

Available online at http:// www.ijbms.org

International Journal of Business and Management Sciences Volume 02(01), 2021

# Wining War for Talent: Gaining Sustainable Competitive Advantage through Talent Management Practices: Evidence from Selected Higher Educational Institutions in Kabul, Afghanistan

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Keywords:

Talent Management Practices, (talent identification, talent retention & talent development), Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

#### ABSTRACT

Far from doubt, talent management has established much consideration of scholars, researchers, academics, practitioners, and all competitive organizations in recent years, but still many gaps exist for further studies. In this view, the study aims to evaluate the influence of talent management practices (talent identification, talent retention & talent development) on sustainable competitive advantage on selected higher educational institutions in Kabul, Afghanistan. Five different higher institutions were targeted population. A sample size of 250 respondents was selected from a listed higher institution. The results revealed that there is a strong positive association between talent management practices (TMP) and sustainable competitive advantage. All three hypotheses are accepted in the final remarks of the study. Furthermore, the study applies a quantitative approach, and entire data was collected through an adopted questionnaire translated into two national languages (Pashto & Dari). Based on data analysis and current literature the paper suggests a new model (see, future direction) to explore the sense of sustainable competitive advantage within higher educational institutions in Kabul, Afghanistan.

#### INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is among underdeveloped countries, after four decades of war now every sector is trying to reach its goal for sustainable competitive advantage. Higher educational institutions are among them. If we revisit the past, over the many years, several types of research have been conducted related to talent management. Talent is defined as a collective set of knowledge, skills, experiences, values, abilities, and individual behaviors (Schiemann, 2014). Talent is all about

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outstanding traits of individuals leading toward doing something different and in higher-order (Cooke *et al.*, 2014; Stuart-Kotze and Dunn, 2008; Frank and Taylor, 2004).

According to Armstrong and Taylor, 2017,), the process of recognizing, creating, hiring, retaining, and distributing talented human resources within an organization is referred to as talent management. Though, talent management practices have become a critical aspect and a common term for every (service and non-service) type of organization (Saxena, 2013). For this reason, talent management is not a single philosophy for the organizations, but rather a set of components that embody the concept and are customized to the particular work environment (Jyoti & Rani, 2014).

Talent management has piqued the attention of both practitioners and academics in the last decade (Collings and Mellahi 2009, 2010; Sheenhan and Anderson 2015), and is now recognized as a critical subjective to management problem (Thunnissen *et al.* 2013). Even though this enthusiasm, the term still lacks a well-defined meaning and clear theoretical boundaries (Collings and Mellahi 2009; Festing and Schafer 2014).

Furthermore, talent management (TM) is the human resource management technique, procedures, and activities for identifying and focusing resources on a specific talent (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2013). A small quantity of talented personnel's those that are high tasks carrying out (Lewis and Heckman, 2006). Or high potential (Gllardo *et al.* 2013) – have received litter attention from a moral and organizational position in the business and management (Gelens, J *et al.*, 2014). Considering all talent-related issues in Afghanistan.

The current study mainly focuses on achieving main two different objectives (1) Why talent management? (2) Achieving sustainable competitive advantage with the help of talent? While the current study aimed to achieve the following research-related questions, (1) To what extent the importance of talent exists within the market, in higher educational institutions in particular? (2) What is the importance of talent identification, retention, and development?

#### **1.1 THEORYTHICAL REVIEW**

*Social Exchange Theory;* **SET** (Blau 1964; Coquitt *et al.* 2001) is a framework for organizational justice that is based on the concepts of mutuality and social obligation (Gouldner 1960; Haynie *et al.* 2016). Although there are varying viewpoints on what social exchange means, most scholars accept that it entails experiences that result in duties (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005;

Emerson 1976). Blau (1964) was one of the primary thinkers to differentiate among arguments in which the nature of the compulsions is precise and exclusively monetary, and exchange in which the nature of the obligations is less specific and more social or emotional. Bjorkman *et al.*, (2013) and Cropanzano, R, *et al.*, (2017) use social exchange theory to unpack and understand how employee's impressions of organizational talent management practices. Saks, (2006) argues that social exchange theory offers a "meaningful theoretical foundation for recognizing and researching employee's engagement" (Saks 2006, p. 616), as it explains why individuals would reciprocate in kind, such as with constructive attitudes when they assume their relationship with their employees is equal and just a positive behavior (Blau 1964; Settoon, R. P, *et al.*, 1960).

*Organizational Justice Theory;* organizational justice theory is committed to perceived equity in the employment relationship and has long been a research subject in the organization and management field (Colquitt *et al.* 2005). Most of the earliest research efforts on organizational justice enticements on social exchange theory. SET (Blau 1964; Colquitt *et al.* 2001) is a structure for organizational justice that is based on the concept of exchange and societal obligation (Gouldner 1960; Haynie *et al.*, 2016). The aspects of SET help to understand why an individual is effective? Employees contribution to the organization is contingent on their evaluation of the organization worth, fairness, and justice as part of their romantic partnership (Collier and Esteban, 2007) as or Slack et al. (2015, p. 537) put a claim the implicit social contract between a corporation and its employees.

Furthermore, the equity theory of Adams (1963), which is defined as a "prevailing theory in social exchange and justice (fairness) in the organization" (Glass and Wood 1996, p. 1191), is subjective and dependent on interpretation. Employees are driven by a desire for justice. According to the equity theory, and are therefore more concerned with how fair-minded (they observe) their fallouts and outcomes to be (Hofmans, 2012).

#### 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

#### 2.1 Talent identification and sustainable competitive advantage

Talent identification is mentioned in a considerable amount of recent literature in the field of talent management (Ntonga, 2010). Talent identification (recruitment and selection) procedures for an organization are the foundation of talent management (Alruwaili, 2018). Armstrong, (2006) stated that there are many ways to attract talented people (individuals), but recruitment and selection is one of the most important phases of talent identification. According to Allen (2012), due to labor market shortages, the war for talent has intensified. Low talent engagement and output result from a lack of talent management, which leads to lower performance and unhappy employees who do not perform to their full potential. Cook (2011), talent identification is the process of identifying the right individuals for each role within the organization by determining what constitutes high performance in each role. Ntonga (2010) also stated that there should be transparency and that workers should be informed whether or not they are talented in some related given task, the ability of a manager to cultivate or recognize the talent that aligned with organizational development.

According to Mellahi & Collings (2010), there is a positive and important relationship between talent identification and the organizational advantage. Mellahi & Collings (2010), further state if an organization fails to recognize talented and suitable people for needed positions, it may not be able to add the expected value to its growth, organizations utilize a variety of identification techniques to find talent that is important and distinguishes them from competitors in the existing globalized market. When compared to public sector organizations that are subject to strict policies and frameworks, recruitment and selection are among the innovative strategies toward talent identification (Farrukh & Waheed, 2015). Recruitment and selection, employees branding, are considered as a component of talent identification (Armstrong, 2010). According to Mishra, Singh, and Kumar (2021), an organization should observe the hiring process to be based on their personal qualities, and traits. Considering previews literature the current study proposed H1 as followings;

# *H1: There is a positive relationship between talent identification and sustainable competitive advantage*

# 2.2 Talent retention management and sustainable competitive advantage

For an organization to remain competitive, it is more important to retain talent. This can be accomplished by implementing compensation practices to keep employees from leaving (Chiekezie, Emejulu, & Nwanneka, 2017; Nzewi & Chiekezie, 2016). on the other hand, researchers (e.g, Mabaso, 2016) claim that retaining valuable and talented employees has become a major challenge for an organization. As a result, most of the researchers suggested compensation to be a viable strategy for retaining talented individuals, who are so-called committed to the

organization's growth and achievements of its objectives. Compensation is defined as earnings generated by an employee's work (Dessler, 2013). In an organization, a process by which employees are paid for their contributions is known as compensation (Sharma, 2013).

Compensation is measured as an actual tactic by organizations since it affects the performance and retention of talented employees (Osibanjo, Adeniji, Olubusayo, & Heirsmac, 2014). They further suggest compensation plays a critical role in improving an employee's sustainable performance in an organization. A study was conducted by (Hameed, Ramzan, Zubair, Ali, & Arslanm, 2014) to investigate the effect of talent retention practice (Compensation) on employee performance. They discovered that compensation has a positive impact on employee's performance. Another study, by (Sulaefi, 2018) conducted an exploratory study to evaluate how salary, organizational commitment, and career path can affect employee's performance. Considering past literature, the authors suggest the following H2 of the study;

# *H2*: *There is a positive relationship between retention management and sustainable competitive advantage*

### 2.3 Talent Development and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Employees' learning and development have become a mainstay for organizational longterm profitability and success; without continuous learning and development, employees may find it difficult to sustain their performance in today's competitive environment. As a result, learning and development are critical for employees to upgrade their skills that lead toward meeting the demands of a constantly changing market environment (Rabbi *et al.*, 2015). While in the other hand, (Mangusho *et al.*, 2015) argued that employees Talent development (coaching and mentoring) are two key elements for talent development. coaching and mentoring are important tools utilized by many organizations to improve employee's performance toward sustainable advantage. According to (Khakwani, Aslam, Azhar, & Mateen, 2012).

Therefore, implementation of development (training) practices by the organization helps the workforce to develop services of individuals to meet the existing and predicted performance constraints at work. Coaching is one to one intervention for learning and development that utilizes a gold-focused approach in rising the prospective employee's skills and competencies (Achi & sleilati, 2016; Jones, Woods, & Guillaume, 2016). Moreover, (Utrilla, Grande, & Lorenzo, 2015)

defines coaching as a process for improving an individual's skills and capabilities to increase work-related performance.

According to (Singh, A. & Sharma, J. 2015), learning and development are valuable tools for learning and overseeing organizational changes as workers advance in their careers and perform better. It has now evolved into a strategy for the growth of employee talent (Ofobruku & Nwakoby, 2015). Moreover, (Neupane, 2015) investigated the impact of coaching and mentoring on employee's performance in the organization. Mundia & Iravo (2014), conducted another study on the influence of talent-related development and employee performance. They stated that talent-related development practices (e.g., mentoring) have a positive impact on performance. As a result, such practices improving an individual's performance through knowledge transfer and job-related advice. Similarly, other researchers (e.g., Raza, Ali, Garrison, Ahmed & Moueed, 2017) looked into the link between variables such as talent-related development practice (Coaching) and employee's performance. Considering previews studies, we suggest the following subsequent hypothesis;

*H3*: *There is a positive relationship between talent development and sustainable competitive advantage* 

#### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

Now higher educational institutions in Afghanistan performing transparently, which opens a new door to stakeholders, managers, academicians to take a wide range of decisions toward sustainability in the competitive market. The study is quantitative and utilizing the non-probability conveniences sampling techniques for data collection (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). The population for this study was faculty members of the higher educational institutions recognized by the ministry of higher education in Kabul, Afghanistan. For data collection, we distributed adopted questionnaires (reference) to 250 sample respondents of selected private higher institutions. All questionnaire was distributed in hard copy having utilized (interpreted) into three languages (English, Dari, and Pashto) to make it easy for the respondents in replying in front of each question. SPSS – 25 and AMOS – 24 versions were utilized for data analysis and accurate results.

#### **3.1** Measurements

*Talent Identification;* 7 items adopted questionnaires from (Rovena, E. (2020). All items were developed according to talent identification. The authors of the current paper were distributed the same adopted questionnaire with no change.

*Retention Management;* 7 items adopted questionnaire related to retention management utilized from (Lyria, R. K., & Namusonge, G. S, 2017). These items were developed based on the retention of employees.

*Talent Development;* talent-related development 7 items utilized from (Thomas, C. E., Abbott, G., Gastin, P. B., & Main, L. C. (2020), these items were developed based on the long term development of individuals working into different service and non-service organizations.

Furthermore, to answer each question 5 Likert scales were designed. For instance, 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Natural, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree. Moreover, we translated the questionnaire into two national languages (Pashto & Dari) to facilitate the respondents.

### **3.2 Population and Sample Size**

A total 250 of questionnaires were utilized from the participant working in different higher institutions. Table 1 statistically explains the demographics characteristics of the respondents, the majority of the respondents were male which is 221 = 88.9%, only 39 = 11.1% are female respondents. We asked the age of the participants 111 = 66.7% respondents were having age between 20 - 25 and 71 = 21.2% marked having age from 26 - 30 of age. 190 = 76.7% bachelor level and 60 = 23.3% were master level. Finally, among demographic characteristics, we also asked respondents to mention their experiences level at higher educational institutions among 250 (161 = 55.7%) were having experience from 0 - 5, (60 = 25.3%) were having 6 - 10 years of experience. Finally, only 29 = 19.0% of the respondents marked themselves as having 11 - above, years of experience in the education sector.

		Number	Percentage	Valid
Characteristics	Characteristics	<b>(n)</b>	(%)	%
Condon	Male	221	88.9%	88.9%
Gender	Female	39	11.1%	11.1%
Age	20 - 25	111	66.7%	66.7%

## Table 1: Demographics

	26 - 30	71	21.2%	21.2%
	Bachelor Level	190	76.7%	76.7%
Qualification	Master Level	60	23.3%	23.3%
	0-5	161	55.7%	55.7%
Experience	6 – 10	60	25.3%	25.3%
-	11 – above	29	19.0%	19.0%
Total Number of Part	ticipant			250

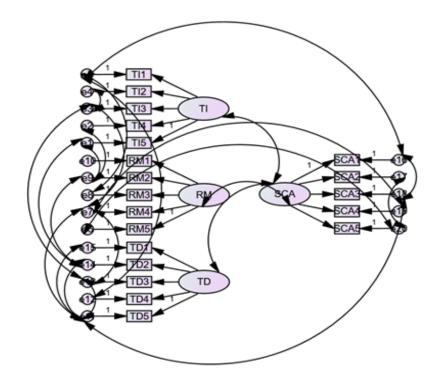
Total Number of Participant

#### 4.0 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

To explain our proposed research model, several tests were carried out, the research tests demographic characteristics of the respondent's sample, followed by the analysis of descriptive statistics. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was tested to know the model goodness of fit, while reliability and validity of the measures were tested via Cronbach's Alpha and utilizing the Pearson correlation method. AMOS was used to test the direct effect between the variables.

#### 4.1 **Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

CFA is carried out, to test and confirm the factors structure along with model goodness of fitness of the research model. The full model was tested in CFA with all four variables in this study. The fitness of the model indices for four-factor model explained adequate model fitness by meeting the standard criteria (Bentler, 1990; Hair et al., 2010), Chi-square / df value = 2.83 less than 3, Probability =  $\geq 0.05$ , CMIN / DF =  $\leq 2.00$ , GFI =  $\leq 0.90$ , AGFI =  $\leq 0.90$ , TLI =  $\geq 0.94$ , CFI =  $\geq 0.94$  and the standardized value for RMSEA =  $\leq 0.08$ .



**Goodness of Fit:** 

Chi square = 262.876Probability (P) = 0.73CMIN/DF = 0.814GFI = 0.981AGFI = 0.928TLI = 0.958CFI = 0.981RMSEA = 1.231

Figure 2: Variables Relationship

# 4.2 Reliability and Validation of Measurements

SEM Structural equation modeling was utilized to reveal the relationship between taken variables for the study, (See, figure 2). Table 2, explains the reliability and validity of the measurements, a homogeneity test conducted to know the validity utilizing Pearson correlations method < 0.4 (Singgih, 2000), and Cronbach Alpha > 0.6 (See, Table 2) which explains that all instruments measured valid and reliable.

Variables		Values	Remarks
Talent Identification	Pearson correlation	0.891	Valid
	Cronbach's Alpha	0.914	Reliable
Retention Management	Pearson correlation	0.780	Valid
	Cronbach's Alpha	0.924	Reliable
Talent Development	Pearson correlation	0.824	Valid
	Cronbach's Alpha	0.915	Reliable

# 4.3 Conformity Factor Analysis (CFA)

The measurements of the variables relationship model at final stages based on criteria of goodness of fid index explored by Ferdinand (2002). A comparison of model value and cut off value of the data compatibility is chi-square ( $x^2$ ) = 252,865 (Good), significance value is the probability value denotes by (P) which is = 0.073 (Good), the values for RMSEA = 1.231  $\ge$  0.08 explains good fit, GFI = 0.018  $\le$  0.090, AGFI = 0.928  $\ge$  0.90, CMIN / DF = 0.814  $\ge$  2.00, TLI = 0.958  $\ge$  0.94, and the value for the CFI = 0.981  $\ge$  0.94 in the result overall values for model shows good fit. This further explains that all criteria for good fit indexes are above cut – off as is also explained by table 4 of the study.

 Table 3: Evaluation Criteria for Goodness of Fit Indices Final Structural Model

Goodness of	Value for	<b>Results of Model</b>	Remarks
Fit Index	Cut-Off		
Chi – Square	Should Small	262.876 (0.05:223 = 258.836)	Goodness of Fit
Probability	$\geq 0.05$	0.073	Goodness of Fit
CMIN / DF	$\leq 2.00$	0.814	Goodness of Fit
GFI	$\leq 0.90$	0.018	Goodness of Fit
AGFI	$\geq 0.90$	0.928	Goodness of Fit
TLI	$\geq 0.94$	0.958	Goodness of Fit
CFI	$\geq 0.94$	0.981	Goodness of Fit
RMSEA	$\leq 0.08$	1.231	Goodness of Fit

The value for the chi-square  $(X^2)$  is good or small enough. Correspondingly, the value for CMIN / DF, GFI, AGFI, TLI, CFI, RMSEA, and probability (P) in table 3 indicates acceptable value and good model fit.

The goodness of **Cut–Off Value** Initial **Final Model** Remarks **Remarks Fit Index** Model Chi-Square (X<sup>2</sup>) Should Small 750.359 Marginal 262.876 Good Fit **Probability** (P)  $\geq 0.05$ 0.000 Marginal 0.73 Good Fit  $\leq 2.00$ CMIN / DF 0.825 Marginal 0.814 Good Fit  $\geq 0.90$ GFI 0.071 Marginal 0.018 Good Fit AGFI  $\geq 0.90$ 0.857 Marginal 0.928 Good Fit TLI  $\geq 0.94$ 0.836 Marginal 0.958 Good Fit > 0.94 Good Fit CFI 0.855 Marginal 0.981  $\leq 0.88$ 2.832 Marginal 1.231 Good Fit **RMSEA** 

 Table 4: Overall Model Comparison of Goodness of fit Index

Hypothesis	Variables	Path Co	efficient Direct	Effect
		Standardized	<b>P-Value</b>	Remarks
H1	There is a positive relationship between TI & SCA	0.208	0.001	Accepted
H2	There is a positive relationship between RM & SCA	0.479	0.000	Accepted
Н3	Ther is positive relationship between TD & SCA	0.148	0.000	Accepted

Table 5: Direct Effect of Dependent and Independent Variabl
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**Note:** TI = Talent identification, SCA = Sustainable competitive advantage, RM = Retention management, TD = Talent development

Table 5 structural equation model (SEM) for hypothesis testing matrix explains that the overall model has a positive influence. Furthermore, below the path model is elaborated.

- Talent identification has a positive influence on sustainable competitive advantage with having a p-value of 0.001 and a standardized value of 0.208.
- Retention management has a positive influence on sustainable competitive advantage with a p-value of 0.000 and a standardized value of 0.479.
- Talent development has a positive influence on sustainable competitive advantage with a p-value of 0.000 and a standardized value of 0.148.

#### 5.0 DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS

This study focused on the need for talent in the current competitive market environment for almost all kinds of the organization (Service, non-service), and evaluated the influences of talent management practices (Talent identification, retention management, and talent development) toward the sustainable competitive advantage of selected higher educational institutions in Kabul, Afghanistan. After some tests, the results revealed positive goodness of fit during evaluating of the goodness of fit. The final values in the structural model (Chi-Square = 262.876, Probability = 0.73, CMIN/DF = 0.814, RMSEA = 1.231, GFI = 0.981, AGFI = 0.928, TLI = 0.958, CFI = 0.981, for more detail statistical results (see, table 3). Based on data analysis, all hypothesis was accepted (see, table 5). The study further states positive relation between the variables, which is discussed in the direct effect of the path coefficient table. The standard values and p values are statistically analyzed, where the direct effect of variables were as followings; TI & SCA, standardized value = 0.208, P-value = 0.001, RM & SCA, standardized value = 0.479, P-value = 0.000, TD & SCA, Standardized value = 0.148, P-value = 0.000. Moreover, in table 4 of the study comparison of the goodness of fit statistically explored, the results revealed a good fit of the model. Based on previews literature and current data analysis the study suggests, the implementation of talent management practices (talent identification, which is possible through effective recruitment and selection, retention management, which can be possible through different retention practices (for instance, compensation and motivation), and talent development, where it can happen through practicing different training and learning programs within the organization.

#### 6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study evaluated talent management practices, in particular talent identification, retention management, and talent development, and the impact over sustainable competitive advantage. The study revealed a positive significant relationship of all variables. The hypothesis of the study meets the standard values, and all of them were accepted. Higher educational institutions are in need to develop proper talent management-related strategies, implements talent concern practices to cope with organizational change in the current competitive market environment.

Furthermore, the study directs future researchers to implement such scales in other than educational sectors, for instance, future researchers may look at the influences of talent management practices over other dependent variables such as performance of employees, satisfaction, higher productivity. There are no mediating and moderating variables in this study. Future studies may take some mediating variables for instance (knowledge hiding, organizational justice). And moderating variables for instance (dark side of leadership, mismanagement, micromanagement). Furthermore, the current study had 250 total respondents for data collection, this number can be increased. Finally, the study suggests longitudinal research for future researchers.

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