

# Talent management research in Africa: towards multilevel model and research agenda

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to systematically review talent management research in Africa with the aim of developing a multilevel talent management model and defining future research agenda.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A systematic literature review is performed utilising studies published on the topic from 2008 to 2019 in various research databases.

**Findings** – The findings highlighted various talent management contributions and challenges in the African context. They further revealed major issues with the nature of research method adopted in talent management research in Africa. Moreover, contextually, apart from Southern Africa sub-region, talent management research is highly under-researched in the North African, West African and Eastern African sub-regions of the continent. Therefore, talent management research in Africa can be described as being at an embryonic stage.

**Practical implications** – Effective talent management has significant transformative and growth power through its varied positive contributions. Talent management in Africa is faced with numerous organisational and macro-level challenges and requires attention from relevant stakeholders, if African talents are to be harnessed to facilitate the development of the continent.

**Originality/value** – This systematic review on talent management is the first of its kind focusing solely on Africa. Also, this study contributes further evidence by proposing a multilevel talent management model based on the synthesised evidence since multilevel research in the field of talent management is very limited.

**Keywords** Talent management, Multilevel model, Systematic review, Africa

**Paper type** Literature review

## Introduction

Talent management has become a critical issue for organisational success due to its potential roles in discriminating between high and low performing organisations. It has also become a top priority for organisations as a result of the limited supply of talented employees. According to Anlesinya *et al.* (2019a) and Tarique and Schuler (2012), there is ever-growing competition among firms globally for the attraction and retention of scarce talented employees. Consequently, talent management has become an important subject for both scholars and practitioners. Given the significance of the topic, it can benefit from studies that have provided a systematic evidence of its impacts and challenges generally and specifically in developing economies. Hence, we systematically review the effects and challenges of talent management as well as the nature of methods adopted in talent management research in Africa with the aim of developing a multilevel talent management model and defining future research agenda. Consequently, the specific research questions are:

- RQ1. What is the geographical distribution of talent management research in Africa?
- RQ2. What is the nature of research methods employed in talent management scholarship in Africa?
- RQ3. What are the effects of talent management practices at various levels of analyses in Africa?
- RQ4. What are talent management challenges at various levels of analyses in Africa?



The contribution of this paper is in two main folds: first, although some reviews on talent management were conducted, none has paid attention to the specific context of Africa. Specifically, researchers such as Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016) and McDonnell *et al.* (2017) systematically reviewed the talent management generally, Anlesinya *et al.* (2019a), Collings and Mellahi (2009) reviewed strategic talent management scholarship, whereas Anlesinya *et al.* (2019b) and Tarique and Schuler (2012) provided a review on empirical and conceptual domains of global talent management research respectively. However, none has focused on talent management outcomes and challenges as well the nature of research method in talent management research in Africa. Meanwhile, talent management and retention is of significant importance to less developed economies like Africa given their numerous challenges and the potential contributions of effective talent management regime to the growth of firms and national competitiveness. Moreover, cultural factors (see Oppong and Gold, 2016), business contexts (Sparrow *et al.*, 2013) and other contextual and institutional factors (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016) can make difference in successful implementation of talent management initiatives and strategies. Hence, this study contributes to the talent management literature by critically reviewing and identifying key talent management issues (outcomes and challenges) in Africa that are expected to influence policy and practice as well as stimulate future research in the area.

Second, Molloy *et al.* (2011) and Shen (2016) maintained that multilevel research in the human resource management (HRM) field from both conceptual and empirical perspectives is limited. Consequently, there are increasing calls (e.g. Paauwe, 2009; Renkema *et al.*, 2017; Shen, 2016) for more multilevel research in HRM and related fields. However, none of the previous reviews indicated above have explicitly developed a multilevel model on talent management practices, outcomes and boundary conditions. Thus, the multilevel model that we developed on talent management impacts and potential facilitating or inhibiting factors provides useful insights for policy makers and practitioners to better understand how to design and implement talent management initiatives. Hence, the proposed multilevel model is a major addition to the talent management literature as such models are necessary not only to promote conceptual but also empirical multilevel research and thinking in talent management discourse. It can also enrich talent management discourse, practice and policy making in Africa while enhancing the overall growth and competitiveness of the continent.

The rest of the paper discussed the methodology, results and findings, gaps and future research agenda and conclusion.

## Methodology

### *Research approach*

The study adopted systematic literature review method in order to provide critical analysis of talent management in Africa. A systematic literature review is a means of identifying, evaluating and interpreting all available research relevant to a particular research question, or topic area, or phenomenon of interest (Kitchenham, 2004; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). A systematic literature review approach was chosen because it is a more rigorous and accountable research method and offers the possibility of identifying other under-research areas (Kitchenham, 2004; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003; Yatu *et al.*, 2018).

### *Data collection procedure*

The study searched for “Talent management”, “Talent development”, “International talent management”, “Strategic talent management” and “Africa” or their combination using the Boolean “And or Or”. The search was conducted in six databases, specifically: Emerald Insight, Taylor and Francis Online, Wiley & Son Online Library, Sage, Science Direct and

Google Scholar. Following Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016), the keywords were searched in the titles or topic, abstract and keywords of the papers. No limitation of time frame was used for the present study since that could limit the ability to capture all the literature available on the topic. We, however, found articles from 2008 to May 2019. The 2008 as starting point for talent management scholarship in Africa is not surprising since similar reviews of general talent management literature (see Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016), strategic talent management scholarship (see Anlesinya *et al.*, 2019a) and empirical global talent management research (Anlesinya *et al.*, 2019b) with no time limitations, found articles from 2006, 2007 and 2008 onwards, respectively, as the base year.

#### *Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

Prior to the search, inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined. Only papers published in international peer-reviewed journals, written in English, have an available authorship (Boselie *et al.*, 2005; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016), and full-text article available (Knipschild, 1995) were included. As a result, theses, interviews, editorial notes, book chapters and reviews, brief communications and commentaries, symposia and presentation slides were excluded from the retained papers. Also, conference proceedings, unpublished masters or doctoral theses and working papers were not included as they are mostly converted in articles, and prevent issue of double counting. Moreover, the articles must focus on the African context or include an African organisation or institution and must not collect data from non-African context. A total of 69 articles were retrieved but 41 were retained for further analysis. The process of article identification, screening, eligibility assessment and inclusion is depicted in Figure 1. A template was developed to summarise and extract relevant information from the text of the paper.

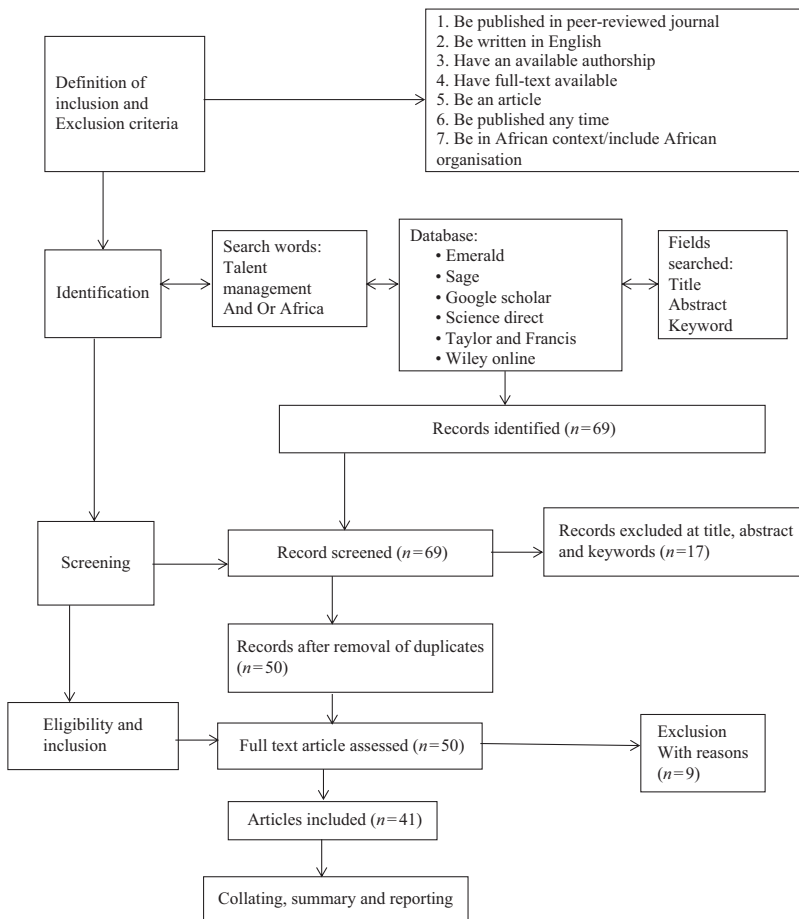
## **Results and findings**

### *Publication trends*

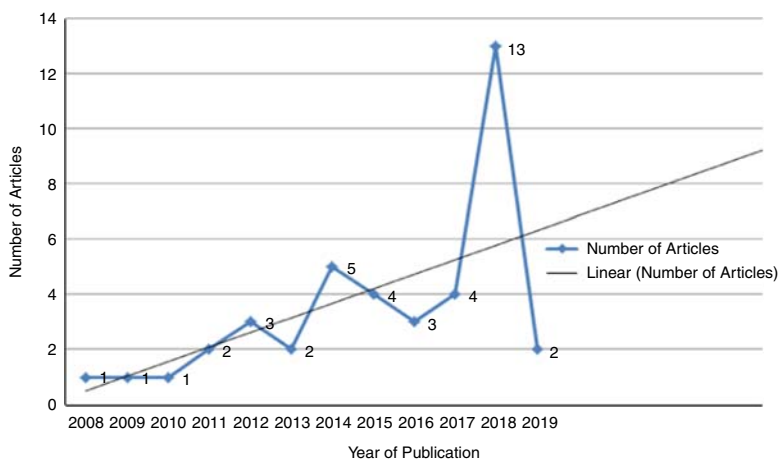
The 41 research articles were published between 2008 and May 2019, thus, about 12 year period. Figure 2 below showed the general trend in talent management research in Africa. Overall, research on talent management research in Africa is very low and appears not to be increasing at an impressive rate with the exception of the 2018 figure of 13 articles. This is surprising as research publications in the general field of talent management seem to be increasing (see Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017).

### *Publication outlets*

The journal outlets for the 41 articles are presented in Table I. In total, 31 different journals published the 41 articles. Only five journals published more than one article. The two journals recording four to five publications were not ranked and so are many others. Unfortunately, none of the articles were published in the leading Africa-centred journals like *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies*, *Africa Journal of Management* and *Journal of African Business*. Similarly, previous reviews (e.g. Anlesinya *et al.*, 2019b; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016) indicated that *The International of Human Resource Management* and *Journal of World Business* are the leading publication outlets for talent management research but is not the case in talent management scholarship in Africa. It is unclear why these journals were not seen as important medium for publishing on the topic, but it does raises questions about the general quality of the articles defining talent management scholarship in Africa.



**Figure 1.** Flow chart of the systematic review



**Figure 2.** Trends in talent management publications in Africa

**Table I.**  
Publication outlets

Database	Journal	Total	
Emerald Insight	<i>International Journal of Organizational Analysis</i>	1	
	<i>Industrial and Commercial Training</i>	1	
	<i>Management Research Review</i>	1	
	<i>World Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development</i>	1	
	<i>International Journal of Manpower</i>	1	
	<i>Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management</i>	1	
	<i>Journal of Management Development</i>	2	
	<i>Career Development International</i>	1	
	<i>Public Personnel Management</i>	1	
	<i>Journal of Research in Nursing</i>	1	
Sage	<i>Advances in Developing Human Resources</i>	1	
	<i>International Review of Administrative Sciences</i>	1	
	<i>Journal of Psychology in Africa</i>	2	
Taylor and Francis	<i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	1	
Online Library	<i>Journal of Human Ecology</i>	1	
	<i>International Journal of Construction Management</i>	1	
	<i>Human Resource Development International</i>	1	
	<i>Africa Education Review</i>	1	
	<i>Journal of World Business</i>	1	
	<i>Data in Brief</i>	1	
	<i>Public Organization Review: A Global Journal</i>	1	
	Google Scholar	<i>Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences</i>	4
		<i>Southern African Business Review</i>	1
		<i>Journal of Management Research</i>	1
<i>The Journal of Applied Business Research</i>		1	
<i>SA Journal of Human Resource Management</i>		5	
<i>African Journal of Business Management</i>		2	
<i>International Business Research</i>		1	
Total	<i>Journal of the South African Institution of Civil Engineering</i>	1	
	<i>Acta Commercii</i>	1	
	<i>Problems and Perspectives in Management</i>	1	
		41	

### *Geographical distribution*

The geographical distribution of the studies was analysed based on where sample is sourced and authors' affiliation. The results showed that the 41 papers were conducted by 78 different scholars. More than half (41) of the scholars were from South Africa, 11 from UK-based institutions, 8 from Nigeria, 4 each from Ghana and Egypt, 3 each from Uganda and USA and 1 each from Mauritius, Thailand, Australia and UAE. This means that talent management research in Africa is being led and dominated by various South Africa-based scholars. Similarly, the empirical papers (38 out of 41) used samples from 15 different countries in Africa. Majority (23 articles) used samples from South Africa, six papers used samples from Ghana, five employed samples from Egypt and four papers used samples from Nigeria. Furthermore, two articles each used samples from Uganda and Botswana. One article each used sample from Mauritius, Tanzania, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Namibia, Malawi, Lesotho and Swaziland. Thus, empirically, South African context has received much research attention compared to its peers. This has the potential to bias talent management scholarship in the continent.

### *Methodological assessment of research on talent management in Africa*

The methodological assessment of talent management research in Africa revealed that most (92.68 per cent) were empirical, whereas few (7.32 per cent) were theoretical/conceptual in nature.

This may be based on the view that evidence-based research provides better rich insights to managers about talent management issues (Anlesinya *et al.*, 2019b). In terms of analysis level, 43.90 per cent of the studies focused on individual-level issues (e.g. Mensah and Bawole, 2017), 39.02 per cent conducted organisational level analysis (e.g. Maheshwari *et al.*, 2017) and macro-level analysis was 12.20 per cent (e.g. Mwila and Turay, 2018), whereas multilevel analysis constituted 4.88 per cent. Although generally under-researched, employee-level and organisational-level phenomenon have received relatively higher attention compared to multilevel and macro-level studies. The results also imply that there was no group/team-level analysis as well as cross-country comparative analysis although Africa is a very big continent that includes lots of different countries, and within each country, there are lots of differences and cultural factors should be taken into consideration.

Moreover, majority (76.32 per cent) of the empirical papers adopted quantitative approach, some (18.42 per cent) adopted qualitative approach and few (4.17 per cent) employed the mixed methods. This contradicted the results of Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2015) that revealed that qualitative research dominated the general talent management literature and was understandable based on the developing nature of the field. Surprising, however, this is rather the opposite in African talent management scholarship. This may suggest that most talent management scholars in Africa are mainly positivism oriented, with less qualitative expertise or researchers in the area. Similar, reason could be attributed to the small number of the mixed method research on the topic in Africa. The results imply that, generally, talent management scholars in Africa are disposed to the use of inferential quantitative analytical techniques. Relatedly, qualitative research design like ethnography, phenomenology and others, as well as data collection strategies such as focus group discussions and participant observation are less commonly used. The qualitative research on the topic have frequently employed single case study strategy and interview (semi-structured or unstructured) as means of data collection. The foregoing raises concerns about the rigor in the qualitative studies on the topic. All the 38 empirical papers employed cross-sectional data, implying that none of them have examined talent management issue over a period of time.

#### *Talent management outcomes in Africa*

*Individual-level outcomes.* The effect of talent management on employee level outcomes were examined in some of the reviewed studies (e.g. Barkhuizen, Mogwere and Schutte, 2014; Mensah *et al.*, 2016; Mensah and Bawole, 2017; Ngozwana and Rugimbana, 2011). In their study, Mensah *et al.* (2016) indicated that talent management has positive effects on talented employees' performance and negative effect on counterproductive behaviours in the Ghanaian banking industry. They further found that job satisfaction and affective commitment partially mediate the effect of talent management on the various performance measures. Relatedly, Mensah and Bawole (2017) suggested that talent management did not only have a direct effect, but also an indirect effect on talented employees' affective commitment and quit intention via person–job fit working in selected parastatal institutions in Ghana. In South Africa, Ngozwana and Rugimbana (2011) found that talent management practices are used to retain talents in parastatal institution in the aviation sector. This result is also consistent with Plessis *et al.*'s (2015) finding that suggests that talent management practices are negatively related to intention to quit in the South African recruitment industry. Similarly, using samples from the manufacturing, mining and financial services industry in South Africa, Seopa *et al.* (2015) revealed that employees included in organisation talent pool reported higher the relational and transactional psychological contract, organisational commitment, OCB, trust and the intention to stay with organisations compared to non-talent pool members. This means that employees' perception of talent pool membership can increase their relational

psychological contract, organisational commitment and OCB. Moreover, the positive impact of talent management on work engagement was found in only one study (see Barkhuizen, Mogwere and Schutte, 2014) but talent management relationship with employees' service quality performance was insignificant in the South African's higher education sector (Barkhuizen, Mogwere and Schutte, 2014). Recently, in the same sector in Nigeria, Salau *et al.*'s (2018) suggested that academic staff indicated talent management facilitates employee innovation performance and retention. In another study but with a different focus, Hashish (2019) demonstrates that perceived career and talent development self-efficacy is significantly negatively related to and overall career barriers among nursing students in Egypt. Relatedly, Potgieter and Snyman's (2018) study in the South African banking industry showed relationship between personality factors and job retention factors. Specifically, personal factors (emotional intelligence and self-esteem) as composite significantly influence the talent retention factors of job characteristics, supervisor support, career opportunities and work/life balance. From the above, it is argued that when implemented effectively, talent management can become an important instrument to facilitate the achievement of positive employee.

*Organisational-level outcomes.* At the organisational level, Maheshwari *et al.* (2017) showed that the banking sector in Mauritius effective talent management can attract the best talent which will in turn help to create a distinct competitive advantage for the firm and enhance their employer branding and employer attractiveness. Earlier in South Africa public sector, Kock and Burke (2008) argued conceptually that complementing HRM practices with talent management will allow public sector organisations to better realise their public service objectives by repositioning the public service as a good place to work and an environment for talent to thrive. This supports Kehinde's (2012) findings that talent management has positive impact on the performance of multinational and the national firms in Lagos Metropolis in Nigeria.

Recently, in the Egyptian higher education sector, Mousa and Ayoubi (2019) indicated that exclusive talent management has significant effect on organisational downsizing, whereas inclusive TM has an insignificant effect. The authors further revealed that responsible leadership failed to mediate the relationship between organisational downsizing and each of the two talent management approaches. In a similar study on the Egyptian Architecture, Engineering and Construction (AEC) industry, Othman and Khalil (2018a) suggested that talent management decreases demotivation but did not significantly influence creativity of architectural firms. In another study, Othman and Khalil (2018b) suggested the application of Lean Six Sigma principles to talent management can eliminate the waste of nonutilizing talented architects in the Egyptian AEC industry. Earlier, Nafei (2015) found that talent management positively affects firm's service quality performance. Thus, it is obvious that talent management can improve various firm-level outcomes.

*Macro-level outcomes.* We found only a study focusing on talent management outcomes at the macro-level (see Mwila and Turay, 2018), an indication that macro-level analysis is highly under-researched in talent management scholarship in Africa. According to Mwila and Turay (2018), psychometric testing as talent management tools can provide solutions in enabling talent management to become more inclusive and in so doing contribute to the UN's vision for sustainable development.

#### *Talent management challenges in Africa*

*Firm-level challenges.* Talent management at the firm level is confronted with the lack of qualified talent professionals for effective design and implementation of talent strategies. According to Rudhumbu and Maphosa (2015), talent management strategies of private higher education institution in Botswana are faced with lack of qualified talent managers/professional to effectively plan and implement TM programme. Consequently, the

institutions have problems attracting and retaining talent as their TM strategies are not effective in motivating employees to improve performance. In the Ghanaian mining sector, Oppong and Gold (2016) showed that cultural factors can affect the success of talent management efforts. They authors suggest that failure of foreign managers of western multinationals in Ghana to adopt holistic approach in considering and appreciating indigenous cultural and local contexts in developing and managing local managers can impede success. Recently, Muyia *et al.* (2018) observed that companies in Kenya lack the necessary resources for talent development investments.

In South Africa, Barkhuizen, Welby-Cooke, Schutte and Stanz (2014) found that, in general, leaders do not demonstrate talent mindset and reciprocity towards talent strategies, talent acquisition practices and talent retention practices. Leaders also demonstrated low commitment toward talent management. This can have negative consequences for effectiveness of talent management interventions. Similarly, Koketso and Rust (2012) revealed that talent management challenges confronting the South African public service organisations are retention of talented employees, lack of employee recognition, succession planning and management problems and sluggish career management strategies. These problems of talent management have implications for employee pay satisfaction, turnover and intention to turnover, and motivation. In a related study, Barkhuizen (2014) noted that talent management is poorly applied in the local government institutions in South Africa and lacks strategic focus. Earlier, Ngozwana and Rugimbana (2011) indicated that when the mission or purpose of firms does not indicate the importance of employees' job, when employees are not involvement in decisions and there is lack of recognition for higher performance, it will be difficult in achieving talent management outcomes. High work demands and less job resources were also identified as a major threat to talent management initiatives. In the higher education sector in South Africa, Barkhuizen, Roodt and Schutte (2014) showed that academics work is associated with high work demands but with no proper job resources. This kind of academic environment in their views can have serve consequences on effective talent management of academic staff, particularly, in terms of their attraction and retention. In the engineering and construction sector, Oosthuizen and Nienaber (2010) found that while most managers (94 per cent) consider talent management as a priority of their firms, only 57 per cent implemented some talent management initiative. More than half (55 per cent) of the firms are primarily concern with how to create deep reservoir of potential successors at the various levels within the firm. They concluded that failure to do so pose major threats to the firms' continuity and also the wealth-creating capacity at the country level.

*Macro-level challenges.* According to Muyia *et al.* (2018), talent development challenges in Kenya are created as result of ill-prepared graduates and migration of talented people, whereas security, corruption also pose challenges. Earlier, Horwitz (2013) noted that South Africa is unfavourably affected by a shortage of intermediate and certain high-level skills. The author consequently argued that HRD and education in skills and competencies that are required are vital in addressing the country's twin problems of global competitiveness and the eradication of unfair discrimination. In a related study, Kerr-Phillips and Thomas (2009) collected both qualitative and quantitative data from migrated talents of South Africa during the period 1994–2006 and found that macro-level reasons for emigration included "uncertainty about the future of the country, job insecurity and fears regarding both corruption and violent crime" (p. 82). Recently, Oseghale *et al.*'s (2018) study in Nigeria showed that government regulations and prevalence of crimes in society can influence talent management issues. Also, Ibeh and Debrah (2011) have found that African Business-schools have not paid significant attention to the development of female talents; as a result, their female student figures have also remained generally low.



Clearly, talent management in Africa is faced with numerous organisational and macro-level challenges and requires attention from relevant stakeholders, if African talents are to be harnessed to facilitate the development of the continent. It is important to note that micro-level factors are not examined explicitly by any of the articles although some personal factors and demographic factors are highlighted as critical success factors for talent management and are elaborated under the multilevel talent management model below.

#### *Multilevel talent management model*

Multilevel research as earlier noted in the HRM field from both conceptual and empirical perspectives is very limited (Molloy *et al.*, 2011; Shen, 2016). As a result, there are increasing calls (e.g. Paauwe, 2009; Renkema *et al.*, 2017) for more multilevel research in HRM and related fields. Hence, based on the proceeding discussions and synthesised evidence, a multilevel talent management model is proposed (Figure 2), focusing on practices, impacts/outcomes and boundary conditions (moderating factors).

Talent management practices are generally categorised into three: talent attraction and acquisition practices, talent development practices and talent retention management (see Tarique and Schuler, 2010). Talent attraction management practices generally consist of reputation management (practices and activities aimed at enhancing employer's image as an employer of choice or great employer) and talent pool management (how and who to select from an organisation's pool of talented employees). Talent development practices involve competence training and development, developmental performance appraisal, developmental mentoring and coaching and career management. These activities or practices are aimed at developing the strengths and unique competencies of talented employees while helping them to overcome their weaknesses. Talent retention management is an organisational effort directed at ensuring that existing talents are retained. Commonly used techniques in talent retention management are succession planning/management, compensation and rewards management and creation of supportive work climate.

The model which is based on the synthesised evidence suggests that talent management practices can serve as important instruments to facilitate the achievement of employee outcomes such as retention, commitment, OCB, performance, motivation, job satisfaction and work engagement. It can also create various organisational outcomes such as employer attractiveness, quality service delivery, creation of appealing employer brand, competitive advantage and financial performance, as well as macro-level outcomes like industry and national competitiveness, and achievement of sustainable development goal. Moreover, employee level outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, among others can mediate the relationship between talent management practices and organisational level outcomes. Similarly, organisational level outcomes such as competitive advantage can serve as underlying psychological mechanisms for leveraging talent management practices on macro-level outcomes such as industry growth and national competitiveness.

In addition, the relationship between talent management and the various outcomes can be moderated by a range of individual, organisational and macro-level factors. Individual-level factors or personality factors such as emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, career aspiration, etc. and demographic factors like gender, generational cohorts, age, educational level, race, etc. can affect outcomes of talent management practices, and thus, serving as a boundary condition in the relationship. For instance, Poisat *et al.* (2018) found that white ethnic grouping have significant positive effect on retention of talented employees, whereas gender and millennials as a generational cohort have a negative effect on psychological contract perception among talented employees in South Africa. In a related study, Potgieter and Snyman (2018) indicated that emotional intelligence and self-esteem of employees influence talent retention factors or practices of organisations in South Africa. Likewise, in the Nigerian oil and gas sector, Oseghale *et al.* (2018) in their qualitative study revealed that individual-level

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drivers such as skills and career aspirations can moderate the nature and extent of training provision for talented employees.

Furthermore, organisational-level factors such as availability of qualified talent professionals, organisational talent mindset, managerial commitment, managerial involvement, strategic orientation and integration and the nature of working environment constitute important boundary conditions or contexts for the realization of talent management outcomes or benefits. According to Oseghale *et al.*'s (2018) study in the oil and gas sector of Nigeria, firms' strategic orientation can moderate the nature and extent of training provision for talented employees. Muyia *et al.* (2018) also expressed similar view when they argued that firms' proper definition of talent development vision is critical success factors for talent management in Kenya.

Similarly, it is important to note that Africa is a very big continent that includes lots of different countries, and within each country, there are lots of differences and cultural factors that should be taken into consideration. Hence, macro-level moderators are included in the model to account for regional, country and sectoral/industry environmental differences as these can affect the relationship between talent management practices and its outcomes at various levels. For instance, a study on the effect of talent management on quality service delivery showed conflicting findings in different countries and sectors. Specifically, while Nafei's (2015) study focusing on the Egyptian Commercial Banks showed positive effect, Barkhuizen Mogwere and Schutte's (2014) study in South African higher education sector showed no significant results. This contradiction, therefore, may be explained by differences in national and sectoral contexts. Earlier, Weng (2008) found that some particular sectors or industries provide more favourable environments for the retention of talented employees compared to others. Likewise, culture, differences in business contexts and environmental complexities (see Oppong and Gold, 2016; Sparrow *et al.*, 2013) tend to influence the success of talent management initiatives. In Oseghale *et al.*'s (2018) view, macro-level factors such as government regulations and prevalence of crimes in society, general industry performance and industry-education collaborative programmes promote proactive training provision, a key talent management technique. Moreover, well-designed quality education and training programs can facilitate talent development by exposing people to new ideas and a disposition to question what people already know (Muyia *et al.*, 2018). Clearly from the above, context matters a lot and should be taken into consideration in assessing talent management impacts.

## **Discussion of managerial implications, future research agenda and conclusions**

### *Managerial implications*

Talent management has become an importance issue for both practitioners and academics due to its potential contributions to organisational effectiveness and national competitiveness. This study sought to make contributions to the literature by performing systematic review of talent management research in Africa to ascertain major practices, impacts and challenges of talent management. The synthesised evidence suggests that talent management can generate positive employee outcomes (such as employee performance, retention, commitment and motivation), organisational outcomes (employer attractiveness, appealing employer brand, competitive advantage and financial performance) and macro-level outcomes such as industry and national competitiveness and achievement of sustainable development goals. Moreover, findings showed that challenges to effective talent management in Africa at the organisational-level includes lack of necessary resources for talent development investments, lack of qualified talent professionals for effective design and implementation of talent strategies, low managerial commitment, lack of strategic approach in talent management process, non-involvement in decision making, lack of recognition for higher performance and uncondusive working conditions, among others. This indicates that managers should create condusive work environment for the retention of talented employees by injecting more job resources such

as job autonomy, supportive leadership, among others while eradicating or minimising job demands that can trigger their intention to leave the organisation. Additionally, corporate leaders should invest in developing and motivating not just talented employees but in talent managers or professionals for the institution and design of proper systems that can boost talent related outcomes. Moreover, there should be mechanisms in organisations to promote involvement and participation of talented employees in decision making at various levels of management or policies and programmes that can have direct or indirect impact on them. Finally, leaders should adopt and demonstrate talent mindset and commitment to talent management processes by ensuring that their corporate mission inspire talent management initiatives and outcomes as well as provide required resources (financial, human, technological, etc.) to promote the development and sustenance of talent management initiatives.

At the macro-level the synthesised evidence revealed that challenges to talent management include ill-prepared graduates, migration of talented people, job insecurity, violent crimes, corruption and unfair labour market practices such as discrimination. This implies that various nations in the continent need to pay attention to the development of educational curriculum that can better prepare graduates for the job market. Similarly, governments in the continents should engage in job creation and creation of supportive environments such as elimination of crimes and unfair labour practices to prevent the migration of their talented employees.

#### *Future research agenda*

*Contextual gaps.* While research publications in the general field of talent management appear to be increasing (see Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017), Africa focused publications on talent management is yet to gather major momentum and can be described as being at an embryonic stage, even though researchers in the continent are gradually showing interest in the topic. This means that despite the various calls (e.g. Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Lewis and Heckman, 2006) for more scholarly works on the topic, they are yet to be embraced by researchers in Africa to step up publication efforts in the continent.

Also, talent management research in Africa is being led by various South Africa-based scholars although other scholars based in other African context have shown some interest in the field. Besides, only 15 different countries in Africa have been represented in the empirical studies with South African context again receiving much research attention compared to its peers. The high interest on the topic in the South African context may suggest that institutions in South Africa tend to prioritise talent management issues compared to other countries in the continent. Generally, North Africa, West African and Eastern African are highly under-researched regions in Africa. As a result, there are geographical imbalances in the talent management research in Africa. Meanwhile, socio-cultural, political and economic conditions differ across the various countries in the continent. Hence, this trend need to be changed with increased research activities by scholars in other parts of the continent in order to bring out the various perspectives, opportunities and benefits, challenges to and critical success factors of talent management in the continent to inform proper managerial policy making and practices to accelerate the needed growth and development in Africa because effective talent management has a growth and transformative power. This recommendation is also based on the fact that “context-specific practices and institutional factors can hamper the application of existing findings in other contexts beyond the sectors and contexts within which they were carried” (e.g. Anlesinya *et al.*, 2019b, p. 156).

*Methodological gaps.* Several methodological gaps are identified. First, the reviews revealed that no group or team-level was performed while multilevel research is scanty.

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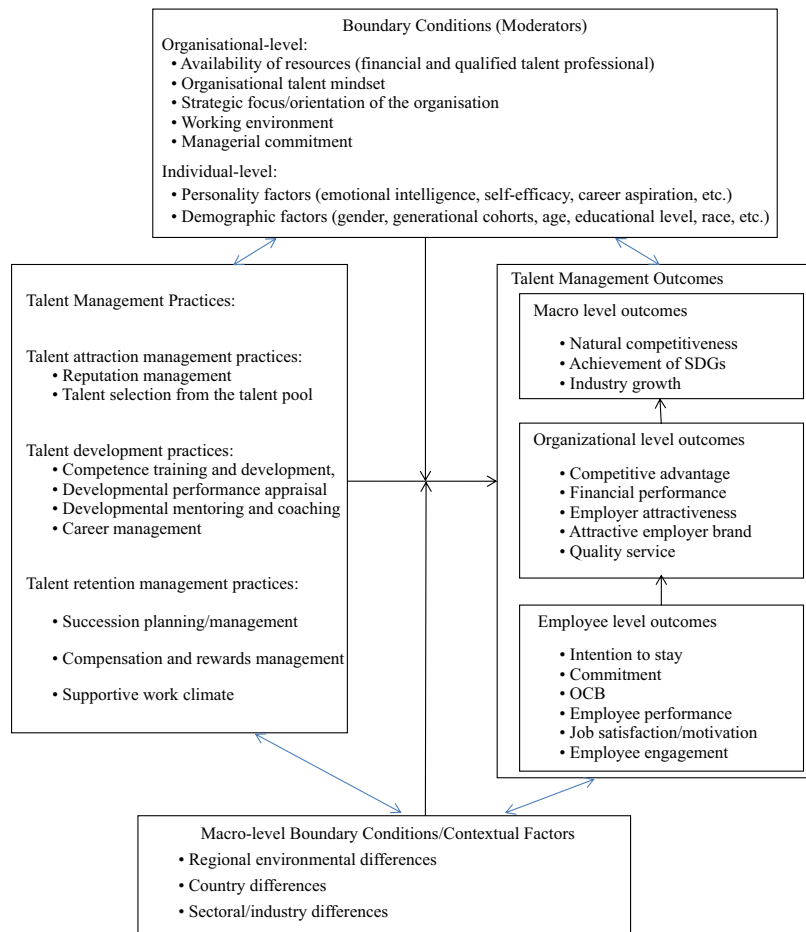
Hence, future research should empirically test the proposed multilevel model in various contexts (organisations, sectors, countries) for validation and generalisation. Additionally, a purely quantitative approach is insufficient in generating new insights and nuances of talent management phenomenon given its developing nature. Hence, future studies should adopt the mixed research method by complementing both approaches to gain a deeper understanding of talent management challenges and outcomes, any other relevant issues in the continent. Besides, none of the empirical papers employed longitudinal data in their analysis. Since the use of cross-sectional data severely impact on the inference of causality between variables, future studies employing data over time (longitudinal and diary survey) can provide very useful insights into the various talent management issues in the continent. Such studies can permit development of robust African-focused talent management theories that can in turn influence policy and practice for the overall competitiveness, growth and prosperity of the various nations and organisations in the continent.

Furthermore, although one article (see Ibeh and Debrah, 2011) collected samples from multiple African countries, there was no cross-country comparative analysis. Cross-country comparative research may potentially enhance understanding of the social-cultural, historical, political and economic contexts that shape talent management across countries in the continent by highlighting similarities and differences thereof. Differences within sub-regions of the continent should equally be given maximum attention. Such studies can facilitate the development of a set of transferable principles and strategies for effective talent management in the continent.

*Content gaps.* Since research on talent management is generally limited in Africa, more studies are required on various aspects of talent management in the continent. Again, factors that can play moderating and mediating roles in the relationship between talent management practices and outcomes were nearly ignored. Only 6 (14.63 per cent) out of the 41 articles have conducted a mediation study (e.g. Mensah and Bawole, 2017; Mousa and Ayoubi, 2019). Similarly, only one study (2.44 per cent) has performed a moderation analysis (see Plessis *et al.*, 2015). This implies that empirical talent management scholarship in Africa lacks complexity and fails to take into account the physical, social and psychological mechanisms that can translate talent management initiatives into various levels of outcomes. Likewise, the nearly absence of moderation research means that we have limited understanding of the boundary conditions or context under which talent management can affect employee, organisational and macro-level outcomes. Meanwhile, some factors as indicated in Figure 3 the potential to facilitate or inhibit the effectiveness of talent management initiatives. Consequently, future research is proposed to examine the moderating role of potential moderating and mediating variables (see Figure 3) on talent management and its outcomes. Also, given the talent management challenges identified earlier, more mechanisms are needed to convert talent management practices into desired impacts on employee, organisational and macro-level outcomes. For example, future studies can explore the mediating role of various job resources on talent management practices and outcomes. Besides, future research opportunities also exist in the area of scale development and validation on talent management practices based on the continents or individual country's unique requirements and characteristics since most of the quantitative studies had to rely on scales developed in non-African contexts.

## Conclusion

We conclude based on the synthesised evidence that talent management can be leveraged to achieve positive employee, organisational and macro-level outcomes to promote the growth and competitiveness of firms in Africa. However, the realisation of the positive impacts of talent management in Africa is threatened by range of organisational and macro-level challenges. Hence, stakeholders need to eliminate talent management



**Figure 3.**  
Multilevel talent  
management model

**Source:** Authors' Own Model

constraints to generate positive contributions for the much desired growth and transformation at all levels in the continent. Moreover, research on talent management in Africa apart from Southern Africa sub-region is highly under-researched in other sub-regions of the continent. Research methods adopted also generally lack rigor. These are important research future research agenda. Additionally, both conceptual and empirical multilevel research in the field of talent management is very limited. Hence, this study contributes further evidence by proposing a multilevel talent management model that is expected to promote conceptual but also empirical multilevel research and thinking in talent management discourse. Finally, this first systematic review on talent management focusing solely on Africa coupled with the various research gaps and proposed future research agenda attested to its significant value, originality and contributions to in the African context. However, since certain search criteria were used coupled with the fact that majority of the articles focused on the South African context, findings and the proposed multilevel model should be applied more cautiously, paying attention to the particularity of their research context.

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