs managers job performance	Malaysia	Manufacturing	Quan	JP	NS
28 Krishnan & Scullion, 2017	TM and dynamic view of talent in small and medium enterprises	Global	Mixed	CP	TDCO	IT, ET
29 Lawless et al., 2019	Talk-about talent: underlying philosophies on talent in Thai SMEs	Thailand	Mixed	Qual	TI, TR	CoP

Authors	Article Title	Country	Industry	Methodology	Theme	Theory
30 Leu et al., 2020	TM and the Digital Journey: Case Studies on the Apparel SMEs in Malaysia	Malaysia	Manufacturing	Qual	TDCO	DCT
31 Lin et al., 2021	Key factors affecting technological capabilities in small and medium-sized Enterprises in Taiwan	Taiwan	Manufacturing	Qual	TD	NS
32 Lin et al., 2011	New Product Development and Commercialization Process in the SME Fashion Design Houses	UK	Manufacturing	CP	TD	NS
33 Liu et al., 2012	The Discipline of SME Cellular Innovative Organization	NS	IT	CP	TD	NS
34 Ližbetinová, 2015	Potential of TM for SME	Czech	Service	Quan	TR	NET
35 Martidianty et al., 2020	Job embeddedness of manufacturing SME employees in Indonesia	Indonesia	Manufacturing	Quan	TR	JET
36 Mates et al., 2011	Intellectual Capital Management: Case Study Portugal Versus Romania	Romania, Portugal	NS	Qual	TD	ICM
37 Mendy & Rahman, 2019	Application of human resource management's universal model: An examination of people versus institutions as barriers of internationalization for SMEs in a small developing country	Bangladesh	Manufacturing	Quan	TD	IT, UT
38 Michailova & Ott, 2019	TM in small advanced economies: In TM in Small Advanced Economies.	Switzerland, Singapore, Norway	Mixed	CP	TDCO	NS
39 Monteiro et al., 2020	Employer branding applied to SMEs: A pioneering model proposal for attracting and retaining talent	Portugal	Mixed	Quan	TA, TR	ASA
40 Morawski, 2018	MANAGEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE WORKERS. SUPPORT FOR CREATIVE THINKING AND ACTION - THE CASE OF CREATIVE INDUSTRIES	Poland	Creative Industry	CP	TD	NS
41 Nauileau 2014.	The prerequisites of TM: a French SME case study	France	Building suppliers	Qual	TI	NS
42 Nawangsari & Sutawidjaya, 2019	TM in mediating competencies and motivation to improve employee's engagement	Indonesia	Hospitality	Quan	TD, TM	AMT
43 Pauli, 2018	TM Practices in Polish Small and Medium Enterprises	Poland	Mixed	Quan	TDCO	NS
44 Pauli & Poczowski, 2019	TM in SMEs: An exploratory study of polish companies.	Poland	Mixed	Quan	TDCO	NS
45 Phoemphan et al., 2015	Cross Case Analysis of TM in Thai SMEs: Multiple Case Studies Approach	Thailand	Lifestyle	Qual	TDCO	NS
46 Savov et al., 2020	Size of the company as the main determinant of TM in Slovakia	Slovakia	Mixed	Quan	TDCO	NS
47 Sheehan et al., 2018	Strategic TM: A macro and micro analysis of current issues in hospitality and tourism	Global	Hospitality	CP	TDCO	NS
48 Skoumpopoulou et al., 2019	TM in European SMEs: case analysis between Slovenia and Poland	Slovakia, Poland	Mixed	Qual	TDCO	NS
49 Skuza & Scullion, 2015	TM: Contemporary issues in a European context	Europe	Mixed	CP	TDCO	PC, SET
50 Stokes et al., 2016	Managing talent across advanced and emerging economies: HR issues and challenges in a Sino-German strategic collaboration	Germany, China	Manufacturing	Qual	TRc	NS
51 Supian et al., 2021	Exploring Recruitment Practices and TM Among SME Manufacturing Workers in Selangor.	Malaysia	Manufacturing	Quan	TRc	NS
52 Valverde et al., 2013	TM in Spanish medium-sized organizations	Spain	Mixed	Qual	TDCO	NS
53 Vargas-Hernandez & Elias, 2017	Organizational Culture Based on Human TM as a Factor of Retention of SMEs in Zacatecas	Mexico	Mixed	CP	TDCO	NS
54 Zamcu, 2014	Trends and Challenges in the Modern HRM-TM.	Romania	Mixed	Qual	TD	NS
55 Zhumabayeva & Mahmood, 2021	TM in SMEs of Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan	Mixed	Quan	TDCO	NS

KEY: Methodology: Qual = Qualitative; Quan = Quantitative; CP = Conceptual Paper
Theory: NS=Not Specified; PC=Psychological Contract; SET=Social Exchange Theory; AMT=Achievement Motivation Theory; ASA=Attraction, Selection, Attrition
IT=Institutional Theory; AMO=Ability, Motivation; Opportunity; RBV=Resource Based Theory; JET=Job Embeddedness Theory; KYT=Know Why Theory
PAA=Principal Agency Approach; SCT=Social Cognitive Theory; CoP=Communities of Practice; DCT=Dynamic Capability Theory; ICM=Intellectual Capital Model
ICM=Intellectual Capital Model; UT=Universal HR Theory; ET=Economic Theory | Themes: TE= Talent Engagement; TM= Talent Motivation; JP= Job Performance; TI=Talent Identification
TA=Talent Attraction; TRc= Talent Recruitment; TR= Talent Retention; TD= Talent Development; TT= Talent Training; TDCO= Talent Definition, Conceptualization, Operation; TT= Talent Training

4.1 Type of articles/papers

The search among the databases for this review focused on papers that were available in open sources and the review revealed that 84 percent (46 papers) were articles from journal publications while 9 percent (5 papers) were conference proceedings. The remaining 7 percent (4 papers) were shared between books and one dissertation thesis (Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of the reviewed papers according to type of articles

Type	Total	
	No	%
Thesis	1	2%
Book chapter	3	5%
Conference proceedings	5	9%
Journals	46	84%
Total	55	100%

4.2 Journals and publication frequency

Although TM has been around since the 1990s, the investigation of its impact on SMEs can be considered still an emerging field. Based on the period of the review, the vast majority of papers were published since 2015. This is evidenced by the fact that since 2015, 87 percent of the papers reviewed were published as of 2015 (less than 6 years ago). On closer analysis, roughly 34 percent was since 2020 and 20 percent in 2021 (Table 3). These findings suggest that the pace of scholastic inquisition of TM in SMEs is in its infancy (Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021), offering a lot of room for even further investigation of the subject in the future.

Table 3: Distribution of the reviewed papers according to publication year

Year	Journal	Conference	Chapter	Thesis	Total	
					No	%
2011		2			2	4%
2012		1			1	2%
2013	2				2	4%
2014	4				4	7%
2015	5				5	9%
2016	2	1	1		4	7%
2017	2				2	4%
2018	6	1	1	1	9	16%
2019	6		1		7	13%
2020	8				8	15%
2021	11				11	20%
Total	46	5	3	1	55	100%

4.3 Publication journals

The 55 reviewed papers were published in 42 different journals (Table 4). Roughly 60 percent of the paper appeared in 33 different journals, while those dealing primarily with issues relating to human resources appeared to have been most frequently mentioned, there was no concentration in any particular one. The review revealed that researchers had their papers published in journals covering such diverse areas as engineering, risk management, tourism, and even medicine. This would suggest that research of TM in SMEs is still a novel enough subject that piques the attention of editors or the publishing community is still trying to figure out where the discipline should reside as its preferred home.

Table 4: Distribution of the reviewed papers according to journals

Name of Journal	Total	
	No	%
Human Resource Management Review	2	4%
Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Review	2	4%
Thunderbird International Business Review	2	4%
International Journal of Management	2	4%
Human Resource Management International	2	4%
Human Resource Management	2	4%
European Journal of Training and Development	2	4%
International Journal of Human Resources	4	7%
Conference Proceedings	4	7%
Others	33	60%
Total	55	100

4.4 Countries and regions

The vast majority of the papers reviewed showed that the construct was studied mainly in countries outside of North America. Studies conducted in 23 countries located within Europe, Asia, and Africa accounted for 73 percent of the reviewed papers (Table 5). Cross-country studies conducted within 2 or more countries accounted for the second-largest category with 25 percent of the papers. Interestingly, countries within this group from Europe figured prominently among the cross-country studies. Studies from SMEs within the Americas accounted for only 2 percent of the papers reviewed. Scholars like Al Ariss et al., (2014) have been among the voices calling for a shift away from a North American viewpoint of TM (Al Ariss et al., 2014). It is thus promising to see that roughly 73 percent of the papers reviewed represented studies done on SMEs in Europe, Asia, and Africa. This would suggest that viewpoints about TM in SMEs have appeared from other countries, and seem not to be dominated by the US experience.

Table 5: Distribution of the reviewed papers according to countries

Name of Country/ Region	Total	
	No	%
Europe	20	36%
Albania	1	
Denmark	1	
France	1	
Greece	1	
Ireland	1	
Portugal	1	
Spain	1	
Slovenia	1	
Czech Republic	2	
Germany	2	
Romania	2	
UK	2	
Poland	3	
Asia	18	33%
Bangladesh	1	
China	1	
Kazakhstan	1	
Taiwan	1	
Indonesia	2	
Thailand	2	
India	3	
Malaysia	7	
North America	1	2%
Mexico	1	
Africa	2	4%
Kenya	1	
Nigeria	1	
Multiple Countries	14	25%
Czech Rep & Slovenia	1	
DACH (Austria, Germany & Switzerland)	1	
Germany & China	1	
Slovenia & Poland	1	
Switzerland, Singapore, Norway	1	
None Specified	2	
Global	7	
Total	55	100%

4.5 Research methodologies

In the review, we identified 25 of the 55 papers (45 percent) that utilized a qualitative approach (Table 6). The qualitative studies were thus the largest category of empirical TM research using systematic reviews, case studies, and in-depth interviews of owners/managers, and employees within SMEs. Quantitative studies followed next, being used by 33 percent of studies using primarily various survey approaches to gather data. Conceptual papers accounted for the remaining 22 percent of research methods using a mix of thematic analysis, and comparative analysis.

Table 6: Distribution of the reviewed papers according to methodology

Method	SLR	Case Study	Survey	Other	Total	%
Qualitative	3	8	1	13	25	45%
Quantitative			13	5	18	33%
Conceptual Papers					12	22%
Total	3	8	14	18	55	100%

4.6 Theories

There were many theories used in the studies that were reviewed. The reviewed papers revealed that 13 different theories were used by researchers (Table 7). Three theories accounted for 9 percent of those mentioned and were the most frequently found used. The three theories were accounted for by the Resourced Based View (2 percent), Psychological Contract (3 percent), and Institutional Theory (4 percent). However, 65 percent of the papers did not specify a theory or were not explicit about the theory on which the study was grounded.

Table 7: Distribution of the reviewed papers according to theories

Theory	Total	
	No	%
Ability, Motivation & Achievement	1	2%
Achievement, Motivation Theory	1	2%
Attraction, Selection, Attrition	1	2%
Community of Practice Theory	1	2%
Dynamic Capabilities Theory	1	2%
Intellectual Capital Theory	1	2%
Job Embeddedness Theory	1	2%
Knowing Why Theory	1	2%
Principal Agency Theory	1	2%
Social Exchange Theory	1	2%
Resource Based View	2	4%
Psychological Contract	3	5%
Institutional Theory	4	7%
Not Specified/ None used	36	65%
Total	55	100

4.8 Thematic categorizations

Although talent management has been around since the '90s, there is still debate about its definition (Pauli & Poczowski, 2019). Scullion et al. (2010) regarded it as a systematic series of activities for identifying, attracting, developing, engaging, and retaining the talents needed by the organization to attain its business objectives. The study identified more than 8 different thematic focus in the articles that were reviewed (Table 8). Talent conceptualization was the theme featured in 36 percent of the papers. This category included the probing of SMEs' owners/ managers and staff about what TM mean to them and how is it practiced and operationalized within their organization. Talent development and training of staff was the second-largest category with 20 percent, while issues surrounding the attraction, recruitment, and retention of talent were the third and fourth themes highlighted by SMEs accounting for 13 and 11 percent respectively.

Table 8: Distribution of the reviewed papers according to themes

Theme	No of paper	
1. Talent management conceptualization	20	36%
2. Talent Development & Training	11	20%
3. Talent Attraction & Recruitment	7	13%
4. Talent Retention	6	11%
5. Talent Identification	3	5%
6. Talent Attraction & Retention	2	4%
7. Job Satisfaction	2	4%
8. Others (Engagement, Performance)	4	7%
Total	55	100

4.9 Whose views are surveyed

The review found that researchers displayed a disproportionate preference for surveying the views of either the owners, CEOs or managers of SMEs. This was the case in 51 percent of the papers (Table 9). Next, the views of both the employers and owners were the second preference with 18 percent of the papers. The views of employees were only featured in 13 percent of the papers.

Table 9: Distribution of the reviewed papers according to whose views were surveyed

Category	No of paper	
Owners, CEO, Managers	28	51%
Both (Employers & Employees)	10	18%
Employees Only	7	13%
None Specified	10	18%
Total	55	100

5. Discussion

Based on the papers that were reviewed, we were able to make some observations and gleaned some useful insights on SMEs talent management. We outline present our discussion as follows:

There is a level of uncertainty among SMEs owners and managers about how TM is defined and practiced, with some likening it to human resource management. This uncertainty extends to within the SMEs where there seemed to be a gap between the expectations of employees and employers (owners and managers) about TM practices in SMEs (Phoemphian et al., 2015; Pauli, 2018; Skoumpopoulou, et al., 2019). This may not be a unique issue that is confined to SMEs as there remains tension in the broader TM debate around this same matter (Ansar & Baloch, 2018; Bostjancic & Slana, 2018).

Given the challenges that SMEs have with resources that have been highlighted in other literature, it was stated by some SMEs that implementing TM would increase their cost and reduce their financial performance (Valverde, 2013; Lonial & Carter, 2015; Grimmer et al., 2018; Hasan & Saufie, 2021). The literature on SMEs is replete with studies that point to the constraint on their operations caused by insufficient resources, so it is not unusual that this may extend to areas of HR and TM (Bakhtiari, et al., 2020)

The approaches taken to TM and talent are largely determined by the size, resource, culture (organizational, national), and knowledge (HR, Owner, manager) of the SMEs. The larger and more financially endowed the SME, the more like they are to embrace TM and be knowledgeable of how to operationalize elements of it (Valverde & Scullion, 2013; Epie, 2014; Sheehan et al., 2018; Harney & Alkhalaf, 2020, Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020). "Context matters" is a significant point that was stressed by Gallardo-Gallardo et al., (2020) and which has been validated by the work of other scholars (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020; Cosgrave & O'Dwyer, 2020).

Attracting talents, identifying, and designating persons as talents, training, developing and retaining talented staff featured prominently among SMEs' owners and managers as matters of pressing concern for them (Zamcu, 2014; Lizbetinova, 2015; Stokes et al., 2016; Lawless et al., 2019). The war for talent prompted by McKinsey's study has been one of the seminal works in TM studies (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). The essence of this warning is that talents are essential to an organization's competitiveness and organizations should seek to attract and retain the talents who will help them achieve this objective (Ansar & Baloch, 2018).

Countries in Europe and Asia were the ones featured most often in the SME talent management research. We came across no studies focusing on SMEs in the USA during the 10-year review. Scholars like Al Ariss et al., (2014) have been among the voices calling for a shift away from a North American viewpoint of TM (Al Ariss et al., 2014), and it is noteworthy to see many of the papers were from SMEs in Europe, Asia, and Africa. This would suggest that viewpoints about TM in SMEs have appeared from other countries, and they are not dominated by the US experience.

While the qualitative research method was the preferred approach among researchers, there seemed to be a definite preference for using the case study method for data collection. Many researchers selected it as it uses real-life

evidence that allows for a more in-depth study of a field that is still emerging (Epie, 2014; Skuza et al., 2015; Vargas-Hernandez & Elias, 2017; Sheehan & Garavan, 2018).

6. Conclusion

In response to the call for more research in TM in SMEs, this study was undertaken by reviewing 55 prior papers that have been done on the subject and the results have generated some useful insights. While talent management remains a fairly new field of discipline for scholars and HR practitioners the current state of inquisition into the construct in SMEs is growing. The literature review points to a field of study that is still developing, but with opportunities for development with regard to how talent management is viewed, conceptualized, and operationalized within SMEs. It was McDonnell et al., (2017) who asserted that the broader TM research was approaching the adolescent phase, so based on this assertion, it is safe to conclude that its advancement in the SME sector is at the infancy stage (McDonnell et al., 2017). The review also holds significant ramifications for future research as well as for the practical application of the discipline to enhance the human resource practices of companies within the SME sector.

The review's main contributions are to provide a critical analysis of the literature to review the breadth, scope, and depth of existing works that have been done on talent management within the SMEs sector in terms of how it is viewed, defined, and operationalized by organizations and their stakeholders within the sector. By offering fresh information on the different approaches to talent management, the review provides a firm foundation for other researchers to accelerate the pace of research in the sector. This contribution also aligns with the calls of many scholars for more research on talent management within the SME sector (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). The limited number of publications on SME talent management studies alongside the heightened interest in TM presents an important opportunity for researchers and academics to improve the theoretical development of the field.

7. Agenda for future talent management research in small and medium sized enterprises

One of the main aims of this review is to spur further interest in the field so that the pace of research will increase in the coming years. In this regard, we propose the following agenda for future research.

More research is needed to reflect the voices of the workers in SMEs. The majority of studies in our review have polled the views of SME owners and managers, but given the gap that exists between both groups, a more concerted effort is needed to capture the views of workers. How do they perceive TM, and how does it impact their behaviour in terms of turnover intention, job satisfaction, and performance?

Researchers need to undertake more cross-industry, country studies, and longitudinal studies. Many of the studies we reviewed stressed the importance of looking at the contextual setting when examining TM in SMEs (Krishan & Scullion, 2017) and others have shown the influence of organizational and country factors. It's now an opportune time for researchers to explore these further for SMEs.

We are living in the age of the 4th industrial revolution which has been described as the new modes of production where consumption patterns will transform all the major industrial systems (Johnston, 2018; Claus, 2019). This will have huge implications for SMEs engaged in manufacturing, which will, in turn, have implications for their TM strategies, particularly regarding the recruitment, development, and retention of talents (Antoniuk et al., 2017). Yet only one study in our review explored this trend. This we believe is yet another understudied area warranting more investigation.

One of the ongoing debates among TM practitioners is which TM practices are more effective (King & Vairman, 2019). This inquisition requires more focus among SMEs.

References

- Ansar, N., & Baloch, A. (2018). Talent and talent management: definition and issues. *IBT Journal of Business Studies (JBS)*, 1(2).
- Al Ariss, A., Cascio, W. F., & Paauwe, J. (2014). Talent management: Current theories and future research directions. *Journal of World Business*, 49(2), 173-179.
- Abor, J., & Biekpe, N. (2006). Small business financing initiatives in Ghana. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 4(3), 69-77.
- Bakhtiari, S., Breunig, R., Magnani, L., & Zhang, J. (2020). Financial constraints and small and medium enterprises: A review. *Economic Record*, 96(315), 506-523.
- Beechler, S., & Woodward, I. C. (2009). The global "war for talent". *Journal of international management*, 15(3), 273-285.
- Bibi, M. (2019). Impact of talent management practices on employee performance: an empirical study among healthcare employees. *SEISENSE Journal of Management*, 2(1), 22-32.
- Boštjančič, E., & Slana, Z. (2018). The role of talent management comparing medium-sized and large companies—major challenges in attracting and retaining talented employees. *Frontiers in psychology*, 9, 1750.
- Chandler, G. N., & Hanks, S. H. (1994). Founder competence, the environment, and venture performance. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 18(3), 77-89.
- Cosgrave, D., & O'Dwyer, M. (2020). Ethical standards and perceptions of CRM among millennial consumers. *International Marketing Review*.
- Epie, C. (2014). Improving talent retention in an SME in the Nigerian environment: Reflections on a case study. *International Journal of Employment Studies*, 22(1), 60-76.
- Festing, M., Harsch, K., Schäfer, L., & Scullion, H. (2017). Talent management in small-and medium-sized enterprises.

- Gallardo-Gallardo, E., & Thunnissen, M. (2016). Standing on the shoulders of giants? A critical review of empirical talent management research. *Employee Relations*.
- Gallardo-Gallardo, E., Thunnissen, M., & Scullion, H. (2020). Talent management: context matters. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 31(4), 457-473.
- Grimmer, L., Grimmer, M., & Mortimer, G. (2018). The more things change the more they stay the same: A replicated study of small retail firm resources. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 44, 54-63.
- Harney, B., & Alkhalaf, H. (2021). A quarter-century review of HRM in small and medium-sized enterprises: Capturing what we know, exploring where we need to go. *Human Resource Management*, 60(1), 5-29.
- Hasan, N. A., & Saufie, N. H. (2021). The curvilinear effect of talent management on financial and innovation performance of SMEs. *International Journal of Management*, 12(1), 33-45.
- Joshua, A., & Quartey, P. (2010). Issues in SME development in Ghana and South Africa. *International Research journal of finance and Economics*, 39(2), 219-228.
- Kayanula, D., & Quartey, P. (2000). Paper on the policy environment for prompting small and medium-sized enterprise in Ghana and Malawi. *University of Manchester: Crawford House*.
- Kitchenham, B., & Charters, S. (2007). Guidelines for performing systematic literature reviews in software engineering.
- Krishnan, T. N., & Scullion, H. (2017). Talent management and dynamic view of talent in small and medium enterprises. *Human Resource Management Review*, 27(3), 431-441.
- Kuratko, D. F., Montagnano, R. V., & Hornsby, J. S. (1990). Developing an intrapreneurial assessment instrument for an effective corporate entrepreneurial environment. *Strategic management journal*, 49-58.
- Lawless, A., Panya, F., O'Brien, S., & Kok, S. (2019). Talk-about talent: underlying philosophies on talent in Thai SMEs. *Human Resource Development International*, 22(5), 553-572.
- Ližbetinová, L. (2015). Potential of Talent Management for SMEs.
- Lonial, S. C., & Carter, R. E. (2015). The impact of organizational orientations on medium and small firm performance: A resource-based perspective. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 53(1), 94-113.
- McDonnell, A., Collings, D. G., Mellahi, K., & Schuler, R. (2017). Talent management: a systematic review and prospects. *European Journal of International Management*, 11(1), 86-128.
- Mensah, J. K. (2019). Talent management and employee outcomes: A psychological contract fulfilment perspective. *Public Organization Review*, 19(3), 325-344.
- Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., Altman, D. G., & PRISMA Group*. (2009). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: the PRISMA statement. *Annals of internal medicine*, 151(4), 264-269.
- Olusegun, A. I. (2012). Is small and medium enterprises (SMEs) an entrepreneurship? *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 2(1), 487.

- Pauli, U. (2018). Talent Management Practices in Polish Small and Medium Enterprises. *Human Resource Management/Zarzadzanie Zasobami Ludzkimi*, 125(6).
- Pauli, U., & Poczowski, A. (2019). Talent management in SMEs: An exploratory study of Polish companies. *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, 7(4), 199-218.
- Phoemphian, T. (2015). Employer Brand: Tool for Human Resource Attraction and Retention. *Panyapiwat Journal*, 7, 241-252.
- Redman, T., & Wilkinson, A. (2009). *Contemporary human resource management: Text and cases*. Pearson Education.
- Serban, A., & Andanut, M. (2014). Talent competitiveness and competitiveness through talent. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 16, 506-511.
- Scullion, H., Collings, D.G. and Caligiuri, P. (2010) 'Global talent management', *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 45, pp.105–108.
- Shahi, T., Farroksheresht, B., Taghipourian, M. J., & Aghajani, H. A. (2020). Behavioral Factors Affecting Talent Management: Meta-Synthesis Technique. *Iranian Journal of Management Studies*, 13(1), 117-137.
- Sheehan, M., Grant, K., & Garavan, T. (2018). Strategic talent management: A macro and micro analysis of current issues in hospitality and tourism. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*.
- Shulga, L. V., & Busser, J. A. (2019). Talent management meta review: a validity network schema approach. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
- Skoumpopoulou, D., Stalker, B., & Kohont, A. (2019). Talent management in European SMEs: case analysis between Slovenia and Poland. *International journal of human resource development practice, policy & research*, 4(2), 45-64.
- Skuza, A., McDonnell, A., & Scullion, H. (2015). Talent management in the emerging markets. In *Handbook of human resource management in emerging markets* (pp. 225-243). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Stokes, P., Liu, Y., Smith, S., Leidner, S., Moore, N., & Rowland, C. (2016). Managing talent across advanced and emerging economies: HR issues and challenges in a Sino-German strategic collaboration. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 27(20), 2310-2338.
- Tocher, N., & Rutherford, M. W. (2009). Perceived acute human resource management problems in small and medium firms: an empirical examination. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 33(2), 455-479.
- Unger, J. M., Rauch, A., Frese, M., & Rosenbusch, N. (2011). Human capital and entrepreneurial success: A meta-analytical review. *Journal of business venturing*, 26(3), 341-358.
- Valverde, M., Scullion, H., & Ryan, G. (2013). Talent management in Spanish medium-sized organisations. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(9), 1832-1852.
- Vargas-Hernandez, J. G., & Elias, E. I. B. (2017). Organizational Culture Based on Human Talent Management as a Factor of Retention of SMEs in Zacatecas. *ANVESHAK-International Journal of Management*, 6(2), 9-28.
- Zamcu, E. G. (2014). Trends and Challenges in the Modern HRM–Talent Management. *SEA–Practical Application of Science*, 2(04), 173-180.