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The Effectiveness of Talent Acquisition Strategies on Organisational Competitiveness: A Case of South African Organisations

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation titled: **The Effectiveness of Talent Acquisition Strategies on Organisational Competitiveness: A Case of South African Organisations** is my own original work under the supervision of Dr Euphemia Godspower-Akpomiemie (Wits Business School). It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Business Administration to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, and has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

Signature: 

Date: 30/June / 2025

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my father, **Ntsietja Samuel Rakgoale**

God called you home before I could share this milestone with you, but I know you have been watching from above. Your unwavering belief in me, your quiet strength, and your many sacrifices laid the foundation upon which I have built my dreams. You taught me the enduring values of hard work, integrity, and humility. This Master of Business Administration is not just a personal achievement, it is a tribute to the wisdom, love, and values you instilled in me. May this accomplishment reflect the guidance you selflessly provided. This is for you, Dad. You remain forever in my heart, and I hope this makes you proud.

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the importance, challenges, and management attitudes towards the effectiveness of talent acquisition in South African organisations, including both private and public sectors, in Gauteng Province. The qualitative research design was used, with 15 participants drawn from diverse organisational settings. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews which were conducted online on Zoom and Microsoft Teams for the audience's convenience. Thematic analysis was used in data processing to help draw out the key issues regarding strategic recruitment practice, senior management engagement, employee turnover, and recruitment issues. The findings show that effective talent acquisition raises organisational productivity and efficiency and generates competitiveness, heightening the demand for leadership to connect recruitment practice and goals. Turnover challenges and alignment issues between responsibility expectations and duties were underscored as leading obstacles. This study is a contributory work of utility for researchers and practitioners in bringing to the fore the necessity for strategy-led, technology-focused, and retention-based models in the making of South African future workforce.

Key words: Recruitment strategies, Talent acquisition, private and public organisations.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of purpose

The research investigated how talent recruitment practices can help gain a competitive advantage in modern organisation. This study assessed the importance of acquiring and retaining quality staff, then analyse strategies that can be instituted to improve market competitiveness through the means of employee recruitment, firm reputation, and technology; recommendations are provided for improved talent acquisition and organisational performance.

1.2. Background of study

Human capital is viewed as a significant strategic asset by organisations in the modern competitive business environment. Quality staff attract excellence and competitiveness in any given organisational setup. Technology and globalisation, therefore, have forced South African organisations to compete for talent that innovates, produces efficiently, and adapts quickly to shifting market dynamics. Employers experience challenges in finding the right people for certain positions because of the shortage of candidates with the relevant skills. According to Mbele (2023) and Manpower survey (2018), this competitive landscape presents the disadvantage of obtaining top talents. It is important to note that Mbele (2023) highlights that effective talent management is a challenge and opportunity presented to organisations, and in light of this, employer branding, technology, and progressive online recruitment processes are put in place to attract qualified talent in a manner that minimises costs while increasing productivity. The need to upskill currently employed individuals and develop new employees has to be undertaken by industries in order to meet the objectives of the Integrated Development Plan. This is true, considering that low levels of skills are a deterrent to economic growth. This is supported by IDP (2021) and Ngonyama-Ndou (2023).

The socio-economic disparities and skill gaps pose a challenge in the attraction and retention of skilled professionals in South Africa. Therefore, it is important that organisations apply strategic methods of talent acquisition, such as employer branding, e-recruitment, and evidence-based hiring to be competitive. In fact, these methods improve an organisation's capability to attract the best talent and increase employee

retention and long-term performance. However, findings have shown that most South African organisations fail in aligning recruitment to wider objectives. It is in the light of this lacuna that the present study examines how talent acquisition practices influence organisational competitiveness and performance.

1.3. Problem statement

It is also important to note that the inadequate supply of critical skills continues to hamper the business sector in South Africa, affecting both private and public organisations and ultimately severely impacting on the country's competitiveness, productivity, and attractiveness to talented individuals. This has been exacerbated by poor quality education previously, inequality in technical training opportunities, and increasing recruitment-related costs, often at the expense of operational efficiency. The skill crisis persists in South Africa, according to recent research by Mutize and (2024), because the education system in the country has not kept pace with changing labor market needs, and many employers still face difficulty in finding an ideal candidate who possesses the right technical expertise combined with essential soft skills.

Moreover, digital transformation has exposed deficits in digital literacy and innovation skills. The general shortage of professionals with technology skills and a lack of investment in digital upskilling make it hard for organisations, especially SMEs, to keep pace with rapid change (Maasdorp, 2022; Madyo & Nyawo, 2023). The shortage is fuelling intense competition for scarce talent across sectors, mainly ICT, engineering, and finance, which is contributing to wage pressure and retention problems (Hoeppli, 2014; Daniels, 2007). RBV provides a conceptual framework, premised on the argument that human capital, considered as a strategic resource, will eventually harm a firm's ability to sustain its competitive advantage if not sufficiently supplied (Barney, 1991). According to the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, organisations in South Africa lack appropriate capabilities that would assist them in reconfiguring or changing employee competencies through shifting demands and changes in technology and market (Teece et al., 1997).

In an added perspective, South Africa is still grappling with the relevant brain drain issue as highly qualified professionals have left and continue to leave for other countries in search of better pay, improved working conditions, and political stability, as mentioned by

Rasool and Botha (2014) and Mlambo and Adetiba (2023). This has weakened global competitiveness, eroded institutional memory, and reduced national innovation capacity in the process. According to human capital theory, individuals are made more productive through training, education, and experience to improve the overall health of the economy, as indicated by Becker (1993). However, losing skilled workers persistently reduces returns on investment in education and lessens the sustainability of talent development in the country.

Besides, public sector organisations have continued to grapple with persistent structural obstacles to recruit and retain talent. Bureaucratic inefficiency, financial constraints, and a lack of congruence between policy and practice have weakened the hiring processes of the government and organisational efficiency in general (Mello, 2017; Khambule, 2021). Generally, poor governance and ineffective implementation of the programs that develop skills have hampered national efforts aimed at addressing the shortage of skills (Tshilongamulenzhe, 2015; Maredi, 2023). According to the institutional theory, these are the structural and regulatory limitations to adaptation policy reform and help in sustaining inefficiency.

These structural issues are further compounded by continued high levels of youth unemployment and slow economic growth in South Africa, which, because these factors further reduce experiential learning and career opportunities, have a multiplier effect on employable talent scarcity. As cited by Mutize (2024) and Maasdorp (2022), these conditions foster a poor transition from education to employment that diminishes organisational talent pipelines. In this regard, the inability of organisations to attract and retain competent professionals has emerged as one of the most binding constraints on the competitiveness of public and private sectors.

Collectively, these challenges indicate a dire need for evidence-based and innovative talent acquisition strategies that have the capacity to attract and retain a pool of high-potential individuals with specialised expertise. These include data-driven hiring, employer branding, and competency-based selection, which have been highly promising in increasing efficiency in recruitment processes. However, their application is very inconsistent across South African sectors because of financial constraints, a lack of technological integration, and low levels of HR digital transformation.

Against this background, the study will investigate the ways in which talent acquisition processes influence an organisation's competitiveness in South Africa through the attraction, selection, and retention of competent professionals. It also aims at investigating good practices and strategic actions that ensure increased efficiency in recruitment and provide long-term outcomes in talent management both for private and public organisnations. The research contributes to management knowledge and practical strategies for sustainable talent management in the context of South Africa by applying such transdisciplinary management theories as RBV, Human Capital, Dynamic Capabilities, and Institutional Theory.

1.4. Study objectives

1.4.1. To examine how different talent acquisition approaches have impacted competitiveness in South African organisations.

1.4.2. To investigate managers and executives' perceptions on talent acquisition practices and their impact on business performance.

1.5. Research questions

1.5.1. How do different talent acquisition approaches impact in competitiveness of organisations in South Africa?

1.5.2. What are managers and executives' perceptions of talent acquisition practices and their impact on business performance?

1.6. Rationale of the study

With today's rapid business and competitive landscape, the talent attraction, recruitment, and retention ability are increasingly becoming a core determinant of business success for organisations. There are various studies of different kinds globally exploring the techniques of acquiring talent but with what can be perceived as few studies directly correlating these methods to measurable business outcomes like productivity, retention, and competitiveness in the South African context. Majority of South African organisations are faced with universal challenges, including skills shortages, high turnover rates, and shifting workforce expectations, and the necessity to implement a context-driven definition of effective talent acquisition.

This study addresses this gap by investigating the perceptions of managers on the effectiveness of current recruitment processes and their organisational performance impact. By examination of the practices based on business outcomes, this study offers valuable information regarding the manner in which talent acquisition can be aligned to overall organisational strategies. The findings of this research aim to help in further building talent plans capable not only of recruiting good candidates but also enhancing the keeping of employees, productivity, and ultimately competitiveness in South African organisations.

1.7. Organisation of chapters

Chapter one: Introduction: This chapter sets the bases for the study through describing background, problem statement, research aim, objectives, questions, significance, scope, terminologies, and dissertation outline.

Chapter two: Literature review: The second chapter summarises the relevant literature comprising theoretical frameworks, analysis of key themes and controversies, critical review of empirical studies, identification of knowledge gaps, and thereby establishes the scholarly foundation for the research.

Chapter three: Research methodology: It describes the methodology that the researcher has used in carrying out the research. This includes design, setting and population, sampling methods, data collection and analysis, and the ethical issues considered. Trustworthiness issues are presented, together with research limitations.

Chapter Four: Presentation and analysis of findings: Chapter four presents the research findings by describing demographic characteristics, categorising data into themes and sub-themes supported by direct quotations, and narrative summaries interpreting the findings.

Chapter Five: Discussion, conclusions, and recommendations: The last chapter provides a review of the findings, discusses the theoretical and practical implications, concludes with policy and research recommendations, and identifies the limitations of the study within the existing literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The chapter examines the impact of the effectiveness of talent acquisition strategies on organisational competitiveness in South African organisations through empirical research and theoretical analysis. It highlights trends, discussions, and gaps in previous research, situating itself in the broader academic dialogue on talent acquisition effectiveness.

2.2. Empirical literature review

2.2.1. Talent acquisition strategies used in South African organisations to attain best candidates

Global competition for talent has forced companies, even those based in South Africa, to focus on the attraction and retention of talent. It is only through local practice that is congruent with the best global practice that successful talent acquisition programs could be developed that are contextually relevant yet globally competitive, enabling organisations to attract and retain high performers while meeting international standards (Deloitte, 2019; Keller & Meaney, 2017). According to Deloitte (2023), other best talent acquisition strategies include strong Employer Brands, Employee Value Propositions, and assuring diversity and inclusion to effect Affirmative Action. Besides, embracing electronic recruitment methods such as artificial intelligence and social networks, along with offering flexible work arrangements, competitive benefits, and partnerships with universities, helps organisations attract talent. Also, embedding corporate social responsibility within talent acquisition practices makes an organisation more attractive to potential employees and aids long-term employment success through aligning recruitment efforts with wider societal values (Deloitte, 2023).

Abiwu and Martins (2024); Ngonyama-Ndou (2023) identifies that South African organisations respond to the competitive challenges at the local and global level by employing different kinds of talent acquisition strategies targeted at attracting high-quality candidates. From the employers' perspective, there is a need to develop EVP and employer branding, which is crucial in organisational attractiveness development. Abiwu

& Martins (2024); Ngonyama-Ndou (2023) states that technology adoption within the recruitment process, including AI and data analytics, increases efficacy and reduces algorithmic bias. Organisations also make attempts to frame job analysis, job descriptions effectively, and diversified sourcing for alignment with strategic objectives. From Deshmukh et al. (2023) and as asserted by Vermeulen (2008), for retaining talent and assuring their success, continual learning for the HR professionals and orientation toward candidate experiences are significant. Studies by Koch et al. (2018), Macpherson et al. (2023), and Wolfswinkeland Enslin (2022), in the South African organisations, brand building, specification of the required skills, utilization of LinkedIn, and cooperation with the stakeholders are key in building effective talent acquisition. Also, the retention strategies focus on wellness of employees, their development, and transformational leadership. The study conducted by Muzanenhamo and Rankhumise (2023) showed that the implementation of wellness programs, increasing time off, giving growth opportunities, and offering permanent contracts may be the factors that positively influence employee satisfaction in the SOEs.

2.2.2. The significance of talent acquisition approaches and its impact on the competitive advantage

Given this, talent acquisition in South African companies is very important, with an aging workforce and technological change calling for appropriate strategies that will help in improving performance, minimizing the gaps in skills, and developing workforces for the future. According to Ngonyama-Ndou (2023), Nzimakwe and Mbele (2024), and Musakuro (2022), talent acquisition has to be amongst the top priorities; similarly, talent management plays an important role in higher education. The sure way of ensuring competitiveness in the economy of South Africa is alignment between the company's objectives and the talent plan. Indeed, effective teamwork, alignment of strategy, and social platforms have greatly influenced talent recruitment and management in performance improvement across industries (Macpherson et al., 2023; Shikweni et al., 2019; Musakuro, 2022).

According to Grobler (2020), talent management is necessary to facilitate the realization of business objectives such as innovation and adaptability. Social media recruitment in South Africa successfully attains diverse candidates, reduces costs, and targets younger generations. Technology-based recruitment offers improved candidate experiences than the use of human resources based-recruitment methods (Kriel & Du Plessis, 2019). Collaboration at the workplace boosts the acquisition of skills and diversity, leading to increased satisfaction and employee retention (Mwambuli & Vorster, 2022). Effective talent acquisition increases competitiveness and, thus, addresses shortfalls in skilled labor in the construction sector. The attraction of talent has been considered a source of competitiveness for organisations. Evidence indicates that evidence-based and innovative approaches attract top performers, hence improving performance and agility of firms. For instance, Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2020), Farndale et al. (2022), Marler and Boudreau (2017), and Melanthiou et al. (2021) argue that the more innovative the approach, the more likely it is to attract top performers who subsequently perform better and with more agility. Other contemporary practices such as employer branding, candidate relationship management, and AI-enabled recruitment enhance quality and reduce time-to-hire. These are strategies that make recruitment shift from reactive towards being strategically proactive. In a similar way, organisational strategy connected with talent acquisition is seen to enhance talent fitness, agility, innovation, and fuel a competitive advantage in today's unpredictable business environments (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013; Farndale et al., 2022).

2.2.3. Strategic Talent Acquisition in Practice: Evidence from South African Companies

Various means of talent acquisition have worked in ways that have greatly influenced the competitiveness of businesses in South Africa through digitalization, employer branding, and alignment to business strategy (Ngcobo et al., 2019). For instance, TSAM has aligned its talent management processes with business strategy in a bid to remain one of the largest vehicle manufacturers. In fact, such linkage to strategy is very crucial for a competitive international industry like manufacturing cars, whose quality, innovation, and effectiveness of operation depend significantly on well-educated and motivated employees (Ngcobo et al., 2019). Secondly, workforce development integrated into

strategic goals saw TSAM develop a strong talent pipeline that ensures business continuity in the long term and productivity.

In the public domain, technology is increasingly being used to solve system problems in recruitment. For example, Zindi (2024) noted that towns have started using computerized hiring systems in order to eliminate inefficiencies and cut administrative queues and enhance transparency of the selection process, something very important in environments characterized by high unemployment as in the case of South Africa. Besides simplifying recruitment, the digital technology helps to match more suitable candidates, hence improving the success of service delivery.

The usefulness of employer brands and EVPs is self-evident in competitive markets. According to Sirin (2018), 81% of South African business leaders acknowledge talent recruitment as a key business concern, testifying to the necessity of strategic recruitment approaches. Companies like Discovery Limited, which has featured in the rankings of the most sought-after employers in South Africa on multiple occasions, testify to how the successful EVP can fuel recruitment achievement. The work carried out by Discovery on innovation, wellness, and purpose as areas of focus has enabled it to latch onto scarce tech and finance talent and secure 17% growth in operating profit for the year 2024 (ZAR 11.6 billion) and healthy stock performance (Discovery Annual Report, 2024).

Similarly, retailing and fintech player Pepkor Holdings tapped into recruitment strategy in order to expand its customer base and provide mobile credit services. By giving significant priority to digitally competent staff and fintech professionals, Pepkor attained 12.8% growth in revenue (ZAR 48.8 billion) and 35% in revenue of the fintech segment (ZAR 3.8 billion) in early 2025 (Wall Street Journal, 2025). Its share price is the witness to this growth, reflecting market confidence on talent-centric strategy.

2.3. Theoretical framework

2.3.1. Human Capital Theory

The research is grounded in Human Capital Theory, in which employees' experience, skills, and knowledge are identified as key to enhancing productivity and competitiveness

(Becker, 1993). In the same line, as with physical capital, recruitment, training, and development expenses can be used to enhance performance. Becker (1993) argued that it is people's skills and knowledge that can create value and guarantee an organisation's long-term success by conducting its operations efficiently. Complementing the theoretical basis, Goldin (2016) goes on to say that "human capital is not only an individual asset but a source of national economic progress," and that organisational achievement notably hinges on the procedure of acquiring and gaining talent for strategic purposes. Such a broad perspective justifies the fact that organisations are rendered more competitive when they attain proper competence.

Human Capital Theory was also highly applicable in this research, as it informed the investigation into the attitudes of managers and executives on the strategies of talent acquisition and their impact on business performance. The theory supports the truism that effective talent acquisition forms the bedrock for a solid human capital foundation. It postulates that organisations benefit immensely when they acquire workers with the required competencies because such employees contribute to innovation, adaptability, and sustain competitiveness of organisations from a competitive environment perspective (Becker, 1993; Goldin, 2016). Talent acquisition, therefore, was seen as a strategic process through which organisations aligned human resource investment with general business objectives.

In sum, Human Capital Theory strongly supported the model of this study in affirming that efficient recruitment of talent develops an effective workforce that builds up the performance and competitiveness of an organisation. This theory was applied in assessing how South African organisations influence their talent attraction practices in view of the mandate of the organisation and its competitive imperative. Finally, Human Capital Theory provided a strong basis for the study by confirming that successful talent acquisition forms an efficient workforce that is in line with organisational goals and supports Becker's perspective on performance and competitiveness.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter reviewed talent acquisition strategy literature and organisational performance critically with the consideration of managerial views and noted the shifting

from transactional processes to drivers of success and linked successful recruitment to innovation and productivity. From Human Capital Theory, it proposed talent as a central resource shaping outcome, while noting sector differences in acquisition strategy. It pointed out the pressing necessity of contextually appropriate research in the South African context for knowledge gap filling, the research agenda, and to guide methodology choice for the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The methodological framework of this qualitative study is outlined in this chapter, which seeks to investigate how talent acquisition strategies influence organisational competitiveness. Qualitative research was the choice for this study because research issues are complex and contextual; this allows detailed, proximal knowledge of participants' everyday experiences, attitudes, and interpretations of their social world according to the study's objectives.

3.2. Research design

Methodologically, the design is exploratory and qualitative in nature. This is justified because the phenomenon, the influence of talent acquisition strategies on organisational competitiveness in South African firms-are not well researched and may involve variables and relationships that at this stage are not clearly defined (George, 2021). In such respect, the present study implemented a qualitative research design in exploring managers' and executives' perceptions of how talent acquisition strategies drive organisational competitiveness within South African organisations. The qualitative research approach was considered most suitable for this present study, as it provided the researchers with an avenue to capture meanings that are complex and dependent upon context, rather than numerical data, as would be seen under any typical quantitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This provides detailed descriptive insight into the lived experiences and social realities of participants and aligns with the study's focus on understanding human perspectives within organisational settings (Nowell et al., 2017).

This research was based on an interpretivist research paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed, subjective, personalistic, and different in each person or situation, and this was observed by Thanh and Thanh (2015). Knowledge exists as a consequence of interactions between researchers and participants in this approach, and hence it is very relevant to organisational studies that look at attitudes, beliefs, and meanings, according to Pulla and Carter (2018). This is an interpretivist position since the aim will be to explore various opinions on talent acquisition strategies rather than testing hypotheses.

Interpretivism maintains that because meaning is contextual and dynamic, in order for researchers to make sense of organisational behavior, they interact reflexively and sympathetically with participants (Simpson 2014; Willis 2007). He further adds, citing Willis (2007), that an interpretivist research design is designed more to comprehend and interpret rather than predict and generalise. This approach will thus be suitable for a South African study in that it will ensure sensitivity to the contextual features of variation shaped by various socio-economic and historical factors moulding organisational cultures and human resource practices. In addition, the interpretivist qualitative design guarantees an inductive reasoning approach, where themes and patterns emerge from the data instead of imposing any preconceived theoretical frameworks. (Paudel, 2024). Thus, deep and flexible exploratory methods were used in this study, necessary for researching phenomena that are not well studied, like the strategic relationship between competitiveness and talent acquisition in an emerging economy.

This is reinforced by the paradigm's emphasis on social interaction and understanding of subjective meaning, as discussed by Simpson (2014). The holistic perspective of interpretivism allows for a number of managerial roles and enables nuanced understanding of how talent strategies are perceived and implemented across different sectors. In concert, these factors ensure higher credibility and contextual relevance of the findings while maintaining that interpretations will be true to participants' experiences, according to Nowell et al. (2017) and Saliya (2016).

3.3. Data collection

Data collection was carried out through individual, semi-structured interviews. Most importantly, emphasis was placed on the opinion of the respondents (Adama, 2015). Demographic questionnaires were used in ascertaining participant appropriateness. The interviews, recorded upon permission, were done on virtual platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams to allow for rich analysis and extensive interrogation of the respondents.

3.4. Population

The workplace participant characteristics were considered, and subject matter opinions were included. The participants were chosen using traits that evoked the phenomenon being studied (Pernecky, 2016). The research targeted senior management employees working in South African private and public organisations, including their HR practitioners

and executive staff. They were targeted because the middle management and managerial level employees up to executive leadership were mainly composed of the groups in the talent procurement process.

3.5. Sampling

In this regard, the researcher has utilized expert opinion sampling, which is a purposive approach, to select respondents with in-depth information on the topic. As advised by Patton and Cochran (2002) and Etikan et al. (2016), such senior management or human resource leadership staff were purposively sampled because they are exposed to talent acquisition. The data collection instrument used here was semi-structured interviews; facilitated questions were combined with exploration of developing themes. A total of 15 individuals from varied industries were included in this study, while senior executives provided the initial contacts.

3.6. Data collection

Thematic analysis is an open and systematic process to find, examine, and report patterns in qualitative data; semi-structured interview data were processed. The process adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2021) well-developed six-step procedure that has widely been noted for clarity and quality in qualitative studies.

3.6.1. Familiarisation with the data

The first step is to fully transcribe the interviews and read the transcripts severally for a rich understanding of the content. Through immersion, the researcher was able to begin noticing repeat ideas and significant observations (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.6.2. Generating initial codes

In step two, relevant data segments were coded for the essential attributes related to research questions, based on both inductive reasoning concerning emerging themes and deductive reasoning based on theory and the literature (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.6.3. Searching for themes

Step three grouped the codes into broader patterns or themes reflecting shared meanings throughout the dataset. Codes reflecting similar underlying concepts were grouped together to form emergent themes that reflected various dimensions of managers' and executives' perceptions of talent acquisition.

3.6.4. Reviewing themes

Themes were developed and contrasted against the coded extracts and the entire dataset for relevance and consistency at step four. Any broad theme or those unsupported by data were modified or excluded in order to arrive at a thematic schema that was consistent and meaningful, according to Clarke and Braun (2018).

3.6.5. Defining and naming themes

This was followed by defining the intrinsic nature of each theme and its worth to the research aims. Naming of themes was done in a manner that reflected both scope and analytic depth (Clarke & Braun, 2018).

3.6.6. Production report

In step six, themes were woven into a coherent narrative in which direct participant quotes were used to illustrate points. This narrative helped connect findings to the broader theoretical and contextual framework of the study and enabled an in-depth analysis of the way in which talent acquisition strategy determines organisational competitiveness (Clarke & Braun, 2018).

3.7. Quality assurance

3.7.1. Trustworthiness

The most general standard for assessing quality, credibility, and integrity in qualitative research is trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are characteristics that establish trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry, whereas in quantitative studies, objectivity, validity, and reliability via measurement are the most important features (Shenton, 2004; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). These four elements ensure that findings are true to participants' experiences, that methods are transparent and replicable, and that interpretations are grounded within the data rather than in the bias of the researcher. Approaches to enhance these and strengthen the overall rigor of the study were embedded throughout this research.

Combined, these elements establish the detailed framework of trustworthiness that ensures the methodological coherence, transparency, and authenticity of this qualitative study. Stringent adherence to the criteria set by Lincoln and Guba (1985) gives proof that the conclusions made in this study are reliable, contextually relevant, and authentic

depictions of how talent acquisition tactics boost organisational competitiveness in South African businesses. The following four key requirements have been addressed to ensure that the validity of this qualitative inquiry has been attained:

3.7.2. Transferability (External Validity)

To enhance transferability, the research utilied thick description by giving elaborate descriptions of the organisational settings, industry sectors, and talent acquisition practices identified among the sample of 15 South African business managers, executives, and Human Resources Practitioners. A small sample size was used, but the participants were sampled purposively across different sectors such as finance, transport, health, government, research and development, and media; thus, it embraced a broad spectrum of talent acquisition activities in the South African economy. By documenting contextual variables such as organisation size, recruitment challenges, and industry-specific strategies, this study provides rich, contextualised results that allow readers and potential researchers to establish the importance and applicability of the results to similar organisational contexts. These kinds of rich descriptions allow an explanation of how the perceived practices and understandings may resonate with other firms doing business under similar conditions, thereby enhancing the transferability of the study findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.7.3. Credibility (Internal Validity)

Triangulation was assured in order to guarantee credibility by collecting data from human resources practitioners, senior managers and executives of varied organisations and industries. Such diversity added richness and gave weight to the findings (Patton, 2002).

3.7.4. Dependability (Reliability)

The interviews were carried out with the same standard semi-structured interview guide to guarantee reliability, allowing probing questions without losing the important areas under investigation, thus enabling useful comparison of the findings as argued by Creswell & Poth (2018).

3.7.5. Confirmability

Confirmability was attained by using researcher reflexivity and reducing bias by utilising detailed field notes, checks on transcription, and external supervision of the analysis. This

helped to ensure that findings were informed by the participants' perspectives rather than researcher assumptions (Shenton, 2004).

3.8. Ethical considerations

3.8.1. Permission to conduct study

The researcher sought permission from the University's Research Ethics Committee before embarking on this study. Informed consent was obtained from each of the participants prior to the study.

3.8.2. Voluntary participation

The participants were free to volunteer or withdraw from the research and thus could do this at any time without any penalty. The research put in place measures for informed consent ethical issues whereby participants had to know they were taking part, the potential outcomes, and that they had a right to decline to take part in the research. According to Rubin and Babbie (2017), the researcher ensures that utmost regard is taken to ensure voluntariness in participation.

3.8.3. Informed consent

According to Klykken (2022), informed consent is essential in social research; it is the foundation of confidence and personal autonomy. Before getting consent, the researcher described the purpose and risks and benefits of the study to participants. Full information was provided with consent forms. Besides, permission for audio recording was asked and at the same time was promised that the request for its deletion will not be penalized according to Padgett (2017).

3.8.4. Anonymity, Confidentiality and Privacy

The Researcher ensured that only participants, her supervisor and herself can access data gathered (Christensen et al, 2015). Identification information had to be removed from research records for confidentiality and participant identities had to be hidden for anonymity (Lune & Berg, 2017). Participant identities were hidden from analysis and sharing of results by use of pseudonyms (Padgett, 2017).

3.9. Summary of chapter

This qualitative study accessed primary data through semi-structured interviews with senior managers, HR experts, and executives in South African public and private sectors.

In this, purposive sampling targeted experienced participants. Thematic analysis identified the key patterns. Strict ethical standards include informed consent and confidentiality that ensure participants are protected and the validity of the research is maintained. The findings from these data are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the effectiveness of talent acquisition strategies on organisational competitiveness: a case of South African organisations. Data was obtained from 15 key informant interviews with HR practitioners, senior manager and executive from both private and public South African organisations in Gauteng province. The interviews were insightful into the status of current talent acquisition strategies within the two sectors. Findings will be presented along the key themes which emerged during analysis. These themes give an understanding of the challenges of talent acquisition, strategies, perceptions, and strategies for improvement. The chapter will be concluded by providing a discussion and summary of the findings.

4.2. The table below depicts the demographic information of participants that took part in the study:

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

Participant No	Positions	Sector
1.	Senior Manager	State owned
2.	Director	Private
3.	Senior Manager	Private
4.	Senior Technical manager	State owned
5.	Acting Executive Manager	State owned
6.	Managing Director (Senior Physiotherapist)	Private
7.	Senior Engineer	Government
8.	Chief Pharmacist	Government
9.	Senior Researcher	State owned
10.	Human Resources Practitioner	State owned
11.	Operations Manager	Private
12.	Deputy Director	Government
13.	Senior Manager	Private
14.	Human Resources Practitioner	Government
15.	Chief Director	Government

4.3. Emerging themes

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the results are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: Themes and Sub-themes

Main theme	Sub-theme
1. Role of HR practitioners in talent acquisition	a) Recruitment b) Identifying skills and gaps c) Advertising vacancies
2. Effective approaches for talent acquisition attraction	a) social media platforms b) Networking and referrals c) Internship programmes d) Offering comprehensive benefits
3. Challenges in talent acquisition	a) Shortage of skills b) Global and local Competitiveness c) Economic instability /financial constraints d) Lengthy hiring processes
4. significance of talent acquisition	a) Increase productivity and efficiency
5. Senior Management role in talent acquisition	a) Recruitment budgets b) setting long term workforce goals c) Identifying gaps
6. Management perception on talent acquisition	a) Employee turnover relationship to talent acquisition b) Misalignment between job expectations and responsibilities c) Strategies for improvement

4.3.1. Theme 1: Role of HR practitioners in talent acquisition

(a). Subtheme: Recruitment

The study findings suggested that recruitment is one of the major roles for HR personnel as part of the talent acquisition strategy. As per the findings, recruitment involves

structured hiring practices and collaboration with HR to secure suitable candidates. Participants had this say about recruitment in talent aquation processes:

“As an HR practitioner, I play a huge role in talent acquisition by overseeing recruitment process, creating positions best suited for expectations and for making sure management choses the best candidates.” ***P14***

*“My main talent acquisition practices involve overseeing recruitment strategies, managing onboarding processes**.”*** Additionally, **P2** added that *“we prioritise internal talent development and promotion, ensuring that employees have opportunities to grow within the organisation”.* ***P2***

“My role involves providing leadership in identifying, attracting, and recruiting top talent, conducting interviews, and managing onboarding processes.” ***P5***

Although **P4** is not formally part of HR, they play an important role in the recruitment of technical positions as explain herein: *"While I’m not directly in HR, I play a crucial role in recruitment for technical roles, such as mechanics, drivers, and fleet controllers."****P4***

(b). Subtheme: Identifying skills and gaps

Participants emphasised identifying organisational skill needs and gaps is a major recruitment strategy that HR personnel in organisations adopts. This is what some of the participants said:

“We leverage data analytics to forecast talent needs and match the right candidates to the right roles faster.” ***P3***

“We identify and try to manage the gap between the skills required for highly specialised roles and the pool of available talent.” **(P2)**

P4 collaborates closely with the HR department to ensure candidates meet both technical and compliance standards, emphasising the importance of identifying appropriate skill sets as expressed herein: *"I collaborate closely with HR during the selection process to ensure candidates meet operational and compliance standards.****"P4***

“I will describe when we wanted two candidates one PhD and one doctoral fellow, the first thing we asked ourselves was, what do we need these people for? what do we need them to help us achieve, so that’s how we were able to come up with an advertisement post and the post spoke to what skills we wanted and helped us identify the skills we really wanted” ***P9***

“I observed that HR is key in helping organisations identify potential for capabilities existing candidates have, or where they lack it. Via skills audits and workforce planning, HR aids in shaping available capacities into strategy target plans, suggesting where they don't have gaps” ***P15***

(c). Subtheme: Advertising vacancies

The findings also revealed that HR practitioners also play a role in job advertisement through online platforms and networks were used to post vacancies and recruit new talent.

“Our organisation follows a structured recruitment process, including job postings on professional networks”. ***(P1)***

“We leverage a variety of strategies, including a strong online presence, showcasing our work through social media platforms”. ***(P2)***

“We use a mix of digital recruitment platforms, headhunting, internal mobility, graduate programmes, and partnerships with universities.” ***P3***

“We utilise online job portals and professional networking sites to advertise to attract skilled candidates”. ***P5***

*"We mostly rely on internal referrals, local advertising (radio and community boards), and partnerships with local training institutions."****P4***

“As HR practitioners, we identify skills needed and then we advertise positions best suited to fill those roles and skills needed” ***P13***

4.3.2. Theme 2: Effective approaches for talent acquisition attraction

(a). Subtheme: Social media platforms

Findings revealed that social media websites are one of the effective means through which organisations utilise to entice talents. Participants also highlighted that social media extends reach and branding. Participants' narratives are shared below:

"*We leverage a variety of strategies, including a strong online presence, showcasing our work through social media platforms and our website."* **(P2)**

"We actively participate in industry networking events, career fairs, and online recruitment platforms such as social media to engage with potential candidates". ***(P1)***

"We use targeted recruitment platforms to reach specific skill sets. LinkedIn campaigns have been particularly effective. ***P5"***

P9 indicated that she's not directly involved in HR recruitment, but she has a major role in ensuring the organisation retains the best candidates: this is what she said:

"We inform HR of the skills that we require from a certain job and then they help us advertise through our web" ***P9***

"HR also plays a significant role in defining the competencies required in order to acquire new talent through platforms like social media and online job portals". ***P15***

(b). Subtheme: Networking and referrals

The findings also revealed that referrals and professional connections are regarded as a highly effective strategy for talent acquisition as indicated by participants herein:

"Leveraging employee referrals… these methods often yield high-quality candidates." **(P1)**. *"Networking and referrals from current employees and industry contacts have also proven to be successful"*. **(P2)**

"*Employee referral programmes and executive search firms have been particularly effective. We mostly rely on internal referrals*."**P3**

P5 Discussed partnerships with educational institutions and targeted recruitment platforms as valuable networking approaches. *"Networking and partnerships with educational institutions have been particularly successful…"* Although not explicitly mentioning employee referrals, the reference to networking through institutions points to building pipeline relationships and community connections to access niche talent.

(c). Subthemes: Internship programmes

Graduate programmes through internships were identified as methods used as a pipeline for future talent by most participants. Below are narratives extracted from participants:

"We have strong partnerships with universities to engage with young talent through internship and graduate programs." **(P1)**

"The most successful approach has been partnering with local universities to offer practicals." ***(P6)***

"Our young talent programme through graduate internships is also a successful pipeline for scarce skills." ***(P3)***

P4 highlighted that internships and apprenticeships, especially through partnerships with local colleges, have been successful in building a future workforce. *"We focus on community engagement, offering internships and apprenticeships, which often lead to full-time employment."*

*"HR is responsible for identifying skill gaps by creating internship programs. Such programs develop future professionals and tackle organisational needs by targeting areas where there are skills gaps like digital communication, content creation, or data analysis. "****P12***

(d). Subtheme: Offering comprehensive benefits

Some participants identified retaining talent though offering comprehensive benefits and flexibility play a key role in talent attraction. This is what participants had to say below:

"Attracting talent and addressing skill gaps require comprehensive benefits packages, including healthcare and flexible schedules, enhancing employee satisfaction and loyalty, crucial for long-term organisational stability and growth." ***P10***

"We focus on offering competitive salaries, comprehensive benefits, and clear career progression opportunities. Additionally, we provide flexible work arrangements, such as hybrid work models where possible." ***P1***

"Providing attractive employment perks and development opportunities has proven to be successful. We emphasise a supportive work environment, mentorship opportunities, and a manageable workload." ***P6***

"Offering postgraduate study support and competitive relocation packages has been successful." ***P7***

"Offering competitive compensation packages, fostering a positive company culture, and providing opportunities for career growth has proven to be effective". ***P5***

P4 indicated *"Flexible working conditions and additional benefits are sometimes offered to attract and retain staff in a competitive market. We often need to offer flexible working hours or additional benefits to retain staff."*

4.3.3. Theme 3: Challenges with talent acquisition

(a). Subtheme: Shortage of skills

The study findings highlighted the scarcity of specialised skilled professionals poses a challenge and impacts recruitment.

"The scarcity of skilled professionals, particularly in niche areas of the arts and culture sector is a serious challenge. For instance, roles requiring expertise in emerging technologies like virtual reality or advanced digital media are difficult to fill, which can sometimes slow down project timelines". ***(P2)***

"A lack of candidates with the necessary expertise. For example, some junior physios have strong academic backgrounds but struggle with soft skills…" ***P6***

*"The biggest challenge is the scarcity of digital and analytics skills. The scarcity of skilled professionals can lead to increased competition and longer recruitment processes."**P5***

Contrary to the above, **P9** indicated that highly skilled candidates pose a challenge to HR personnel as they baffle with choosing the right candidates as explained herein:

*"Challenge we always experience is that in most instances many of the CV we receive have high number of highly competent candidates to a point where it gets difficult to choose the best candidate". **P9***

(b) Subtheme: Global and local competitiveness

Participants indicated that global markets hinder talent attraction and retention due to numerous options for skilled professionals. Key factors include competitive compensation, company culture, career growth, and effective employment branding. participants' narratives are shared below:

*"Many skilled individuals are either in high demand or recruited by global firms offering attractive compensation packages. This creates intense competition, making it difficult to secure the best candidates". **(P1)***

P1 went further to elaborate*: "The global demand for skilled engineers drives many to pursue overseas opportunities for better pay and growth. To retain talent, we must enhance our efforts with competitive salaries, training, career advancement, and innovative hiring strategies, including recruitment technology and international talent acquisition."*

*"External factors such as global competition and the brain drain of skilled professionals to larger metropolitan areas or international organisations certainly influence our talent acquisition efforts." **(P2)***

*"Competition from fintech companies is increasing… they offer more flexible work environments and as a result, we lose best candidates to our competitors". **P3***

*"Competition from larger companies offering better compensation packages makes retaining talent difficult". **P4***

*"Staying competitive in the job market is a challenge. Global competition has pushed us to be more agile and competitive with our offers." **P7***

Contrary to the other, **P14** underscored that strategic talent recruitment adds to an organisation's competitive advantage at both local and global levels. *"Employing skilled individuals with international experience provides organisations insights, innovative methods, and competitive advantages, enabling swift local market responses and outperforming competitors."*

(c). Subtheme: Economic instability /financial constraints

The study also revealed financial and economic constraints as a factor that influence talent acquisition strategies negatively.

*"Limited resources for recruitment and retention due to broader economic issues. Economic instability has forced us to become more selective and efficient in hiring." **P6***

*"Economic instability has also led to more contract-based hiring rather than permanent positions." **P7***

*"Companies have adjusted strategies due to economic instability… streamlining operations to remain competitive and financially resilient." **P5***

*"Because of financial instability in our economy, I'm noticing now that people are moving to organisations that are secure in terms of finances". For example, we know that universities are very stable in terms of finances and everything, so we see many people living our organisation to join university institutions". **P9***

(d) Subtheme: Lengthy hiring processes

Some participants indicated that lengthy hiring processes often pose as a challenge for organisations:

P9 "*My challenge with talent acquisition is that it takes very long. The lengthy hiring process can be draining, time consuming and financial straining. if we do interviews today from the time we've posted, in my mind I don't expect the process to take longer than 3 weeks, but sometimes it can take longer than 3 months, so that is a challenge"*

"Another challenge is the lengthy hiring process, as technical roles require rigorous assessments and interviews, which can delay recruitment". ***P1***

4.3.4. Theme 4: Significance of talent acquisition

(a) Subtheme: Increase productivity and efficiency

Strategic hiring significantly enhances organisational productivity and goal achievement by aligning new hires with direction, improving team performance, fostering innovation, and ensuring better project delivery and operational effectiveness.

"Hiring the right professionals directly impact innovation, productivity, and long-term retention. For example, a recent strategic hire of an experienced engineering lead significantly improved our project execution efficiency and reduced downtime, which ultimately enhanced our competitiveness in the market". ***(P1)***

"Talent acquisition is crucial to our organisation's success, as it directly impacts the creativity, innovation, and overall quality of the work we produce." **P2**

P4 strongly emphasised that effective hiring directly impacts business performance, including service delivery, customer satisfaction, and vehicle fleet management as indicated below:

*"Hiring qualified drivers directly affects service delivery and customer satisfaction." "Recruiting reliable workshop staff has also helped reduce vehicle downtime, improving our fleet efficiency and service punctuality."****P4***

4.3.5. Theme 5: Senior Management role in talent acquisition

(a). Subtheme: Recruitment budgets

Senior management significantly influences recruitment budgets, enabling investment in tools like software and branding. Prioritising budgets with organisational goals supports competitive compensation, effective onboarding, and well-resourced initiatives to attract the best talent.

P11 highlighted *"Senior management determines the recruitment budget, impacting talent acquisition quality. Adequate funding allows for competitive salaries, targeted advertising, and specialized recruitment tools, but often limits the ability to attract best candidates".*

"Senior management plays a significant role in shaping talent acquisition strategies by approving recruitment budgets and ensuring that hiring aligns with the company's overall business strategy". ***(P1)***

"Senior management allocate resources to support hiring efforts for talent development programs…" ***P7***

"Senior management involved in approving budgets spearheading key initiatives…" ***P5***

*"Senior management is actively involved, especially in approving hiring plans and reviewing performance metrics tied to staffing."****P4***

(b). Subtheme: setting long-term workforce goals

The study highlights that long-term strategic alignment in hiring is crucial. Senior management must define workforce goals to address talent needs and skills gaps, ensuring future competitiveness and adaptability to evolving organisational requirements.

P12 highlighted that *"senior management is crucial for establishing long-term labor goals aligned with strategic intent, enabling proactive talent recruitment and sustainable skills development to enhance competitiveness in the changing labor market".*

“Senior management plays a vital role in setting long-term workforce development goals, ensure that the organisation remains adaptable and competitive over time”. ***P1***

“Senior management plays a key role in aligning recruitment practices with our long-term vision and goals and ensure competitiveness within the organisation.” ***P2***

(c). Subtheme: Identifying gaps

Results indicate that leadership aligns hiring with strategic needs. Participants highlighted talent gap identification as crucial in strategic workforce planning, comparing current competencies with future requirements to pinpoint deficiencies in personnel, experience, or skills.

“Identifying key positions in advance allows management to create effective succession, training, or recruitment plans, ensuring continuity and maintaining talent for performance. ***P14***

“Understanding where skill shortages exist in the workforce. We maintain relationships with academic institutions to foster future talent pipelines.” ***P7***

“Leadership discusses pipeline gaps. “Understanding staffing requirements… is a core part of my leadership role.” ***P5***

P4 indicated management closely monitors staffing levels and retention to identify gaps that could affect operational efficiency. *"We hold quarterly meetings to assess workforce gaps and retention trends."****P4***

P9 however, indicated that organisation identify skills through training:

“For instance, I’ve seen company A train people to be managers, so they collaborated with universities to give short courses on management skill, so that really equips a candidate and it broadens their knowledge on management”. ***P9***

4.3.6. Theme 6: Management perception on talent aquation

(a). Subtheme: Employee turnover relationship to talent acquisition

The research reveals that high employee turnover strains talent acquisition, leading to increased recruitment costs and negatively impacting employer reputation. To attract and retain talent effectively, firms should align talent attraction campaigns with retention initiatives to enhance new hire success and tenure.

"A strong recruitment process ensures the selection of suitable candidates, resulting in low turnover and motivated employees. In contrast, flaws in recruitment lead to high turnover, disrupting organisational stability and increasing hiring costs due to mismatched job expectations." ***(P1)***

"Turnover rates can be linked to how well we align recruitment efforts with organisational needs. A more strategic and intentional approach to talent acquisition could help reduce turnover." **(P2)**

P4 links higher turnover directly to ineffective recruitment processes, especially when cultural fit and job readiness are not properly evaluated. *"Definitely. If the recruitment process is rushed or doesn't properly assess cultural fit or job readiness, turnover increases."*

P13 *"emphasised how high employee turnover strains recruitment, causing resource overload and lower hire quality. This ongoing turnover signals issues like poor cultural fit and ineffective onboarding in talent acquisition".*

one of the respondents has mentioned, *"If we continue to hire but people keep leaving, we need to go back and look at how we're hiring in the first place." That highlight having recruitment strategies as part of retention efforts to build a stable, motivated workforce".* ***P10***

(b). Subtheme: Misalignment between job expectations and responsibilities

Where the responsibilities of a job are either not communicated or are not aligned with the expectations of the candidates, it leads to dissatisfaction, poor performance, and increased turnover. participants emphasised how disparities between expected and real responsibilities resulted in talent management problems.

*“Discrepancy between what candidates expect and what the job entails is sometimes a challenge. We’ve learned to improve our interview questions and onboarding to better match expectations and retain staff longer”. **P6**.*

P12 identified job postings as being misaligned with actual work as a significant problem impacting talent hiring and retention. *“Candidates are typically enticed to roles by job listings and prospects, but misalignment happens when the actual work is distinct. This misalignment leads to early dissatisfaction, reduced motivation, and in certain cases, early turnover”*

According to **P4** There is a recognised need for improved coordination between HR and operations to ensure job roles are clearly defined and expectations are met as expressed herein: *"We need more collaboration between HR and operational departments to refine job requirements." **P4***

(c). Subtheme: Strategies for improvement

Recommendations to enhance talent hiring. Participants made actionable recommendations for enhancing talent acquisition processes and addressing existing challenges, such as inefficiencies, turnover, and competitiveness.

“To improve talent acquisition strategies and enhance competitiveness, it is important to streamline the recruitment process, reducing the time taken to identify and onboard candidates.” (**P1)**

“Employer branding programs need to be strengthened to position the company as a place of choice to work. With advanced hiring technologies, such as AI-driven candidate assessments and data analysis, also improving decision-making in recruitment and overall quality of hire.” (**P1)**

“I would suggest more investment in targeted training programs that upskill current employees to match the evolving needs of the industry. We could also develop stronger partnerships with creative and technical educational institutions to create a more direct pipeline of talent.” (**P2)**

"More collaboration between small practices and training institutions to shape graduates." ***P6***

P5 *indicated: "Creating a community of practice a platform for collaboration… promotes a culture of learning and adaptability."* ***P5***

Participant 5 recommends digitising parts of the hiring process and shifting towards a more proactive, data-driven approach to talent acquisition. *"I see a shift towards more proactive and data-driven approaches using workforce analytics to forecast needs and investing more in in-house talent development programs."*

"If we can improve on the talent acquisition period, for example if we advertise a position, I don't expect it to take longer than 3 weeks, so if we can improve on fast tracking the process" ***P9***

"Naturally when organisations reject individuals, they don't specify why, so it would be great if they point out exactly on which areas and skills they should improve on" ***P14****"*

As one of the participants described*, "New recruits quickly disengage when they realise that the job is not what they thought it was."* This mismatch not only affects employee morale but also reflects poorly on the organisation's recruitment process, highlighting the need for improved communication and more accurate job descriptions in recruiting. ***P11***

4.4. Discussion of results

4.4.1. Theme 1: Role of HR Practitioners in Talent Acquisition

These results of the study indicated that the three important responsibilities of HR professionals in talent attraction are hiring, identifying skill gaps, and posting job openings. The respondents identified coordination between operations and human resources and formalised procedures for recruitment. For example, one respondent referred to "identifying skill gaps, close working with HR," while another identified "providing leadership in identifying, attracting, and recruiting top talent."

These positions also support the notion that strategic resourcing and capability-building go hand in hand with modern HR functions. Armstrong and Taylor (2023) state that organisational capability is highly dependent upon strategic human-resource

management in terms of workforce planning, recruitment, and induction procedures. This leads directly to the evidence provided by the participants.

This is further supported by the cooperation of operations and HR in coordinating the requirements related to both technical and compliance issues, supporting the competency-based HR practices. According to Ulrich et al. (2017), HR is a boundary spanner in translating business needs into recruitment strategy. The participant reinforcement of technical-operational alignment and, consequently, the need for the proficiency of HR professionals in identifying business needs and coordinating recruitment accordingly are data findings that corroborate this model.

4.4.2. Theme 2: Effective Approaches for Talent Acquisition Attraction

This is further supported by a study that shows firms use a mix of traditional and modern approaches to find talent, including networking/referrals, social media, and internships. Both enhance attractiveness and the volume of applicants. The prevalence of using social networking sites, like LinkedIn Campaigns, is corroborated by recent statistics showing that digital hiring is becoming increasingly important. For example, Tuttle and Critchlow (2025) found that digital tools, such as AI, predictive analytics, and online platforms that enable rapid candidate sourcing and selection, are fundamentally changing the methods utilised in the recruitment process. The same goes for the trend witnessed in this study, where the respondents stressed social media presence and focused recruitment efforts. Additionally, Indra Setiawan, 2024, found that in such "talent-war" situations, where the competition is tough, online recruitment platforms and applicant tracking systems enhance productivity and employer branding.

The results indicated that networking and referral tactics worked very well. According to the respondents, professional relationships and referrals of current employees provide better candidates with better cultural fit. This supports research, such as that by Zamri and Halim (2024), which shows referrals often improve fit and retention. It was important to note, however, that while referrals can make things faster and more fitting, they can also reduce the diversity of candidate pools if outreach or internship pipelines are not utilised in concert with them. The results thus indicate a balanced strategy that uses referrals but creates pipelines, internships, and outreach in order not to lose diversity and become homogeneous.

The data findings also clearly showed that internships and graduate programs represent a future talent pipeline. This is in line with new studies showing that, when properly designed, internships enhance early retention and build a sense of community (Haunschild et al., 2024). For instance, a diary study reported that in cases where interns have structured tasks, there is a significant improvement in their self-perceived learning, which may better prepare them for employment and tenure (Haunschild et al., 2024). Thus, the participants' comments on "strong partnerships with universities to engage young talent" reflect an established best practice.

It was further established that generous packages, including competitive remuneration, flexible scheduling, and actual career development, formed the core of the approach in attracting and retaining talent. In this regard, studies indicate that firms with clearly articulated EVPs driven by flexibility, growth, and career prospects tend to outperform those anchored on pay when facing talent shortages (Urme, 2023). Consequently, the information justifies that the offer presented by an organisation is as critical as the channels utilised to attract customers.

Lastly, though not the main focus of the findings, data indicate technological recruitment enablers such as online advertising and targeted campaigns. The emphasis of recent research has been on how AI and analytics can greatly enhance selection speed and accuracy (Tuttle & Critchlow, 2025; Chen et al., 2022). This is indeed reflected in participants' shifting to online targeting. It may well benefit organisations to use digital tools supporting the people-centered strategies described in this study. Multi-channel sourcing, pipeline building, and strong EVPs are therefore examples of effective strategies in the study's findings. However, in order to remain competitive, organisations also have to manage trade-offs, including speed vs. quality and referrals vs. diversity, and increasingly integrate digital tools.

4.4.3. Theme 3: Challenges with Talent Acquisition

The data findings identify four sub-themes of challenge: lack of skills, local and global competition, financial and economic constraints, and protracted hiring procedures.

Skill shortage: The discovery of a lack of digital and analytical specialists supports studies conducted on the gap in skills globally (Bone et al., 2023). Due to this scarcity of

skills, longer recruitment cycles, better remuneration, and increased competition have been encountered by organisations. Therefore, it authenticates the accounts of the respondents. Logically, it would then be derived that the balance between internal skill development and external hiring has to be struck by companies, which is supported through recommendations from the talent management literature (Urme, 2023).

Global and local competitiveness: The participants identified that multinational corporations rely on flexible working arrangements and higher salaries to attract top talent. This is in line with the literature on global talent management, which claims that companies must compete in a talent war setting through providing development, mobility, and employer branding (Gilch & Sieweke, 2020). Local organisations must therefore focus on differentiation of EVPs beyond salary and even regional retention strategies, as the data would suggest they are cognisant of the competitive disadvantage.

Economic instability/financial constraints: The literature on workforce planning in turbulent environments indeed supports the idea that hiring cautiously owing to the economic climate, preferring contract over permanent employment, and recruiting on a tight budget all contribute negatively to talent acquisition. In this respect, cost-cutting measures may well lead to slower hiring, bad candidate experience, and shifting HR from a strategic to a very reactive approach.

Long hiring processes: The dissatisfaction of participants with regards to time-to-hire, versus the reality of more than 3 months, is in line with studies indicating a relationship between a longer hiring process and WA-HR risk and candidate dropout, as found in Setiawan (2024). A key realisation is that speed in hiring is a competitive advantage in talent-scarce markets. HR must therefore track time-to-offer as a KPI and facilitate the process by using e-recruitment and delegating decision powers, for example.

Taken together, these challenges suggest that even when organisations recognise best-practice strategies, structural frictions, along with external and internal ones, impede the best possible execution. A critical reflection is that good practice is not enough; execution capacity, resourcing, process design, and market conditions interact in determining outcomes.

4.4.4. Theme 4: Significance of Talent Acquisition

Results from this study highlight the fact that effective talent acquisition can be viewed as much more than administrative or HR-driven activities; rather, it is an intrinsic part of strategy and touches the core of organisational success. Quality hires enhance productivity, innovation, and service delivery. For instance, some of the respondents testified to the importance of experienced recruits, such as a lead engineer, in terms of improved project execution, reduced downtime, and higher operational efficiency. These findings confirm the premises of Human Capital Theory, which contend that investments in competent, skilled individuals have quantitative organisational returns. In the same vein, Collings et al. (2023); Cooke et al. (2023) suggest that TA is a strategic investment that will enhance the firm's competitive advantage by capability building and developing innovation potential. Afsar and Umrani (2024) also assert that those organisations capable of attracting and retaining high-performing talents will be more able to sustain superior performance along with adaptability in dynamic environments.

4.4.5 Theme 5: Senior Management Role in Talent Acquisition

According to the findings, senior management influences the hiring budget, long-term workforce objectives, and the identification of skill gaps. This is also supported by strategic HRM theory, which sees management's top-down support as crucial to successful HR alignment (Ulrich et al., 2017). Recruitment is ad hoc and reactive where leadership does not commit to strategic workforce planning and budgeting. Highlighting how long-term objectives and budgeting affect recruitment alignments underlines that HR cannot exist in a vacuum outside business strategy.

High management plays a vital role in talent acquisition, guiding recruitment budgets and aligning workforce goals with organisational strategies. The study found that senior leaders actively allocate resources for effective recruitment, enhance employer branding, and provide competitive rewards. Key findings emphasised the approval of recruitment budgets and their alignment with business strategies as essential for successful talent acquisition. Top management’s involvement in developing hiring plans and monitoring staffing metrics ensures recruitment meets organisational requirements. This resonates with Farndale et al. (2022), asserting that management backing is crucial for securing

recruitment resources and addressing future skill gaps, aligning with Collings et al. (2019)'s view.

The findings emphasise the crucial role of senior leadership in identifying skill shortages and implementing solutions. Management regularly assesses staffing and retention to align the workforce with business objectives. A proactive approach to addressing skills gaps ensures organisations adapt to market changes. Furthermore, collaboration with higher education for talent development highlights the significance of long-term workforce planning. This aligns with Festing and Schäfer's (2014) view that continuous workforce analysis is essential for effective strategic talent management and business continuity.

4.4.6 Theme 6: Management Perception on Talent Acquisition

Strong sub-themes in the data include high post-hire turnover, a mismatch between job expectations and responsibilities, and the need for better recruitment–retention linkage. These problems reflect traditional recruitment issues: early turnover rises when job advertisements and selection procedures fail to reflect real job demands (Dineen & Soltis, 2011). In addition, the literature on person-job and person-organisation fit highlights the effects of fit on performance and retention. As one respondent stated, "if we keep hiring but people keep leaving, we need to go back and look at how we're hiring in the first place." Structured onboarding, early career support, and realistic job previews are ways an organisation can close the gap between expectations and reality.

The results also showed that managers consider recruitment as a crucial function within the organisation given the rates of turnover and mismatches in job expectations. The majority of respondents indicated that high turnover keeps the recruitment departments under continuous pressure, increasing labour costs and making team dynamics unstable. The respondents mentioned that one of the primary reasons for turnover was a gap between what the newly recruited employees expected and the actual job experience, which generally led to dissatisfaction and early departure.

This incompatibility in perception was attributed to poor communication in the recruitment process, with a focus on clarity of role, organisational culture, and expectations of performance. According to the respondents, employees who take on jobs without proper understanding of responsibilities or knowledge of the organisational structure become

easy targets to disengage or quit. This evidence conforms to Cao et al. (2021) and Hutchinson and Purcell (2022), who asserted that unrealistic views on jobs hurt employee retention and organisational stability.

In response, a few organisations reported moving towards strategic recruitment practices that focus on aligning the candidates with the values, technical needs, and culture of the organisation. A few participants reported such emerging practices as personality tests, formal interviews, and realistic job previews to reduce mismatches. Edwards et al. (2020) have also reiterated that task fit, and cultural fit inconsistencies result in premature resignations. Other participants mentioned the emerging AI and predictive analytics trends applied to applicant-job matching and also for constructing employer brands to hire talent with greater likelihood of staying. While not mainstream in practice as yet, these practices were considered to be high-potential means of proactive talent recruitment. It is thus found to be consistent with Kim et al. (2021), who hypothesise that branding and smart technologies add to improved recruitment efficiency.

Moreover, some organisations indicated internal development programs such as mentoring and onboarding that had reduced the utilisation of external hires and improved retention-a move supported by Kang et al. (2021). Another factor mentioned that was most responsible for more engaged workers and less premature turnover was prompt feedback, transparent communication during the hiring process, and efficient hiring processes. This finding by participants aligns with those presented by Sullivan (2022).

4.5 Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretical Implications: The results theoretically support the Resource-Based View and Human Capital Theory, which view human talent as a significant strategic asset that contributes to a firm's long-term competitive advantage. The findings support these theories by demonstrating the relationship between talent acquisition choices and important outcomes like organisational efficiency, creativity, and productivity. The argument that human resources are strategic assets that impact organisational performance and the process of generating long-term value rather than just being operational inputs is further supported by this. Furthermore, the results provide empirical

support for the idea that creating innovative and learning-oriented organisational cultures includes effective recruitment practices.

Practical Implications: The study's practical implication is that businesses should view hiring new employees as a strategic investment rather than a cost-driven HR task. Business performance metrics like time-to-productivity, innovation results, and quality improvements should be used to gauge how effective hiring is. In order to make evidence-based decisions regarding workforce planning and match hiring practices with organisational objectives, HR professionals must collaborate closely with senior managers. In addition, in order to create a skilled and flexible workforce that can maintain operational excellence, the companies must improve employer branding, streamline e-recruitment processes, and evaluate post-hire results.

Overview of General Findings: The entire study offers proof that HR specialists are essential in coordinating hiring practices with corporate goals and skilfully combining new and conventional talent acquisition techniques to enhance workforce quality. The main themes that emerged were the strategic role that HR professionals play in recruitment coordination, the effectiveness of "blended" attraction strategies like social media and networking, and the use of development opportunities, internships, and incentives to draw in high-ability candidates. All things considered, the results show how strong, empirically funded talent acquisition procedures significantly boost organisational success through increases in output, creativity, and long-term retention results.

4.6. Concluding remarks

This study has identified that talent acquisition itself is a driver of organisational success, rather than an administrative function. Good recruitment improves output levels, efficiency, and innovation. Budgeting and talent need planning are core functions of senior leadership, which exhibits the seriousness and commitment on the part of leadership. Turnover arises from a mismatch between jobs and expectations from jobs, which reflects problems in onboarding and well-defined roles. The proactive methods for improvement in talent sourcing include technology applications, employer branding, and investing in internal talent building, all matched with long-term goals and objectives. The next chapter concludes with the study and provides recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter concludes the study. The conclusions and recommendations chapter serves as a critical assessment of the research findings and provides an overview of the key insights gained from the analysis. The chapter will also provide limitations and future recommendations.

5.2. Summary of findings and conclusions

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This study confirms talent acquisition as a strategic role that is a critical determinant in the organisational competitiveness, efficiency, and productivity context of South Africa. The investigation into the various organisations operating within different sectors proved that good recruitment practices, supported by appropriate leadership involvement and strategic fit, yield increased team performance, reduction of project delivery times, and enhanced overall quality of output. These findings respond to Objective 1, reaffirming that talent acquisition strategies do create a considerable difference in strengthening the competitive positions of South African organisations.

Relating to Objective 2, this research established that managers and executives consider talent acquisition as a core business function and not an HR effort. The participants indicated the involvement of senior management in manpower planning, budgeting, and forecasting future workforce needs to ensure a pipeline of talent to overcome future shortfalls. It was also established that there was a perfect extreme relation between recruitment practices and staff turnover, and one of the early departure reasons was poor onboarding, cultural fit, and mismatched expectations. The above perception has been used to point out the belief that recruitment practices that are focused on retention are a prime ingredient in successful long-term business.

From the findings, the study recommends a portfolio of measures to enhance talent procurement: utilisation of technology and data analysis in order to drive efficiency in recruitment processes, enhancement of employer branding, links with schools, and investment in in-house training. It calls for an active, strategic, and inter-disciplinary effort towards developing a sustainable long-term competitive talent pool. It underlines that strategic recruitment is a strategic asset driving productivity, efficiency, innovation, and works in the interest of long-term business objectives. Manpower planning, budgeting, and gap analysis by senior managers drive the quality and timing of recruitment.

The findings of this study show that employee turnover is linked to recruitment success, mismatched expectations, and poor onboarding. Each of these problems has an integrated solution that includes state-of-the-art recruitment technology, improved employer branding, internal talent development, and better job-role fit. Firms that invest in strategic talent acquisition are most likely to result in a high-performance, engaged, and resilient workforce within a competitive environment. This study confirms that South African organisations are most likely to develop a resilient and high-performing workforce to cope with the increasingly competitive and dynamic business environment by adopting talent acquisition as an asset of strategy and not just a reactive mechanism.

5.3. Recommendations

5.3.1. Strengthening Alignment Between Recruitment and Retention

Results showed that most organisations were more concerned with filling their vacant positions rather than developing ways of retaining workers on the job in the long term; this explains the high turnover and skills mismatch. Organisations in this regard should develop integrated talent strategies to connect recruitment to retention goals. To achieve this, realistic job previews, concise job descriptions, and onboarding can help staff members understand the culture and expectations of the company on the first day. According to Collings et al. (2023), talent acquisition must be aligned with career satisfaction and long-term engagement because the earlier these two factors are achieved, the lower the turnover ratio and the higher the productivity. This recommendation's driving force is thus the understanding that retention begins at the hiring stage, and candidates are more likely to stay and perform well when they're well-suited to their roles and the culture.

5.3.2. Enhance Senior Management Involvement

The study found that though HR professionals played an active role in hiring, the limited involvement of senior management undermined strategic alignment and accountability. It is, therefore, crucial that senior leaders establish workforce priorities, approve budgets for hiring, and meaningfully review recruitment outcomes. Their involvement provides the strategic lead that should make hiring achievable of the organisation's longer-term objectives and more general aims. Evidence supports the argument of Armstrong and Taylor (2023) that human resource strategies are most effective when integrated at the top management decision-making level. Greater leadership reinforces the connection of organisational performance with investment in human capital for continued development and competitiveness.

5.3.3. Invest in Employer Branding and Recruitment Technology

This research has identified the increasing role that digital recruitment tools play in creating a strong employer brand as important in finding the best talent in the competitive labor market. It thus calls for increased investment in AI-driven hiring platforms, predictive analytics, and automated screening tools to improve the effectiveness and quality of

applicants. Effective employer branding strategies showcasing diversity, cultural fit, and employee growth opportunities raise an organisation's appeal to potential employees. Cooke et al. (2023) asserts that today, the digital transformation and reputation of every employer have become major differentiators in the talent marketplace. The attempt toward improving the hiring process in order to attract top talent and position the business as an employer of choice justifies the above suggestion.

5.3.4. Build Talent Pipelines Through Partnerships

One theme that came up time and again in this study is the need to collaborate with education and training providers if the gap in skills was to be bridged and plans to be made for the future of the workforce. By working with a provider of education and training, such as educational institutions, trade associations, or other relevant organisations, co-designing of curriculum, work experience, and direct entry into the company can be facilitated by the organisation. As rightly pointed out, active participation lowers recruitment costs, removes any academic-job requirement gap, and ensures a steady flow of qualified candidates joining the workforce (Ng & Law, 2023). Such collaboration adds value to an organisation by enhancing its reputation for national skill development and corporate social responsibility.

5.3.5. Internal Talent Development

It emerged from the study that reliance on external recruitment generally tends to limit employee morale and organisational learning. It is expected that organisations will, therefore, nurture the talents of their workforce, whether through career growth opportunities, focused upskilling, or management training programs. Internal mobility cuts down hiring costs and boosts loyalty, translating into organisational stability. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2023), investment in employees presages better engagement, continuity of performance, and a culture of growth. This recommendation is informed by the need to ensure that the organisation attains resilience; building internal talent pipelines guarantees the continuity of critical positions, limits organisations' reliance on labor markets, and cushions them by offering professional growth paths that raise retention.

5.4. Limitations

The study, "The Effectiveness of Talent Acquisition Strategies on Organisational Competitiveness: A case of South African Organisations," was not without limitations. First, there was limited generalisability in the results when participants were small or limited in number, or within a particular sector. Results could also be affected by external factors in the economy of South Africa and the changes in the labour market. Furthermore, due to time constraints, the study may have failed to record the long-term repercussions of the talent acquisition processes. Data collection methods are prone to bias in that the answers tend to be subjective opinion-based rather than facts. The study is context-specific, reflecting practices and attitudes within a certain organisational and cultural setting; therefore, the findings are not transferable to other contexts. Also, in light of the fast-changing talent acquisition environment, especially with technologies, the findings represent a snapshot at one point in time and cannot capture all the emerging trends or forthcoming shifts in recruitment practices.

5.5. Conclusion of the study

The study, therefore, underlines the pivotal role of hiring talents for improving organisational productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness. Effective recruitment has to be done in tandem with long-term workforce objectives and strategies for retaining workers. Involvement of top management in setting goals and identifying gaps in talent will help optimise recruitment effectiveness. Furthermore, the turnover problem needs to be tackled, and job demands have to be coupled with responsibilities to successfully develop talent through strategic means in a data-driven manner. Future research should be directed toward understanding the talent acquisition practices of different industries and cultures for generalisation. Longitudinal research will uncover how long-term effects due to recruitment practices prevail in the context of organisations regarding their performance and retention. Also, studying the influence of emerging technologies like predictive analytics and AI will provide an insight into optimising the talent pipeline and tackling challenges such as turnover and mismatches.

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APPENDIX

THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. PART A: Background information

1.1. Can you briefly describe your role and experience in talent acquisition or Human Resources?

1.2. What are the main talent acquisition practices your organisation uses?

2. PART B: Talent acquisition approaches

2.1. What strategies do you use to attract skilled professionals? Which approaches have been the most successful?

2.2. What key challenges does your organisation face in talent acquisition, especially regarding skills mismatch and staying competitive?

2.3. Have you noticed any changes in strategies due to external pressures like global competition or economic instability?

3. PART C: Talent acquisition & competitive advantage

3.1. How critical is talent acquisition to your organisation's success? Can you give examples where it has contributed to competitiveness, productivity and retention?

3.2. How does the scarcity of skilled professionals affect your organisation's ability to attract talent?

4. PART D: Leadership & external factors

4.1. How involved are senior management in shaping talent acquisition strategies?

4.2. How do external factors like global competition or brain drain influence your talent acquisition efforts?

4.3. How do talent acquisition practices align with business performance? Can you provide examples of positive or negative impacts?

4.4. What is your perception of employee turnover and its relationship with talent acquisition? Are turnover rates influenced by talent acquisition effectiveness?

5. PART E: Closing reflections

5.1. What changes would you suggest for improving talent acquisition and competitiveness?

5.2. Where do you see talent acquisition strategies heading in the next few years?

5.3. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding talent acquisition and organisational competitiveness?