Assessing the role of talent management in manufacturing SMEs' performance in the Gauteng Province during COVID-19

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DECLARATION BY THE STUDENT

An article format was chosen for this study. The researcher, Gladys Bakijeeja Zake, assisted with conceptualising the study, conducted and reviewed the literature search, collected and captured data and was responsible for writing up of the PhD manuscript. Prof Petronella Jonck acted as promoter and Prof Anna-Marie Pelser as co-promoter. Prof Jonck as promoter assisted with the conceptualisation of the study, the analysis of data and the statistical results, provided guidance and co-authored all research outputs produced for this thesis. Prof Pelser assisted with conceptualising the study, provided guidance and co-authored the research outputs. Articles produced from the research study were submitted for publication to the following journals and conferences:

An article from Manuscript 1, titled “Business continuity strategies employed during COVID-19 underscoring organisational performance and talent management”, is currently under review at the *South African Journal of Business Management*.

An article from Manuscript 2, titled “Impact of contextual factors on talent management and organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector”, is currently under review at the *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*.

An article from Manuscript 3, titled “An entrepreneurial ecosystem approach underscoring talent management and organisational performance”, is currently under review at the *African Journal of Management*.

A paper from Manuscript 4, titled “Impact of COVID-19 on SMEs organisational performance and talent management practices in a South African manufacturing sub-sector: preliminary findings” was presented at the 23rd International Conference on Human Resource Development and Practices across Europe hosted by the National College of Ireland from 7 to 9 June 2023 and published in a book of abstracts.

I, Gladys Bakijeeja Zake, hereby declare that ‘*Assessing the role of talent management in manufacturing SMEs’ performance in the Gauteng Province during COVID-19*’ is my own work and that all sources used in this research have been indicated in-text and in the reference lists of each chapter.

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ABSTRACT

Subject: This research study assessed the role of talent management in manufacturing SMEs' performance in Gauteng Province during COVID-19.

Keywords: Talent management, talent management practices, organisational performance; SME performance, Covid-19 impact, entrepreneurial ecosystem, manufacturing SMEs, business continuity strategies

The significant role played by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has been confirmed in both developed and developing countries specifically in terms of economic growth and poverty alleviation. More specifically, the manufacturing SME sector is an important contributor to employment and gross domestic product (GDP). Therefore, the significant role played by the manufacturing sector is determined by the value it contributes to the economy in terms of GDP and as a catalyst for job creation, which is indicative of the sector. On the other hand, the failure rate of SMEs within the South African context is high, with an extrapolated 70% of SMEs failing within three years from establishment, emphasising the importance of organisational performance. Furthermore, 'talent', which should be aptly managed, has been identified as a major driver of organisational performance in the fourth industrial revolution milieu. Talent management is an emerging phenomenon and is deemed a significant concept in strategic human resource management. However, a paucity of studies focuses on the applicability thereof in different economic settings. Talent management, for the sake of clarity, can be explained as the systematic identification of keystone positions contributing to an organisationally-sustained competitive advantage, the establishment of a talent pool of candidates with requisite aptitude to fill the identified roles, the development of human resource architecture to facilitate filling identified positions with competent incumbents and ensuring employees' continued commitment to the organisation (viz. talent development and performance appraisal). Considering the stated, the empirical study aimed to assess the role of talent management in SMEs' organisational performance in the mentioned sector. Moreover, the adverse effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the survival and performance of the sector is a concern that has not been investigated in its entirety.

The present study proposes to address the following gaps in the corpus of knowledge: (i) the paucity of research on talent management in various settings, i.e.

manufacturing sector; (ii) empirical research underscoring understanding the effectiveness of COVID-19 mitigating measures; (iii) limited empirical evidence of the impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance; (iv) the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems, which is an emerging theoretical framework underpinning entrepreneurial activity in SMEs, is under-theorised and the corpus of knowledge predominantly consist of conceptual studies; and (v) entrepreneurial ecosystems research focuses on technological-based industries in developed economies using case study research designs. Therefore, the main aim of the study was to assess the effect of talent management practices on organisational performance, and subsequently, propose a talent management conceptual framework for SMEs in the manufacturing industry during COVID-19. To achieve the stated main aim of the research, four research objectives were developed, including:

- To ascertain whether demographic variables, *inter alia*, the size of the SME, nature of service delivery, and perceived level of competition, to mention a few, statistically significantly influence talent management practises and SME performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province.
- To ascertain whether talent management practices (i.e., recruitment and retention practices, succession planning practice, promotion practice, performance appraisal practice, talent development) significantly influence SMEs' organisational performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province.
- To establish whether there is a correlation between the various aspects of talent management within the context of SMEs' organisational performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province.
- To explore the impact of COVID-19 on the performance of SMEs in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province.

The study employed a mixed-method cross-sectional research design. A total of 395 participants partook in the study with the target population including proprietors, general managers and human resource practitioners employed at manufacturing SMEs in the Gauteng Province. Data was collected using a self-constructed questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale. The Likert scale ranged from: (1) strongly disagree; (2) disagree; (3) agree; to (4) strongly agree. The total scale had an internal consistency of 0.951, as measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Recruitment and retention had a Cronbach's

alpha coefficient of 0.891, succession planning and promotion an alpha of 0.766, performance appraisal 0.860 and talent development an alpha of 0.846. Organisational performance had a reliability score of 0.913 and COVID-19's impact was 0.700. The validity of the measuring instrument was confirmed by means of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) supported by structural equation modelling (SEM). Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. A combination of descriptive and inferential statistical analyses was performed. Descriptive statistical analysis was executed to provide a profile of the sample and to determine the measures of central tendency. Inferential statistical analysis was also computed to test the hypotheses, for example assessing the interrelation between talent management practices and organisational performance. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was carried out to test the hypothesised statistical models and to ascertain the goodness fit indices. Content analysis was used to interpret narrative responses related to business continuity strategies implemented during the pandemic.

Findings from the pilot study indicated that COVID-19 statistically significantly influenced organisational performance, talent development and recruitment as well as retention. The impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance can statistically significantly be mitigated by talent management practices. The narrative responses revealed that most of the SMEs did not have a business continuity plan in place and reactively reduced expenditure mostly related to human capital underscoring talent management. Results from the main study emphasising the influence of contextual factors revealed that most SMEs did not have a formal talent management strategy. Exogenous contextual factors partially statistically significantly predicted talent management facets and organisational performance, whereas endogenous contextual factors predicted talent management facets and organisational performance to a large extent. Lastly, the empirical research performed indicated that talent management and talent management practices (viz. recruitment and retention, succession planning and promotion, performance appraisal and talent development) are predictors of organisational performance in the manufacturing SME sector in accordance with the entrepreneurial ecosystem theoretical underpinning. Results confirmed the statistical significance of the proposed nexus and contributed to the development of the mentioned theory.

Managerial implications derived from the study encompass that SMEs in the manufacturing sector ought to develop and implement strategic business continuity strategies supported by effective talent management practices with a specific reference to talent development, recruitment and retention. It is also recommended that novel business continuity models be implemented post-COVID-19 to ensure business sustainability in the unforeseen event of a catastrophe. Furthermore, it is recommended that manufacturing SMEs ought to focus on endogenous contextual factors, including the perceived importance of talent management practices as a significant factor predicting organisational performance necessitating implementation and continuous assessment. Lastly, it is recommended that management pays specific attention to succession planning, promotion, recruitment and retention when developing talent management strategies as these are confirmed contributors to improved organisational performance.

Several contributions were made by the research reported on. Firstly, the study contributed to current empirical literature on talent management and talent management practices specifically within the manufacturing SME sector. Therefore, the research study contributed to an in-depth understanding and appreciation of the importance of talent management and talent management practices, considering the associated benefits to improved organisational performance. Secondly, the study contributed to the emaciated literature relating to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and what measures enterprises employed during the pandemic while proposing a business continuity framework post-COVID-19. The theoretical contribution is associated with the entrepreneurial ecosystem theory. The reported research empirically validated the proposed theoretical framework in the manufacturing sector within a developing economy context utilising a quantitative research design indicative of the novel theoretical contribution of the research study.

The thesis concludes and argues that talent management had a statistically significant influence on the performance of manufacturing sector SMEs in the Gauteng Province during the COVID-19 pandemic. Talent management facets that contributed to the variance in SME performance included succession planning and promotion (62.8%), recruitment and retention (58.8%), talent development (54.9%) and performance appraisal (54.5%).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This thesis underscores the role of talent management in the performance of manufacturing SMEs in the Gauteng Province during COVID-19. Chapter 1 highlights the background and motivation of the study and elaborates on the research problem and gaps that the study attempted to address. The overview is followed by the primary and secondary objectives, research methodology and chapter layout.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The significant contribution of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in economies throughout the world, has been emphasised by various researchers, such as Irawan and Sukiyono (2021), indicating that SMEs contribute to economic growth, employment, poverty reduction, investment, foreign commerce and tax revenue. In the same breath, Elijah (2021) emphasises the contribution of SMEs in underdeveloped countries or least-developed countries towards economic growth and poverty alleviation. Among other identified areas in the economy, employment is a major contribution made by the SME sector (Erdin & Ozkaya, 2020). Global economic changes and associated integrations are confirmed structural transformations that have impacted the way economies operate, irrespective of the level of socio-economic development (Soud, 2020). Furthermore, as a response to the outbreak of COVID-19, most businesses incorporated measures to counter the impact of the outbreak and its related reactions from economic actors on business operations. However, a paucity of empirical studies or reports have been carried out to investigate the effectiveness of the measures implemented (Anakpo & Mishi, 2021). Murithi (2020) notes that, in Africa, the pandemic led to a negative growth of -5.1% by 2020, thereby plunging the continent into the worst recession in 25 years. Bano, Omar, and Ismail (2021) emphasise the need for emergency succession planning during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure business continuity, underscoring the fact that organisations cannot ignore that employees are a pivotal asset. According to Baharin and Hanafi (2018), employees are the heart and backbone of an organisation and put an emphasis on the importance of employee retention in keeping organisations on track. It

is in line with this assertion of Ako-Nai (2020) who states that leadership is important in the success or failure of an organisation, especially in the post-COVID-19 era.

Moreover, the global phenomenon with reference to the competition for resources has resulted in what is referred to as a war on talent (Sparrow, 2019). To remain competitive, organisations must identify talented employees as a critical business process part and parcel of internal operations (Cardigan, 2017; Sommer *et al*., 2017). Organisations that are successful at managing talented employees tend to excel in the competitive market (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018). Hilman and Abubakar (2017) argue that there are different definitions of talent management, creating confusion to such an extent that there is a lack of clarity on the concept. Therefore, talent management has various definitions put forward by different scholars, yet none are said to be generally accepted. Cardigan (2017) argued that despite the growing popularity of the field relating to talent management, there remains a lack of consensus partly ascribed to incorrect definitions of the concept, and partly from overlapping and conflicting literature. Moreover, Wadhwa and Tripathi (2018) argue that different industries have defined the term 'talent' and 'talent management' in their own terminology. Consequently, organisations can prefer to accept their own interpretations instead of accepting universal or prescribed definitions. According to the authors, 'talent' consists of those individuals who may make the greatest difference to organisational performance either by their contribution or by demonstrating the highest levels of potential longitudinally (Wadhwa & Tripathi, 2018). Research has found that, to improve employee performance, training and development are key facets of talent management that contribute to employee performance (Lawal *et al*., 2022). Previous authors further recommend that employee performance can be improved through organisations implementing talent retention measures such as succession planning, career development and employee motivation (Lawal *et al*., 2022). This recommendation is supported by Afriany (2020), who concluded that work motivation affects job satisfaction and job satisfaction directly affects performance. Cera and Kusaku (2021) further highlight that organisational performance can be improved through leadership and skill flexibility.

Notwithstanding the importance of talent management, there is a lack of empirical talent management research with notably little attention to industry's perspective (Cardigan, 2017). According to Collings, Mellahi, and Cascio (2019), a key limitation in the research on global talent management has been a failure to develop theoretical and empirical

insights into how talent management links to organisational performance even though, currently, the stated enjoys considerable legitimacy as an area of practice. Supporting the stated narrative, Latif *et al*. (2020) state that there is a paucity of empirical studies investigating the association between talent management and other variables such as turnover intention (TI). Latif *et al*. (2020) found that talent management practices, *inter alia*, talent attraction, talent development and talent retention, influence employees' turnover intention but also stated that there is a lack of empirical evidence on talent management overall. Although various authors (for example, Agbaeze *et al.*, 2017; Bibi, 2019; Hitu & Baroda, 2018; Ndolo *et al*., 2017, Son *et al*., 2018; Supraptiningsih *et al.*, 2018) have shown that talent management influences organisational performance, none of the mentioned studies were conducted within the South African context and specifically in the manufacturing industry.

Furthermore, succession planning is deemed a pivotal talent management facet. Identifying potential successors for key positions could be one of the organisation's most challenging tasks. It is not unusual, however, to see incumbent leaders single-handedly pick their successors or exert tremendous influence on their selection. Maurya and Agarwal (2018) opine that this practice could have serious implications for the organisation, since such successors potentially lack the required skills and competencies to be effective leaders. According to Baker, Lunsford, and Pifer (2019), as well as Maurya and Agarwal (2018), a strong leadership cadre could be fostered through the practice of succession planning. The extent to which South African manufacturing organisations practise succession planning as part and parcel of talent management relative to organisational performance is yet to be known.

Against the stated background, Hilman and Abubakar (2017), as well as Wong and Sixl-Daniell (2017) suggest that future empirical research should be done on strategic talent management in different industrial settings and in different countries to further investigate the generalisability of empirical findings. To the knowledge of the researcher, there is no identified research that has explored the effect of talent management practices on organisational performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. Consequently, the proposed study will attempt to contribute to the body of knowledge by investigating the relationship between talent management practices and organisational performance in the manufacturing industry. For the sake of clarity, the following definitions are used in the research reported on:

1.1.1 Talent management

Agarwal (2019) defines talent management as the systematic attraction, identification, enlargement, engagement and deployment of employees who are deemed of particular value to the organisation, either ascribed to future potential or currently fulfilling critical roles within the organisation. Al-Dalahmeh, Heder, and Dajnoki (2020) state that successful human capital planning assists organisations to focus on meeting unambiguously identified workforce needs, and therefore talent management emphasises selecting the right candidate for the right position. On the other hand, Latif *et al.* (2020) define talent management as the implementation of cohesive policies or systems intended to improve workplace productivity by designing processes relating to attracting, developing, retaining and utilising incumbents with the requisite skills and aptitude to meet current and future organisational requirements. For this research study, the definition by Wadhwa and Tripathi (2018) was adopted that refers to talent management as the system of incorporating new employees, developing and retaining existing employees and drawing attention to highly skilled employees to work in the organisation. Singh (2021) expounds that talent management is pivotal to achieving and improving organisational performance towards sustaining competitive advantage.

1.1.2 Organisational performance

According to Zumitzavan and Michie (2015), organisational performance can refer to the level of productivity that the organisation can accomplish towards attaining its goals, increasing organisational resources, meeting customers' needs and improving internal processes. Mafini and Pooe (2013) defined organisational performance as outputs measured against intended goals and objectives. Various approaches can be employed to measure organisational performance, such as financial indicators, customer base, internal processes, innovation and learning perspective (Mafina & Pooe, 2013). In this study, primary data was used to assess organisational performance through a questionnaire where participants were asked to respond to questions related to profitability levels, their enterprise's achievement of its strategic goals and objectives, customer satisfaction levels, adherence to good governance, and the enterprise's ability

to survive or remain afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic, with minimum losses in profitability and human capital.

1.1.3 Small and medium sized enterprises

The South African National Small Enterprise Act, 2004 (Act No. 29 of 2004), schedule 1 amendment (2019) defines 'Small enterprise' as a separate and distinct business entity, together with its branches or subsidiaries, if any, including cooperative enterprises, managed by one owner or more predominantly carried on in any sector or subsector of the economy and classified as a micro-, a small or a medium enterprise by satisfying the criteria in terms of the total full-time equivalent of paid employees and the total annual turnover. In terms of the manufacturing sector, this study focuses on (i) the total full-time equivalent of paid employees of between 11 and 50 for small enterprises and between 51 and 250 for medium enterprises; (ii) a total annual turnover of ≤ R50 million for small enterprises and ≤ R170 million for medium enterprises.

1.1.4 COVID-19

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus resulting in respiratory illness. The outbreak of COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020, and a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Krishnan *et al.* 2021). According to Peleg *et al.* (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic followed a unique pattern of a cascading effect unlike other pandemics and brought about a slowly developing economic and social crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic affected people's lifestyles in aspects, such as cultural, social, educational, economic, and environmental facets (Nanehkaran *et al.* 2023).

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Authors opine organisations are challenged by retaining decent employees ascribed to market competition and talent scarcity forcing management to improve internalised human resource strategies (Kaliannan *et al*., 2023). Talent management is defined as the

practice of engaging, managing, evaluating and sustaining an enterprise's most valuable resource, i.e., employees. Employees are regarded as the enterprise's most critical asset and enterprises are continuously searching for mechanisms to make informed decisions and create platforms to sustain competitiveness (Alziari, 2017). Rohida and Akbar (2019) define talent management as a series of integrated organisational initiatives that include the process of analysing, recruiting, developing, and maintaining talented and sustainable human resources to meet the needs of organisations that aim to develop a competitive advantage as future leaders. Talent management needs active participation from top management, and it is important that the management team endeavours to have in place relevant talent management processes and systems. It should not be seen as a sole human resources management activity, but rather, a mentality that is aligned towards a holistic and incorporated approach to enhance organisational survival, growth, development and competitiveness through human capital. This would ensure a sufficient supply of 'talent' to appoint the right category of candidates to vacancies at the right time with the intention of attaining short-term and long-term organisational strategic goals (Harsch & Festing, 2020). Talent management is analysed in terms of processes and systems put in place by the organisation to acquire the right skills and abilities, at the right time. Authors (for example, Collings *et al*., 2018; McDonell & Wiblen, 2020) believe that there is a lack of clarity relating to the definition, latitude and overall strategic agenda of talent management in organisations. Nevertheless, although there is no agreed position on the universal definition of talent management, it can be deduced that talent management is concerned with how best organisational human capital can be acquired, retained, developed, motivated and utilised by the management echelon. Therefore, talent management can be seen as a strategic process that has to be propelled by senior management as a across-board responsibility, encompassing all departments and sections of the organisation.

Baharin and Hanafi (2018) opine that the lack of effective management of human capital is caused by factors such as lack of understanding of the importance of human resources and talent management. With reference to the importance of talent management, Mansour and Shehadeah (2020) found an inverse relationship between talent management practices and counter-productive work behaviours (i.e., sabotage, withdrawal, deviation in production, theft, and bribery) in Jordan. Abdullahi, Kavitha, and Solarin (2020) found that talent management does not only improve employee

performance, but also decreases negative work behaviour through the partial mediating role of employee workplace attitudes. Wong and Sixl-Daniell (2017) state that talent management is a critical success factor in the corporate world ascribed to factors such as globalisation, knowledge-based competition, new forms of organisation, demographic changes, increased mobility, and changing complexity of the workplace. In line with this assertion, Collings *et al*. (2019) introduce global talent management wherein talent management is viewed as a global concept and key ingredient to global business environments contributing to organisational growth. However, Glaister, Karacay, and Demirbag (2017) argue that anomalies in managing talents are universal, but more critical in emerging market economies where talent shortages highlight an urgent need for organisations to practice talent management. Previous authors advise that management echelons ought to be more vigilant and conscious while developing succession and career development plans for the employees to improve 'talent' retention (Glaister *et al*., 2017). Furthermore, various approaches to talent management can be adopted to enhance performance and competitiveness, *inter alia,* organisation-wide focus, talent pool, leadership development, functional-level or workforce group focus, and identifying specific critical posts. The co-constructed competency model is also recommended for talent management as a systemic approach to enhancing performance and the design of strategy to retain talent (Mupepi & Mambo, 2017).

1.2.1 Talent management facets

Talent management is pivotal in organisational performance to sustain a competitive advantage, and therefore the careful practising of attracting, selecting, acquiring, retaining, and developing talented employees has become critical (Singh, 2021). Talent management consists of three major components, namely the process to attract, develop, and retain employees (Harsch & Festing, 2020). According to Abdullahi *et al*. (2020; 2021), talent management practices include succession planning, promotion and performance appraisal, which are thought to have a significant effect on employee performance. According to Anlesinya, Dartey-Baah and Amponsah-Tawiah (2019), the core components in the talent management process subsume workforce planning, talent attraction and development, which are deemed critical links in an organisation's talent supply chain. Mansour and Shehadeh (2020) utilise talent attraction, training and

development, talent retention, and succession planning as independent variables to measure talent management. The following talent management practices are outlined in this study, namely recruitment and retention, succession planning and promotion, performance appraisal as well as talent development.

1.2.1.1 Recruitment and retention

Organisational performance is contingent on recruitment and selection (Alsakarneh *et al*., 2023; Makhamreh *et al*., 2022), whereas recruitment and selection play a significant part in employee performance and commitment, which are linked with employee retention (Nazari, Akbari, & Veismoradi, 2014; Zhang & Stewart, 2017). According to Tirta and Enrika (2020), rewards and recognition, work-life balance and job satisfaction have a statistically significant positive effect on employee retention. Effective recruitment practices are considered as key contributing factor to organisational efficiency and quality service delivery, thereby impacting organisational performance (Basalamah, Syahnur, & Basalamah, 2020). Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs (2013), reflecting on previous research, explain that recruiting and retaining talent are vital components to organisational success.

1.2.1.2 Succession planning and promotion

Foremost, the review of literature has assisted in facilitating the theoretical integration of the fundamentals of succession management practice. As reported by most authors, the reasons for succession management practice are to ensure organisational performance, organisational strategic alignment and long-term business sustainability. For instance, Aboradi and Masari (2018) as well as Mokhber *et al*., (2017) confirm that a well-managed succession strategy has the potential to positively influence organisational performance. Likewise, Bottomley (2018) and Rothwell (2018) found a relationship between a well-managed succession plan and long-term organisational sustainability. Nonetheless, leadership commitment to succession management practices creates awareness at all organisational levels, with shared responsibilities for succession management practices that enhance the continuous supply of competent leaders towards organisational performance (Mokhber *et al*., 2017; Rothwell, 2018).

Moreover, a succession management system requires aligning employees with organisational needs necessitating the concurrent appraisal of the organisation's current performance and the assessment of potential candidates in relation to organisational needs (Bottomley, 2018; Rothwell, 2018). The procedure for such an assessment must be based on an organisation's core competencies, designed specifically for the selection and development of high-potential candidates intentionally to achieve organisational performance (Rothwell, 2018). Therefore, it is pertinent to know how South African SMEs use succession management to ensure that vacant key positions are filled with the appropriate candidates to ensure organisational performance.

Succession planning is regarded as a process of determining a successor for an organisation's key senior executives, as well as any employee with specialist knowledge relevant to the organisation. Succession management practice involves the identification, grooming and appointment of competent leaders at all levels of an organisation to ensure organisational strategic continuity and the alignment of individual employees' needs with organisational needs (Cardigan, 2017). It is a process that should ideally be initiated long before the time comes to replace the identified employee and should be monitored on an ongoing basis. Succession planning must become part of organisational culture. From a talent management perspective, it is no longer only top executives who should be considered for succession planning. Talented employees identified by the organisation's talent mapping tools should also be factored in, since identified employees' retention has transformed, leaving organisations vulnerable to unexpected vacant key positions. Rohida and Akbar (2019) describe promotion as an increase in rank or seniority for employees who are consistent with superior performance.

1.2.1.3 Performance appraisal

Performance appraisal is a pivotal aspect of organisations in terms of assessing employees' progress and to provide ratification measures accordingly (Dhanabhakyam & Fahad, 2023). Performance appraisal can be defined as a review process that cascades down through the organisation to provide a link between each employee and the overall strategy of the organisation (Smith & Goddard, 2002). The quality of a performance appraisal system is determined by the outcome thereof on factors such as job satisfaction, turnover intention and commitment. Furthermore, it was found that an effective

performance appraisal system had a linear influence on employee morale (Dhanabhakyam & Fahad, 2023). Almohtaseb, Shaneen, Alomari, and Akmaha (2020) expound that performance management systems moderate the relationship between talent management and organisational performance.

1.2.1.4 Talent development

Talent development, as a construct, is described as a complex process involving both individual and environmental factors, and how different factors contribute to the development of talent in different populations, contexts, and domains (Subotnik, Assouline, Olszewski-Kubilius, Stoeger, & Ziegler, 2019). Moreover, Rohida and Akbar (2019) suggest that talent development is important for organisations to have the capabilities required to implement organisational strategies. Previous authors recommend the development of internal talents versus the recruitment of new employees, since talent development as a strategy reduces risks (viz. assessment of internal talent is deemed more accurate than recruiting candidates), according to Rohida and Akbar (2019). Fletcher, Alfes, and Robinson (2018) interpret talent development as a systematic approach to learning and development intended to enhance employee, team and organisational effectiveness. Tamba and Riyanto (2020) established that training and development positively contribute to improved employee performance and, similarly, impact on improved organisational performance in relation to profitability, effectiveness and productivity.

1.2.2 Talent management and organisational performance

Almohtaseb *et al*. (2020) explain that talent management has a positive influence on organisational performance. Similarly, Irfan *et al*. (2023) indicate that organisational performance is directly impacted by talent management elements (viz. recruitment, training and development) in addition to employee skills, employee behaviour and attitude as well as organisational setting especially in the performance of manufacturing companies. Nafei (2016) found a relationship between talent management dimensions and organisational performance in Egypt. Sareen and Mishra (2016) reveal a partial relationship between talent management and organisational performance in India,

specifically in the information technology sector. Najm and Mahasrah (2017) reported that talent management facets have a positive influence on organisational performance in the Jordanian banking sector. El Dahshan, Keshk and Dorgham (2018) reported a statistically significant positive effect between organisational performance and talent management dimensions in the Egyptian healthcare sector. However, Luna-Arocas (2023) discloses that innovation is a mediating variable in the link between talent management and organisational performance. Furthermore, Hongal and Kinange (2020) opine that if organisations implement talent management effectively, employee engagement would increase, which would improve organisational performance.

1.2.3 Organisational impact of COVID-19

Aday and Aday (2020) opine that it is anticipated that COVID-19 affected the manufacturing sector. As such, the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on global supply chains in terms of weakening demand for certain products while demand for alternative products or businesses increased, failure of supplies and uncertainty of availability of raw materials, logistical challenges ascribed to shortages, as well as workforce capacity challenges (Kumar, Luthra, Mangla, & Kazançoğlu, 2020). Wang, Hong, Li, and Gao (2020), reflecting on previous research, note that during the COVID-19 crisis consumer demands and purchasing behaviour changed fundamentally. This directly impacted the manufacturing sector and therefore it is suggested that manufacturing SMEs ought to adopt resilience and flexibility in a pandemic situation by applying alternative production mechanisms such as artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to ensure sustainable production (Kumar *et al*., 2020). Donthu and Gustafsson (2020) reiterate further on the severity of the COVID-19 impact as a crisis that requires organisations to implement strategies to mitigate the associated impact. Four innovative strategies are suggested in this regard, namely (i) the responsive strategy for organisations that involve physical contact – suggesting a move to off-site marketing channels/online services, (ii) a collective strategy for organisations highly impacted by the crisis – by developing business through collaboration, (iii) a proactive strategy for less affected organisations by developing new business to cater for special customer needs, and (iv) a partnership strategy through collaborations with other firms to introduce new product/service offerings (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). This study, however, explores

further on the COVID-19 impact in the South African perspective and the type of strategies implemented by the manufacturing sector to minimise the impact of the pandemic.

1.2.4 Conceptual framework

Figure 1 overleaf illustrates the proposed theoretical framework that will further guide the study under discussion. The framework indicates the underlying assumption that talent management practices statistically significantly influence organisational performance.

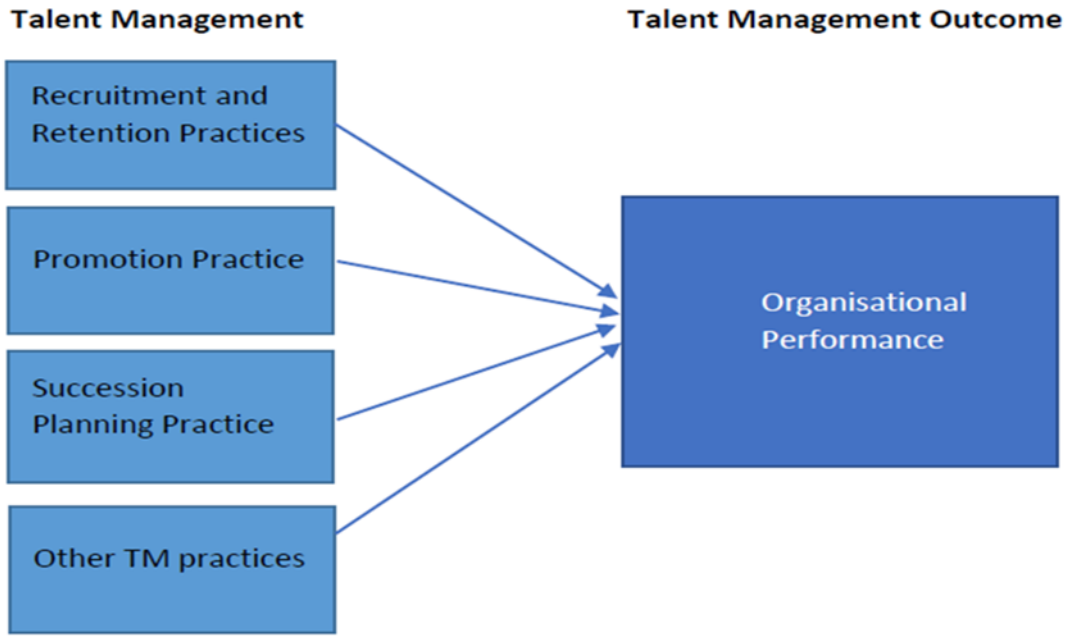

Figure 1.1: Proposed conceptual framework

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since SMEs account for a vast portion of new employment opportunities, stimulate growth, create social cohesion, generate income and are known as a primary driver for gross domestic product (GDP) growth (Nketsiah, 2018), it is pivotal to investigate aspects related to organisational performance, especially, since the failure rate of SMEs within the South African context is high. *Per se*, Olawale and Garwe (2010) specify that the SME failure rate of 75% is of the highest globally. Van Staden (2022) confirms that in excess of 70% of SMEs fail within three years of establishment. Various authors (for example Ayansola & Ayandibu, 2017; Darlington, 2017; Masocha & Fatoki, 2018) opine that SMEs face an overall lack of prudent leadership and managerial capabilities, which is critical for

day-to-day management and strategic planning. This contention has further been supported by the governing body for human resource management, which has pronounced that South Africa is in the trenches of a leadership crisis (SABPP, 2017). Moreover, organisations experience a leadership gap ascribed mainly to the inability to develop potential leadership (Frawley et al., 2017; Frederik & Julia, 2020; Opoku & Williams, 2019; Whysall et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it has also been recognised that the biggest challenge faced by SMEs stems from a lack of talent management practices (Chung & D'Annunzio-Green, 2018).

As such, SMEs seem to lack understanding of what talent and talent management entail, and the usage thereof to enhance organisational performance and improve competitiveness (Cardigan, 2017; Hilman & Abubakar, 2017; Latif *et al*., 2020). To date limited research has been conducted to explore the influence of talent management practices on organisational performance in the manufacturing industry within the South African context. It has been proposed that more empirical research should be done on strategic talent management in different industrial settings and in different countries to further investigate the generalisability of findings (Hilman & Abubakar, 2017; Wong & Sixl-Daniell, 2017). There are also no empirical studies or reports done to date to investigate the effectiveness of the relief measures applied by organisations to avert the COVID-19 impact (Anakpo & Mishi, 2021).

Against the stated background, the study attempts to contribute to the body of knowledge by addressing the identified gap, viz. the lack of a shared understanding and the usage of industry-specific talent management practices. The practical contribution of the study is related to examining the effect of talent management on organisational performance in the manufacturing industry during the COVID-19 pandemic, which could be used to develop policies and procedures to improve overall performance, directly contributing to GDP growth, job creation and economic growth.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

The primary aim of the research reported on was to assess the role of talent management in manufacturing SMEs' performance in the Gauteng Province during COVID-19. To achieve the aim of the study, the following specific research objectives were formulated:

- Ascertain whether demographic variables, *inter alia*, size of the SME, nature of service delivery, establishment of the SMEs and perceived level of competition statistically significantly influence talent management practices and SME performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province.
- Ascertain whether the variance in the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector could be attributed to talent management.
- Determine whether talent management practices (i.e., recruitment and retention, succession planning, promotion, performance appraisal, talent development) significantly influence SMEs' organisational performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province.
- Determine whether there is a correlation between the various aspects of talent management within the context of SME organisational performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province.
- Explore the impact of COVID-19 on the performance of SMEs in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province.

The main aim and objectives were operationalised by means of the following research questions, namely:

- Does talent management statistically significantly influence the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province?
- Do demographic variables, including size of the SME, nature of service delivery, establishment of the SMEs and perceived level of competition statistically significantly influence talent management practices and SME performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province?
- Which talent management practices (i.e., recruitment and retention practices, succession planning practices, promotion practices, performance appraisal practices, talent development) significantly influence SME organisational performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province?
- What is the correlation between the various aspects of talent management within the context of SME organisational performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province?

- Is the measuring instrument used psychometrically stable?
- What has been the influence of COVID-19 on the performance of SMEs in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of talent management practices in SME operations cannot be over-emphasised, as SMEs are crucial to increased economic growth and development (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017). However, according to the relevant literature (for example Ayansola & Ayandibu, 2017; Darlington, 2017; Masocha & Fatoki, 2018), SMEs lack judicious leadership and managerial capabilities, which are critical for the day-to-day management and strategic planning in addition to an absence of talent management practices (Chung & D'Annunzio-Green, 2018). Empirical research is therefore required to address the mentioned anomalies towards finding solutions. Therefore, the proposed study is aimed at addressing this gap by contributing to the existing knowledge, practices and policies.

The proposed study intends to contribute to the ongoing debate by exploring an aspect that has not been well researched, particularly within the African perspective considering the effect that talent management practices, including succession planning, suppositionally have on the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector. It is anticipated that the present study will contribute to the corpus of knowledge relating to talent management practice as an organisational strategic tool to achieve sustained organisational performance and improved competitiveness. Expectantly, practitioners in the manufacturing industry, as well as academic researchers and students in the field of business economics will benefit from this study. The significance of the study is related to Sustainable Development Goal 8, titled *decent work and economic growth*.

1.6 RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

1.6.1 Research philosophy

Bryman (2016) defined ontology as a concept underscoring the existence and relationship between different aspects of society such as social actors, cultural norms and social structures. Therefore, ontology is concerned with the nature of the world and what is known about it. The author went further to introduce the concept of social ontology that looks at whether these entities are objective, exist independently from social actors or are just social constructions based on opinions, actions and interpretations of individuals within society (Bryman, 2016). On the other hand, epistemology is related to the theory of knowledge, i.e., a way of looking at the world and making sense of it. Hetherington (2019) stated that epistemology is the philosophical study of knowledge. Epistemologists seek to understand the nature of knowledge and the availability thereof. In this study, the epistemological and ontological position or paradigm is positivism. From a positivistic perspective, facts and values are distinct, enabling, objective and value-free inquiry assuming objective reality (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To elaborate, this study applied the post-positivistic paradigm operationalised by means of quantitative methods ascribed to investigating relationships between variables and testing hypotheses using mathematical statistics.

1.6.2 Research methods

In this study, a mixed-method approach was utilised where both quantitative and qualitative data was collected, analysed and interpreted. Specifically, an embedded mixed-method design was used as a primarily quantitative design that contains a qualitative component, for example open-ended items. Yu and Khazanchi (2017), reflecting on previous research, describe an embedded mixed-method design as a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in either a primarily quantitative or the alternative design. The collection of data can be achieved through various means, including the use of open-ended questions in a quantitative questionnaire (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In the current research study, the mixed-method research design was operationalised by administering a primarily quantitative questionnaire with open-ended items capturing the qualitative component of the study.

Consequently, data was analysed using statistical and text analyses, where applicable. Zina (2021) notes that quantitative methodology uses analytical tools in data analysis as opposed to qualitative methods where the researcher analyses text and images. The quantitative method provides an objective platform upon which facts are based and uses deductive reasoning in data analysis. Therefore, it enhances the level of validity and repeatable results that could be replicated in future (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Also, inferences based on quantitatively measured outcomes justify the inclination to conduct a study in an objective way (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, the quantitative method involved the use of a survey instrument (questionnaire) to collect participants' views relating to talent management practices and a hypothesised COVID-19 impact in selected SMEs in the Gauteng Province relative to organisational performance. Utilising quantitative methods ensures a high probability of generating concrete results that might be replicated for further research endeavours. The assurance of anonymity was given to enhance honest responses to questions posed (Leedy & Omrod, 2016). The qualitative component provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of phenomena, which is not based on a numerical measurement. Also, qualitative research is conducted in a natural environment and the results are interpreted by making use of narratives or narrated responses that are given by participants (Van der Walt *et al*., 2016).

1.6.3 Research design

Research design can be described as a framework through which relevant information for the study was obtained (Zina, 2021). The design is usually in accordance with the selected research method to be used in sourcing and analysing data. For this study, an embedded mixed-method design was used, which involved the convergent or sequential use of data, but the core idea is that either quantitative or qualitative data is embedded within a larger design and the data sources play a supporting role in the overall design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In the research reported on, a qualitative component was embedded in a predominantly quantitative research design. There are three main research design sub-categories under a predominantly quantitative approach, which, according to Creswell and Creswell (2017), are: (1) experimental design (2) quasi-experimental design, and (3) descriptive design. In this study, a descriptive design sub-

category, which relies on a quantitative method that identifies and describes reasons for certain occurrences or theories, was implemented.

The research design was operationalised by means of administering a questionnaire cross-sectionally. In a cross-sectional research design, the measuring instrument is administered once without repeat measurements (Jonck, Van der Walt, & Sobayeni, 2019). The implemented research design is characterised as *ex post facto* research as there was no experimental intervention and the participants belong to the various groups prior to data gathering (Jonck, De Coning, & Radikonyana, 2018). Furthermore, a quantitative method leans towards theoretical positivism (Mertens, 2019). In other words, it is reasonable to assume that organisations would adopt better ways of achieving success. Therefore, a variable such as talent management could be classified into the philosophical realm of pragmatism and support for change in ensuring an organisation's success.

1.6.4 Population

Population is the primary source of data; therefore, a population is a set of individuals with a specific set of characteristics the researcher intends to make inferences about. There are three types of population, namely general, target and accessible population (Asiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Aboyie, 2017). In this study, the target population is registered manufacturing SMEs, notably in the Gauteng Province in South Africa. For the purposes of this study, the informal sector is defined as small, unregistered businesses operating as street vendors and in-home businesses established on residential sites (often termed 'spaza shops' or 'tuck shops' in South Africa), while formal small businesses are defined as enterprises operating from fixed building structures located on business stands demarcated as such by municipal town planning regulations (Litghelm, 2013). Only formal small businesses were studied in the research reported on. Proprietors, general managers and human resource practitioners employed at the aforementioned SMEs constituted the population of participants in this study.

1.6.5 Sampling method and size

Sampling is an economical and time efficient method of obtaining information about a population. Bryman (2016) opines that if the sample is suitably drawn, it would, within the specified variable limits, reflect the characteristics of the population. Sampling techniques are divided into two broad categories, namely probability and non-probability sampling (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Probability sampling was employed in the research study. Foretasted is a sampling technique where each population member is given a known probability or chance of participating in the study. Probability sampling comprises the following sampling techniques, *inter alia*, simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, systematic random sampling and cluster sampling (Wagner, Kawulich, & Garner, 2012). Probability sampling enables the researcher to obtain a reputable representative sample of the target population in terms of each characteristic such as size and type of SME. Ascribed to SMEs representing the unit of analysis, 395 eligible SMEs were randomly selected from the manufacturing sector in the Gauteng Province. A two-pronged sampling strategy was implemented whereby once an SME had been selected, convenience sampling was at that time used by including the proprietors, general managers and human resource practitioners employed at the selected SMEs to form part of the study.

Sample size should be in accordance with the population size. A sample of 384 participants on the 95 percent confidence level is representative of a population of 2.5 million with a 5 percent margin of error (Orban, 2021). Therefore, a sample of at least 395 participants, as indicated above, was included in the study. The sample size was estimated by applying Yaro Yamani's mathematical formula with a 5% margin of error; the required sample size can be estimated using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where: n = the desired sample size; N = the population; e = acceptable margin error limit (0.05 based on 95% confidence level)

1.6.6 Data collection procedure

A database of registered manufacturing SMEs was obtained from a public platform in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) regulations. From said list, every seventh unit of analysis was included in the initial sample, and therefore simple random sampling was performed. As anticipated, not all the selected SMEs opted to participate, and in such instances, the next SME on the list was included. Organisational consent forms were distributed to the sampled SMEs, after which a list of possible participants was requested. To gain stakeholder support and ensure POPIA adherence, a generic email informing the population (all possible participants) of the envisioned research project was distributed. The questionnaires were thereafter administered to participants who had consented to form part of the study through the participant consent form in compliance with POPIA. Specifically, in terms of the data collection process, the following should be highlighted:

- An organisational consent form was sent to the sampled enterprises to obtain gatekeeper consent.
- A list of possible participants was requested from the participating SMEs.
- Participants were requested to provide informed consent to be included in the study by completing the participant consent form. Informed consent was based on an explanation of the purpose of the research study.
- The consent form clearly indicated that collected information will be used for research purposes only and ethical considerations of confidentiality and anonymity, among others, would be ensured.
- Respondents had to provide informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire.

1.6.7 Measuring instrument

Data collection instruments constitute a fundamental component of the research process providing the analytical basis in the quest for answers to a given research problem (Moyo, 2017). A self-developed semi-structured questionnaire was administered to collect both quantitative and qualitative data in the study. The measuring instrument was designed in

accordance with the purpose of the study and based on the literature review. The questionnaire was made up of three sections. Section A collected demographical information of participants. Section B had three parts and collected information based on the study objectives. Part 1 collected background information on the SMEs. Part II focused on the importance of talent management systems. A typical item is "*Reasons for practising talent management is to identify talents for leadership development and retention in the organisation*." Part III focused on the knowledge, understanding and implementation of talent management practices. An example of a typical item is "*The enterprise promotes deserving employees in line with its performance appraisal programme.*" Another example is "*The SME has a performance appraisal system that is implemented with a reward system for good performance.*" Part IV emphasised organisational performance. A typical item is "*In general, the SMEs' customer satisfaction is high with few complaints*." Section C focused on the impact of COVID-19 on enterprises' performance and survival during the pandemic. An example of a typical item is "*The SME experienced minimum loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic and remained profitable.*" For the most part, a four-point Likert scale was used ranging from (1) *strongly disagree*; (2) *disagree*; (3) *agree*; (4) *strongly agree*, to measure the variables. Open-ended items were included to obtain narrative responses from participants, giving the last mentioned the opportunity to explain additional information in their own words. For example, "*Please indicate how well talented employees are being managed in your enterprise, if applicable."*

Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was piloted using 30 randomly selected SMEs to ensure the measuring instrument is valid and reliable. To ascertain the ease of usage, five SMEs selected from the target population were requested to complete the questionnaire, with participants invited to provide feedback on the ease of use (viz. whether the questions are logical and clear).

1.6.7.1 Validity and reliability

The questionnaire was designed according to the various constructs as elucidated on in the literature study. As these constructs are latent and operationalised via statements participants must agree or disagree with on a Likert scale, it was necessary to determine construct validity and reliability. Validity and reliability are imperative indicators in

conducting research indicative of the quality of research (Zina, 2021). The questionnaire administered in this study was self-constructed, inspired mainly by the works of Rothwell (2018), and validated prior to data gathering using a pilot study. Validity denotes the degree to which a specific measurement provides data that relates to the accepted meaning of a particular concept (Jonck *et al*., 2018). Therefore, validity relates to the soundness of the interpretation of scores. In the research reported on, the emphasis was placed on construct validity ascertained by means of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (Taber, 2018). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to (i) psychometrically evaluate measurements, (ii) validate the structure, (iii) test the effect, and (iv) indicate invariance (Koğar & Koğar, 2015). External validity of the study was ensured by means of sample size (viz. generalisability of inferences) and sampling method (viz. utilising probability sampling).

Reliability refers to the likelihood that a given measure would yield similar results in various interactions (Jonck *et al*., 2018). Therefore, reliability is related to the replicability of the research conducted. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed to establish reliability with an alpha coefficient of 0.7 deemed as acceptable (Taber, 2018).

1.6.8 Statistical analysis

Data was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

1.6.8.1 Quantitative data analysis

Data was captured in an Excel spreadsheet, after which it was exported to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). IBM SPSS (version 28) was used to analyse the data. Before embarking on the data analysis, the data was screened to check for consistency and to ensure data accuracy by identifying and removing outliers, determining statistical fit based on the assumption of normality and linearity, and the identification of missing data (Zina, 2021). Frequencies were calculated to provide a descriptive view of the sample profile. Moreover, descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data collected and to check whether the data represents a normal distribution by means of skewness and kurtosis. Skewness values below ± 3 and kurtosis values below ± 10 could be deemed indicative of a normal distribution, according to Kline (2015). Specifically, measures of central tendency (mean, median and mode), standard

deviation, and frequency tables were used to summarise the data. Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated to assess the reliability of the measuring instrument. Reliability was deemed satisfactory where the alpha scores exceeded 0.70, with scores above 0.80 being taken as desirable (Taber, 2018). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, subsuming the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy with a principal component analysis was performed to ascertain the validity of the measuring instrument (McCallaghan, 2020).

Structural equation modelling (SEM) performed in SPSS Amos version 28 was computed to estimate the theoretical model, determine goodness fit indices and explain the extent of variance (Ramlall, 2017). Pearson's product moment correlation was calculated to ascertain the relationship between variables using the following criteria for interpretation: r = 0.1 to r = 0.29 representing a small effect; r = 0.30 to r = 0.49 indicative of a medium effect and r = 0.50 to r = 1.0 *in lieu of* a large effect (Botha, Van Dijk, & Marais, 2023). Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the variance in talent management and organisational performance (Pallant, 2011, p. 283). Statistical significance was set at the 95th ($p \leq 0.05$) or 99th ($p \leq 0.01$) percentile.

1.6.8.2 Qualitative data analysis

Responses obtained by means of open-ended narrative items on the questionnaire were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis in accordance with a phenomenological approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Themes that emerged through induction were identified and categorised into themes and sub-themes. In each case, relevant quotes elaborating further on the specific thematic category were included. Research triangulation was used to ensure the reliability of results. In addition to data triangulation viz. using both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously in an embedded mixed-method research design, a mixed-method research design was used where researcher triangulation ensured trustworthiness and rigour (Zina, 2021).

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Faculty Ethics Committee (FEMS-REC) prior to the implementation of the data-gathering phase (NWU-00610-22-A4).

Moreover, the researcher abided by the university's code of ethics. Ethical conduct can be described as generally accepted moral codes or standards prescribed by various professional bodies and organisations (Zina, 2021). In research, it is required that participants' information should be kept in strict confidence and to maintain the highest degree of honesty and transparency with all participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). More specifically, the following ethical protocols were observed:

- Participants were informed that participation is voluntary, and they are free to refrain from answering questions that violate their privacy.
- During the data collection process, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. There were no details on the questionnaire that allow participants to be identified. In addition to this, participants were informed that data would be kept strictly confidential, and it will only be used for scientific/research purposes included, but not limited to academic publications and conference proceedings. Completed questionnaires were de-identified and statistical analysis was performed using the coded de-identified data sets.
- Participants were assured that responses provided would be kept anonymous and no one would be able to connect a participant to the answers provided.
- Efforts were made to ensure that all participants and participating organisations consent to inclusion in the study by signing consent forms prior to completing the questionnaires. The purpose of the research project was explained.
- Participants were also informed that no monetary incentives would be due to them for participating in the study.
- No physical or psychological harm would be imposed due to participation in the research study.

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is structured in an article format with three manuscripts and a conference paper developed according to the themes elucidated in the research aim and objectives, including:

Chapter 1:	Contains the introduction of the study, consisting of the problem statement, research questions, objectives, and the scope and limitations of the study.
Chapter 2:	Business continuity strategies employed during COVID-19 underscoring organisational performance and talent management.
Chapter 3:	Impact of contextual factors on talent management and organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector.
Chapter 4:	An entrepreneurial ecosystem approach underscoring talent management and organisational performance.
Chapter 5:	Impact of COVID-19 on SMEs' organisational performance and talent management practices in a South African manufacturing sub-sector: preliminary findings
Chapter 6:	Conclusions, recommendations and limitations.

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CHAPTER 2: MANUSCRIPT 1

BUSINESS CONTINUITY STRATEGIES EMPLOYED DURING COVID-19 UNDERSCORING ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

Manuscript 1, titled *Business continuity strategies employed during COVID-19 underscoring organisational performance and talent management*, is aimed at exploring secondary research objective 5 of the study, namely the impact of COVID-19 on the performance of manufacturing SMEs in the Gauteng Province, specifically the mitigating influence of talent management. The article underscores strategies utilised by stated SMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic towards ensuring business continuity. A paucity of studies leverages the strategies employed by SMEs to overcome challenges faced during the pandemic. A paper from this manuscript was submitted to the *South African Journal of Business Management* and is currently under review. The submission letter is marked as Annexure B and the guidelines for publication in the journal as Annexure C.

This research study was designed and executed by three researchers at the North-West University. The contributions of each researcher are indicated as follows: Ms GB Zake is the PhD candidate responsible for co-conceptualising the paper, conducting the literature review, implementing the research methodology, and interpreting the research findings. Prof P Jonck is the PhD promoter responsible for conceptualising the article, statistical analyses, and co-authoring the paper. Prof AM Pelser is the co-promoter acting as a critical reader and providing guidance throughout the study. The author and co-authors declare and confirm their roles in this research study. All authors agree that the appropriate format was used for the submission of this dissertation at the North-West University. All authors are also in agreement that the contents of this research study and any modified versions thereof may be used and publicised by the authors in peer-reviewed academic journals and/or presented at academic conferences.

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are a key catalyst in poverty alleviation and job creation in most economies. The COVID-19 pandemic adversely impacted this sector even though many SMEs implemented mitigating measures to curb the effects thereof. The purpose of this paper was to report on preliminary findings exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on organisational performance and talent management practices in the South African manufacturing SME sector, specifically the Gauteng Province.

Design/methodology: An embedded mixed-methodology research design was employed in the pilot study. A self-developed survey was conducted, which produced acceptable Cronbach alpha coefficients. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were computed. Content analysis was used to interpret narrative responses related to business continuity strategies implemented during the pandemic.

Findings: Results indicated that COVID-19 statistically significantly influenced organisational performance, talent development and recruitment, as well as retention. The impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance can statistically significantly be mitigated by talent management practices. Results of the narrative responses revealed that most of the SMEs did not have a business continuity plan in place and reactively reduced expenditures mostly related to employees.

Implications: SMEs in the manufacturing sector could utilise the findings to develop a business continuity strategy to mitigate against the adverse impact of global economic changes.

Originality/value: This paper is among a few empirical research studies conducted on the impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance and talent management in the SME manufacturing sector contributing to the body of knowledge.

Keywords: Business continuity, mitigating measures, COVID-19, organisational performance, talent management

INTRODUCTION

The role of small and medium-sized entities in economic growth and poverty alleviation in underdeveloped or least developed countries (LDC) is of paramount concern to policymakers, academics, and all stakeholders concerned (Elijah & Usaini, 2021). The rationale for the stated is that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play a vital role in job creation, especially in underprivileged countries (Maksimov, Wang, & Luo, 2017). As such, SMEs contribute to gross domestic product (GDP), reduce unemployment and poverty as well as stimulate entrepreneurial activity (Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). Global economic changes (for example a global pandemic) and associated integrations are confirmed structural transformations that impact the way economic sectors operate, irrespective of the level of socio-economic development (Soud, 2020). In response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many SMEs incorporated measures to counter the impact of the outbreak and its related reaction from economic stakeholders towards ensuring business continuity (Muparadzi & Rodze, 2021). The global COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures taken by governments constitute a significant disruption to operations and might transform societies permanently (Gülseven, 2021).

Reflecting on previous research, You, Lou, Zhang, Chen, and Zeng (2023) noted that the COVID-19 outbreak affected social and environmental factors, impeding the growth of SMEs in particular. In the post-COVID-19 scenario, novel approaches are essential, underscoring, for example, new business models, redefining customer bases, identifying new business opportunities and developing sustainable income sources (Muriithi, 2021). Nonetheless, innovative approaches should be founded on empirical evidence emphasising the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on organisational performance and talent management practices; for example, in addition to leveraging the business strategies employed during the pandemic to inform future business continuity policies. However, a paucity of empirical studies or reports have been carried out to investigate the effectiveness of the mentioned mitigating measures (Anakpo & Mishi, 2021).

Murithi (2020) noted that, in Africa, the pandemic led to a negative growth of -5.1% by 2020 and, in so doing, plunged the continent into the worst recession in 25 years. Bano, Omar, and Ismail (2021) emphasise the need for emergency succession planning during and post-COVID-19 pandemic to ensure business continuity underscoring the paramount importance of human capital. According to Baharin and Hanafi (2018), employees are the backbone of an organisation and emphasise the importance of employee retention in

keeping organisations on track. It is in line with this assertion that Ako-Nai (2020) states that leadership is key to the success of an organisation, especially in the post-COVID-19 scenario. To remain competitive, an organisation must identify talented employees as a critical business process (Cardigan, 2017; Sommer, Heidenreich, & Handrich, 2017). Enterprises that are successful at managing talented employees tend to excel in the competitive market (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018). Cardigan (2017) argues that, despite the growing popularity of the field relating to talent management, there remains a lack of consensus relating to the definition thereof. For the sake of clarity, in the research reported on, talent consists of those employees who might make the greatest difference to organisational performance either by their contribution or by demonstrating the highest level of potential longitudinally (Wadhwa & Tripathi, 2018).

Considering the above, SMEs within the African context provide employment to approximately 70 to 90 percent of the population. Consequently, the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic has been considerable, with 87 percent of SME owners ambiguous about the future of the enterprise (Muriithi, 2021). More specifically, the manufacturing sector has been significantly influenced by the COVID-19 outbreak with an extrapolated 85 percent experiencing supply chain disruptions (Udofia, Adejare, Olaore, & Udofia, 2021). The impact of COVID-19, specifically on the manufacturing sector, subsumes production disruption of raw materials and spare parts, disgruntled market demands ascribed to logistical interruptions, increased bankruptcy risk for SMEs and demand fluctuation enlargements (Cai & Luo, 2020). Additionally, Udofia *et al*. (2021) refer to the emaciated state of empirical evidence relating to the impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance. Cai and Luo (2020) propose that for the recovery of SMEs in the manufacturing sector, it is pivotal to analyse the impact of COVID-19 in addition to exploring the countermeasures employed. Muparadzi and Rodze (2021) opine that the earnestness and relevance of business continuity to mitigate potential risk and promote business recovery remains pivotal post-COVID-19. Furthermore, Collings, Mellahi, and Cascio (2018) expound that a key limitation in the research on global talent management has been a failure to develop theoretical and empirical insights emphasising the nexus between talent management and organisational performance even though, currently, the stated has considerable legitimacy as an area of practice. Therefore, further research is warranted to understand the relationship between talent management and organisational performance in various sectors of the economy contributing to organisational success.

PROBLEM INVESTIGATED

Since SMEs account for a vast portion of new employment opportunities, stimulate growth, create social cohesion, generate income and are known as a primary driver for GDP growth (Nketsiah, 2018), it is pivotal to investigate aspects related to organisational performance. Various authors (for example Darlington, 2017; Masocha & Fatoki, 2018) opine that SMEs face an overall lack of prudent leadership and managerial capabilities, which are critical for day-to-day management and strategic planning. It has also been recognised that the biggest challenge faced by SMEs stems from a lack of talent management practices (Chung & D'Annunzio-Green, 2018). Moreover, organisations experience a leadership gap ascribed mainly to the inability to develop potential leaders (Frawley, Favaloro & Schulenkorf, 2017; Frederik & Julia, 2020; Opoku & Williams, 2019; Whysall, Owtram, & Brittian, 2019). From literature, it would appear that SMEs lack an understanding of what talent and talent management entail, and the usage thereof to enhance organisational performance and improve competitiveness (Cardigan, 2017; Hilman & Abubakar, 2017; Latif *et al*., 2020). To date, limited research has been conducted to explore the influence of talent management practices on organisational performance in the manufacturing industry within the South African context. It has been proposed that more empirical research should be done on strategic talent management in different industrial settings and in different countries to further investigate the generalisability of findings (Hilman & Abubakar, 2017; Wong & Sixl-Daniell, 2017).

Moreover, Fernandes, Veiga, Lobo, and Roposa (2023) opine that COVID-19 exacerbated the implementation of talent management practices. Tomcikova, Svetozarovova, and Coculova (2020) state that COVID-19 impacted talent management. Limited research could be identified within the South African context in the manufacturing sector. Furthermore, a paucity of empirical studies or reports to date investigate measures implemented by businesses to mitigate the COVID-19 impact (Anakpo & Mishi, 2021). To this end, Cai and Luo (2020) note that exploring the countermeasures employed by manufacturing SMEs is pivotal for business continuity.

Against the stated background, the proposed study attempts to contribute to the corpus of knowledge by addressing the identified gaps, i.e., the usage of industry-specific talent management practices and the impact of COVID-19. The practical contribution of the study is related to examining the relationship between talent management and organisational performance in the manufacturing industry during the COVID-19

pandemic, which could be used to develop policies and procedures to improve overall SME performance, as well as to explore measures implemented by manufacturing SMEs to mitigate against the COVID-19 impact.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organisational performance

Zumitzavan (2022) defines organisational performance as the level of productivity that the organisation can accomplish towards attaining its goals, increasing organisational resources, meeting customers' needs and improving internal processes. Contu (2020) indicates that organisational performance refers to the degree to which the organisation, with informational, financial, and human resources, positions itself effectively in the market. The previous author further contends that organisational performance relies on the adaptation of a specific corporate culture to the changes within the external environment. According to Nene and Pillay (2019), organisational performance is defined as the measure of the outcome in comparison with inputs within an organisation towards the achievement of internalised goals. Organisational performance is also defined as the outcome of organisational actions that increase the worth of goods, services or even a business. The key basis for performance in an organisation is that all inputs from intangible assets to value creation should be measured without ambiguity (Chowdhury, Rana, & Azim, 2019). Additionally, organisational performance, as a construct, also refers to growth in sales, market share, an increase in profit margins and return on investment (Rehman Khan, Sarwat, Godil, Amin, & Shujaat, 2022). Constructs linked to organisational performance include organisational culture, which is defined as beliefs, assumptions and symbols of organisational members that define the process in which an SME conduct its operations (Tedla, 2016). A study by Bakotic (2022) revealed a correlation between employees' job satisfaction and organisational performance, concluding that job satisfaction statistically significantly determines organisational performance as opposed to organisational performance determining job satisfaction. Neha and Narwal (2017) assert that high levels of employee engagement often result in improved work performance. Similarly, it is affirmed that employees who feel committed to their organisation have the right skillsets, perform satisfactorily, and tend to be productive contributing to organisational competitiveness (Shirin & Kleyn, 2017). This study has adopted the definition by Zumitzavan (2022) which refers to organisational

performance as goal orientated with specific reference to increasing organisational resources, meeting customers' needs and improving internal processes.

Various theories have been proposed based on their contribution to organisational performance. According to Dininni (2017), the Chris Argyris theory underscores organisational and employee learning and development resulting in employee motivation, accountability and empowerment, which impact on SMEs' growth, effectiveness and adaptability. On the other hand, the resource-based theory states that SMEs' competitive advantage and superior performance originate from its specific resources and capabilities (Kiyabo & Isaga, 2020). Similarly, the resource dependence theory (RDT) asserts that a SME must engage with others operating in its environment to acquire the necessary resources to differentiate itself from its competitors (Orakwue & Iguisi, 2020). In the same breath, the social capital theory (SCT) emphasises the importance of acquisition and retention of valuable and scarce resources for SMEs to gain competitive advantage and therefore identifies social capital as a key component to entrepreneurial activities (Kanini & Muathe, 2019). The dynamic capability theory is also aligned to the above-mentioned theories as it emphasises that, to maintain competitive advantage, SMEs need to be capable of dynamically and proactively identifying and responding to opportunities and threats that arise from operating in a non-static environment and sustain competitive advantage (Elis, Nabella, & Sari, 2022).

Talent management

Talent management is defined as integrated human resource management strategies aimed at attracting, retaining and effectively utilising employees with the requisite aptitude and abilities to meet current and projected organisational needs (Lesenyeho, Barkhuizen, & Schutte, 2018). Human capital is regarded as a critical asset and organisations are continuously searching for mechanisms to inform decision-making and create platforms with the view to sustain competitiveness (Alziari, 2017). Talent management requires a leadership talent mindset to ensure that talent management strategies are encouraged (Tladi, 2016), i.e., active participation from the management echelon with the understanding that the aforementioned should endeavour to have in place relevant processes and systems for talent management. Luno-Arocas and Morley (2015) define a talent mindset as the conviction that talented employees are a value-add contributing to

organisational performance (viz. the bottom line). Therefore, a talent mindset refers to a holistic and incorporated approach to enhance organisational survival, growth, development and competitiveness through keystone employees, ensuring that, from the organisational perspective, there is a sufficient supply of keystone employees (talent) to appoint the correct applicants in available vacancies at the right time with the intention to attain short- and long-term business strategic goals (Harsch & Festing, 2020). Talent management is analysed in terms of processes and systems put in place to acquire the right employee in the right job at the right time (Cappelli & Keller, 2014). Talent management consists of three major components, namely the processes to attract, develop, and retain employees (Harsch & Festing, 2020). According to Abdullahi *et al*. (2021), talent management practices include succession planning, promotion and performance appraisal, which are thought to have a significant effect on employee performance. Various authors (for example Collings *et al*., 2018; McDonell & Wiblen, 2020) opine that there is a lack of clarity in the definition, latitude and overall strategic agenda of talent management in SMEs. However, although, there is no agreed-upon definition of what talent management encompasses, it can be deduced that talent management is concerned with how best the SMEs anticipate and meet the need for talent in strategic jobs (Cappelli & Keller, 2014). Consequently, talent management has a delineated focus on being a strategic process that must be propelled by senior management as an across-board responsibility (Cappelli & Keller, 2014).

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Organisational performance and talent management practices during COVID-19

Organisational performance can be linked to human resources and, in the post-COVID-19 scenario, challenges include recruitment, selection, and development (Ahmed, Khan, Thitivesa, Siraphathada, & Phumdara, 2020). Fernandes *et al*. (2023) found a positive nexus between talent management practices and organisational performance. Bano *et al*. (2021) suggest that organisations should implement both long-term and emergency succession planning to overcome challenges faced by organisations during and after the pandemic. Mahato *et al*. (2021) propose a blended or hybrid workforce model for business continuity post-COVID-19 pandemic. For those organisations that survive, a recovery strategy will be the priority, according to Ako-Nai (2020). Supporting components include:

(i) a review of the organisational structure; (ii) skills audit and defining new skills and competences; (iii) infrastructure assessment and acquisition of new technologies; and (iv) a revised reward system that rewards and celebrates innovation, and significant achievements should be implemented post-COVID-19 (Ako-Nai, 2020). Therefore, talent management components should be revised post-COVID-19 as a business continuity strategy necessitating determining the impact of COVID-19 on talent management practices. Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

- H1: COVID-19 statistically significantly influenced the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector, notably the Gauteng Province.
- H2: The variance in talent management components, *inter alia*, (i) recruitment and retention; (ii) succession planning and promotion; (iii) performance appraisal; and (iv) talent development can be statistically significantly attributed to the impact of COVID-19.
- H3: The impact of COVID-19 on the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector, notably the Gauteng Province, can statistically significantly be moderated by talent management practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An embedded mixed-method was utilised where both quantitative and qualitative data was collected, analysed and interpreted. A questionnaire consisting of closed-ended and open-ended questions was used to gather data. More specifically, an embedded mixed-method design was implemented, which involves the convergent use of approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The research design was operationalised by means of administering a self-constructed questionnaire in a cross-sectional design. In a cross-sectional research design, the measuring instrument is administered once without repeat measurements (Jonck, Van der Walt, & Sobayeni, 2019). The design utilised could be classified as *ex post facto* as there is no experimental intervention and the participants belong to various groups prior to data gathering (Lacruz & Cunha, 2018). The quantitative section inclines towards theoretical positivism (Mertens, 2019). In other words, it is reasonable to assume that organisations would adopt better ways of achieving success. Therefore, a variable like talent management could be classified into the philosophical realm of pragmatism and support for change in ensuring an organisation's success.

The target population is registered manufacturing SMEs in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. For the purposes of this study, following Litghelm (2013), the informal sector was defined as small, unregistered businesses operating as street vendors and in-home businesses established on residential premises (often termed ‘spaza shops’ or ‘tuck shops’ in South Africa), while formal small businesses were defined as businesses operating from fixed building structures located on business stands demarcated as such by local municipal town planning regulations. Only formal small businesses were included in the research reported on. Probability sampling was used to generate the sample where each population member is given a known probability or chance of participating in the study. The benefit of the previously mentioned sampling technique is that a good representative sample of the target population in terms of each characteristic such as size and type of business are included (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). More specifically, simple random sampling was used to generate the pilot study sample. The final pilot study sample (n = 30) consisted mostly of male respondents (n = 24; 80%) with the remainder of the sample being female (n = 6; 20%). In terms of the age distribution, 56.7% (n = 17) of the sample were in the 25 to 35 years age category, followed by respondents in the 46 to 55 years category (n = 7; 23.3%), respondents in the 36 to 45 years category (n = 4; 13.3%) and lastly two respondents, representing 6.7% of the sample, were categorised in the 56 to 65 years category. Considering the highest academic qualification, 60% (n = 18) of the sample had a grade 12 qualification, followed by 20% (n = 6) of the sample who selected other, 13.3% (n = 4) had a bachelor’s degree and 3.3% (n = 1) held an honours degree and a postgraduate qualification, respectively. In terms of work experience, 33.3% (n = 10) of the sample had respectively between one and five years and six to 10 years’ work experience, followed by 13.3% (n = 4) with either 11 to 15 years or more than 25 years’ experience. Lastly, 6.7%, representing two respondents, had between 16 and 20 years’ experience. Looking at respondents’ present rank, most of the sample (n = 15; 50%) were middle management, while 26.7% (n = 8) were senior management and 23.3%, representing seven respondents, owned the SME. In terms of SME size, respondents indicated that 56.7% (n = 17) of the sample were micro-enterprises, 26.7% (n = 8) small enterprises and 16.7% (n = 5) medium enterprises. A breakdown of the primary items manufactured includes pharmaceuticals and healthcare objects (n = 6; 20%), building materials (n = 5; 16.7%), chemicals and paint (n = 2; 6.7%), packaging (n = 2; 6.7%), and textile and clothing (n = 1; 3.3%). Most of the sample,

representing 46.7% (n = 14), selected *other*, which included service delivery, for example beauty salons or funeral services.

Primary data for the pilot study was collected by means of an electronic self-developed structured questionnaire designed in accordance with the objectives and purpose of the study. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section A underscored participants' demographic information. Section B addressed the key talent management practices, including recruitment and retention, succession planning and promotion, performance appraisal and talent development. Section B also included a sub-section that emphasised organisational performance. Section C focused on the impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance and survival during the pandemic. A four-point Likert scale was used ranging from (1) *strongly disagree*; (2) *disagree*; (3) *agree*; (4) *strongly agree*, to measure the variables. Open-ended items were included to obtain narrative responses from respondents, giving the last mentioned the opportunity to explain additional information in their own words. The total scale had an internal consistency of 0.951, as measured by a Cronbach alpha coefficient. More specifically, recruitment and retention had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.891, succession planning and promotion an alpha of 0.766, performance appraisal 0.860 and talent development an alpha of 0.846. Additionally, organisational performance had a reliability score of 0.913 and COVID-19 impact 0.700.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28 was used to analyse the quantitative data. Data was captured into an Excel spreadsheet, after which the dataset was screened to check consistency and ensure data accuracy by identifying outliers, determining statistical fit based on the assumption of normal distribution and linearity, and the identification of missing data (Zina, 2021). Frequencies were computed to provide a descriptive profile of the sample. Measures of central tendency and standard deviation were used to summarise the data and to check whether the data is normally distributed. Cronbach alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the reliability of the measuring instrument. Reliability was deemed satisfactory where the alpha scores exceed 0.70, with scores above 0.80 desirable (Taber, 2018). Inferential statistics were performed to test the hypotheses. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine the correlation between the measured variables. Multiple regression analysis was performed to investigate the influence of COVID-19. Moreover, hierarchical regression analysis was performed to control for the influence of talent management as a possible moderating

variable. Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis. Content analysis is deemed a systematic coding and categorisation approach used to explore large amounts of textual information to determine trends and patterns in narration, the frequency, structure and discourse in written communication (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

Ethical clearance was obtained for the study from the EMS-REC (reference number NW-00610-22-S4). Standard ethical protocol was observed, namely informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and benevolence (i.e., no psychological or physical harm).

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The aim of the research reported on was to establish the extent to which COVID-19 influenced organisational performance and talent management practices, as well as whether talent management practices moderated the postulated impact of COVID-19, and lastly, to explore business strategies utilised by SMEs in the manufacturing sector to mitigate against the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve the mentioned objectives, the measures of central tendency were determined and are depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Measures of central tendency for the variables measures

Variable	Mean	Median	STD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Recruitment and retention	32.70	33.50	4.900	0.430	-0.230
Succession and promotion	25.37	25.00	3.926	0.545	0.193
Performance appraisal	21.83	21.50	4.268	-0.105	-0.046
Talent development	37.93	38.00	5.407	-0.164	0.241
Organisational performance	49.47	48.50	7.234	0.444	0.009
COVID-19	38.37	39.00	5.939	-0.091	-0.153

As can be seen from Table 1 above, three of the variables were negative and three were positive taking into consideration that the scale was calibrated from negative to positive. More specifically, recruitment and retention were viewed in a slightly negative light, as seen from the mean (32.70) evaluated below the median or midpoint (33.50). Talent development was also scored below the midpoint (mean = 37.93; median = 38.00), as was the case with COVID-19 impact (mean = 38.37; median = 39.00). On the other hand, succession planning and promotion were seen positively (mean = 25.37; median = 25.00) as was the case with performance appraisal (mean = 21.83; 21.50) and organisational performance (mean = 49.47; median = 48.50). According to Kline (2016), the recommended guideline for skewness is below ±3 and kurtosis values below ±10. Therefore, the supposition of univariate normality was met, and normality was supported (see Table 1).

To determine whether COVID-19 statistically significantly influenced organisational performance and talent management practices, a Pearson product-moment correlation was performed as a prerequisite to multiple and hierarchical regression analyses being performed. The results of this analysis are indicated in Table 2 overleaf. The correlation matrix presented in Table 2 indicates that there was a statistically significant association on the 99th percentile between succession planning and promotion as well as recruitment and retention. The association was positive and had a large effect as seen from the R-value of 0.748. Similarly, a statistically significant strong relationship was noted between performance appraisal and recruitment as well as retention ($r = 0.608$; $p = 0.000^{**}$) in addition to succession planning and promotion ($r = 0.634$; $p = 0.000^{**}$). This tendency could also be identified between talent development and recruitment as well as retention ($r = 0.578$; $p = 0.001^{**}$) and performance appraisal ($r = 0.612$; $p = 0.000^{**}$). Moreover, statistically significant correlations can be seen between organisational performance and retention and recruitment ($r = 0.650$; $p = 0.000^{**}$), succession planning and promotion ($r = 0.588$; $p = 0.001^{**}$), performance appraisal ($r = 0.657$; $p = 0.000^{**}$) and talent development ($r = 0.745$; $p = 0.000^{**}$). The afore-stated correlations were all on the 99th percentile and had a strong positive effect. Lastly, a statistically significant positive association was found between COVID-19 impact as well as recruitment and retention on the 95th percentile ($r = 0.401$; $p = 0.028^{*}$). The correlations between COVID-19 impact and talent development ($r = 0.613$; $p = 0.000^{**}$) as well as organisational performance (r

= 0.644; p = 0.000**) were statistically significant on the 99th percentile and had a large positive effect.

Table 2: Pearson's product-moment correlation results indicating the relationship between the different variables measured

		RR	SPP	PA	TD	OP	CI
RR	R	1					
SPP	R	0.748**	1				
PA	R	0.608**	0.634**	1			
TD	R	0.578**	0.355	0.612**	1		
OP	R	0.650**	0.588**	0.657**	0.745**	1	

Note: p ≤ 0.05, p ≤0.01**; small effect r = 0.10 to r = 0.29; medium effect r = 0.3 to r = 0.49; large effect r = 0.5 to r = 1.0*

RR = recruitment and retention; SPP = succession planning and promotion; PA = performance appraisal; TD = talent development; OP = organisational performance; and CI = COVID-19 impact

To ascertain the impact of COVID-19 on the talent management and organisational performance, multiple regression analyses were performed and are presented in Table 3 overleaf. As evident from Table 3, COVID-19 statistically significantly influenced organisational performance on the 99th percentile. It was found that 64.4% (β = 0.644; p = 0.000**) of the variance in organisational performance can be attributed to COVID-19. Therefore, the first research hypothesis can be accepted. Furthermore, according to Table 3, 61.3% (β = 0.613; p = 0.000**) of the variance in talent development, a sub-component of talent management, can be explained by COVID-19. The impact was statistically significant on the 99th percentile. Lastly, 40.1% (β = 0.401; p = 0.028*) of the variance in recruitment and retention can be attributed to COVID-19's impact although the regression analysis was only statistically significant on the 95th percentile. None of the other talent management practices were statistically significantly influenced by COVID-19, and therefore the second research hypothesis can only be partially accepted.

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis results with COVID-19 impact as independent variable

Variable	COVID-19 impact					
	R	R^2	F	β	T	P
Organisational performance	0.644	0.414	19.799	0.644	4.450	0.000**
Recruitment and retention	0.401	0.161	5.360	0.401	2.315	0.028*
Succession planning and promotion	0.146	0.021	0.613	0.146	0.783	0.440
Performance appraisal	0.279	0.078	2.357	0.279	1.535	0.136
Talent development	0.613	0.376	16.840	0.613	4.104	0.000**

R, R-value; R2, R-squared; F, F-value; β, Beta; t, t-value; p, significance

p ≤ 0.05; p ≤ 0.01***

Table 4: Hierarchical regression analysis to control for talent management practices as moderating variable

Model	R	R^2	R^2 change	P
1	0.775	0.601	0.601	0.000**
2	0.852	0.725	0.124	0.002**

p ≤ 0.05; p ≤ 0.01***

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance after controlling for talent management practices, with results displayed in Table 4. Talent management practices were entered into model 1, explaining 60.1% of the variance in organisational performance. After the entry of COVID-19 in the second model, the total variance explained by the entire model was 72.5% (f-change = 42.208; p = 0.000**). COVID-19 explained an additional 12.4% of the variance in organisational performance (f-change = 12.200; p = 0.002**). Considering the mentioned,

the research hypothesis that stated that the impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector, notably the Gauteng Province, can statistically significantly be mitigated by talent management practices, can be accepted.

An open-ended question was posed relating to emergency measures implemented to minimise the impact of COVID-19, premised on phenomenography, which allowed narrative data to be categorised into themes with results presented sequentially. A total of 29 questionnaires with qualitative responses were captured. Codes were not predetermined and developed during the analysis process after the full set of responses was thoroughly read. This approach allowed the codes to emerge from the data rather than determining how the data matched a set of predetermined codes. Table 5 presents the themes that emerged from the narrative responses and the frequency thereof.

Table 5: Frequency of themes

Theme	Description	Frequency
Theme 1	Lack of a business continuity strategy	15
Theme 2	Reduce operating costs	11
Theme 3	Apply for government support	3
Theme 4	Generate alternative income sources	2
Theme 5	Implementing new business models	4

As per Table 5, it is evident that most of the SMEs did not have a business continuity strategy in place and reactively reduced operating costs that, for the most part, underscored employee downsizing and cutting salaries. Therefore, from the narrative responses, there appears to be a link between organisational performance and talent management facets (viz. retention and remuneration), confirming the quantitative results.

Theme 1: Lack of business continuity strategy

Most of the participants noted that the SME did not have a business continuity strategy in place prior to the global pandemic. As such, one participant noted that: "*Had no plan*

but to cut on employees and cancel rental of building space in order to cut costs." Another participant explained that: "*Nothing, we shut down and terminated the lease to save up as much to keep business alive after COVID-19*." Another excerpt to this effect stated that: "*We had none, but luckily we received funds from Government which kept us floating in hard times.*" And: "*We had no plans but to close down.*"

Theme 2: Reducing operating costs

As a result of the lack of a business continuity strategy and/or plan, participants reactively reduced the operating costs, which, for the most part, underscored cutting salaries and downsizing the staff component. As such, one participant noted that: "*We did not want to let everyone go rather, we decided to cut salaries by 50% but still keeping them in our system.*" Another excerpt to this effect: "*We just cut salaries and closed for a month then came back and resumed operation.*" And: "*[..] cutting salaries only for 5 months.*" Another participant noted: "*We cut the salaries of employees*." In terms of downsizing, a participant noted that: "*We let go of few employees*….". Another excerpt to this effect: "*We had to let go a lot of our trainers and cut half of the salaries to cover rental costs and management of equipment for months*." And "*Layoff all employees without pay.*" Another excerpt to this effect was: "*Also released 80% of employees to save so that the business could function again*."

Theme 3: Business continuity strategic imperatives

Business continuity imperatives subsume, for example, implementing new business models, redefining customer bases, sustaining income sources and identifying alternative business opportunities (Muriithi, 2021). From the narrative responses, it became apparent that alternative business opportunities were identified, sustained income sources were considered (viz. government subsidies) and new business models were implemented. With reference to alternative business opportunities, a participant noted that the SME started distributing parcels. Specifically, *"We had to shut down and stop stock distribution but soon opened as we supplied food parcels.*" Another participant referred to reducing prices to attract customers: "*Decreased prices for our rooms to get more customers right after COVID-19.*" Lastly, a participant referred to selling fixed assets to generate income: "*….] had to sell big machines and returned cars owed to the bank.*" When considering

finding sustainable income sources, participants noted assistance from government. Excerpts to this effect, include: "*Funding from Government.*" And: "*We received funds from Government which kept us floating in hard times.*" Considering implementing new business models, various options were mentioned, for example hybrid workforce modes of working. Specifically, "*Number of employees working in terms of shifts, not risking them to exposure of COVID-19.*" And "*We had workers working from home and we had mobile delivery.*" Another model mentioned was conducting business on an online platform. For example, "*We diverted our business more online and selling on that platform.*"

Based on the results presented the following framework is proposed:

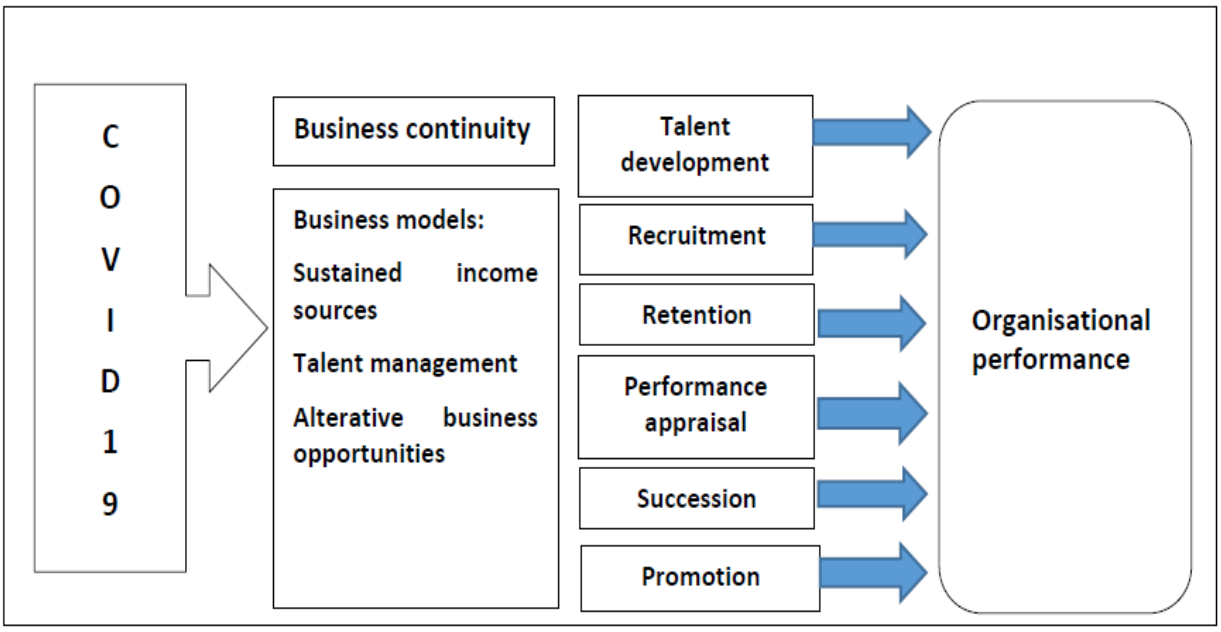

Figure 1: Proposed theoretical framework

DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

Results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that COVID-19 statistically significantly influenced the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector. The impact could be extrapolated to around 64.4 percent, confirming research findings by Udofia *et al*. (2021). Furthermore, 40.1 percent of the variance in recruitment and retention practices could be explained by COVID-19, where 14.6 percent of the variance in succession planning and promotion could be attributed to the pandemic, 27.9 percent of the variance in performance appraisal and 61.3 percent of talent development.

Results presented confirm research by Tomcikova *et al*. (2021). Results of the qualitative analysis revealed that business continuity post-COVID-19 should focus on new business models, sustained income sources, redefining customer bases and identifying alternative business opportunities, which confirmed research conducted by Muriithi (2021). Ako-Nai (2020) furthermore emphasised the importance of talent management practices post-COVID-19, which was also evident from the qualitative analysis. Considering the findings presented, COVID-19 had a statistically significant impact on organisational performance necessitating a business continuity strategy that should underscore talent development as well as recruitment and retention. Organisations in the manufacturing industry ought to focus, for example, on conducting skills audits to determine the current skillsets, defining new skills and competencies (i.e., technological literacy) crucial for employees post-COVID-19, and talent development programmes supporting current employees to meet the revised skill requirements. To conclude, the recruitment of new entrants should be in accordance with the reviewed skills and competencies to ensure business continuity. The following caveat should be taken into consideration, namely the results presented in this paper are based on a pilot study therefore the sample is not representative of the larger population. Caution is advised when generalising and interpreting the findings.

CONCLUSION

The impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance has yet to be fully established, even though it has been assumed to be severe given the economic indicators post-COVID-19. The research study under discussion, albeit a pilot study, attempted to report on preliminary findings towards determining the impact of the pandemic on the organisational performance of a manufacturing subsector within the South African context. Literature recommends that a business continuity strategy should be deemed a priority post-COVID-19 with identified talent management components, including succession planning and rewards, performance appraisal, recruitment and retention as well as talent development. As a result, the study envisioned investigating which talent management aspects should be key in the business continuity strategy to inform evidence-based strategy development. Evidence suggests that talent development should be emphasised, followed by recruitment and retention. In addition to leveraging on the business strategies employed during the pandemic to inform future business

continuity policies, future research endeavours emphasise implementing the main study and could possibly be extended to a national study. Moreover, the study could also be enlarged to include other business sectors.

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CHAPTER 3: MANUSCRIPT 2

IMPACT OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS ON TALENT MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF SME'S IN THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR

Manuscript 2, titled *Impact of contextual factors on talent management and organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector* is aimed at investigating research objective 1, 2 and 5 of the study, namely (i) ascertaining whether demographic variables, *inter alia*, size of the SME, nature of service delivery, establishment of the SMEs and perceived level of competition statistically significantly influence talent management and SME performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province, (ii) determining whether the variance in the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector could be attributed to talent management as such, and (iii) evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on talent management and the performance of manufacturing SMEs in the Gauteng Province. A paper from this manuscript was submitted to the *South African Journal of Human Resource Management* and is currently under review. The submission letter is marked as Annexure D. The author guideline is attached at the end of this thesis and marked as Annexure E.

This research study was designed and executed by three researchers at the North-West University. The contributions of each researcher are indicated as follows: Ms GB Zake is the PhD candidate responsible for co-conceptualising the paper, conducting the literature review, implementing the research methodology, and for interpreting the research findings. Prof P Jonck is the PhD promoter responsible for conceptualising the article, statistical analyses, and co-authoring the paper. Prof AM Pelser is the co-promoter acting as a critical reader and providing guidance throughout the study. The author and co-authors declare and confirm their roles in this research study. All authors agree that the appropriate format was used for the submission of this dissertation at the North-West University. All authors are also in agreement that the contents of this research study and any modified versions thereof may be used and publicised by the authors in peer-reviewed academic journals and/or presented at academic conferences.

ABSTRACT

Orientation: Talent management has become a significant concept influencing effective human resource management with benefits relating to improving organisational performance in a competitive business environment.

Research purpose: The study investigated the impact of contextual factors subsuming exogenous and endogenous factors on the talent management and organisational performance of small and medium-sized entities (SMEs) in the Gauteng manufacturing sector.

Motivation for the study: A paucity of research underscores organisational context, which is an oversight ascribed to the pivotal role thereof in the implementation of talent management and related organisational performance.

Research approach: The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design. The target population included proprietors, general managers and human resource practitioners employed at manufacturing SMEs in the Gauteng Province. A self-designed survey was utilised to gather data. A total of 395 participants were included in the sample.

Main findings: Most of the SMEs did not have a formal talent management strategy in place. Furthermore, the SMEs indicated that talent management is not a strategic objective. Exogenous and endogenous contextual factors statistically significantly predict talent management and organisational performance. Endogenous contextual factors predicted the dependent variables greatly.

Practical/managerial implications: To promote strategic human resource management and significantly contribute to the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector, one should comprehend the pivotal strategic role of talent management, in addition to the influence of exogenous and endogenous contextual factors.

Contribution: This study contributes to the body of knowledge regarding talent management and organisational performance underscoring key exogenous and endogenous contextual factors.

Keywords: Exogenous factors; endogenous factors; organisational performance; talent management; SME size, establishment

INTRODUCTION

Orientation

Talent management is a strategic imperative for organisations nationally and internationally with a paucity of studies investigating mentioned in developing markets (Jayaraman, Talib, & Khan, 2018). Al Aina and Atan (2020) argue that talent management should be considered as a strategic tool that has to be implemented to obtain the desired results. Talent is emphasised as a principal factor in organisational success (Macpherson, Werner, & Mey, 2023). Swailes and Lever (2022) define talent within the context of organisational performance as the abilities employees have or are perceived to have. Furthermore, the previous authors describe the characteristic of talented employees as possessing above average abilities as determined by the organisation (Swailes & Lever, 2022). Talent management is a set of "activities and processes that involve the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention and deployment of those talents that are deemed valuable to an organisation toward creating strategic sustainable success" (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen, & Scullin, 2020, p.458). Rohida and Akbar (2019) define talent management as a series of integrated organisational initiatives that include recruiting, developing and maintaining talent as well as sustainable human resources to meet organisational requirements towards developing a competitive advantage as future leaders. Macpherson *et al*. (2023), reflecting on research by Phillips (2018), expound that effective talent management has been a periodic stumbling block for South African organisations. As a result, the country has only 16% of the required talent to successfully compete on a global scale. Moreover, talent management to achieve sustainable performance in developing economies is yet at its infancy stage (Mujtaba & Mubarik, 2020). Therefore, context appears to be pivotal in the study between talent management and performance.

Gallardo-Gallardo *et al*. (2020) opine that talent management cannot be comprehended as a separate phenomenon ascribed to the implementation thereof within an organisational context, which, in turn, is part of a broader societal and even global context. Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo (2019) expound that the impact of contextual factors on talent management conceptualisation and implementation has largely been neglected. In the same vein, Aleksy and Urban (2022) note that the impact of contextual factors on talent management practices is scarce. Irfan, Khurshid, Khurshid, and Khokhar (2023) evaluated the impact of human resource management on organisational performance in

Pakistan underscoring exogenous and endogenous factors. A lacuna of studies focuses on the impact of contextual factors on talent management and organisational performance within the South African context. The research reported on therefore aims to ascertain the impact of contextual factors associated with talent management and organisational performance within the context of the manufacturing sector. The significance of the reported research is premised on the contribution thereof to the emaciated empirical evidence surrounding talent management as a strategic tool that can be used to influence organisational performance in SMMEs specifically, which is subject to exogenous and endogenous factors.

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Contextual factors influence talent management and organisational performance even though the stated has been underappreciated in the corpus of knowledge (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al*., 2020) with limited empirical research within the South African context. Moreover, Harney and Alhkalaf (2021) note a dearth of human resource management including talent management research across various types of SMMEs with a seemingly limited consideration for SMME characteristics and contextual factors. Roumpi and Delery (2019, p. 431) opine that SMMEs provide 'a unique but under-researched context' validating the assertion by Katz, Aldrich, Welbourne and Williams (2000) as cited in Harney and Alhkalaf (2021, p. 5) that SMME context provide vital insights for human resource management research of which talent management is part and parcel of. Similarly, Shafeek (2016) alludes to a dearth of research underscoring the study of human resource practices in SMEs. To date, a similar study could not be identified within the South African context. Therefore, the study aimed to investigate and test, by means of a hypothesised statistical model, the effect or impact of exogenous and endogenous contextual factors on talent management and organisational performance specifically with reference to SMEs in the manufacturing sector.

HYPOTHESISED MODEL

A hypothesised model was developed and is graphically illustrated in Figure 1, where contextual factors consisting of exogenous and endogenous factors influence talent management practices and organisational performance.

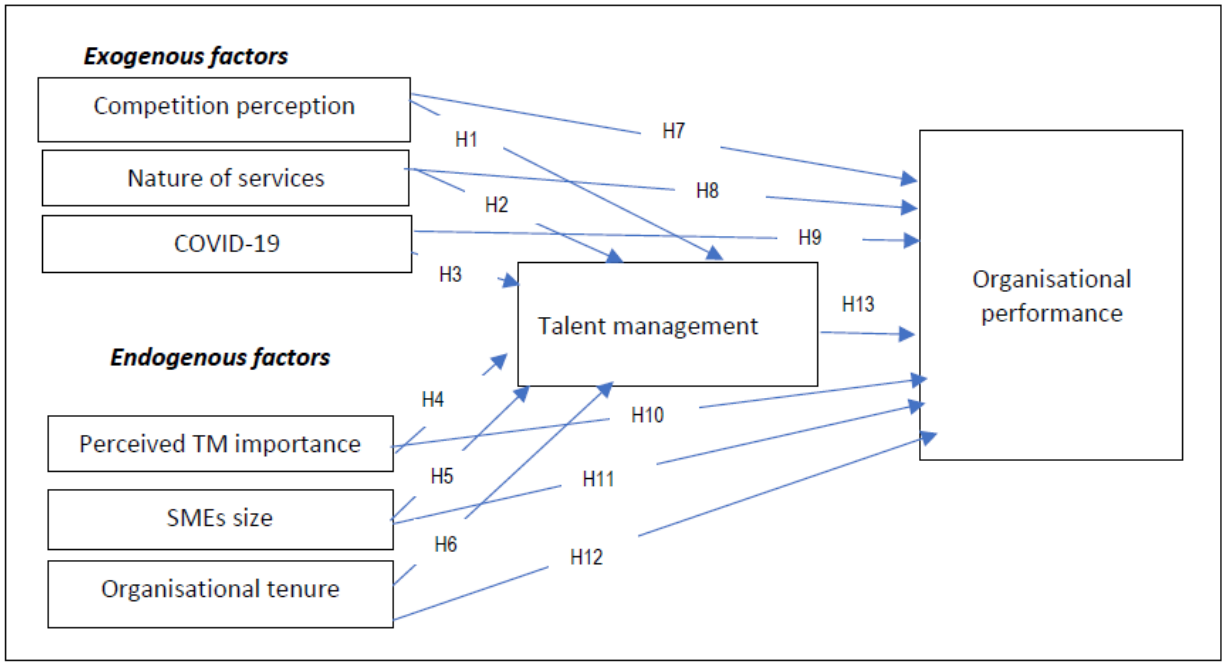

Figure 1: Hypothesised model with contextual factors, talent management and organisational performance

Based on the above hypothesised model, the following hypotheses were tested for this study:

Hypothesis 1: Competition perception statistically significantly influences talent management in the SME manufacturing sector.

Hypothesis 2: Nature of service delivery statistically significantly influences talent management in the SME manufacturing sector.

Hypothesis 3: COVID-19 statistically significantly influences talent management in the SME manufacturing sector.

Hypothesis 4: Perceived talent management importance provided statistically significantly influences on talent management in the SME manufacturing sector.

Hypothesis 5: SMEs' size statistically significantly influences talent management in the SME manufacturing sector.

Hypothesis 6: Organisational tenure statistically significantly influences talent management in the SME manufacturing sector.

Hypothesis 7: The variance in organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector can statistically significantly be attributed to competition perception.

Hypothesis 8: The variance in organisational performance can statistically significantly be attributed to the nature of services.

Hypothesis 9: The variance in organisational performance can statistically significantly be attributed to COVID-19.

Hypothesis 10: The variance in organisational performance can statistically significantly be attributed to perceived talent management importance.

Hypothesis 11: The variance in organisational performance can statistically significantly be attributed to size of the SME.

Hypothesis 12: The variance in organisational performance can statistically significantly be attributed to organisational tenure.

Hypothesis 13: Talent management statistically significantly influences the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector.

The following section centres on a review of literature in accordance with the proposed model variables.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contextual factors

Gallardo-Gallardo *et al*. (2020) explain that talent management is a context dependent phenomenon, necessitating its conceptualisation as it must operate within an organisational context. The contextualisation of talent management is viewed through a multilevel approach, according to Muratbekova-Touron, Kabalina, and Festing (2018). The previously mentioned authors identify the multiple levels as, *inter alia*, macro-environment, organisational environment and individual perspective, and how these three factors interrelate to influence talent management, further emphasising the importance of adopting a contextualisation approach in explaining and identifying the co-existence of

the various factors surrounding the environment within which effective talent management operates (Muratbekova-Touron *et al*., 2018).

Similarly, King and Vaiman (2019) emphasise the contextual milieu mainly at the macro- and micro-levels, with the macro-level characterised by exogenous contextual factors, being economic, political, regulatory, technological and cultural conditions. The micro-level takes into consideration the endogenous contextual factors at the organisational level, wherein monitoring and effective strategic systems are implemented towards the achievement of effective talent management. At a micro-level, management considers the implementation of talent management practices and how both exogenous and endogenous contextual factors interrelate to achieve effective talent management (King & Vaiman, 2019). Gallardo-Gallardo *et al*. (2020) concur that exogenous factors that influence talent management subsume competition market mechanisms, technology, innovation, product-market combination and institutional mechanisms viz. social, political, cultural, legal and regulatory facets inherent to the organisational environment. Endogenous factors include organisational history, strategy, culture and human capital (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al*., 2020; Paauwe & Farndale, 2017). Furthermore, the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA, 2023) identify enterprise age as a SMME contextual characteristic.

This study focused on both exogenous and endogenous contextual factors within which talent management operates, as depicted in Figure 1 above. The exogenous contextual factors were operationalised as competition perception (viz. competitive market mechanism), nature of services rendered (viz. product-market combination) and COVID-19 (viz. social and legal facets indicative of a specific period). The endogenous contextual factors subsume the perceived importance of talent management practices (viz. implementation of talent management and human capital related), SMEs' size, and organisational tenure, which refer to organisational history characteristics.

Talent management

Effective talent management is key with reference to responding to market demands, fast-tracking competitiveness and enhancing organisational capabilities (Irudayaraj, 2018). Researchers have attempted to explain the phenomenon of talent management in various ways; nevertheless, the majority emphasise that talent management should be

implemented within the context of the specific environment, taking into consideration the interrelated factors, whether directly or indirectly (Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2018; Kravariti & Johnston, 2020). As such, Kravariti and Johnston (2020) define talent management in the public sector in relation to employees who possess the required competencies, knowledge, and values that relate to the public sector's principles, underscoring a shared strategic goal. Macpherson *et al*. (2023), citing Bussin (2014), define talent management as an umbrella term referring to integrated activities to ensure that a suitable candidate is occupying the right position at the appropriate time to make a meaningful contribution to the organisational strategic goals. Hongal and Kinange (2020) provide a simplified explanation of talent management as a focus on the way candidates enter the organisation and how they progress within or out of the organisation. Considering the above discussion, there is an emphasis on the influence of talent management on organisational strategic intent, which underlines the role of effective talent management as a strategic tool towards the improvement of organisational performance. Moreover, talent management is confronted with exogenous and endogenous contextual challenges, such as increased job mobility, changing workforce demographics, economic challenges, expanded use of information and communication technologies, and globalisation, to mention a few (Cizmić & Ahmić, 2021).

Organisational performance

Organisational performance is defined as the measure of outcomes compared to inputs towards achieving organisational strategic goals (Nene & Pillay, 2019). Organisational performance is subject to the business environment consisting of exogenous and endogenous contextual factors (Jankowić, Mihajlović & Cvetković, 2016). Exogenous contextual factors subsume competition, globalisation, markets, crime, labour and regulations, which influence organisational performance, according to Olawale and Garwe (2016). Other exogenous factors, *inter alia*, economic, social, political, legal and technological factors, impact organisational performance (Jankowić *et al*., 2016). Endogenous factors that influence organisational performance include human capital (Irfan *et al*., 2023), organisational culture (Shahzad, Luqman, Khan, & Shabbir, 2012) and organisational structure (Nene & Pillay, 2019). Moreover, Cizmić and Ahmić (2021) report that talent management had a positive statistically significant influence on organisational performance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is within a developing country context.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research approach

The research study used a mixed-method cross-sectional design. Despite the main study being mixed method in nature, only quantitative data is being reported on. The cross-sectional characteristic of the research study refers to a structured observation based on data gathered from a sample at a singular point in time without repeat measures to make inferences (Botha, van Dijk, & Marais, 2023).

Population and sampling

The target population of the study comprised proprietors, general managers and human resource practitioners employed at manufacturing SMEs in the Gauteng Province. Statistics South Africa (2023, p.4) define manufacturing SMMEs as enterprises registered for value-added tax engaged in the manufacturing of food products, textiles, clothing, wood products, glass, basic metals, furniture, chemical products, professional equipment and transport equipment to mention a few. Hence, the only excluding criterion implemented was registration. Therefore, unregistered informal sector SMEs were excluded, while SMEs operating from fixed building structures on business premises demarcated as such by municipal town planning regulations were included. Simple random probability sampling was used as a sampling strategy, taking into consideration that not all possible cases opted to take part in the study. Therefore, the sample unit consists of population cases with an equal probability of inclusion in the study (Taherdoost, 2016). More specifically, there was a total of 71 291 manufacturing SMMEs in the Gauteng province in the third quarter of 2021 (SEDA, 2023). Whereas Statistics South Africa (2023) indicates that an extrapolated 468 000 employees were employed in manufacturing SMMEs in the Gauteng province in 2021, which serves as the population of the research reported on. A total of 395 participants were selected by means of convenient sampling. A sample size of n = 384 participants is on the 95-confidence level representative of a population consisting of 1 000 000 units of analysis, based on a 5 percent margin of error (Taherdoost, 2017).

Research participants

A simple random probability sample of participants (n = 395) currently employed in the manufacturing industry took part in the research project. A summary of the samples demographic profile revealed that most of the participants identified as male (n = 279; 72.1%) and were in the early adulthood life stage viz. 25 to 45 years (n = 307; 77.7%). Most of the participants held a grade 12 qualification (n = 269; 68.6%) and occupied middle-managerial-level positions (n = 302; 83.9%) in the manufacturing industry. Moreover, 44 participants representing 12.2% of the sample were SME proprietors.

Measuring instrument

Data was collected by means of a self-constructed coded measuring instrument. The questionnaire comprised four sections. Section A underscored obtaining demographic information, such as gender, age, highest academic qualification, work experience and rank. Section B emphasised contextual factors relating to the SME, *inter alia*, SME size, date of establishment, type of services rendered, and level of competition, to mention a few. Section C addressed talent management practices, including recruitment and retention, succession planning and promotion, performance appraisal, and talent development. Additionally, Section C contains a 19-item sub-section that focused on organisational performance. Section D consisted of 13 items relating to the perceived COVID-19 impacts. Lastly, five open-ended items were included in the questionnaire providing participants the opportunity to provide narrative responses. A four-point Likert-scale was utilised with 1 denoting *strongly disagree* and 4 representing *strongly agree.* Typical questions included, for example, ‘most of the employees in the SME are recruited through competitive processes’, ‘good governance such as organisational transparency and accountability are adhered to and of great importance in the SME’, and ‘the SME had to put in place measures to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on company performance such as work from home’. The pilot study reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.951 for the total scale. A breakdown of the reliability per sub-category revealed that recruitment and retention had a Cronbach alpha of 0.891, succession planning and promotion $\alpha = 0.766$, performance appraisal $\alpha = 0.860$, talent development $\alpha = 0.846$, organisational performance $\alpha = 0.913$ and perceived COVID-19 impact $\alpha = 0.700$.

Ascribed to the measuring instrument being developed specifically for the study, the reliability and validity of the measurement had to be accessed prior to investigating the research hypotheses (De Souze, Alexandré, & Guirardello, 2017). Reliability refers to the likelihood that a given measure would yield similar results over various iterations, whereas validity underscores the extent to which a measuring instrument provides data consistent with the accepted meaning of a construct (Jonck, De Coning, & Radikonyana, 2018). In terms of the first mentioned Cronbach's alpha coefficient as an indication of internal consistency, it can be interpreted in accordance with the following guidelines provided by McCallaghan, Jackson, and Heyns (2019): $\alpha > 0.80$ (exemplary); $\alpha > 0.70$ (extensive) and $\alpha > 0.60$ (moderate). Results revealed that the total scale had an alpha coefficient of 0.948, which can be deemed exemplary. More specifically, recruitment and retention had an alpha of 0.897 (exemplary); succession planning and promotion $\alpha = 0.858$ (exemplary); performance appraisal $\alpha = 0.765$ (extensive); talent development $\alpha = 0.856$ (exemplary); organisational performance $\alpha = 0.892$ (exemplary) and perceived COVID-19 impact had an alpha coefficient of 0.639, which can be deemed moderate. Lu (2014) suggests that factor analysis can be deemed an efficient tool to ascertain the underlying construct validity. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test for sampling adequacy returned a value of 0.936, and Bartlett's test of sphericity reverted a statistically significant p-value on the 99^{th} percentile or $p \leq 0.01$ ($X2 = 12898.535$; $DF = 2850$; $p = 0.000^{**}$). McCallaghan *et al*. (2019) explained that a value close to 1 would point to patterns of correlations that are relatively compact, indicative of factor analysis reverting individual and reliable factors. Exploratory factor analysis with oblique or Oblimin rotation was performed, and it was determined that 15 components had an eigenvalue exceeding 1, accounting for 61.484% of the total variance. Nevertheless, an inspection of the scree plot indicated a clear break after the fifth factor. To statistically verify the number of factors, a Monte Carlo simulation or parallel analysis was performed. Lim and Jahng (2019) noted that parallel analysis is deemed an accurate method to determine which factors to retain. Results obtained from the parallel analysis indicated that five components had eigenvalues exceeding the corresponding criterion value for a randomly generated data matrix consisting of 1 000 cases. Therefore, confirmatory factor analysis was performed with a forced five-factor rotation.

Results of the confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the first factor accounted for 26.139% of the variance underscored talent management practices, specifically

recruitment, retention, succession planning and promotion, with factor loadings ranging between 0.750 and 0.313. Factor 2 accounted for 7.142% of the variance and emphasised organisational performance with factor loadings ranging from 0.650 to 0.355. Factors 3 and 5 respectively accounted for 5.437% as well as 2.841% of the variance and focused for the most part on the perceived COVID-19 impact. Lastly, factor 4 accounted for 3.299% of the variance and included items relating to performance appraisal and talent development with factor loadings ranging between 0.713 and 0.352.

Self-administered questionnaires are subject to common method bias in that both independent and dependent variables are measured using one measuring instrument and a similar scale (viz. Likert-scale). Steps used to control for common method bias include procedural (*Ex Ante*) and statistical (*Ex Post*) controls (Kock, Berbekova & Assaf, 2021). *Ex Ante* controls utilised in the research study subsume clear questionnaire instruction, concise survey design and piloting of the measuring instrument. *Ex post* control include exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. If an unrotated solution produce one factor which accounts for more than 50% of the variance, common method bias is present (Kock et al., 2021). In the extant study the first factor accounted for 26.136% of the variance, thus common method bias was absent.

Statistical analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28 was utilised to analyse collected data. To provide justification for the use of the measuring instrument, a confirmatory factor analysis, in accordance with a parallel analysis, was conducted to verify the factor structure (Lim & Jahng, 2019). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed to ascertain the internal consistency and reliability with guidelines, elucidated by McCallaghan *et al*. (2019). Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the dataset, specifically with reference to the contextual factors relating to SMEs in the manufacturing sector. Moreover, descriptive statistics were computed to determine the measures of central tendency and normality, specifically skewness and kurtosis (Botha *et al*., 2023). Skewness values below ± 3 and kurtosis values below ± 10 could be deemed indicative of a normal distribution, according to Kline (2015). Structural equation modelling (SEM) in SPSS Amos was used to estimate the theoretical model and explain the extent of variance (Ramlall, 2017). Pearson's r correlation was performed to determine the strength

and direction of the relationship between variables using the following criteria to interpret the results: r = 0.1 to r = 0.29 (small effect); r = 0.30 to r = 0.49 (medium effect) and r = 0.50 to r = 1.0 (large effect) (see Botha *et al*., 2023; and the seminal work by Cohen, 1992). Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the variance in talent management and organisational performance (Pallant, 2011, 283). Only direct effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables were investigated in the research reported on. Statistical significance was set at the 95^{th} ($p \leq 0.05$) or 99^{th} ($p \leq 0.01$) percentile.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Economic and Management Sciences Research and Ethics Committee (EMS-REC), reference number NWU-00610-22-A4. Furthermore, standard ethics protocols were adhered to, which include permission to conduct the study, informed consent, voluntary participation, right to anonymity, confidentiality, privacy and honesty in presenting the results (see Sarantakos, 2013, 19). Data was de-identified prior to data analysis to ensure data confidentiality.

RESULTS

Results of the study are presented in terms of the descriptive analysis, followed sequentially by the SEM findings, the correlation analysis, MANOVA and lastly the multiple regression analyses are presented.

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 provides a summary with reference to the contextual factors relating to SMEs in the manufacturing sector in terms of size, establishment, and nature of services rendered, to mention a few. As deduced from Table 1 overleaf, the sample consisted mainly of micro-enterprises with an annual turnover of less than R200 000.00 (n = 271; 70%), followed by small enterprises with an annual turnover between R200 000.00 and R399 000.00 (n = 79; 20.4%) and medium enterprises with a turnover of between R400 000.00 and R599 000.00 (n = 37; 9.6%). Considering how long the SMEs have been in operation, only one (0.3%) SME was established before 1900, with six (1.6%) SMEs established

between 1901 and 1950. Moreover, 19.6%, representing 76 SMEs, were established between 1951 and 2000, while most of the SMEs being established after 2001 (n = 304; 78.6%). In terms of nature of services rendered, most of the respondents selected other (n = 181; 46.3%), with 12.3% (n = 48) noting textile and clothing as their primary business, 11.8% (n = 46) selected pharmaceuticals and healthcare, 10.7% (n = 42) selected building materials and 10.5% (n = 41) selected packaging. When asked whether the SME had a formal talent management plan in place, the overwhelming majority indicated no (n = 340; 86.1%), with 10.9% (n = 43) affirming the presence of a talent management plan and 3% (n = 12) were unsure. Once again, when asked whether talent management is a strategic objective the overwhelming majority selected no (n = 337; 85.3%) and 11.4% (n = 45) selected yes, while 3% (n = 12) were unsure.

Table 1: Contextual factors relating to SMEs

ITEM	N	%
SMEs size		
Micro-enterprises	271	70.0
Small enterprises	79	20.4
Medium enterprises	37	9.6
Establishment / SME lifespan		
Before 1900	1	0.3
Between 1901 and 1950	6	1.6
between 1951 and 2000	76	19.6
Between 2001 and current	304	78.6
Nature of SME services		
Agriculture	5	1.3
Chemicals and paint	28	7.2
Building materials	42	10.7
Packaging	41	10.5
Pharmaceuticals and healthcare	46	11.8
Textile and clothing	48	12.3
Other	181	46.3

ITEM	N	%
Talent management presence		
Yes	43	10.9
No	340	86.1
Not sure	12	3.0
Talent management as a strategic objective		
Yes	45	11.4
No	337	85.3
Not sure	13	3.3

Table 2 illustrate the descriptive results of the measured variables in addition to the central tendency indicators.

Table 2: Descriptive results and normality indicators

Variable	Mean	Median	STD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Talent management practices	118.07	117.00	19.224	-0.129	-0.378
Organisational performance	46.27	47.00	8.267	-0.315	0.783
COVID-19 impact	22.03	21.00	4.727	0.498	1.469

Table 2 reveals that most of the mean scores of the measured variables were within the positive or agree range, except for organisational performance, which was in the negative or disagree range. This would imply that despite a lack of a formalised talent management plans, as indicated in Table 1, talent management practices are present in the sample SMEs, such as recruitment, retention, succession planning, promotion and talent development. Moreover, organisational performance is deemed to be lacking in the sample SMEs. The skewness and kurtosis results are within the set threshold values (skewness ≤ 3; kurtosis ≤ 10), and therefore the supposition of univariate normality was met and supported. As a result, the maximum likelihood method can be utilised to

evaluate the fitness of the model (Fitong Ketchiwou, Naong, Van der Walt, & Dzansi, 2023).

Structural equation modelling (SEM)

Maximum likelihood estimation in SPSS Amos 28 was performed to assess the structural model since, in accordance with Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2014), prior to hypothesis testing, the model's fitness should be determined. Results reverted a satisfactory fit [chi-square = -61447; p = 1.000; df = 15; chi-square / degreed of freedom (CMIN/DF) = -4096; normed fit index (NFI) = 6.710; Tucker-Lewis's index (TLI) = -1.692; comparative fit index (CFI) = 1.000; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.000]. An interpretation of the results revealed that the CFI and TLI exceed 0.90, also representing a good fit. The NFI exceeds 0.90 and the RMSEA value is below 0.08, all indicators of an acceptable model fit (see Ketchiwou *et al*., 2022 reflecting on previous authors). It is therefore concluded that the structural model fits the data. After determining the model fitness, the estimates of the proposed hypothesised model were calculated (see Table 3 overleaf).

According to Table 3 above, competition perception, COVID-19 impact and perceived talent management importance statistically significantly influenced organisational performance on the 95th percentile. COVID-19 impact, SME size, and SME tenure statistically significantly influenced talent management on the 99th percentile. Furthermore, talent management statistically significantly influenced organisational performance on the 99th percentile. Based on the results displayed, hypothesis 3, hypothesis 5, hypothesis 6, hypothesis 7, hypothesis 9, hypothesis 10 and hypothesis 13 could be accepted.

Table 3: SEM estimates for the proposed model

H0	Variables	Estimate	S.E.	C.R	P
H_1	Talent management ←competition	-1.691	2.283	-0.741	0.459
H_2	Talent management ←nature of services	-0.280	0.486	-0.577	0.564
H_3	Talent management ←COVID-19 impact	-0.543	0.183	-2.988	0.003**
H_4	Talent management ←TM importance	1.967	2.445	0.804	0.421
H_5	Talent management ←SME size	11.568	1.315	8.798	0.000**
H_6	Talent management ←SME tenure	-4.872	1.819	-2.678	0.007**
H_7	Organisational performance ←Competition	-1.981	0.814	-2.432	0.015*
H_8	Organisational performance ←nature of services	-0.172	0.173	-0.994	0.320
H_9	Organisational performance ←COVID-19 impact	0.152	0.066	2.326	0.020*
H_{10}	Organisational performance ←TM importance	1.719	0.872	1.971	0.049*
H_{11}	Organisational performance ←SME size	-0.359	0.516	-0.695	0.487
H_{12}	Organisational performance ←SME tenure	0.778	0.655	1.188	0.235
H_{13}	Organisational performance ←talent management	0.289	0.018	15.954	0.000**

To investigate the hypothesised associations, various statistical techniques were performed, *inter alia*, correlational analysis as well as multiple regression analysis, and these are reported on sequentially.

Correlation analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation was performed to investigate the strength and direction of the relationship between the measured variables with results depicted in Table 4 overleaf (Pallant, 2011, 128).

Table 4: Correlation matrix results

	TM	OP	COVID	COMP	TMP	SERV	SIZE	TEN
TM	1							
OP	0.663**	1						
COVID	-0.041	0.077	1					
COMP	-0.034	-0.119*	-0.163**	1				
TMP	0.163**	0.180**	0.161**	0.053	1			
SERV	-0.142**	-0.134**	-0.086	0.002	-0.148**	1		
SIZE	0.443**	0.302**	0.156**	-0.055	0.313**	-0.246**	1	
TEN	-0.277**	-0.160**	-0.119*	-0.026	-0.210**	0.207**	-0.395**	1

** p ≤ 0.05; ** p ≤ 0.01*

Note: TM, talent management; OP, organisational performance; COVID, COVID-19 impact; COMP, competition perception; TMP, perceived talent management importance; SEV, nature of services; SIZE, SME size; TEN, Organisational tenure.

A closer look at the results displayed in Table 4 above revealed that talent management had a statistically significant large correlation with organisational performance (r = 0.663**). The association was positive, and therefore, as talent management increases, there would be a concomitant increase in organisational performance. Competition perception reverted a small statistically significant correlation with organisational performance on the 95th percentile (r = -0.119*). The association was negative, indicative of an inverse relationship, viz. if competition perception increases, there would be a decrease in organisational performance. A similar result was found between competition perception and COVID-19 impact (r = -0.163**). Perceived importance of talent management reverted a small statistically significant association with talent management on the 99th percentile (r = 0.163**). Similarly, a small statistically significant association on the 99th percentile was reported between talent management importance and organisational performance (r = 0.180**) as was the case with COVID-19 impact (r = 0.161**). Nature of services reverted a small negative correlation on the 99th percentile with talent management (r = -0.142**), organisational performance (r = -0.134**) and

perceived talent management importance (r = -0.148**). A statistically significant medium positive association was revealed between SME size and talent management (r = 0.443**), organisational performance (r= 0.302**) and perceived talent management importance (r = 0.313**). A small statistically significant association was found between SME size and COVID-19 impact (r = 0.156**), while a negative small statistically significant association was reported between SMES size and nature of services (r = -0.246**). Organisational tenure had statistically significant small and negative correlations with talent management (r = -0.277**), organisational performance (r = -0.160**), COVID-19 impact (r = -0.119**), and perceived talent management importance (r = -0.210**). A small positive correlation on the 99th percentile was reported between organisational tenure and the nature of services rendered (r = 0.207**). Lastly, a medium negative association was reported between organisational tenure and SME size on the 99th percentile (r = -0.395**).

To determine the isolated impact of each categorical factor on talent management and organisational performance, multiple regression analysis was performed.

Multiple regression analysis

A standard multiple regression analysis was performed with results presented in Table 5 to determine the variance attributed to each of the contextual factors.

Table 5: Standard multiple regression analysis results

	R	R^2	ΔR^2	F	B	t	P
EXOGENOUS CONTEXTUAL FACTORS							
Competition perception							
Talent management	0.034	0.001	-0.001	0.446	-0.034	-0.668	0.505
Organisational performance	0.119	0.014	0.012	5.516	-0.119	-2.349	0.019*
Nature of service delivery							
Talent management	0.142	0.020	0.018	7.899	-0.142	-2.811	0.005**
Organisational performance	0.134	0.018	0.015	7.017	-0.134	-2.649	0.008**
COVID-19 impact							
Talent management	0.041	0.002	-0.001	0.650	-0.041	-0.806	0.420
Organisational performance	0.077	0.006	0.003	2.309	0.077	1.519	0.129
ENDOGENOUS CONTEXTUAL FACTORS							
Importance of talent management							
Talent management	0.799	0.638	0.637	687.227	0.779	26.215	0.000**
Organisational performance	0.560	0.313	0.311	177.759	0.560	13.000	0.000**
SME Size							
Talent management	0.443	0.196	0.194	93.021	0.443	9.645	0.000**
Organisational performance	0.302	0.091	0.089	38.462	0.302	6.202	0.000**
Organisational tenure							
Talent management	0.277	0.077	0.074	31.662	-0.277	-5.627	0.000**
Organisational performance	0.160	0.026	0.023	10.028	-0.160	-3.167	0.002**
Talent management							
Organisational performance	0.663	0.439	0.438	305.726	0.663	17.485	0.000**

** $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$*

R, R-value; R2, R-square; ΔR^2, adjusted R squared; F, f-value; β, beta; p, significance.

As can be deduced from Table 5, exogenous contextual factors statistically significantly predicted talent management and organisational performance. As such, perceived level of competition statistically significantly predicted organisational performance (β = -0.119; p = 0.019*). More specifically, 11.9 percent of the variance in organisational performance could be attributed to the perceived level of competition. The relationship direction was negative, and therefore, as perceived level of competition increases, there would hypothetically be a concomitant decrease in organisational performance. Furthermore, nature of service delivery (viz. product-market combination) statistically significantly predicted talent management (β = -0.142; p = 0.005**). Therefore, 14.2 percent of the variance in talent management could be explained by the nature of service delivery. The relationship was negative. Moreover, the nature of service delivery also statistically significantly predicted organisational performance (β = -0.134; p = 0.008**). Consequently, 13.4 percent of the variance in organisational performance could be predicted by the nature of service delivery.

As deduced from Table 5, endogenous contextual factors statistically significantly predicted talent management and organisational performance. *Per se*, the importance of talent management perception statistically significantly predicted talent management practices (β = 0.779; p = 0.000**). Therefore, the perception of the importance of talent management within the organisation predicts 77.9% of the variance in talent management. Similarly, the perceived importance of talent management statistically significantly predicted organisational performance (β = 0.560; p = 0.000**). Consequently, 56% of the variance in organisational performance can be attributed to the perceived importance of talent management. Moreover, SME size statistically significantly predicted both talent management (β = 0.443; p = 0.000**) and organisational performance (β = 0.302; p = 0.000**). Thus, 44.3 percent of the variance in talent management practices could be explained by SME size and 30.2 percent of the variance in organisational performance. Organisational tenure or duration in service statistically significantly predicted the variance in both talent management (β = -0.277; p = 0.000**) and organisational performance (β = -0.160; p = 0.002**). Therefore, 27.7 percent of the variance in talent management could be explained by tenure, and 16 percent of the variance in organisational performance could be explained by said contextual factor. The relationship was inverse in each case. Lastly, 66.3 percent of the variance in

organisational performance could be attributed to talent management practices (β = 0.663; p = 0.000**).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Evidence from the study indicated that 85.3% of SMEs that formed part of the study do not perceive talent management as an organisational strategic objective, with 86.1% of the sample noting an absence of formalised talent management plans. Findings also reflect that seven of the hypotheses (hypotheses 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 13) were tested to be true and accepted, while six hypotheses were rejected. More specifically, exogenous contextual factors, namely COVID-19 statistically significantly influenced talent management and organisational performance. Competition perception had a statistically significant impact on organisational performance. Endogenous contextual factors, *inter alia*, SME size and organisational tenure, impacted talent management, while perceived talent management importance had a statistically significant impact on organisational performance. Lastly, talent management predicts organisational performance. Results presented partially confirm research findings by Gallardo-Gallardo *et al*. (2020), Paauwe and Farndale (2017), Jankowić *et al*. (2016), Irfan *et al*. (2023) as well as Aina and Atan (2020). More specifically, Irfan *et al*. (2023) found that talent development, a facet of talent management, statistically significantly influenced organisational performance. Similar findings were reported by Al Aina and Atan (2020), while the reported research revealed that talent management statistically significantly influenced organisational performance. This result confirms research reported by Cizmić and Ahmić (2021), which was also within a developing country context. Lastly, endogenous contextual factors had the most influence on both talent management and organisational performance, specifically the perceived importance of talent management as well as the size of the SME. This result partially confirms research findings by Newman and Sheikh (2014) in that firm size and age had a statistically significant correlation with human resource management adoption and growth orientation. Furthermore, 66.3 percent of the variance in organisation performance could be attributed to talent management practices. This finding validates research conducted by Cizmić and Ahmić (2021), who reported that talent management had a positive statistically significant influence on organisational performance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is within a developing country context.

Managerial implications based on the findings presented would suggest that SMEs in the manufacturing sector need to institute talent management plans to reap the associated benefits towards improving and sustaining organisational performance. Furthermore, talent management should be an organisational strategic objective. It is also important for SMEs in the manufacturing sector to have plans in place to curb the impact of competition perception and a global pandemic to ensure sustainable organisational performance. Therefore, SMEs in the manufacturing sector should have business recovery plans in place to mitigate future pandemics towards sustainable organisational performance.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Caution is advised when interpreting the results since self-administered questionnaires are subject to common method bias which was controlled for using both procedural and statistical controls. The research was limited to the Gauteng Province and to the manufacturing sector. It is recommended that future research endeavours expand research nationally to have a national perspective. It is also recommended that the research be extended to other business sectors. Furthermore, it is recommended that future studies verify the research reported on since there is limited empirical evidence on the impact of exogenous and endogenous contextual factors within the South African context. Lastly, the research reported on ascertained the direct effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables. It is recommended that the mediating role of talent management should be investigated in future research studies.

CONCLUSION

The research reported on attempted to address a lacuna in the corpus of knowledge relating to human resource management research, notably talent management in various SMME types specifically focusing on contextual factors and characteristics. It can be concluded, based on the objectives of this study and the empirical findings, that talent management remains an important aspect that can have a positive impact on organisational performance if implemented and practised by SMEs in the manufacturing sector. It is also pivotal to pay careful attention to exogenous and endogenous contextual factors as they have been confirmed to have a positive influence on talent management and organisational performance.

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CHAPTER 4: MANUSCRIPT 3

AN ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM APPROACH UNDERSCORING TALENT MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Manuscript 3, titled *An entrepreneurial ecosystem approach underscoring talent management and organisational performance*, is aimed at investigating research objectives 3 and 4 of the study, namely (i) determining whether talent management practices (i.e. recruitment and retention, succession planning, promotion, performance appraisal, talent development) statistically significantly influence SME organisational performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province, and (ii) ascertaining whether there is a correlation between the various aspects of talent management within the context of SME organisational performance in the manufacturing sector, notably in the Gauteng Province. Manuscript 3 underscores the theoretical contribution of the PhD study in that the reported research contributes to the corpus of knowledge relating to the theory of entrepreneurial ecosystems, a novel approach to SMEs, within a developing economy context. A paper from this manuscript has been submitted to the *African Journal of Management* and is currently in review. The submission letter is marked as Annexure F. The author guideline is attached at the end of this thesis and marked as Annexure G.

This research study was designed and executed by three researchers at the North-West University. The contributions of each researcher are indicated as follows: Ms GB Zake is the PhD candidate responsible for co-conceptualising the paper, conducting the literature review, implementing the research methodology, and for interpreting the research findings. Prof P Jonck is the PhD promoter responsible for conceptualising the article, statistical analyses, and co-authoring the paper. Prof AM Pelser is the co-promoter acting as critical reader and provided guidance throughout the study. The author and co-authors declare and confirm their roles in this research study. All authors agree that the appropriate format was used for the submission of this dissertation at the North-West University. All authors are also in agreement that the contents of this research study and any modified versions thereof may be used and publicised by the authors in peer-reviewed academic journals and/or presented at academic conferences.

ABSTRACT

The study evaluates, from an entrepreneurial ecosystem perspective, the influence of talent management practices on SMEs' organisational performance in the manufacturing sector. A cross-sectional quantitative research design was utilised to gather data from a sample of n = 395 participants using a self-constructed questionnaire. Inferential statistical analyses were performed to assess the impact of talent management practices and organisational performance as factors in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Structural equation modelling was performed to test the hypothesised model. Results revealed that talent management facets, *inter alia*, recruitment, retention, succession planning, promotion, performance appraisal and talent development are predictors of organisational performance in the manufacturing SME sector. Interrelationships among ecosystem elements are confirmation of interdependence and a need for a systemic approach enabling a robust process flow and an increase in productivity in the manufacturing sector. The theoretical contribution relates to the entrepreneurial ecosystems theory, investigating talent as a resource endowment and the impact thereof on productive entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial ecosystem, manufacturing SMEs, talent management, talent management facets, organisational performance

INTRODUCTION

Small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) can be considered a vital part of the economy based on the contribution thereof to gross domestic product (GDP) and improvement in living conditions (Van Staden, 2022). As such, SMEs are deemed significant role players in the economic and social advancement of a nation (Zafar & Mustafa, 2017). The International Finance Group (2019) extrapolate that SMEs within the South African context employ between 50 and 60 percent of the labour force and contribute 34 percent to GDP. Moreover, SMEs in the manufacturing sector are a key contributor to employment with the sector contributing positively to the GDP of various countries (Erdin & Ozkaya, 2020). Specifically, the South African manufacturing sector contributed 12 percent to GDP and employment, respectively, and 42 percent to rand value exports in the 2019 financial year (Mnguni & Simbanegavi, 2020). Also, SMEs foster the development of entrepreneurship (Love & Roper, 2013; Ramukumba, 2014). However, Stam and Spigel (2017) explain that entrepreneurship is context dependent. Consequently, a systemic perspective on entrepreneurship has become increasingly pivotal, ascribed to the influence of social, institutional and cultural factors on SME growth (Malecki, 2018). An entrepreneurial ecosystem is a novel concept that describes the entrepreneurial environment underscoring specifically context interdependency (Stam & Spigel, 2017). This notion is further emphasised by Cowell, Lyon-Hill and Tate (2018), asserting that entrepreneurs do not operate in isolation, but in an integrated system with multiple actors. Previously mentioned authors described the entrepreneurial ecosystem as a framework emphasising how entrepreneurs interact with other stakeholders (Cowell *et al*., 2018). Corrente, Greco, Nicotra, Romano and Schillaci (2019), furthermore, expound that the entrepreneurial ecosystem underscores entrepreneurs and recognises other role players' contributions to productive entrepreneurship.

The principal tenet of the entrepreneurial ecosystem paradigm centres on fostering conducive conditions to support prosperous entrepreneurship enabling the entrepreneurial activity to contribute to economic growth and social wellbeing (Maroufkhani, Wagner, & Ismail, 2018). Mazzarol (2014) defines an entrepreneurial ecosystem as a conceptual model designed to nurture economic development by promoting entrepreneurship, SME growth and innovation. Maroufkhani *et al*. (2018), reflecting on research conducted by Isenberg (2011), identify six dimensions of a sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem of which human capital is integral, whereas Stam

and van de Ven (2021) differentiate between seven resource endowments of which 'talent' is hypothesised to influence productive entrepreneurship deemed to be the outcome of the entrepreneurial activity. Nonetheless, Kansheba and Wald (2020) note that the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems is under-theorised and the corpus of knowledge is dominated by conceptual studies. Furthermore, the focus of empirical research is on technological-based industries in developed economies using case study research designs as alluded to by Kansheba and Wald (2020). Against the stated background, a paucity of empirical research could be identified that investigates entrepreneurial ecosystems within the manufacturing SME sector within a developing economy context, focusing specifically on talent as a resource endowment indicative of the significance and contribution of the research reported on to the corpus of knowledge.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The research reported on is theoretically underpinned by the entrepreneurial ecosystem theory. From literature, there appears to be an absence of a shared definition of an entrepreneurial ecosystem ascribed to context dependency (viz. scale, region, economic development and methodological differentiation), according to Malecki (2018). Nevertheless, Cho, Ryan and Buciuni (2022) define an entrepreneurial ecosystem as an evolutionary system that links role players in a demarcated area within a governance structure. Purbasari, Wijaya and Rahaya (2019), reflecting on research conducted by Stam and Spigel (2016), define an entrepreneurial ecosystem as a set of interconnected entrepreneurial role players and facets coordinated in such a way as to enable productive entrepreneurship within a particular region. Moreover, an entrepreneurial ecosystem consists of criterion elements to sustain entrepreneurship in a delineated sector towards achieving productive entrepreneurship (Stam & Van den Ven, 2021).

Productive entrepreneurship is defined as the outcome of the entrepreneurial activity, which is produced by resource endowments consisting of physical infrastructure, demand, intermediaries, talent, knowledge, leadership and finance (Stam & Van den Ven, 2021). In the research reported on, productive entrepreneurship, as an outcome of the entrepreneurial activity, was operationalised as organisational performance. The rationale is based on the assertion by Terjesen, Acs, Audretsch, Hechavarria, Stam, and White (2017) that the *prima facie* impetus for an entrepreneurial ecosystem is economic

performance, while the research endowment investigated was talent operationalised as talent management (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021). Audretsch and Link (2019) note that a pivotal aspect that links an entrepreneurial ecosystem with a business ecosystem is human capital. Human capital can be understood as a set of intangible resources to improve productivity (Goldin, 2016). Therefore, human capital can be defined as the resource endowment tasked to achieve productive entrepreneurship (Olajumoke, 2020), whereas the term 'talent' describes human capital considered most relevant to the long-term interest of the organisation (Ansar & Baloch, 2018).

Moreover, the notion of entrepreneurial ecosystems has been used as a theoretical underpinning to elucidate entrepreneurial activities within regions and industrial sectors (Cantner, Cunningham, Lehmann, & Menter, 2021). Consequently, the delineated sector, as per the definition of an entrepreneurial ecosystem, and in accordance with Cantner *et al*. (2021) in the study, was operationalised as the manufacturing sector. The area or region was the Gauteng Province in South Africa.

Figure 1 below graphically depicts the conceptual underpinning of this research study.

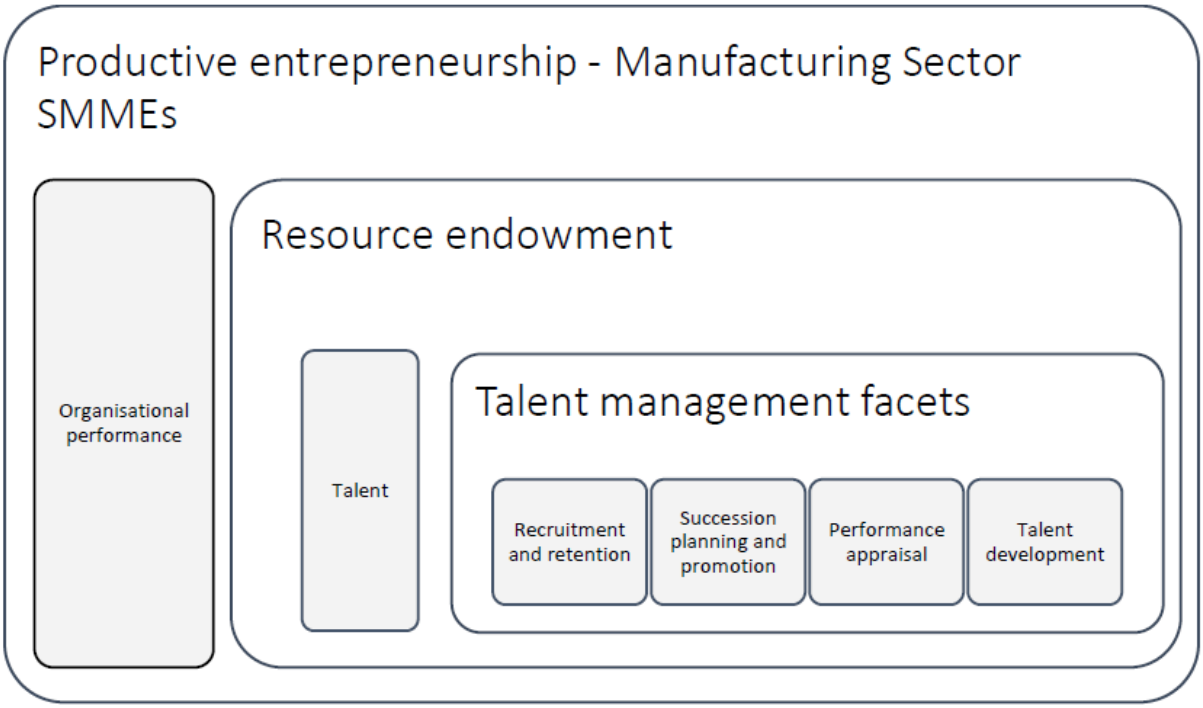

Figure 1: Conceptual underpinning

Source: Adapted from Stan and Van den Ven (2021: 813)

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Organisational performance

Widyastuti, Ferdinand, and Hermanto (2023), citing previous authors, define organisational performance as the organisational accomplishment relating to realising predetermined strategic goals and is measured in terms of turnover or sales, growth and profit. Taouab and Issor (2019) expound that performance is deemed an essential element in organisational survival, especially within a competitive business environment, highlighting the importance of organisational performance measurement as a strategic process to identify internal and external actors in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Organisational performance is also pivotal in the manufacturing sector, ascribed to the key role of the foretasted in economic growth and transformation (Hanaysha, Al Shaikh, & Alzoubi, 2021). According to Lee, Azmi, Hanaysha, Alzoubi, and Alshurideh (2022), numerous research studies have identified the measurement of organisational performance in three-fold, *inter alia*, financial elements, non-financial elements and market elements in, for example, return on investment (ROI), market share, profit margin on sales, growth of ROI, growth of sales, growth of market share, and overall competitive position.

Talent management facets

The importance of talent management practices and their contribution to sustained organisational performance is gaining ground. As such, Macpherson, Werner, and Mey (2023) highlight that talent is a main driver of organisational performance in the fourth industrial revolution. According to Al Aina and Atan (2020), talent management practices mainly focus on talent attraction, talent retention, learning and development, and career management. Bouteraa and Bouaziz (2023) assert that talent management practices involve talent identification, talent development, succession planning and talent retention. The research reported on emphasises the following talent management practices, *inter alia*, recruitment and retention, succession planning and promotion, performance appraisal as well as talent development.

Recruitment and retention

The process of recruitment is related to the identification of requisite skills, characters, competencies, values as well as organisational requirements and proceeds to select candidates who meet those requirements (Kang & Lee, 2021). Bouteraa and Bouaziz (2023) re-iterate that the proper selection of candidates for identified key positions has a positive effect on the organisation's competitive advantage. Kang and Lee (2021) propose that, to retain the acquired or recruited talented employees, organisations must ensure that identified candidates are appropriately maintained through training and development opportunities. In this way, organisations are assured of a certain level of availability of talented employees to fill future vacant key positions.

Succession planning and promotion

According to Rothwell and Prescott (2023), succession planning is a strategy related to identifying critical leadership roles and developing employees to assume said roles, which involve identifying and envisioning the desired organisational objectives. It includes strategies on how to achieve the end state and how new leadership will sustain organisational success. Succession planning is also described as a strategic and systematic approach to ensure the sustainability of leadership changes in an organisation, which requires developing and recognising existing employees with competency to take on key future roles (Eshtrefi, 2021). Succession planning and talent development are synonymous since talented individuals can be identified within the organisation and developed to prepare them or promote them to occupy future key leadership positions that may become vacant.

Performance appraisal

The success of talent management can be measured through a performance appraisal system that is put in place to assess the performance of talented individuals. This system should be able to evaluate the performance of individuals against set goals and recommend reward mechanisms for performance results, ranging from average to top performance. This is considered an approach to motivate good-performing employees and propose development strategies for low performers for improved performance

(Rohida & Akbar, 2019). Performance appraisal involves a documented process of performance review, performance evaluation, and development conversations with employees (Ali, Mahmood, & Mehreen, 2019).

Talent development

Talent development as part of an organisation's resourcing strategy underscores training and development and, given appropriate attention, could bear positive results impacting on organisational success (Irfan, Khurshid, Khurshid, & Khokhar, 2023). For organisations to remain competitive, it is recommended that organisations develop the required competencies and establish incentive systems to reward performance in addition to achieving effective succession planning. According To Rohida and Akbar (2019), training and development opportunities are also identified after conducting performance assessments of individuals as gaps that need to be addressed.

The link between talent management and organisational performance

The link between talent management and organisational performance has been highlighted by researchers who have established the mentioned nexus in various sectors. For example, Hadijah (2022) emphasises the role of talent as the primary factor in determining the level of organisational success, in addition to the organisation's fundamental capabilities being the sum total of the workforce expertise. In the same breath, Kurdi and Alshurideh (2020) assert that organisational performance can be improved with careful attention to employee retention among other aspects of talent management. Masri and Abubakr (2019) discovered, through empirical research, that talent management and employee recognition can significantly affect the level of employee performance and consequently contribute to organisational success. Previously mentioned authors also found that talent management and employee recognition are interrelated variables that affect employee performance (Masri & Abubakr, 2019). As a result, it has been recommended that talent management and employee performance should be considered as strategic tools towards the implementation of strategic objectives and to enhance the organisation's performance (Masri & Abubakr, 2019). Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, and González-Cruz (2013), reflecting on the corpus of knowledge, expound that talent management is a critical determinant of organisational

success, extrapolated as organisational performance. Despite the mentioned research, a dearth of studies has been conducted in the manufacturing industry within a developing country context based on the entrepreneurial ecosystem theory.

HYPOTHESISED MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

In accordance with the empirical review presented, the following hypothesised model is proposed (see Figure 2).

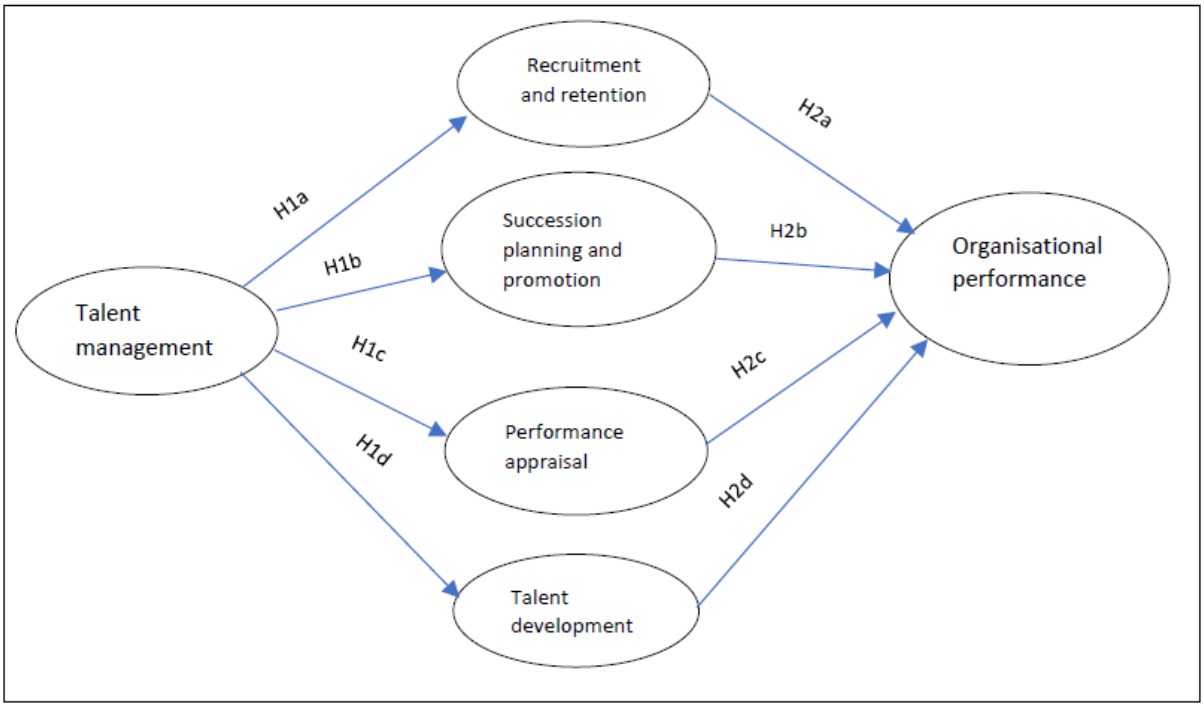

Figure 2: Hypothesised research model

Sequentially, the hypotheses formulated for the study subsume:

H_{1a}: Talent management statically significantly influences recruitment and retention.

H_{1b}: Talent management statically significantly influences succession planning and promotion.

H_{1c}: Talent management statically significantly influences performance appraisal.

H_{1d}: Talent management statically significantly influences talent development.

H_{2a}: The variance in organisational performance can statistically significantly be attributed to recruitment and retention.

H_{2b}: The variance in organisational performance can statistically significantly be attributed to succession planning and promotion.

H_{2c}: The variance in organisational performance can statistically significantly be attributed to performance appraisal.

H_{2d}: The variance in organisational performance can statistically significantly be attributed to talent development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research approach

A cross-sectional quantitative research design was used to achieve the research objective. Quantitative research involves measuring variables, testing hypotheses, and explaining relationships. In addition to the application of statistical tools, deductive reasoning and categorised numeric data assist in providing representativeness and generalisation of research findings (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021). On the other hand, Yue and Xu (2019) emphasise the importance of reliable data as the bedrock on which quantitative research is based, with the main aim of identifying the axioms of various phenomena, explaining human behaviour from a group perspective, and uncovering the relationship between variables. The research could be classified as cross-sectional, ascribed to data gathering taking place at a specific point in time in the absence of repeat measures (Jonck, Van der Walt, & Sobayeni, 2019). Cross-sectional research is advantageous when there is a need to ascertain the relationship between variables and can provide alternative explanations for said relationships (Spector, 2019). Similarly, Wang and Cheng (2020) indicate that a cross-sectional research design assists in describing the distribution of variables in a population, and therefore is suitable to develop and test hypotheses.

Participants

The population of the study was proprietors, general managers and human resources practitioners currently employed at SMEs in the manufacturing industry, notably in the Gauteng Province. Simple random probability sampling was utilised as the sampling strategy; and therefore, each population member had an equal probability of inclusion in the study (Taherdoost, 2016). In total, the sample comprised 395 participants (n = 395), which is on the 95th confidence level representative of a population of 2.5 million based on a 5% margin of error (Orban, 2021). The sample characteristics are depicted in Table 1 overleaf. According to Table 1 it is evident that more men (n = 279; 72.1%) than women (n = 108; 27.9%) participated in the study. Moreover, 2% of the sample representing eight participants selected not to disclose their gender. In terms of the age distribution, most of the sample were in the 36 to 45 years of age category, followed sequentially by those participants in the 25 to 35 years of age category (n = 128; 33.1%), 46 to 55 years (n = 67; 17.3%) and 56 to 65 years (n = 10; 2.6%). Only 0.8% of the sample, representing three respondents, were older than 65, which could be expected, since 65 years is the retirement age according to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. The overwhelming majority of the sample had a grade 12 national diploma (n = 269; 68.6%). Twelve per cent (n = 47) had a bachelor's higher education degree, followed by n = 6 (1.5%) participants with a doctoral qualification, n = 5 (1.3%) participants with an honours degree and n = 4 (1%) participants with a postgraduate qualification. When considering work experience, most of the sample had between six and 10 years of experience (n = 179; 46.3%), followed by 36.2% (n = 140) of the sample with between one and five years of experience. Similarly, 9.8% (n = 38) of the sample had between 11 and 15 years of experience. Only 2.8% of the sample, representing 11 participants, had more than 25 years of experience. Lastly, with reference to rank, the majority represented middle management (n = 302; 83.9%), followed by proprietors and/or owners (n = 44; 12.2%) and senior or top management (n = 14; 3.9%).

Table 1: Sample biographical and demographic characteristics (n=395)

ITEM	N	%
Gender		
Male	279	72.1
Female	108	27.9
Prefer not to answer	8	2.0
Age		
25 to 35 years	128	33.1
36 to 45 years	179	46.3
46 to 55 years	67	17.3
56 to 65 years	10	2.6
Older than 65 years	3	0.8
Academic qualification		
Grade 12	269	68.6
Bachelor's degree	47	12.0
Honours degree	5	1.3
Postgraduate qualification	4	1.0
Doctorate / PhD	6	1.5
Other	61	15.6
Work experience		
1 to 5 years	140	36.2
6 to 10 years	179	46.3
11 to 15 years	38	9.8
16 to 20 years	14	3.6
21 to 25 years	5	1.3
More than 25 years	11	2.8
Rank		
Middle management	302	83.9
Senior / top management	14	3.9
Owner	44	12.2

Measuring instrument

Primary data was collected by means of a self-constructed questionnaire consisting of four sections. A biographical section collected data regarding participants' gender, age, qualification, rank, and work experience, to mention a few. Talent management was measured utilising 44 items with a four-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1: *strongly disagree*, to 4: *strongly agree*. The instrument underscored four dimensions, namely recruitment and retention, succession planning and promotion, performance appraisal, and talent development. Examples of items include: "Employees have confidence in the recruitment processes of the enterprise" (recruitment and retention), "Regular evaluation of the outcome of the succession management process in the SME takes place" (succession planning and promotion), "The SME has a performance appraisal system that is implemented with a reward system for good performance" (performance appraisal) and "There is a staff development programme where staff are encouraged to participate according to their individual needs" (talent development). The internal consistency was satisfactory for the dimensions and ranged between 0.765 and 0.897. The total talent management scale had an alpha coefficient of 0.950.

Organisational performance was measured utilising a one-dimensional 19-item scale. Items focused on financial aspects, customer base, internal processes, innovation and learning perspective, which are deemed indicative of organisational performance (Mafina & Pooe, 2013). Participants rated items using a four-point Likert-type scale where 1 represented *strongly disagree* and 4 *strongly agree*. Examples from the questionnaire include: "Initiatives are taken to align employee potential to the SME's business strategy" (innovation and learning perspective), "The SME's customer satisfaction is high with few complaints" (customer base), "In terms of financial performance, for example profitability, the SME is performing well in my view" (financial performance indicators) and "Good governance such as organisational transparency and accountability are adhered to and of great importance in the SME" (internal processes). The scale had an alpha coefficient of 0.892.

Factor analysis was used to examine the underlying construct validity (Lu, 2014). Results indicated that the data was factorable, as the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test for sampling adequacy returned a value of 0.953, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant on the 99^{th} percentile ($X2 = 10639.92$; $df = 1953$; $p = 0.000^{**}$). Exploratory factor analysis with oblique (Oblimin) rotation was computed with results indicating that

11 factors had an eigenvalue exceeding 1, accounting for 59.070% of the total variance. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed with a forced five-factor rotation based on an inspection of the scree-plot and parallel analysis results. Five underlying dimensions were identified. Factor 1 accounted for 30.83% of the variance and emphasised aspects related to talent management in general, with factor loadings ranging between 0.767 and 0.351. Factor 2, accounting for 8.12% of the variance, underscored organisational performance with factor loadings ranging between 0.476 and 0.357. Factor 3 accounted for 3.98% of the variance, and emphasised recruitment and retention. Factor 4 accounted for 2.81% of the variance and focused on performance appraisal. Lastly, factor 5 accounted for 2.22% of the variance and emphasised talent development.

Statistical analysis

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. Reliability and validity were computed to determine the psychometric properties of the measuring instrument. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was determined to ascertain reliability, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the validity of the questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed. Descriptive analysis was utilised to provide a profile of the sample in addition to determining the measures of central tendency and normality, viz. skewness and kurtosis. Skewness values below ±3 and kurtosis values below ±10 was deemed characteristic of a normal distribution (Kline, 2015). Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the research model. Prior to testing the research model, the fitness of the model was determined. Goodness-of-fit indices were computed with cut-off criteria shown in parentheses: comparative fit index (CFI ≥ 0.90), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI ≥ 0.90) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA ≤ 0.08) (Oosthuizen, Rabie, & De Beer, 2018). A correlation was determined between constructs with practical significance values above 0.30 deemed of medium practical effect and values above 0.50 as of a large practical effect (Oosthuizen *et al*., 2018, citing Cohen, 1992). Regression analysis was computed to ascertain the direction and statistical significance of the beta coefficients. Statistical significance was set at either the 95^{th} ($p \leq 0.05$) or 99^{th} ($p \leq 0.01$) percentile.

Ethical consideration

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Economic and Management Sciences Research and Ethics Committee (EMS-REC), reference number NWU-00610-22-A4. Standard ethical protocols were observed, *inter alia*, informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, privacy and honesty in data presentation (Sarantakos, 2013

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The table below depicts the results obtained from descriptive calculations. According to Table 2, talent management and the facets thereof were positive. On the other hand, organisational performance scored below the median, and therefore is negative (mean = 46.27; median = 47.00). Furthermore, skewness and kurtosis scores were within the acceptable thresholds (Kline, 2015), indicative of a normal distribution.

Table 2: Descriptive and reliability results

Variable	Mean	Median	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Recruitment and retention	31.20	31.00	6.305	-0.142	-0.189
Succession planning and promotion	24.78	24.00	5.245	-0.072	0.210
Performance appraisal	24.39	24.00	4.410	-0.240	-0.497
Talent development	37.70	37.00	6.080	-0.497	0.555
Talent management	118.07	117.00	19.224	-0.129	-0.378
Organisational performance	46.27	47.00	8.267	-0.315	0.783

Table 3 below contains the results from the correlation analysis. Pearson's product-moment bivariate correlation was performed to ascertain the direction and strength of the association between variables.

Table 3: Bivariate correlation analysis results

Variable		1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Recruitment and retention	1					
2	Succession and promotion	0.784**	1				
3	Performance appraisal	0.711**	0.677**	1			
4	Talent development	0.602**	0.602**	0.720**	1		
5	Talent management	0.895**	0.876**	0.875**	0.843**	1	
6	Organisational performance	0.588**	0.628**	0.545**	0.549**	0.663**	1

*p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01

A closer inspection of Table 3 revealed that talent management and the facets thereof had positive and statistically significant correlations on the 99th percentile ($p \leq 0.01$) with organisational performance. The strength of the correlations was of a large practical effect ($r \leq 0.5$). To test the hypothesised model, structural equation modelling (SEM) was performed, preceded by determining the goodness-fit indices. SPSS Amos version 28 was used to calculate the SEM. Ascribed to singularity between talent management and the facets thereof, the goodness-fit indices were computed between talent management facets and organisational performance. Singularity occurs when an independent variable is a combination of other independent variables in the analysis (Pallant, 2011). Results reverted a minimum fit [chi-square = 986.903; p = 0.000; df = 6; chi-square / degreed of freedom (CMIN/DF) = 164.484; normed fit index (NFI) = 0.912; Tucker-Lewis's index (TLI) = -1.033; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.187; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.644]. Notwithstanding the achievement of a minimum fit, it was concluded that SEM could be utilised to test the model based on the TLI ≥ 0.90. Nevertheless, to mitigate against the stated, pluralistic approaches over a single method were utilised (Kline, 2016), for example using SEM in conjunction with multiple regression analysis (see Table 4). After verifying the model fitness, the estimates of the proposed statistical model were calculated (see Table 5).

Table 4: Hypothesis testing using multiple regression analysis

	Hypothesis	R	R^2	F	B	T	P
H_{1a}	Recruitment and retention ← Talent management	0.895	0.802	1574.89	0.895	39.685	0.000**
H_{1b}	Succession planning ←Talent management	0.876	0.767	1284.52	0.876	35.840	0.000**
H_{1c}	Performance appraisal ← Talent management	0.875	0.766	1276.16	0.875	35.723	0.000**
H_{1d}	Talent development ←talent management	0.843	0.711	958.52	0.843	30.960	0.000**
H_{2a}	Organisational performance ←recruitment and retentions	0.588	0.346	206.36	0.588	14.365	0.000**
H_{2b}	Organisational performance ←succession planning and promotion	0.628	0.394	253.60	0.628	15.925	0.000**
H_{2c}	Organisational performance ← performance appraisal	0.545	0.298	165.18	0.545	12.852	0.000**
H_{2d}	Organisational performance ←talent development	0.549	0.301	168.10	0.549	12.965	0.000**

*p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01

Regression analysis results presented in Table 4 revealed that all the hypotheses were supported. Therefore, all the regressions were statistically significant at the 99th percentile. Moreover, talent management statistically significantly predicted recruitment and retention (β = 0.895), succession planning and promotion (β = 0.876), performance appraisal (β = 0.875) and talent development (β = 0.843). Similarly, 58.8% of the variance in organisational performance could be attributed to recruitment and retention (β = 0.588), while 62.8% of the variance in organisational performance could be explained by succession planning and promotion (β = 0.628). Lastly, 54.5% and 54.9% of the variance in organisational performance could be attributed to performance appraisal (β = 0.545) and talent development, respectively (β = 0.549).

Table 5: SEM estimates for the proposed default model

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R	P
Recruitment and retention ← talent management	0.294	0.007	39.736	≤0.01**
Succession planning ←talent management	0.239	0.007	35.886	≤0.01**
Performance appraisal ←talent management	0.201	0.006	35.769	≤0.01**
Talent development ←talent management	0.267	0.009	31.000	≤0.01**
Organisational performance ←recruitment and retentions	0.204	0.093	2.190	0.028*
Organisational performance ←succession planning and promotion	0.544	0.107	5.081	≤0.01**
Organisational performance ←performance appraisal	0.089	0.127	0.701	0.483
Organisational performance ←talent development	0.290	0.086	3.367	≤0.01**

*p ≤0.05; **p ≤0.01

Results displayed in Table 5 indicated that performance appraisal as well as recruitment and retention did not statistically significantly influence organisational performance. However, since only minimum model fitness was achieved, multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses (see Table 4). Figure 3 below graphically demonstrates the results of the SEM modelling, presented in Table 5, confirming the statistical model that underpinned the research reported on.

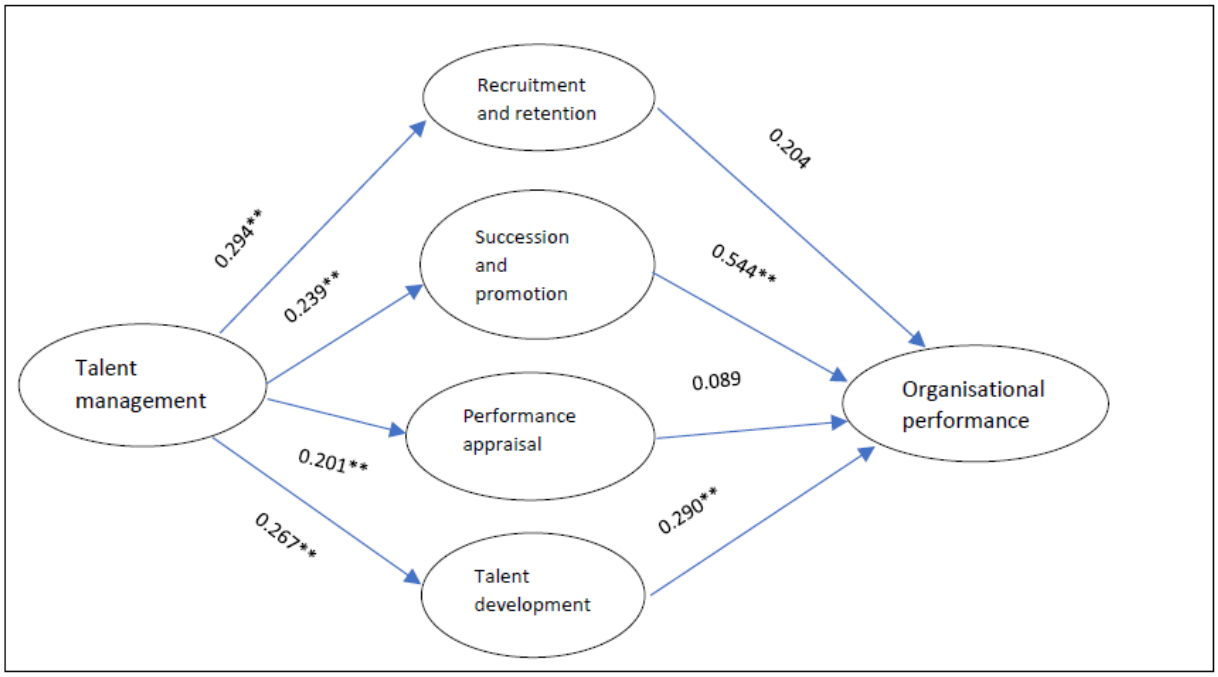

Figure 3: Statistical model based on SEM results

DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The hypothesised model was tested to be fit where talent management was found to be a statistically significant predictor of talent management practices, including recruitment and retention, succession planning and promotion, talent development and performance appraisal. Similarly, organisational performance was found to be sequentially influenced by succession planning and promotion as well as talent development. However, the multiple regression analysis revealed that the variance in organisational performance could statistically significantly be attributed to succession planning and promotion (62.8%), recruitment and retention (58.8%), talent development (54.9%) and performance appraisal. Therefore, the research reported on found that organisational performance was statistically significantly influenced by all the talent management facets. The findings presented confirm research by Gallardo-Gallardo *et al*. (2013) in that talent management is a critical determinant of organisational performance. Results reported on also verify research by Hadijah (2022), who identified talent management as a primary factor in determining organisational performance. Results also partially confirm research by Masri and Abubakr (2019) with specific reference to the importance of employee recognition. Results presented in the current study indicated that succession planning and promotion, which are deemed indicative of employee recognition, had the largest impact on

organisational performance. Similarly, results presented confirm research by Kurdi and Alshurideh (2020) referring to the influence of employee retention as well as talent management in general and the role thereof in organisational performance.

In terms of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, talent as resource endowment statistically significantly influenced productive entrepreneurship within the manufacturing sector within a developing economy context. Results confirm research by Stam and Van de Ven (2021) as well as Olajumoke (2020). Similarly, Kansheba and Wald (2020) note that the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems is under-theorised and the corpus of knowledge is dominated by conceptual studies. The research reported on provide empirical justification for the entrepreneurial ecosystem theory. Furthermore, the focus of empirical research is on technologically based industries in developed economies using case study research designs, as alluded to by Kansheba and Wald (2020). The present study, however, is demarcated in the manufacturing sector within a developing economy context using an empirical research design.

CONCLUSION

The article emphasises the positive contribution and statistical significance of talent management and talent management practices as key contributors in realising productive entrepreneurship within the context of manufacturing SMEs in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. More specifically, it can be deduced from the research study that talent management is a critical determinant of organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector. Additionally, the four tested talent management facets (viz. recruitment and retention, succession planning and promotion, performance appraisal and talent development) are indeed talent management practices that have a significant impact on productive entrepreneurship under the ambit of entrepreneurial ecosystem theory in the manufacturing sector. This necessitates entrepreneurial activity such as SMEs to invest in ensuring that talent management strategies focus on the confirmed talent management practices to realise productive entrepreneurship. Furthermore, specific emphasis should be on succession planning and promotion, as well as talent development as key contributors to improved organisational performance of manufacturing SMEs. The following caveat should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. The research reported on is sector- and geographically specific

and should be interpreted as such. Future research endeavours could expand the study to various other sectors and possibly a national study.

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CHAPTER 5: CONFERENCE PAPER

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SME'S ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN A SOUTH AFRICAN MANUFACTURING SUB-SECTOR: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Manuscript 5, titled *Impact of COVID-19 on SME's organisational performance and talent management practices in a South African manufacturing sub-sector: preliminary findings*, is aimed at reporting on the results of the pilot study implemented to determine the psychometric properties of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the results were utilised to determine whether there is justification for implementing the main research study. An abstract was accepted for presentation at the 23rd International Conference on Human Resource Development Research and Practice across Europe hosted by the National College of Ireland. The acceptance letter is marked as Annexure H.

This research study was designed and executed by three researchers at the North-West University. The contributions of each researcher are indicated as follows: Ms GB Zake is the PhD candidate responsible for co-conceptualising the paper, conducting the literature review, implementing the research methodology, and for interpreting the research findings. Prof P Jonck is the PhD promoter responsible for conceptualising the article, statistical analyses, and co-authoring the paper. Prof AM Pelser is the co-promoter acting as critical reader and provided guidance throughout the study. The author and co-authors declare and confirm their roles in this research study. All authors agree that the appropriate format was used for the submission of this dissertation at the North-West University. All authors are also in agreement that the contents of this research study and any modified versions thereof may be used and publicised by the authors in peer-reviewed academic journals and/or presented at academic conferences.

TOPIC: Impact of COVID-19 on SMEs' organisational performance and talent management practices in a South African manufacturing sub-sector: Preliminary findings

STREAM: Leadership, management and talent development

Research significance: COVID-19 has emerged as an unprecedented global humanitarian crisis that has transformed societies profoundly and permanently (Varlik, 2020). Post-COVID-19, innovative thinking is required, which includes the development of new business models, reshaping and redefining customer bases, identifying business opportunities and establishing reliable income sources (Muriithi, 2021). Nevertheless, novel thinking should be substantiated by empirical evidence relating to the impact of COVID-19 on, for example, organisational performance and talent management practices.

Literature review: Jonck and Nwosu (2022), reflecting on the corpus of knowledge, opine that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for approximately 90 percent of commerce in both developed and developing countries, stimulating job creation, employment, tax contributions as well as growth domestic product (GDP). Within the African context, SMEs employ between 70 and 90 percent of the population. Therefore, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has been substantial, with 87 percent of business owners uncertain about the future of their enterprises (Muriithi, 2021). Specifically, the manufacturing sector had been severely impacted by the pandemic and it has been extrapolated that 85 percent of the sector experienced supply chain disruptions (Udofia, Adejare, Olaore, & Udofia, 2021). The previous authors expound that several million dollars in financial losses within the manufacturing sector have been recorded, ascribed to, among other, epidemics and diseases. Furthermore, a paucity of studies empirically investigates the impact of COVID-19 on, for example, organisational performance (Udofia *et al*., 2021). Determining the impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance is a pivotal step towards ensuring organisational continuity.

Organisational performance can be linked to human resources and in the post-COVID-19 scenario, challenges include recruitment, selection, training and development (Ahmed *et al*., 2020). Bano *et al*. (2021) suggest that organisations should implement both long-term and emergency succession planning to overcome challenges faced by organisations during and after the pandemic. Mahato *et al*. (2021) propose a blended or hybrid workforce model for business continuity post-COVID-19 pandemic. For those organisations that survive, a recovery strategy will be *the* priority, according to Ako-Nai (2020). Supporting components include: (i) a review of the organisational structure; (ii) skills audit and defining new skills and competences; (iii) infrastructure assessment and acquisition of new technologies; (iv) a revised reward system that rewards and celebrates innovation, and significant achievements should be implemented post-COVID-19 (Ako-Nai, 2020). Therefore, talent management components should be revised post-COVID-19 as a business recovery strategy necessitating the determination of the impact of COVID-19 on talent management practices.

Against the stated background, the lack of empirical evidence related to the organisational performance of manufacturing SMEs, given the pivotal role it fulfils in the economy and economic growth, provided the impetus to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance and the subsequent business recovery strategy to mitigate the risk.

Research purpose: This paper reports on preliminary findings of a quantitative pilot study underscoring the impact of COVID-19 on SMEs in a manufacturing sub-sector (notably in the Gauteng Province), organisational performance and talent management practices.

Research questions: The following research questions were formulated for the study under discussion:

1. COVID-19 statistically significantly influenced the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector, notably the Gauteng Province.
2. The variance in talent management components, *inter alia*, (i) recruitment and retention; (ii) succession planning and promotion; (iii) performance appraisal; and

(iv) talent development can be statistically significantly attributed to the impact of COVID-19.

Implications for HRD practitioners: Results of multiple regression analyses revealed that COVID-19 statistically significantly influenced the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector. The impact could be extrapolated to around 64.4 percent. Furthermore, 40.1 percent of the variance in recruitment and retention practices could be explained by COVID-19, whereas 14.6 percent of the variance in succession planning and promotion could be attributed to the pandemic, 27.9 percent of the variance in performance appraisal and 61.3 percent of talent development. Subsequently, based on empirical findings, COVID-19 had a statistically significant impact on organisational performance, necessitating a business recovery strategy that should underscore talent development as well as recruitment and retention. HRD practitioners should focus, for example, on conducting skills audits to determine the current skillsets of the workforce, defining new skills and competencies (i.e., technological literacy) required by employees post-COVID-19, and training current employees to meet the revised skills requirements. Lastly, the recruitment of new entrants should be in accordance with the reviewed skills and competencies to ensure business continuity.

Conclusion: The impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance has yet to be fully determined, although it has been hypothesised to be severe given the economic indicators post-COVID-19. The research study under discussion, although a pilot study, attempted to report on preliminary findings towards determining the impact of the pandemic on the organisational performance of a manufacturing sub-sector within the South African context. Literature recommends that a business recovery strategy should be deemed a priority post-COVID-19 with identified talent management components including succession planning and rewards, performance appraisal, recruitment and retention as well as talent development. Consequently, the study envisioned investigating which talent management aspects should be key in the business recovery strategy to inform evidence-based policy development. Evidence suggests that talent development should be emphasised, followed by recruitment and retention. Future research endeavours will emphasise implementing the main study and could possibly be extended

to a national study. Moreover, the study could also be enlarged to include other business sectors.

Keywords: Talent management, recruitment and retention, succession planning, promotion, performance appraisal, talent development, organisational performance, COVID-19

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CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the conclusions drawn from the findings of the research study and the associated recommendations. It also highlights the limitations of the study and provides guidance on future research to be carried out to expand on the study. The chapter is guided by the main aim, research objectives and related hypotheses that were developed to guide the research study and the proposed frameworks.

6.2 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions drawn from this study are aligned with the main aim and objectives as documented in Chapter 1. The primary objective was to examine the effect of talent management practices on organisational performance during COVID-19. The associated research objectives were as follows:

- Ascertain whether demographic variables, *inter alia*, size of the SME, nature of service delivery, established of the SMEs and perceived level of competition statistically significantly influence talent management practises and SME performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province.
- Ascertain whether the variance in the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector could be attributed to talent management as such.
- Determine whether talent management practices (i.e., recruitment and retention, succession planning, promotion, performance appraisal, talent development) significantly influence SME organisational performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province.
- Determine whether there is a correlation between the various aspects of talent management within the context of SME organisational performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province.
- Explore the impact of COVID-19 on the performance of SMEs in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province.

6.2.1 Impact of demographic variables on organisational performance and talent management

The research study investigated the impact of demographic variables, for example size of the SME, the nature of service delivery, and the perceived level of competition, to mention a few, on organisational performance and talent management. The demographic variables were divided into exogenous and endogenous contextual factors. Exogenous factors included competition perception, nature of service delivery and COVID-19's impact. Endogenous contextual factors were operationalised as the perceived importance of talent management, SME size and date of establishment (viz. organisational tenure). Results revealed that exogenous contextual factors partially statistically significantly influence organisational performance and talent management, while endogenous contextual factors predicted the dependent variables greatly. The conclusions drawn from the assessment of the impact of contextual factors reflect the importance of identifying the environment within which organisations operate. This is emphasised by research conducted by Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen, and Scullion (2020). *Per se*, Gallardo-Gallardo *et al*. (2020) opine that talent management cannot be understood as a detached phenomenon ascribed to the implementation thereof within an organisational context, which, in turn, is part and parcel of a broader societal, national and international context ascribed to globalisation. However, Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo (2019) explain that the impact of contextual factors on talent management implementation has largely been ignored. Aleksy and Urban (2022) indicate that the impact of contextual factors on talent management practices is scarce. Consequently, the research reported on made a novel contribution to the corpus of knowledge.

Furthermore, most of the SMEs did not have a formal talent management strategy in place. Also, the SMEs indicated that talent management is not a strategic objective. Wadhwa and Tripathi (2018) argue that different industries have defined the terms *talent* and *talent management* in their own terminology; and organisations can prefer to accept their own interpretations instead of accepting universal or prescribed definitions. It would appear from the research reported on that there were aspects of talent management present in the sampled SMEs, but that the formalisation thereof in a strategy and as a strategic intent was lacking. It can be concluded that talent management remains an important aspect for organisations to implement and change the perception thereof to realise the associated benefits. It is also important for organisations to assess the

contextual factors related to their business environments to develop effective business strategies towards improved competitiveness and organisational performance.

6.2.2 Determine the impact of talent management on the organisational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing sector

Talent management statistically significantly predicted organisational performance. As such, 66.3% of the variance in organisational performance could be attributed to talent management. Results presented partially confirm research findings by Gallardo-Gallardo *et al*. (2020), Paauwe and Farndale (2017), Janković, Mihajlović, and Cvetković *et al*. (2016), Irfan, Khurshid, Khurshid, and Khokhar (2023) as well as Al Aina and Atan (2020), in that specific talent management facets influenced organisational performance. The reported research also revealed that talent management as a construct statistically significantly influenced organisational performance. Cizmić and Ahmić (2021) reported that talent management had a positive statistically significant influence on organisational performance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is within a developing country context. According to Collings, Mellahi, and Cascio (2018), a key limitation in the research on talent management has been a lack of empirical evidence to link talent management to organisational performance. The research study contributed to the corpus of knowledge by empirically elucidating the link between talent management and organisational performance.

Based on the results presented, talent management should be an organisational imperative and a strategic objective ascribed to the differential difference it can make to organisational performance. Despite this, most SMEs did not have a formal talent management strategy, and the SMEs also indicated that talent management is not a strategic objective.

6.2.3 Impact of talent management practices on SMEs' organisational performance in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province

The findings of the research reported on revealed that talent management facets statistically significantly influenced the organisational performance of manufacturing SMEs in the Gauteng Province. Specifically, (i) 58.8% of the variance in organisational

performance could be attributed to recruitment and retention, (ii) 62.8% of the variance in organisational performance could be explained by succession planning and promotion, (iii) 54.5% of the variance in organisational performance could be attributed to performance appraisal, and lastly, (iv) 54.9% of the variance in organisational performance could be attributed to talent development. Succession planning seems to be the most important predictor of organisational performance. Maurya and Agarwal (2018) opine that this practice could have serious implications for the organisation, which has been verified by the research reported on specifically relating to organisational performance. Irfan *et al*. (2023) and Al Aina and Atan (2020) found that talent development, a facet of talent management, statistically significantly influenced organisational performance. Moreover, the results presented partially confirm research by Kurdi and Alshurideh (2020), referring to the influence of employee retention on organisational performance.

6.2.4 The correlation between the various aspects of talent management and organisational performance

Results revealed that all the talent management facets had statistically significant correlations on the 99th percentile. The strength was of a large effect and the direction positive. Therefore, if one facet increased, there would be a concomitant increase in another facet. The relationship between talent management practices and organisational performance has been tested to have positive statistical significance. This finding therefore agrees with the research by Fernandes, Veiga, Lobo, and Raposa (2023), who found a similar positive nexus between talent management practices and organisational performance.

6.2.5 Explore the impact of COVID-19 on the performance of SMEs in the manufacturing industry in the Gauteng Province

Business continuity strategies are key to ensure the survival and sustainability of organisations in general, and especially in situations of global economic changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings elucidated from the empirical study carried out indicate that manufacturing SMEs did not have business continuity plans in place during

COVID-19 and this hampered the survival and performance of forestated enterprises. Therefore, it can be concluded that most manufacturing SMEs in Gauteng did not have formal business continuity strategies in place to avert the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the organisational performance of these enterprises. The results from the descriptive and inference analyses reflected that COVID-19 statistically significantly influenced organisational performance. It was also revealed that the impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance can statistically significantly be mitigated by talent management practices. Through content analysis, narrative responses as part of the qualitative data were interpreted reflecting that, in most cases, reactive measures were employed, which included shutting down operations, salary cuts and laying off employees as a way of saving costs. It can therefore be concluded that research study objectives 2 and 5 have been satisfied by the empirical findings highlighted in Chapter 2. These empirical findings therefore attempt to address the concerns expressed by Cai and Luo (2020) regarding the need to assess the impact of COVID-19 and measures employed by businesses to inform business recovery plans.

In view of the above assertion, it is therefore important for organisations to develop business continuity strategies, as emphasised by Muriithi (2021), who recommends that businesses should develop new business sustainability strategies post-COVID-19. It is recommended that the business continuity strategies should incorporate talent management plans wherein talent management practices should be implemented as a key strategic tool to ensure business survival and sustainability to contribute towards improved organisational performance.

6.3 CONTRIBUTIONS

This research study has therefore attempted to address the following gaps identified by previous researchers, such as: (i) the paucity of empirical research on talent management in various settings, for example the manufacturing sector; (ii) a lacuna in the corpus of knowledge relating to human resource management research, notably talent management within the SMME context; (iii) the empirical research gap in understanding the effectiveness of COVID-19-mitigating measures (Anakpo & Mishi 2021); and (iv) limited empirical evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on organisational performance (Udofia, Adejare, & Olaore, 2021). It is envisaged that the research findings and proposed

theoretical and conceptual frameworks will be used to develop business continuity strategies, business survival strategies and improved organisational performance of manufacturing SMEs, among other sectors of the economy. The need for emergency business strategies was further emphasised by Bano, Omar, and Ismail (2021) as paramount during and post the COVID-19 period. It is also envisaged that this research study will contribute to an in-depth understanding and appreciation of the importance of talent management and talent management practices, considering the associated benefits to improved organisational performance. The study furthermore contributed to the development of a definition of talent management and the associated facets thereof within the manufacturing sector context. The study can also be used to guide and influence business policy development and talent management strategies for SMEs in the manufacturing sector.

When considering the theoretical contribution of the research reported on, the theory of entrepreneurial ecosystems is under-theorised and the corpus of knowledge is dominated by conceptual studies (Kansheba & Wald, 2020). Furthermore, entrepreneurial ecosystem research focuses for the most part on technologically based industries in developed economies using case study research designs (Kansheba & Wald, 2020). Therefore, this study further contributes to the limited empirical research on the entrepreneurial ecosystems approach within the context of the manufacturing SME sector in a developing economy. The empirical research study performed asserts the importance of identifying the ecosystem within which organisations operate. The findings from this research revealed that ‘talent’ as a resource endowment statistically significantly influences productive entrepreneurship as per the proposed theoretical framework by Stan and Van den Ven (2021). Talent was further operationalised in terms of talent management and the facets thereof. Specifically, talent management practices, subsuming recruitment and retention, succession planning and promotion, performance appraisal and talent development are confirmed predictors of productive entrepreneurship in the manufacturing SME sector. Previous research on the impact of talent as resource endowment on productive entrepreneurship within a developing economy context could not be identified, indicative of the theoretical contribution of the research study.

6.4 MANAGERIAL AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Several suggestions are put forward in alignment with the research objectives stated above. When considering demographic variables, which, in essence, represent the business environment of SMEs, both exogenous and endogenous contextual factors should be taken into consideration. It is recommended that manufacturing SMEs should adopt and test the identified contextual factors, including competition perception and the nature of services rendered, which are exogenous contextual factors. Moreover, endogenous factors, such as the perceived importance of talent management practices and SME size as key factors ought to be emphasised requiring continuous assessment and implementation, as these have been confirmed to have a significant influence on improved organisational performance.

In terms of the assessment performed to establish whether business continuity strategies were employed during COVID-19 in relation to organisational performance and talent management, a theoretical framework is proposed. The framework recommends that organisations develop a strategic business continuity strategy supported by effective talent management practices with specific reference to talent development, recruitment and retention to be implemented, towards alleviating the impacts of global economic crises, including COVID-19. The study also recommends that new business continuity models be implemented post-COVID-19 to ensure business sustainability. The associated benefit of implementing this framework is its contribution towards improved organisational performance. This, therefore, contributes to the recommendation by Anakpo and Mishi (2021), who identified the gap in empirical studies relating to the leveraging of available mitigating measures carried out by businesses during the pandemic.

The entrepreneurial ecosystem approach is confirmed and recommended as a good approach to establishing the relationship between talent management practices and organisational performance to achieve productive entrepreneurship with specific reference to the manufacturing sector. It is also recommended that management pays specific attention to succession planning and promotion, as well as talent development when developing talent management plans as these talent management practices are confirmed effective contributors to improved organisational performance. Human resource practitioners should focus, for example, on conducting skills audits to determine

the current skillsets of the workforce, defining new skills and competencies (i.e., technological literacy), and providing training for employees to meet the revised skills required. Recruitment of new entrants should be in accordance with the reviewed skills and competencies to ensure business continuity.

6.5 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following caveats should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. The empirical research study focused on one sector of the economy, namely the manufacturing sector in the Gauteng Province, influencing the generalisability of findings to other sectors and geographic regions. It is recommended that future research should expand to include other sectors of the economy and possibly encompass the entire country to provide a nationwide perspective. This would assist in driving economic policies for improved economic growth and associated growth development products. Moreover, a self-developed questionnaire was used. It is recommended that the questionnaire be validated in future research endeavours. Lastly, self-administered questionnaires are subject to common method bias in that both independent and dependent variables are measured using one measuring instrument and a similar scale (viz. Likert-scale). Steps used to control for common method bias include procedural and statistical controls (Kock et al., 2021). Various methods were used in the research reported on to control for common method bias. Ex Ante controls utilised in the research study subsume clear questionnaire instruction, concise survey design and piloting of the measuring instrument. Ex post control include exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Despite, common method bias being absent in this research study this limitation should be noted and alternative data sources could be considered in future research endeavours.

6.6 FINAL CONCLUSION

The main aim of this research study was to assess the effect of talent management practices on organisational performance during COVID-19. It can be concluded that the main aim of the study has been achieved through the five research objectives. The research objectives were supported by developed hypotheses, which have been tested

empirically by means of performing appropriate statistical analyses. Results of the empirical research led to the development of hypothesised models, theoretical and conceptual frameworks proposed to provide impetus to the recommendations of the study, and practical and managerial implications to guide talent management policy development and associated strategic plans. It can therefore be concluded that talent management and talent management practices statistically significantly affect the organisational performance of manufacturing SMEs in Gauteng.

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ANNEXURE A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Assessing the role of Talent Management in Manufacturing SMEs Performance in the Gauteng Province during COVID-19

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this questionnaire is to solicit information from respondents, which will assist the research being conducted related to the above-mentioned topic. Individual identities will be kept strictly CONFIDENTIAL and the data collected will be scientifically processed to determine the role of Talent Management in Manufacturing SMEs Performance during COVID-19 in the Gauteng Province. PLEASE NOTE demographic information including gender will be gathered to provide a profile of the sample. Statistical analysis including those related to demographic information will be aggregated to the population and will not be presented at an individual level.

INSTRUCTIONS

Please insert "×" in the box next to the most appropriate answer. Otherwise, write your answer in the space provided. IMPORTANT NOTICE ONLY SELECT ONE APPROPRIATE ANSWER PER QUESTION

SECTION A: RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1.	Gender:	Male	1	Female	2
		Other	3	Do not wish to disclose	4
2.	Age Bracket:	25 – 35 years	1	36 – 45 years	2
		46 – 55 years	3	56 – 65 years	4
		Above 65 years	5		

3. Your Highest Degree/ Educational Level:

Grade 12	1	Bachelor's degree	2
Honours Degree	3	Postgraduate qualification	4
Doctorate/PhD	5	Other (specify)……	6

4. Your Work Experience: 1- 5 years [1] 6 -10 years [2] 11-15 years [3]
16-20 years [4] 21 – 25 years [5] above 25 years [6]

5. Present Rank/Position: Middle Management [1]
Senior/Top Management [2]
Owner [3]

6. How many years have you been in your current position? .....

7. When last did you receive promotion?

6 months ago	1
1 – 2 years	2
2 – 3 years	3
Never been promoted	4

SECTION B

PART 1: BRIEF BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON RESPONDENTS' COMPANIES

8. What is the size of the SME?

Micro-enterprises (annual turnover of between R0 000 – R199 000)	1
Small enterprises (annual turnover of between R200 000-R399 000)	2
Medium enterprises (annual turnover of between R400 000-R599 000)	3

9. When was your company / business established? .....

10. What is the main business of this manufacturing enterprise? (Tick the most appropriate alternative)

Agriculture	1
Chemicals & paints.....	2
Building material.....	3
Packaging.....	4
Pharmaceuticals / Healthcare.....	5
Textile / Clothing.....	6
Other (specify)	7

11. Please rate the level of competition in the industry that your enterprise is operating in

Very High	1
High	2
Moderate	3
Low	4
Very Low	5

12. How do your rate the performance of your business enterprise?

Very good.....	1
Good	2
Average.....	3
Bad.....	4
Very bad	5

PART II: THIS PART FOCUSES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

13. Does your company have a formal talent management plan in place?

Yes 1

No..... 2

Not Sure 3

14. Is talent management planning included in your company's strategic plan?

Yes 1

No..... 2

Not Sure 3

15. For how long has your company practiced a talent management program?

≤ 1 year 1 ≤ 2 years 2 ≤ 3 years 3 ≤ 5 years 4

≤ 7 years 5 > 7 years 6

16. In your opinion, is a talent management plan important in an organisation?

(a) Not important 1

(b) Less important 2

(c) Important 3

(d) Very important..... 4

(e) I do not know..... 5

17. There are many reasons for practising talent management in a company. For each of the listed reasons below, please rate them in order of their importance using the following scale:

1 = Not important – (NI)

2 = Least important – (LI)

3 = Important – (I)

4 = Very Important – (VI)

	Reasons for practicing talent management	Not important	Least important	Important	Very important
a.	To develop employees for future leadership positions in the company.	1	2	3	4
b.	To ensure perpetual business existence.	1	2	3	4
c.	To align individual employee's needs with company's needs in order to enhance business strategy alignment that will ensure good performance.	1	2	3	4
d.	To encourage individual employees to realise their personal goals within the company.	1	2	3	4
e.	To motivate employees and encourage dedication to duty in order to sustain performance.	1	2	3	4
f.	To identify talents for leadership development and retention in the company.	1	2	3	4
g.	To target future employment needs and the required education and training for employees.	1	2	3	4
h.	To prepare employees for environmental challenges.	1	2	3	4

PART III: THIS PART ADDRESSES THE KEY TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION, SUCCESSION PLANNING, PROMOTION, PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Please insert (×) on the most appropriate response with the following scale:

1 = strongly disagree

2= disagree

3 = agree

4 = strongly agree

	PART III (A): RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
18	The recruitment process of key leadership positions are usually advertised – whether internally or both internal and external.	1	2	3	4
19	The majority of the employees in the SME are recruited through competitive processes.	1	2	3	4
20	The recruitment process of the SME focuses on appointing people with the required talent and skills.	1	2	3	4
21	Employees who contribute to the success of the enterprise are highly valued in the enterprise.	1	2	3	4
22	Our organisational culture encourages talent management and the development and retention of potentials.	1	2	3	4
23	The SME considers the tendency of the candidate to be innovative as a factor during the recruitment process.	1	2	3	4
24	When key vacancies arise, the SME first considers internal top performers for appointment into key positions.	1	2	3	4
25	Tenure with reference to service does not necessarily influence the way higher positions are filled in the SME.	1	2	3	4

26	Employees classified as mentors considered to be experts and or knowledgeable participate in the recruitment processes of the enterprise.	1	2	3	4
27	Employees who are highly productive are highly valued in the SME.	1	2	3	4
28	Generally, employees have confidence in the recruitment processes of the enterprise.	1	2	3	4
29	The management team is aware that the SME incurs losses when talented people are not retained.	1	2	3	4
	PART III (B): SUCCESSION PLANNING				
30	Organisational performance determines the choice of a successor/ future leader either inside or outside my enterprise.	1	2	3	4
31	In my opinion, elements such as ethnicity, gender, religion, favouritism and others influence the choice of a successor in my enterprise.	1	2	3	4
32	In my enterprise, the owner plays an active role in the recruitment or replacement of key positions.	1	2	3	4
33	Identified potential leaders and key personnel participate in leadership development programmes according to their needs and career plans.	1	2	3	4
34	Our SME maintains a pool of potential leaders from which possible successors are identified	1	2	3	4
35	Regular evaluation of the outcome of the succession management process in the SME takes place.	1	2	3	4
	PART III (C): PROMOTION				
36	The enterprise promotes deserving employees in line with its performance appraisal programme.	1	2	3	4
37	In my opinion, the ratio of external versus internal candidates in filling of key vacant leadership positions in my company since inception is good.	1	2	3	4

38	There is evidence in the SME that leadership positions are taken up by those candidates who have been nurtured internally.	1	2	3	4
39	On the average, employees who are low performs are not retained in the SME.	1	2	3	4
	PART III (D): PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL				
40	The SME has a performance appraisal system that is implemented with a reward system for good performance.	1	2	3	4
41	Key performance indicators for each position in the SME are defined.	1	2	3	4
42	Internally groomed potential leaders are regularly monitored, evaluated and given feedback.	1	2	3	4
43	Employees who are critical in creating value for the SME are acknowledged.	1	2	3	4
44	The SME considers reward management as the basis for competitiveness?	1	2	3	4
45	An employee performance agreement is signed annually with bi-annual performance appraisal taking place in the SME.	1	2	3	4
46	Employees are awarded profit shares as part of performance appraisal in the SME.	1	2	3	4
47	The reward management system adopted in the SME is meant to retain talented employees.	1	2	3	4
48	Employees who are multi-skilled are rewarded more than others	1	2	3	4
	PART III (E): TALENT DEVELOPMENT				
49	The SME invests financial resources in employee development in order to build capabilities emphasizing critical skills, knowledge and abilities.	1	2	3	4
50	In the SME, efforts are made to identify skill gaps amongst employees.	1	2	3	4
51	Senior managers in our company are responsible for coaching and	1	2	3	4

	mentoring potential identified successors.				
52	There is a staff development programme where staff is encouraged to participate according to their individual needs.	1	2	3	4
53	The enterprise has procedures for grooming and developing talents for future leadership positions.	1	2	3	4
54	The enterprise has implemented an on-the-job training programme to capacitate employees.	1	2	3	4
55	The SME does assess high performers in order to establish their professional inclinations so that they are effectively utilized.	1	2	3	4

56. Please rank the following development programmes in their order of importance using the following scale:

1 = Not important – (NI)

2 = Least important – (LI)

3 = Important – (I)

4 = Very Important – (VI)

Staff Development Programmes Ranking		Not important	Least important	Important	Very important
a	Sponsoring seminars and workshop training for employees.	1	2	3	4
b	Sponsoring part-time academic/professional studies for employees.	1	2	3	4
c	Granting leave of absence to employees to pursue full-time academic/professional studies.	1	2	3	4
d	Providing on-the-job training for employees.	1	2	3	4
e	Providing mentoring/coaching programmes for employees.	1	2	3	4
f	Using job rotations and special assignment programmes.	1	2	3	

g	Others (Please specify)..... .....

PART IV: ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
57	The SME management team is aware that when talented people are mis-assigned, the operations of the enterprise are negatively affected.	1	2	3	4
58	Poor performance history in my company has largely been attributed to employees' nonchalant attitude to work and lack of organisational cohesiveness.	1	2	3	4
59	Talent management has a great impact on performance in my company.	1	2	3	4
60	Talent management practice is not given its rightful place in relation to organisational performance in the SME.	1	2	3	4
61	A planned and well-managed talent management system will foster business strategy alignment in achieving good organisational performance.	1	2	3	4
62	Organisational progress depends largely on the practice of talent management.	1	2	3	4
63	A certain number of employees are developed to acquire skills that are likely to enhance the competitive advantage of the SME.	1	2	3	4
64	Initiatives are taken to align employee potential to the SMEs business strategies.	1	2	3	4
65	Employees are encouraged to contribute to business strategies to enhance SME competitiveness	1	2	3	4
66	The SME believes in the philosophy that talented people are a key contribution to Organisational success.	1	2	3	4
67	The SME has adequate number of business leaders to propel	1	2	3	4

	its growth, development and competitiveness				
68	Business information is continuously shared between talented employees and others in order to enhance SME competitiveness	1	2	3	4
69	Overall, there is evidence that talented employees in the enterprise yield the highest performance.	1	2	3	4
70	In the SME the attainment of clearly defined organizational strategic goals and objectives are emphasized.	1	2	3	4
71	In terms of financial performance, for example profitability the SME is performing well in my view.	1	2	3	4
72	In general, the SME's customer satisfaction is high with few complaints.	1	2	3	4
73	Good governance such as organizational transparency and accountability are adhered to and of great importance in the SME.	1	2	3	4
74	In my opinion, service delivery, efficiency, productivity and service quality are high in our SME.	1	2	3	4
75	In our SME, we have a culture of valuing results, citizens and customers.	1	2	3	4

SECTION C: COVID-19 IMPACT

This section assesses the impact of COVID-19 on manufacturing SMEs in the Gauteng Province

Please insert "×" on the most appropriate response with the following scale:

1 = strongly disagree

2= disagree

3 = agree

4 = strongly agree

	COVID-19 IMPACT	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
76	My SME has been negatively affected by COVID-19 pandemic.	1	2	3	4
77	Due to COVID-19, the SME had to close down for an extended period of time.	1	2	3	4
78	The SME experienced minimum loss due to COVID-19 pandemic and remained profitable.	1	2	3	4
79	The SME experienced significant losses due to COVID-19 in terms of profitability, organizational performance and human capital.	1	2	3	4
80	The SME had to lay-off some employees in order to minimise its expenses.	1	2	3	4
81	Production or manufacturing had to be suspended indefinitely for an extended period.	1	2	3	4
82	The SME had to put in place measures to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on a company's performance such as work from home protocol.	1	2	3	4
83	The SME had an emergency succession plan to ensure business continuity during COVID-19.	1	2	3	4
84	My enterprise has implemented its emergency succession plan to adjust during COVID-19.	1	2	3	4

85	My company received some form of COVID-19 relief package or support from Government.	1	2	3	4
86	My company found it difficult to implement COVID-19 protocols introduced and enforced by Government.	1	2	3	4
87	Implementation of personal protective wear, hand sanitizing and social distancing had a negative impact on the SME with adverse financial implication.	1	2	3	4
88	The enterprise implemented new ways like new technologies/ systems/ approaches to adjust during COVID-19	1	2	3	4
89	The enterprise had to embrace change management as part of its management strategies especially with the inception of COVID-19.	1	2	3	4
90	The enterprise implemented job rotation for employees as part of measures to minimise the impact of COVID-19.	1	2	3	4

MIXED QUESTIONS

91. On the basis of the competitive business environment your enterprise operates in; please rank the main factor, which influence the way the enterprise is managed. (Circle the most appropriate response).

Leadership of the enterprise ……..... 1

Brand name of the enterprise...…….…….. 2

Reward systems ……..…… 3

Training and development …….…….... 4

Utilization of talented employees …….. 5

Any other, please specify…… 6

92. In your assessment, the rate of turnover [people leaving the enterprise] of skilled people in the past one year can easily be classified as (circle the most appropriate)

Very High …… 1

High …….. 2
Average ……. 3
Low ……... 4
Very low ……..... 5

93. Given your assessment of turnover of skilled people mentioned above, please give reasons that you think may have contributed to the current situation.

……

……

……

94. Indicate how well talented people are being managed in your enterprise, if true.

……

……

……

95. Kindly provide any information that you believe will be useful for this research in relation to talent management planning and practices.

……

……

……

96. In your opinion, what are the factors militating against talent management practices in South Africa?

……

.....

.....

97. Kindly indicate briefly what emergency succession plan measure/s you implemented to minimise the impact of COVID-19 on your

Company.....

.....

.....

Thank you for your valuable time and contribution

ANNEXURE B: SUBMISSION LETTER - SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

SAJBM External Review 4274 - Review Status Update

aosis@sajbm.org <aosis@sajbm.org>
Tue 10/17/2023 2:18 PM
To:
****
Ref. No.: 4274
Manuscript title: Business continuity strategies employed during COVID-19 underscoring organisational performance and talent management
Journal: South African Journal of Business Management
****
Dear Gladys Zake, Petronella Jonck, Anna-Marie Pelser

Your blinded manuscript moved into the peer review process on 17-Oct-23 and is still undergoing assessment by our expert independent reviewers. Read our peer review process https://aosis.co.za/policies#peer_review.

We hope to receive an outcome of the finalisation of the review shortly, which will be communicated by the assigned Review Editor, as our records indicate that your manuscript has been in our review stage for 21 days.

Ensure to keep us informed if any of your credentials have changed during this time, to ease communication with you as your manuscript progresses through the different publication phases. If you need any assistance, kindly contact the Editorial Office at submissions@sajbm.org with any questions or concerns.

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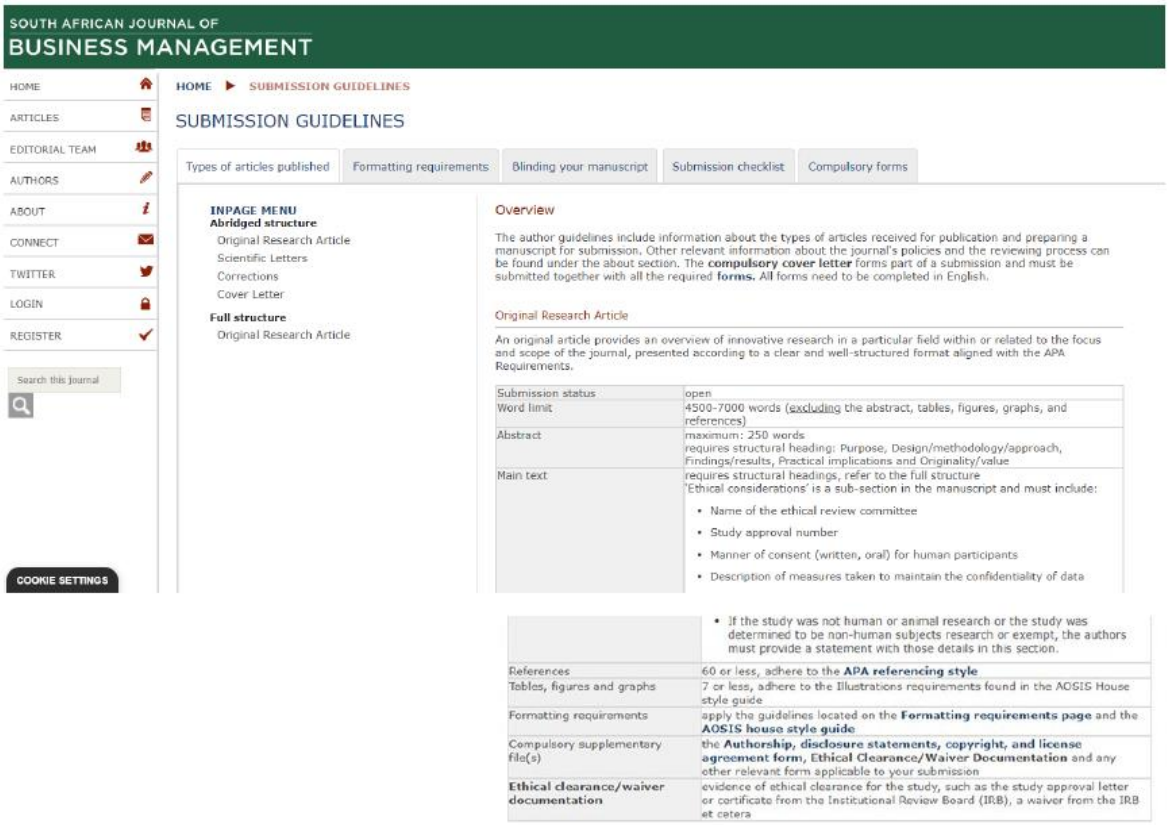
Thank you for your continued patience and support, and we hope you have joined our online community by signing up to our RSS alerts and Twitter page.

Kind regards
Ms McOwen
AOSIS
Editorial Coordinator
Submissions and Review Unit
Scholarly Journals Department
AOSIS Publishing, Empowering Africa through access to knowledge

ANNEXURE C: SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AUTHOR GUIDELINE



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Overview

The author guidelines include information about the types of articles received for publication and preparing a manuscript for submission. Other relevant information about the journal's policies and the reviewing process can be found under the about section. The **compulsory cover letter** forms part of a submission and must be submitted together with all the required **forms.** All forms need to be completed in English.

Original Research Article

An original article provides an overview of innovative research in a particular field within or related to the focus and scope of the journal, presented according to a clear and well-structured format aligned with the APA Requirements.

Submission status	open
Word limit	4500-7000 words (excluding the abstract, tables, figures, graphs, and references)
Abstract	maximum: 250 words requires structural heading: Purpose, Design/methodology/approach, Findings/results, Practical implications and Originality/value
Main text	requires structural headings, refer to the full structure 'Ethical considerations' is a sub-section in the manuscript and must include: • Name of the ethical review committee • Study approval number • Manner of consent (written, oral) for human participants • Description of measures taken to maintain the confidentiality of data • If the study was not human or animal research or the study was determined to be non-human subjects research or exempt, the authors must provide a statement with those details in this section.
References	60 or less, adhere to the **APA referencing style**
Tables, figures and graphs	7 or less, adhere to the Illustrations requirements found in the AOSIS House style guide
Formatting requirements	apply the guidelines located on the **Formatting requirements page** and the **AOSIS house style guide**
Compulsory supplementary file(s)	the **Authorship, disclosure statements, copyright, and license agreement form, Ethical Clearance/Waiver Documentation** and any other relevant form applicable to your submission
Ethical clearance/waiver documentation	evidence of ethical clearance for the study, such as the study approval letter or certificate from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a waiver from the IRB et cetera

Original Research Article full structure

Title:

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- Tweet for the journal Twitter profile: This sentence/statement will be used on the journal Twitter profile to promote your published article. Max 101 characters (including spaces). If you have a Twitter profile, please provide us your Twitter @ name. We will tag you to the Tweet.

Abstract: A structured abstract should provide the context or background for the study and should state the purpose, methodology the, main findings and principal conclusions. The abstract should not exceed 250 words. Write concisely and clearly. Please minimise the use of abbreviations and do not cite references in the abstract. Do not present quantitative or detailed results in the abstract. The abstract should reflect only what appears in the original paper. To produce a structured abstract, please complete the following obligatory fields about your paper, and divide the abstract up into these headings:

- **Purpose**: What are the reason(s) for writing the paper or the aims of the research?
- **Design/methodology/approach**: How are the objectives achieved? Include the main method(s) used for the research. What is the approach to the topic and what is the theoretical or subject scope of the paper?
- **Findings/results:** What was found in the course of the work? This will refer to analysis, discussion, findings or results. Findings apply to qualitative research, results apply to quantitative research.
- **Practical implications:** What outcomes and implications for practice, applications and consequences are identified? How will the research impact business or society? What changes should be made as a result of this research?
- **Originality/value:** What is new in the paper? What is the scientific contribution of the paper to the body of knowledge? State the value of the paper and to whom.

Introduction: The Introduction should put the focus of the manuscript into the broader context of existing knowledge and explain its contribution to new subject knowledge and insights, as well as to business practice. Address this to readers who are not experts in this field and include a brief review of the key literature. If there are relevant controversies or disagreements in the field, they should be mentioned. Conclude with a brief statement of the overall aim of the research comment on whether the aim was achieved. Cite only directly pertinent references, and do not include data any data.

Methodology: This section should provide clarity about how and why a study was done in a particular way. It should provide sufficient detail for the reproduction of the findings. Well-established methodological procedures may simply be referenced but new methods developed should be dealt with in a comprehensive way. Only information that was available at the time the study was conducted should be included; all information obtained during the study itself belongs in the Results section. If an organization or individual was paid or otherwise contracted to help conduct the research (examples include data collection and management), this should be detailed in this section.

Results: Present your results in logical sequence in the text, tables, and figures, giving the main or most important findings first. Do not repeat all the data in the tables or figures in the text; emphasize or summarize only the most important observations. Give numeric results not only as derivatives (for example, percentages) but also as the absolute numbers from which the derivatives were calculated where applicable, and specify the statistical significance attached to them, if any. Restrict tables and figures to those needed to explain the argument of the paper and to assess supporting data. Use graphs as an alternative to tables with many entries; do not duplicate data in graphs and tables.

Conclusion: It is useful to begin the discussion by briefly summarizing the main findings, and explore possible mechanisms or explanations for these findings. Emphasize the new and important aspects of your study and put your findings in the context of the totality of the relevant evidence. State the limitations of your study and explore the implications of your findings for future research. Discuss the limitations of the data. Do not repeat in detail data or other information given in other parts of the manuscript, such as in the Introduction or the Results section. Link the conclusions with the goals of the study but avoid unqualified statements and conclusions not adequately supported by the data. State new hypotheses, when warranted and label them clearly.

Acknowledgements: Those who contributed to the work but do not meet our authorship criteria should be listed in the Acknowledgments with a description of the contribution. Authors are responsible for ensuring that anyone named in the Acknowledgments agrees to be named. Refer to the acknowledgement structure guide on our *Formatting Requirements* page.

Also provide the following, each under their own heading:

- Competing interests: This section should list specific competing interests associated with any of the authors. If authors declare that no competing interests exist, the article will include a statement to this effect: *The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.* Read our **policy on competing interests**.
- Author contributions: All authors must meet the criteria for authorship as outlined in the **authorship** policy and **author contribution** statement policies.

- Funding: Provide information on funding if relevant
- Data availability: All research articles are encouraged to have a data availability statement.
- Disclaimer: A statement that the views expressed in the submitted article are his or her own and not an official position of the institution or funder.

References: Authors should provide direct references to original research sources whenever possible. References should not be used by authors, editors, or peer reviewers to promote self-interests. Refer to the journal referencing style downloadable on our *Formatting Requirements* page.

The above manuscript section guidelines are adapted from the recommendations from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors: preparing for submission, available from http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/manuscript-preparation/preparing-for-submission.html on April, 24, 2017.

ANNEXURE D: SUBMISSION LETTER - SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

SAJHRM External Review 2459 - Review Status Update

aosis@sajhrm.co.za <aosis@sajhrm.co.za>
Tue 10/10/2023 9:06 AM
To:

****

Ref. No.: 2459
Manuscript title: Impact of contextual factors on talent management and organisational performance
Journal: SA Journal of Human Resource Management

****

Dear Gladys Zake, Petronella Jonck, Anna-Marie Pelser

Your blinded manuscript moved into the peer review process on 10-Oct-23 and is still undergoing assessment by our expert independent reviewers. Read our peer review process https://aosis.co.za/policies#peer_review.

We hope to receive an outcome of the finalisation of the review shortly, which will be communicated by the assigned Review Editor.

Ensure to keep us informed if any of your credentials have changed during this time, to ease communication with you as your manuscript progresses through the different publication phases. If you need any assistance, kindly contact the Editorial Office at submissions@sajhrm.co.za with any questions or concerns.

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Kind regards
Ms Adams
AOSIS
Editorial Coordinator
Submissions and Review Unit
Scholarly Journals Department
AOSIS Publishing, Empowering Africa through access to knowledge

ANNEXURE E: SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AUTHOR GUIDELINE

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Types of articles published | Formatting requirements | Blinding your manuscript | Submission checklist | Compulsory forms

INPAGE MENU
Abridged structure
Original Research Article (ORA)
Opinion Paper
Corrections
Cover Letter
Full structure
ORA: Qualitative Research
ORA: Quantitative research
ORA: Theoretical research

Overview

The author guidelines include information about the types of articles received for publication and preparing a manuscript for submission. Other relevant information about the journal's policies and the reviewing process can be found under the about section. The **compulsory cover letter** forms part of a submission and must be submitted together with all the required **forms.** All forms need to be completed in English.

Original Research Article (ORA)

An original article provides an overview of innovative research in a particular field within or related to the focus and scope of the journal, presented according to a clear and well-structured format. Three structures of original research are provided below: **Qualitative, Quantitative and Theoretical.**

Submission status	open
Word limit	4500-7000 words (excluding the abstract, tables, figures, graphs, and references)
Abstract	maximum: 250 words requires structural heading: Orientation, Research purpose, Motivation for the study, Research approach/design and method, Main findings, Practical/managerial implications and Contribution/value-add
Main text	requires structural headings, refer to the full structure 'Ethical considerations' is a sub-section in the manuscript and must include: • Name of the ethical review committee • Study approval number • Manner of consent (written, oral) for human participants • Description of measures taken to maintain the confidentiality of data • If the study was not human or animal research or the study was determined to be non-human subjects research or exempt, the authors must provide a statement with those details in this section.

References	60 or less, adhere to the **APA referencing style**
Tables, figures and graphs	7 or less, adhere to the Illustrations requirements found in the AOSIS House style guide
Formatting requirements	apply the guidelines located on the **Formatting requirements page** and the **AOSIS house style guide**
Compulsory supplementary file(s)	the **Authorship, disclosure statements, copyright, and license agreement form**, **Ethical Clearance/Waiver Documentation** and any other relevant form applicable to your submission
Ethical clearance/waiver documentation	evidence of ethical clearance for the study, such as the study approval letter or certificate from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a waiver from the IRB et cetera

ORA: Quantitative research full structure

Title: The article's full title should contain a maximum of 95 characters (including spaces).

Abstract: The abstract, written in English, should be no longer than 250 words and must be written in the past tense. The abstract should give a succinct account of the objectives, methods, results and significance of the matter. The structured abstract for a Quantitative Research article should consist of seven paragraphs labelled Orientation, Research purpose, Motivation for the study, Research approach/design and method, Main findings, Practical/managerial implications and Contribution/value-add.

Introduction: Provide the following, each under their own heading.

- Orientation
- Research purpose and objectives

Literature review: Provide a summary of previous research findings, indicating the gap in the literature and the necessity to address this void.

Research design: Provide the following, each under their own heading and subheading.

- Research approach
- Research method
    - Research participants
    - Measuring instruments
    - Research procedure and ethical considerations
    - Statistical analysis

Results: The reporting of the results must be clearly linked to the research objectives and research hypotheses. Tables may be used or models (diagrams/figures) may be drafted to indicate key components of the results of the study.

Discussion: Provide the following, each under their own heading.

- Outline of the results
- Practical implications
- Limitations and recommendations

Conclusion: Provide a brief conclusion that summarises the results and their meaning or significance in relation to each objective of the study.

Acknowledgements: Those who contributed to the work but do not meet our authorship criteria should be listed in the Acknowledgments with a description of the contribution. Authors are responsible for ensuring that anyone named in the Acknowledgments agrees to be named. Refer to the acknowledgement structure guide on our *Formatting Requirements* page.

Also provide the following, each under their own heading:

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- Funding: Provide information on funding if relevant
- Data availability: All research articles are encouraged to have a data availability statement.
- Disclaimer: A statement that the views expressed in the submitted article are his or her own and not an official position of the institution or funder.

References: Authors should provide direct references to original research sources whenever possible. References should not be used by authors, editors, or peer reviewers to promote self-interests. Refer to the journal referencing style downloadable on our *Formatting Requirements* page.

ANNEXURE F: SUBMISSION LETTER - AFRICAN JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT

Submission received for Africa Journal of Management (Submission ID: 230189443)

journalshelpdesk@taylorandfrancis.com <journalshelpdesk@taylorandfrancis.com>
Thu 10/12/2023 7:36 AM
To:

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Dear Petronella Jonck,

Thank you for your submission.

Submission ID	**230189443**
Manuscript Title	**An entrepreneurial ecosystem approach underscoring talent management and organisational performance**
Journal	**Africa Journal of Management**

If you made the submission, you can check its progress and make any requested revisions on the Author Portal

Thank you for submitting your work to our journal.
If you have any queries, please get in touch with journalshelpdesk@taylorandfrancis.com.

Kind Regards,
Africa Journal of Management Editorial Office

ANNEXURE G: AFRICAN JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT AUTHOR GUIDELINE

Instructions for authors

Thank you for choosing to submit your paper to us. These instructions will ensure we have everything required so your paper can move through peer review, production and publication smoothly. Please take the time to read and follow them as closely as possible, as doing so will ensure your paper matches the journal's requirements.

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**Usage in 2018-2020 for articles published in 2016-2020.

Contents List

Manuscript preparation

1. General guidelines

- Manuscripts are accepted in English. American English spelling and punctuation are preferred. Please use double quotation marks, except where "a quotation is 'within' a quotation". Long quotations of 40 words or more should be indented without quotation marks. Initialisms (e.g. BBC) do not have full points between them; spaced initials in text, e.g. J. S. Bach; serial comma to be used; ellipsis spaced before and after; names of organizations and research instruments may be abbreviated, but give the full name at the first mention; spaced en rules for parenthetical dashes; use en rule between spans of numbers (e.g. 20–40), including page numbers in references
- A typical manuscript will not exceed 9,000 words. Manuscripts that greatly exceed this will be critically reviewed with respect to length. Authors should include a word count with their manuscript.

- Manuscripts should be compiled in the following order: title page (including Acknowledgements as well as Funding and grant-awarding bodies); abstract; keywords; main text; acknowledgements; references; appendices (as appropriate); table(s) with caption(s) (on individual pages); figure caption(s) (as a list).
- Abstracts of 150 words are required for all manuscripts submitted.
- Each manuscript should have 4 to 6 keywords.
- Search engine optimization (SEO) is a means of making your article more visible to anyone who might be looking for it. Please consult our guidance here.
- Section headings should be concise.
- All authors of a manuscript should include their full name and affiliation on the cover page of the manuscript. One author should be identified as the corresponding author. Please give the affiliation where the research was conducted. If any of the named co-authors moves affiliation during the peer review process, the new affiliation can be given as a footnote. Please note that no changes to affiliation can be made after the manuscript is accepted. Please note that the email address of the corresponding author will normally be displayed in the article PDF (depending on the journal style) and the online article.
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- Please supply a short biographical note for each author.
- Please supply all details required by any funding and grant-awarding bodies as an Acknowledgement on the title page of the manuscript, in a separate paragraph, as follows:
    - *For single agency grants:* "This work was supported by the [Funding Agency] under Grant [number xxxx]."
    - *For multiple agency grants:* "This work was supported by the [Funding Agency 1] under Grant [number xxxx]; [Funding Agency 2] under Grant [number xxxx]; and [Funding Agency 3] under Grant [number xxxx]."
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2. Style guidelines

- Description of the Journal's article style.
- Description of the Journal's reference style.
- Guide to using mathematical scripts and equations.

3. Figures

- Please provide the highest quality figure format possible. To improve the print and online display, please ensure that all figures and graphics are supplied at the appropriate resolutions listed below:
- Minimum 1200 dpi for line art; Minimum 600 dpi for greyscale; Minimum 300 dpi for colour.
- Figures must be saved separate to text. Please do not embed figures in the manuscript file.
- Files should be saved as one of the following formats: TIFF (tagged image file format), PostScript or EPS (encapsulated PostScript), and should contain all the necessary font information and the source file of the application (e.g. CorelDraw/Mac, CorelDraw/PC).
- All figures must be numbered in the order in which they appear in the manuscript (e.g. Figure 1, Figure 2). In multi-part figures, each part should be labelled (e.g. Figure 1(a), Figure 1(b)).
- Figure captions must be saved separately, as part of the file containing the complete text of the manuscript, and numbered correspondingly.
- The filename for a graphic should be descriptive of the graphic, e.g. Figure1, Figure2a.

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Authors are further encouraged to cite any data sets referenced in the article and provide a Data Availability Statement.

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If you have any queries, please contact us via our Author Services website here.

Updated 18 May 2023

ANNEXURE H: ACCEPTANCE LETTER - UFHRD 2023

06 - 09 June 2023

23rd University Forum for Human Resource Development

https://ufhrd2023.exordo.com

Dear Petronella,

Thank you for your submission to ufhrd2023.

Following review by the Programme Committee, I am pleased to inform you that your submission entitled '**Impact of COVID-19 on SME's organisational performance and talent management practices in a South African manufacturing sub-sector: preliminary findings**' has been accepted for **Refereed Papers presentation** at the conference - congratulations.

You will find comments from the reviewers by logging in to your ufhrd2023 Dashboard and clicking on the 'View All Decisions' prompt from your card. Please take these comments into account when preparing the final camera-ready version of your paper. Full details about how to submit your final paper and how to register for the conference will be circulated in a separate e-mail.

We hope that you can also take the time at this point to confirm the RSVP for your submission. This RSVP confirms the presence only of your submission at the conference, not of your own personal attendance. You can respond to the RSVP by clicking the 'Submit my RSVP' prompt from your card or using this link: RSVP your Submission. You (or your co-authors) can confirm or decline the attendance of your submission at any point until **Sunday, 30th April 2023 @ 23:59 America/Los_Angeles**.

Again, congratulations on your acceptance. We look forward to meeting you at ufhrd2023!

Yours Sincerely,

TJ

ANNEXURE I: LETTER OF LANGUAGE EDITING

To whom it may concern

Cecile van Zyl
Language editing and translation
Cell: 072 389 3450
Email: Cecile.vanZyl@nwu.ac.za

27 October 2023

Dear Mr / Ms

Re: Language editing of thesis (Assessing the role of talent management in manufacturing SMEs' performance in the Gauteng Province during COVID-19)

I hereby declare that I language edited the above-mentioned thesis by Ms GB Zake (student number: 16337204).

Please feel free to contact me should you have any enquiries.

Kind regards

Cecile van Zyl

Language practitioner

BA (PU for CHE); BA honours (NWU); MA (NWU)
SATI number: 1002391

ANNEXURE J: TURNITIN REPORT

Zake_(16337204)_PhD_-_Language_Edited.doc

ORIGINALITY REPORT

8%	8%	6%	2%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

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