



TALENT MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN KNOWLEDGE INTENSIVE FIRMS

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ABSTRACT: *This study conducted a systematic literature review by synthesizing existing literature on talent management (TM) and employee retention in knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs). Using the PRISMA framework, the review analyzed 72 peer-reviewed articles published between 2013 and 2025, sourced from Scopus, Taylor & Francis online, Wiley online library online, JSTOR. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were included to provide a comprehensive understanding of how TM practices such as talent acquisition, leadership development, succession planning, and knowledge transfer affect employee retention outcomes such as turnover intention, job embeddedness, loyalty, and affective commitment in the context of KIFs. Following the tenets of the PRISMA 2020 framework, the study applies rigorous screening and inclusion criteria to assess conceptual alignment, empirical strength, and contextual relevance of the various papers. The findings affirm that TM is not merely an HR activity but a strategic enabler of organizational resilience, competitive advantage, and knowledge continuity in today's rapidly evolving, post-pandemic economy. The analysis shows that effective TM practices such as talent acquisition, leadership development, succession planning, flexible work arrangements, and performance-based recognition are vital in influencing employees' intention to stay. These interventions, together with important mediating variables such as perceived organizational support (POS), psychological empowerment, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment greatly influence employees' intention to stay or otherwise. Additionally, factors like digitalization, employee value alignment, and inclusive leadership further reinforce the TM-ER relationship. This is particularly so in sectors where knowledge and innovation are central to success. The review shows that despite the abundant data, several gaps persist. Most studies rely on cross-sectional design,s indicating a scarcity of longitudinal and mixed-method designs studies. Furthermore, there is limited representation of low and middle-income countries (LMICs), especially in Africa and Latin America. This study offers a unique contribution to the field of Talent Management by systematically analysing the relationship between talent management and employee retention within knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs).*

KEYWORDS: Knowledge-intensive firms, Employee retention, Talent management, Talent management frameworks, Talent management practices, Digitalization.



INTRODUCTION

In the modern-day knowledge-driven economy, talent management (TM) has emerged as a key strategic function, particularly within knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs) or organizations where intellectual capital, innovation capacity, and specialized expertise are essential to long-term success. Sectors such as information technology, consulting, higher education, finance, and research & development epitomize this category of industries that depend on high-skill employees to drive organizational resilience, productivity, and competitive advantage (Collings et al., 2019; Costa et al., 2024). However, this heavy reliance on human capital makes KIFs particularly vulnerable to talent shortages, attrition risks, and the changing workplace expectations, especially amongst the Millennial and Generation Z cohorts.

Over the past decade, the scope of TM has expanded beyond the traditional human resource management (HRM) functions to include holistic and integrative strategies such as succession planning, performance appraisal, leadership development, employee engagement, and career progression (Alias et al., 2016; Johennesse & Chou, 2017). These interventions are now recognized as critical for employee retention (ER), which itself has become a strategic tool for ensuring knowledge continuity and institutional resilience (Menezes et al., 2025; Gupta, 2019). Consequently, retaining talent is no longer seen as a reactive human resource (HR) concern but a proactive HR requirement especially in today's environments marked by mobility, competition, and the risk of knowledge leakage.

Employee retention which is defined as an organization's ability to minimize voluntary turnover and maintain a stable, high-performing workforce is strongly shaped by how employees perceive their growth opportunities, value alignment, and organizational support (Sender & Eberly, 2025; Xulu & Parumasur, 2023).

In KIFs, where intrinsic motivators matter as much as compensation, retention is often driven by non-monetary TM strategic factors such as psychological empowerment, inclusive leadership, perceived fairness, and supportive work environments (Mey et al., 2021; Dalal & Akdere, 2023). Consequently, the TM and employee retention relationship represents a vital connection of human capital sustainability and strategic workforce planning.

Despite a surge in scholarly interest, research on the TM-ER relationship remains largely fragmented, with significant disciplinary silos, regional gaps, and conceptual inconsistencies. For instance, many studies isolate specific TM sub-functions without articulating their systemic impact on ER, while empirical evidence is heavily skewed toward developed economies, leaving emerging market contexts underexplored (Alzoraiki et al., 2024; Shingenge & Saurombe, 2022). Additionally, the development of a cohesive understanding of how TM practices contribute to retention in knowledge-based firms has been hampered by inconsistent measurement scales, a lack of longitudinal designs, and theoretical fragmentation.

Consequently, this systematic literature review (SLR) addresses these gaps by synthesizing findings from 72 peer-reviewed journal articles mostly published between 2013 and 2025, across four (4) leading databases such as Scopus, Taylor & Francis, Wiley, and JSTOR. Following the tenets of the PRISMA 2020 framework (Page et al., 2021), the study applies rigorous screening and inclusion criteria to assess conceptual alignment, empirical strength, and contextual relevance of the various papers. The primary objective is to identify the most impactful TM practices for enhancing talent retention, and to determine under what organizational, sectoral, and psychological conditions these effects are amplified or



diminished. Therefore this study synthesizes and evaluates how TM practices such as talent acquisition, leadership development, succession planning, and knowledge transfer affect ER outcomes such as turnover intention, job embeddedness, loyalty, and affective commitment in the context of KIFs.

This review draws from diverse sectors, methodologies, and theoretical perspectives with the view to offer a consolidated knowledge of the strengthen the role of TM in retaining critical talent. The paper also points out gaps in the research, suggests a multidimensional agenda for future research, and stresses the practical importance of TM in planning for the future of work.

METHODOLOGY

Review Framework

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) to examine the relationship between talent management (TM) practices and employee retention (ER) within knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs). The review followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021), which provide the following four-phase structured process: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. These guidelines are in line with the well-known academic standards for rigour, transparency, and replicability. This approach also allows for a blend of empirical and conceptual studies across geographic regions, industries, and theoretical perspectives.

Following the methodological recommendations by Fish and Block (2018) and other systematic review procedures (Fisch & Block, 2018; Johri & Singh, 2024; Graña-Alvarez et al., 2024), a structured review protocol was developed to define the scope, procedures, and inclusion logic for the study. The last search for the study was conducted on 7th July 2025.

The protocol included well-defined research questions and theoretical scope, Boolean search terms related to TM and ER, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, identified data sources and databases and a structured data extraction and synthesis framework. To capture contemporary trends, including digital transformation and post-pandemic workforce evolution, emphasis was placed on studies published from 2013- date. However, relevant foundational studies were acknowledged.

Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted across four academic databases: Scopus (638), Taylor & Francis Online (15), Wiley Online Library (17), and JSTOR (6). The choice of these databases was based on several factors including their availability (access), disciplinary relevance, indexing quality, and coverage of peer-reviewed publications in human resource management, organizational behaviour, and business management and accounting studies. Overall, the initial search across the databases yielded a total of 676 records at the identification stage. Next, a Boolean search strategy using keywords grouped under two thematic areas. Words such as “talent management,” “succession planning,” “leadership development,” “human resource development,” “knowledge management,” “performance appraisal,” “talent strategy” were used to search for articles on talent management. Also, words such as “employee retention,” “intention to stay,” “talent retention,” “turnover intention,” “employee loyalty,” “staff turnover” were used to look for articles on employee retention.



Searches were conducted across titles, abstracts, and keywords, and limited only to peer-reviewed journal articles in English that were published between 2013 and 2025. This range was chosen to reflect evolving TM-ER paradigms and current global HRM discourse as well as to capture contemporary trends. This is especially important because of the digital transformation and acceptance that occurred during and the post-pandemic era.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the review captures both conceptual depth and methodological rigor, the following Inclusion and Exclusion criteria captured in Table 1 below were applied during the screening and eligibility assessment:

Table 1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Study Selection applied by author.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Published in peer-reviewed academic journals (2013–2025)	Studies not directly addressing TM or ER
Written in English	Publications outside HRM or organizational research domains
Explicit focus on both TM and ER constructs	Purely theoretical papers with no applied context
Situated in KIFs or related knowledge-based sectors (e.g., ICT, consulting, academia, R&D, finance)	Opinion pieces, conference abstracts, or non-peer-reviewed materials
Employ conceptual, quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research	Duplicates or studies published outside the 2013–2025-time window
Grounded in recognized theoretical frameworks (e.g., SET, RBV, SDT, Job Embeddedness)	

The application of these inclusion and exclusion criteria in the screening process, ultimately led to the inclusion of 72 articles that met all methodological and conceptual criteria. These 72 articles formed the final data set for review, synthesis and analysis.

Screening and Selection Process

To ensure methodological transparency, consistency, and replicability throughout the systematic review, the screening process followed the four sequential phases (*identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion*) outlined in the PRISMA 2020 framework.

In the identification phase, as noted earlier, a total of 676 records were retrieved from four peer-reviewed academic databases (Scopus (638), Taylor & Francis Online (15), Wiley Online Library (17), and JSTOR (6)). These sources were chosen for their availability (access), indexing strength and disciplinary relevance to talent management, employee retention, and organizational behaviour within knowledge-intensive environments.

During the deduplication phase, no duplicate records were identified. This outcome is mainly because most of the articles (638 out of 676) were sourced from a single database (Scopus). This significantly reduced the likelihood of overlaps. The remaining databases (Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, and JSTOR) yielded a relatively small number of additional records. This was due to limited access to their full repositories. This further reduced

the likelihood of overlapping entries. Consequently, the dataset proceeded to the screening stage without requiring the removal of duplicate entries.

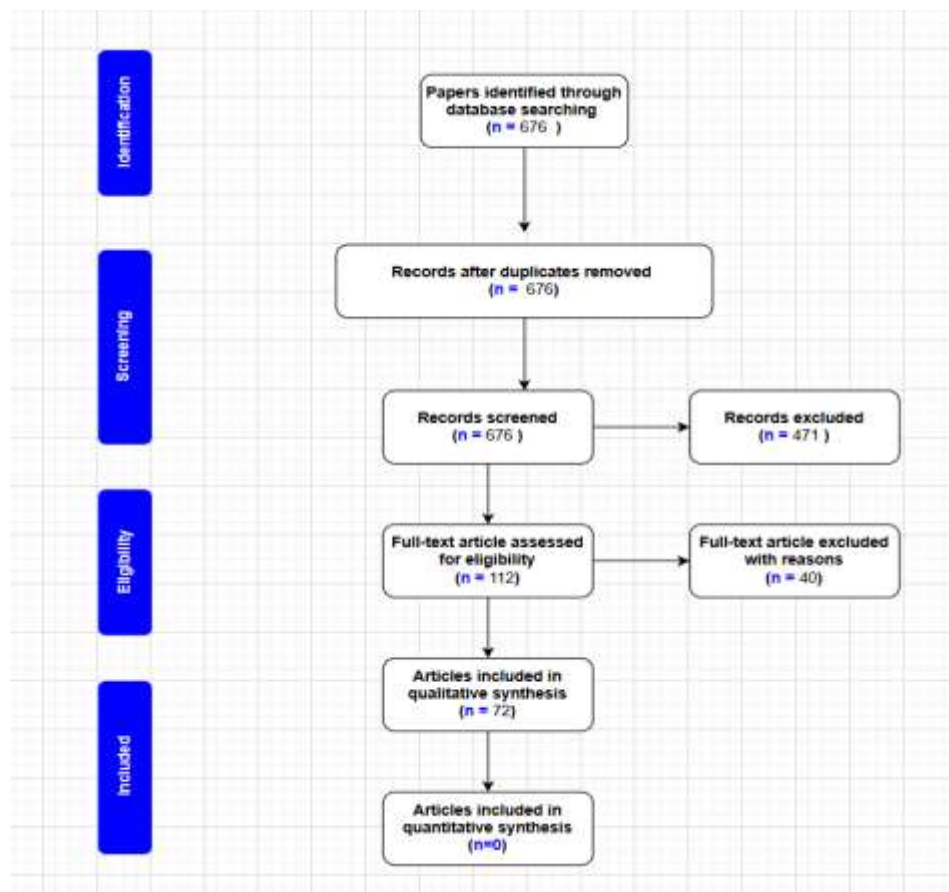
During the screening phase all 676 articles were screened due to the lack of duplicates, The titles and abstracts of all the 676 articles were reviewed against the stated (predefined) inclusion and exclusion criteria. At this stage, 564 articles were excluded due to factors such as irrelevance to talent management or employee retention, lack of empirical grounding, or misalignment with the knowledge-intensive firm (KIF) context. Ultimately 112 articles were eligible to move to the next stage.

The eligibility stage follows the screening stage and involves the retrieval and assessment of the papers. A total of 112 full-text articles were retrieved and rigorously assessed for methodological quality, theoretical depth, and contextual relevance to KIFs. After full-text assessment, 40 additional articles were excluded for reasons including weak methodological design, absence of TM–ER focus, or lack of conceptual clarity.

After the full-text assessment and the exclusion of 40 additional articles, the remaining articles were included due to their strong methodological design, their TM–ER focus and conceptual clarity. Ultimately, 72 studies met all eligibility criteria and were included in the final synthesis in the inclusion stage.

A PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (see Figure1 below) visually summarizes the selection process.

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow chart of the study selection process.





Data Extraction and Analytical Approach

This stage involved the use of a structured Excel-based coding framework to guide the systematic data extraction and synthesis of the final set of 72 included studies. Key data extracted from each article included: author(s) and year of publication, country and sector/industry focus, theoretical framework applied (e.g., SET, RBV, SDT, OST), research methodology (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) and sample characteristics and key findings on the relationship between TM practices and ER outcomes.

Two levels of analysis were conducted: descriptive analysis and thematic analysis

Descriptive Synthesis

To understand the patterns in the literature, the selected studies were first organized based on their research methods (*quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method*). They were also grouped by geographical region, (*Asia, Europe, Africa, North America, Latin America, and the Middle East*), as well as by industry type, (*information and communication technology (ICT), academia, healthcare, consulting, and research and development (R&D)*). In addition, the review examined which theoretical frameworks were most applied in the various studies. E.g., (*Social Exchange Theory (SET), Resource-Based View (RBV), Organizational Support Theory (OST), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Conservation of Resources (COR), and Job Embeddedness Theory*).

Thematic Analysis:

Beyond the patterns in the literature, the review also examined recurring themes and concepts that emerged across the studies. This analysis highlights the core talent management practices that are frequently discussed in the literature. Key amongst these included talent acquisition, succession planning, career development, leadership orientation, employee empowerment, and organizational support. The thematic analysis also focused on how findings of the papers influenced key employee retention outcomes such as reduced turnover intention, improved job satisfaction, higher engagement levels, a stronger sense of organizational support, and deeper commitment to the organization.

To evaluate the empirical robustness of quantitative studies, careful consideration was given to sample sizes, scale validity, reliability coefficients, and the application of sophisticated statistical methods like factor analysis, regression, and structural equation modelling (SEM). Using both descriptive and thematic analysis, a thorough and exacting understanding of the ways in which talent management practices affect employee retention in a variety of knowledge-intensive businesses worldwide.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Frameworks and Concepts

The relationship between talent management (TM) and employee retention (ER) in knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs) is underpinned by a diverse array of theoretical perspectives. These frameworks collectively illuminate the psychological mechanisms, strategic imperatives, and contextual factors that connect TM practices with retention outcomes, especially in



organizations where human capital and intellectual resources are core to value creation and innovation.

According to the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), workers and their companies have reciprocal relationships. Employee loyalty and a lower intention to leave an organization are the results of investments made in career development, training, recognition, and inclusive leadership. In KIFs, where intangible support mechanisms like autonomy and mentorship convey relational value, SET is particularly pertinent (Alferaih et al., 2018; Setyaningrum et al., 2024; Theodorsson et al., 2025).

The Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) considers talent as a valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resource. TM systems that develop and retain intellectual capital contribute directly to sustainable competitive advantage. Empirical studies (e.g., Dalal & Akdere, 2023; Luna-Arocas et al., 2020) support RBV by showing that internal development, knowledge sharing, and succession planning create firm-specific capabilities essential for long-term performance in high-knowledge sectors.

Job Embeddedness Theory (Mitchell et al., 2001) explains why employees remain with organizations, focusing on three core elements: fit (alignment with organizational culture), links (interpersonal relationships), and sacrifice (cost of leaving). TM practices such as structured onboarding, team-based work, and leadership development foster embeddedness. Research confirms that embeddedness mediates the link between TM initiatives and reduced voluntary turnover (Sender & Eberly, 2025; Devassia et al., 2025).

According to Eisenberger et al. (1986), the Organizational Support Theory places a strong emphasis on how employee attitudes and behaviour are influenced by perceived organizational support, or POS. Employee retention results are improved by TM strategies, particularly those that prioritize transparent career progression, inclusive leadership, work-life balance, and recognition (Gupta, 2019; Alzoraiki et al., 2024). This is especially crucial in high-stress settings like academia and finance, where burnout is prevented by organizational support.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) holds that intrinsic motivation increases when employees experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. TM practices such as participative decision-making, personalized development pathways, and inclusive culture nurture these psychological needs, which directly contribute to stronger ER (Mey et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2024). In KIFs, where intellectual autonomy and innovation are prized, SDT offers critical insight into motivational retention drivers.

According to the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals seek to protect, retain, and accumulate valuable resources. In knowledge-intensive environments where stress and cognitive demands are high, TM strategies such as continuous learning, coaching, and psychological safety help employees build resource reservoirs. This reduces stress and fosters loyalty (Cerutti et al., 2023; Kossyva et al., 2024), making COR a strong framework for linking TM to retention under volatility or rapid change.

Integration and Emerging Frameworks

Recent literature increasingly moves beyond single-theory models to develop integrated frameworks that reflect the complexity of modern TM–ER dynamics. Theodorsson et al. (2025) combined SET, Equity Theory, and SDT to explain specialist retention in Nordic banks,



showing how recognition and autonomy operate across generational cohorts. Tai et al. (2025) applied Employer Branding Theory, positioning TM as both a talent acquisition and retention mechanism shaped by organizational identity and external perception. Holban & Bedrule-Grigoruță (2025) leveraged Generational Identity Theory to show that retention drivers differ markedly between Gen Z and millennials in R&D and consulting firms. Alshehhi et al. (2021) and Dorasamy (2021) introduced frameworks involving AI-enabled TM and predictive retention analytics, calling for new ethical and technological perspectives in HRM theory.

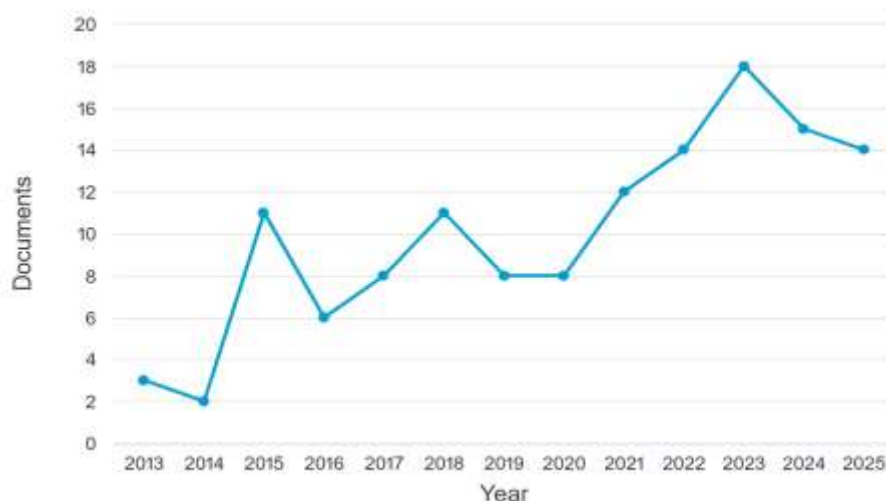
Together, these frameworks highlight that talent management is a system of practices that fosters long-term retention among highly qualified workers in high-knowledge environments rather than being a transactional function. Through the integration of these viewpoints, researchers and practitioners can more effectively match TM interventions with the intricate realities of organizational sustainability and employee behaviour in KIFs.

Descriptive and Trend Analysis

The results of 72 peer-reviewed journal articles, mostly from 2013 to 2025, were combined in this systematic review. Following 2020, a discernible increase in academic curiosity about the connection between talent management (TM) and employee retention (ER) arose in reaction to the post-COVID-19 talent crisis, global digital transformation, and changing employee expectations in knowledge-intensive settings. The analysis in the trends in the publications in the field indicate that 60% of the reviewed studies were published between 2020 and 2025, which is noteworthy and shows how important TM-ER strategies will become in the workplace of the future. This finding is supported by Akanda, M. H. U, et al (2021) that the topic of talent management has received a remarkable degree of interest in both practitioner and academic interests. This increase in interest in talent and talent management in the next 20 years was predicted by Fishman in 1998 according to Akanda, M. H. U, et al (2021).

The graph below adapted from Scopus (2025) shows the trends in the publications in the field of talent management and an indication that there has been a rapid growth in publication that started from 2013 (3 articles) to 2023 (18 articles). The dip in 2025 could be attributed to the fact that the current study was conducted in July i.e. half the year 2025.

Figure 2: Trends in the publications in the field of Talent Management between 2015–2025. Extracted from Scopus, August 2025

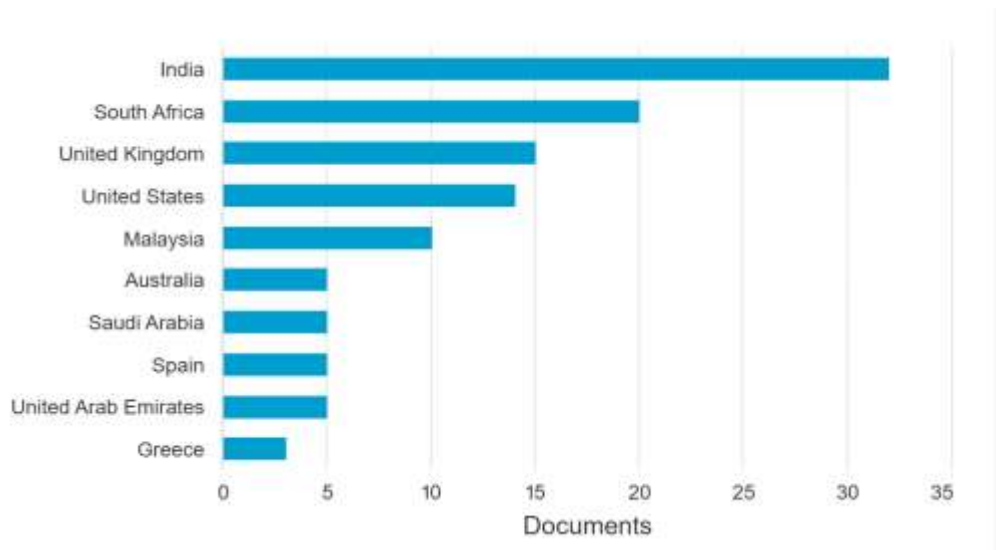




Geographically, the selected studies were diverse and globally distributed by continent as follows: Europe (30%), Asia (25%), North America (18%), Africa (15%) and Latin America and the Middle East (12%).

Figure 3: Number of documents by country in the field of Talent Management (2015–2025). Extracted from Scopus, August 2025

A further breakdown of the distribution of the studies and their publications by country or territory is illustrated in the graph adapted from Scopus (2025) below:



The sectoral coverage focused predominantly on knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs), including ICT, academia, consulting, healthcare, finance, and R&D-intensive sectors industries where intellectual capital, innovation, and knowledge workers are central to value creation. In terms of the most cited literature in the subject area, a review of Scopus-indexed publications reveals key contributions that have significantly shaped the discourse on talent management and employee retention. Table 2 presents the ten most cited peer-reviewed articles, highlighting their bibliographic details and citation counts.

Table 2 Top 10 Most Cited Articles on Talent Management and Employee Retention (Scopus Database)

No	Article Title	Authors	Journal	Year	Volume (Issue), Pages	Citations
1	Revisiting talent management, work-life balance and retention strategies	Deery, M., & Jago, L.	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	2015	27(3), 453–472	281



- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|------|-----------------------|-----|
| 2 | Talent management in medium-sized German companies: An explorative study and agenda for future research | Festing, M., Schäfer, L., & Scullion, H. | <i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> | 2013 | 24(9), 1872–1893 | 155 |
| 3 | Talent management and employee engagement – a meta-analysis of their impact on talent retention | Pandita, D., & Ray, S. | <i>Industrial and Commercial Training</i> | 2018 | 50(4), 185–199 | 133 |
| 4 | The effect of HRM practices on knowledge management capacity: A comparative study in Indian IT industry | Gope, S., Elia, G., & Passiante, G. | <i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i> | 2018 | 22(3), 649–677 | 114 |
| 5 | Recognizing the important role of self-initiated expatriates in effective global talent management | Vaiman, V., Haslberger, A., & Vance, C.M. | <i>Human Resource Management Review</i> | 2015 | 25(3), 280–286 | 113 |
| 6 | Inclusive talent development as a key talent management approach: A systematic literature review | Kaliannan, M., Darmalinggam, D., Dorasamy, M., & Abraham, M. | <i>Human Resource Management Review</i> | 2023 | 33(1), Article 100926 | 109 |
| 7 | From talent management to talent optimization | Schiemann, W.A. | <i>Journal of World Business</i> | 2014 | 49(2), 281–288 | 108 |
| 8 | The effect of leadership style on talent retention during Merger and Acquisition integration: Evidence from China | Zhang, J., Ahammad, M.F., Tarba, S., Glaister, K.W., & Wang, J. | <i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> | 2015 | 26(7), 1021–1050 | 96 |
| 9 | Linking high performance organizational culture and talent management: Satisfaction/motivation and organizational commitment as mediators | Kontoghiorghe, C. | <i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> | 2016 | 27(16), 1833–1853 | 95 |



- | | | | | | | |
|----|---|--|--|------|----------------|----|
| 10 | Talent Management and Employee Retention: An Integrative Research Framework | Narayanan, A., Rajithakumar, S., & Menon, M. | <i>Human Resource Development Review</i> | 2019 | 18(2), 228–247 | 81 |
|----|---|--|--|------|----------------|----|

Scopus Citation Data, Accessed August (2025)

The quantitative studies represented (61%) and utilized surveys, structural equation modelling (SEM), regression analysis, and other statistical tools to test hypotheses related to TM–ER dynamics. The qualitative studies represented (24%) and employed interviews, focus groups, and case studies to explore nuanced perceptions and contextual factors. Mixed-methods studies represented (15%) and integrated survey results with interviews, secondary data, or organizational documents to triangulate insights. Most studies targeted mid-to-senior level knowledge workers, technical experts, and high-potential employees, with growing focus on Millennial and Generation Z cohorts, whose retention is influenced by demand for flexibility, learning autonomy, social impact, and psychological safety.

Talent Management Practices in KIFs

The reviewed literature consistently categorized TM practices in knowledge-intensive contexts into three core clusters. In the Talent Acquisition and Identification cluster emphasis was placed on employer branding, structured onboarding programs, and the use of AI-powered recruitment tools. These practices were shown to attract high-caliber candidates and increase early-stage engagement and retention (Shrivastava, 2022; Kumar, 2022; Tai et al., 2025). The talent development and engagement strategies included continuous learning, mentoring, job rotation, cross-functional assignments, and leadership development. These interventions deepened employee embeddedness and motivation, particularly in academic, R&D, and IT sectors (Xulu & Parumasur, 2023; Shah et al., 2024; León & García-Saavedra, 2021).

Retention-Focused Interventions is the third cluster of TM practices which are effective retention mechanisms encompass flexible work arrangements, internal promotion paths, inclusive leadership behaviours, psychological safety, and performance-based recognition. Leadership styles especially servant, transformational, and inclusive leadership emerged as significant predictors of retention outcomes (Mey et al., 2021; Shingenge & Saurombe, 2022; Theodorsson et al., 2025).

Key Determinants of Retention

Across the 72 studies, several recurring determinants of employee retention emerged in the context of knowledge-intensive firms. These include: the Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Job Satisfaction and Work-Life Balance (WLB), Psychological Empowerment and Engagement, and the Organizational Commitment and Identity Alignment.

TM practices that signal organizational care such as career development, recognition, and transparent communication were found to enhance Perceived Organizational Support (POS). POS acted as a mediating variable, reinforcing employee loyalty and reducing turnover intention (Gupta, 2020; Alzoraiki et al., 2024; Eisenberger et al., 2019).



Job Satisfaction and Work-Life Balance (WLB) was linked with satisfaction with leadership, organizational culture, and career growth opportunities, coupled with flexible work policies, were strongly associated with improved retention, particularly among younger cohorts and knowledge workers in competitive sectors (Qadri, 2024; Theys & Barkhuizen, 2022; Holban & Bedrule-Grigoruță, 2025).

Psychological Empowerment and Engagement enabled employees with autonomy, constructive feedback, and participation in decision-making significantly enhanced their psychological engagement and reduced attrition risks (Mazil et al., 2023; Dalal & Akdere, 2023; Mey et al., 2021).

The Organizational Commitment and Identity Alignment determinants indicated that TM strategies promote inclusive cultures, shared values, and clear career pathways nurtured emotional and affective commitment. Employees who identified strongly with their organizations' mission and values demonstrated higher retention levels (Wikhamn et al., 2021; Sender & Eberly, 2025; Festing et al., 2013).

These findings indicate that employee retention in KIFs is not a standalone outcome, but one that emerges through a strategic interplay of developmental, relational, and cultural talent management interventions.

Summaries of Frameworks and TM Practices

Table 3 below is a summary of representative studies, illustrating the diversity of frameworks, methods, and key findings:

Table 3 TM Frameworks and TM Practices that Improve Employee Retention

Author (Year)	Context	Theoretical Framework	Methodology	Key Finding
Shrivastava (2022)	Higher Education (India)	Talent Strategy	Quantitative (n=200)	Structured onboarding boosts faculty retention
Xulu & Parumasur (2023)	Finance & Tech (SA)	Generational Theory	Mixed (n=196)	Millennials prefer WLB and growth over pay
Theodorsson et al. (2025)	Banking (Nordic)	Social Exchange Theory	Qualitative (32 interviews)	Recognition reduces specialist turnover
Shah et al. (2024)	Corporate HR (Malaysia)	HRM Performance Framework	Quantitative (n=376)	TM drives satisfaction and alignment
Alzoraiki et al. (2024)	Banking (Bahrain)	Organizational Support Theory	SEM (n=257)	POS mediates TM-retention
Mey et al. (2021)	Tech Firms	Psychological Empowerment	Quantitative (n=711)	Empowerment increases retention



Gupta (2020)	IT (India)	OST	&	Quantitative (n=385)	Recognition boosts POS
Qadri (2024)	Healthcare (UAE)	Commitment Satisfaction-Retention		Mixed (n=310)	Job satisfaction lowers exits
Sender & Eberly (2025)	Academia (Global)	Job Embeddedness		Case Study	Fit and links reduce turnover
Tai et al. (2025)	Consulting (Asia)	Employer Branding		Survey (n=289)	Brand alignment retains talent
Holban & Bedrule-Grigoruță (2025)	Corporate (EU)	Generational Identity		Mixed (n=350)	Gen Z values meaning and feedback
Mazil et al. (2023)	Energy (MEA)	Empowerment Theory		Survey (n=264)	Autonomy boosts retention
Wikhamn et al. (2021)	Innovation Firms (EU)	Org. Commitment		Quantitative (n=423)	Inclusive TM builds commitment
León & García-Saavedra (2021)	R&D (Spain)	RBV & KM		Case Study	TM supports innovation via retention
Dalal & Akdere (2023)	Tech (USA)	RBV & SDT		Survey (n=476)	Recognition & autonomy reduce turnover
Setyaningrum et al. (2024)	Finance (Indonesia)	Social Exchange Theory		Survey (n=320)	Reciprocity drives retention
Cerutti et al. (2023)	IT (Europe)	COR Theory		Survey (n=260)	Upskilling protects against exits
Dorasamy (2021)	Government (Asia)	Digital HRM		Quantitative (n=512)	AI use improves retention prediction
Alshehhi et al. (2021)	Retail Banking (GCC)	People Analytics		Survey (n=274)	Predictive TM lowers attrition
Magau & Maritz (2020)	Higher Ed (SA)	Org. Commitment		Survey (n=210)	Lack of growth pushes turnover
Theys & Barkhuizen (2022)	Public Sector (EU)	EVP Theory		Survey (n=395)	Inclusive EVP improves loyalty
Kossyva et al. (2024)	Engineering (Greece)	RBV & KM		Case Study	Knowledge retention improves performance



Kumar (2022)	Telecom (India)	TM Strategy	Quantitative (n=390)	Early career support increases loyalty
Devassia et al. (2025)	Academic (India)	Job Embeddedness	Qualitative	Mentorship fosters retention
Luna-Arocas et al. (2020)	Healthcare (Spain)	RBV	Survey (n=341)	TM tied to strategic advantage
Eisenberger et al. (2019)	Corporate (USA)	OST	Survey (n=401)	Leadership drives POS
Kumar et al. (2024)	Fintech (India)	SDT	Survey (n=377)	Learning autonomy retains talent
Shingenge & Saurombe (2022)	Public (Namibia)	Transformational Leadership	Mixed	Supportive leaders reduce exits
Festing et al. (2013)	SMEs (Germany)	Inclusive TM	Survey (n=700)	Inclusive TM boosts loyalty

These studies offer robust theoretical and empirical foundations for understanding how tailored TM practices improve employee retention across knowledge-intensive sectors.

Theoretical Contributions and Integrations

This systematic review contributes substantively to the theoretical understanding of how talent management (TM) practices influence employee retention in knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs), where human capital serves as a core strategic asset. The review affirms the relevance of several established frameworks while highlighting avenues for theoretical synthesis and contextual nuance.

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a foundational relational lens. It explains how employees reciprocate organizational investments such as inclusive succession planning, developmental opportunities, and recognition with loyalty and reduced turnover intentions (Alferaih et al., 2018; Setyaningrum et al., 2024). This theory is particularly resonant in KIFs, where relational psychological contracts and mutual trust underpin employee engagement.

Secondly, the Resource-Based View (RBV) reinforces the strategic imperative of TM by conceptualizing talent as a VRIN (valuable, rare, inimitable, non-substitutable) resource. TM initiatives that systematize talent identification, retention, and development align with RBV logic to protect firm-specific intellectual capital, sustain innovation, and preserve competitive advantage (Luna-Arocas et al., 2020; Dalal & Akdere, 2023).

The third theory, the Job Embeddedness Theory enhances our understanding of how TM influences employee decisions to stay through “fit” (alignment with culture and role), “links” (relationships and social capital), and “sacrifice” (perceived cost of leaving). TM practices such as career pathing, mentoring, and internal mobility generate embeddedness, especially critical in knowledge-driven environments where identity and expertise are context-bound (Sender & Eberly, 2025).



The Organizational Support Theory (OST) the fourth theory, highlights the mediating role of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) in translating TM practices into retention outcomes. Practices that involve transparent communication, fair treatment, and career support bolster employees' belief that they are valued, thereby enhancing affective commitment and intention to stay (Gupta, 2019; Alzoraiki et al., 2024).

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) are identified as theories that bring a psychological perspective. SDT emphasizes that TM practices that foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness intrinsically motivate employees to remain. COR suggests that TM interventions such as training, upskilling, and mentoring protect and replenish valued resources, reducing turnover by mitigating perceived threats of loss (Mey et al., 2021; Kossyva et al., 2024; Cerutti et al., 2023).

Collectively, these frameworks underscore that talent management is not solely a human resource function but a strategic, motivational, and relational construct. TM practices simultaneously meet employees' psychological needs, strengthen reciprocal bonds, and preserve firm-specific knowledge. The diversity of theoretical foundations points to a need for integrative models that combine relational, psychological, and strategic dimensions to fully capture the complexity of TM and retention dynamics in KIFs.

RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This systematic review highlights several critical research gaps that constrain a holistic understanding of how talent management (TM) influences employee retention in knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs). These include:

Limited longitudinal and mixed-method studies reduce the ability to establish causal inferences or examine how TM–retention relationships evolve over time. Most studies rely on cross-sectional designs, which do not capture shifts in employee motivation, engagement, and organizational commitment throughout the employee lifecycle. Future research should prioritize longitudinal and mixed method approaches to examine the sustained impact of TM interventions and retention outcomes over time.

Underrepresentation of studies from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) particularly in Africa and Latin America undermines the global generalizability of current findings. These regions have unique institutional, cultural, and labour market characteristics that shape both TM practices and employee expectations. Future studies should explore context-specific dynamics in these under-researched regions to diversify theoretical development and enhance the inclusivity of TM frameworks.

Lack of intersectional analysis restricts inclusiveness and equity in TM research. Few studies investigate how gender, race, age, disability status, or caregiving responsibilities intersect with access to talent development, perceptions of organizational support, or retention intentions. Integrating intersectionality into TM research will uncover structural barriers and support the design of more equitable retention strategies.

Insufficient theorization of digital and AI-enabled TM remains a concern. While a few studies explore predictive analytics for identifying turnover risks, there is a limited focus on how



digital tools affect employee trust, agency, fairness, and ethics. As algorithmic decision-making becomes embedded in TM systems, future research must address the implications of AI-driven HRM for relational dynamics, transparency, and psychological safety.

Theoretical fragmentation continues to limit conceptual coherence. Many studies rely on a single dominant framework (e.g., SET or RBV), despite the multidimensional nature of TM retention mechanisms. There is a need for integrative theoretical models that combine perspectives from Social Exchange Theory (SET), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Organizational Support Theory (OST), Conservation of Resources (COR), and Employer Branding Theory. Such hybrid frameworks would better capture the interplay between psychological, strategic, and cultural variables affecting talent retention.

Addressing these gaps will foster the development of more nuanced, inclusive, and globally relevant models of talent management and retention, enabling organizations to adapt to increasingly diverse, digital, and dynamic workforce realities.

PRACTICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the reviewed literature, the following practical recommendations are proposed for organizations particularly knowledge-intensive firms that seek to strengthen employee retention through strategic talent management.

It is recommended to embed retention throughout the TM lifecycle. Retention must be integrated across all TM touchpoints from recruitment and onboarding to career development and succession planning. Strategic alignment across these phases ensures consistency in employee experience and strengthens organizational continuity.

Customization of TM approaches across employee segments is recommended. It is pertinent that, generational cohorts, career stages, and functional roles exhibit different expectations for flexibility, autonomy, and learning. Organizations should tailor TM strategies to personalized talent journeys, ensuring relevance and effectiveness.

Strengthening of leadership for inclusion and empowerment is critical and leaders must play a central role in reinforcing employee value and commitment. Investing in transformational and inclusive leadership including training in emotional intelligence, recognition, and feedback can elevate psychological safety and loyalty.

The use of HR analytics and AI ethically and strategically is highly recommended. Predictive analytics can enhance TM by identifying at-risk talent and suggesting customized development paths. However, transparency, accountability, and data ethics must be safeguarded to maintain trust and employee agency.

Finally, developing a values-driven Employee Value Proposition (EVP) is recommended as a compelling EVP rooted in purpose, growth, and collaboration promotes long-term engagement. This is particularly critical in KIFs where alignment between individual purpose and organizational mission fosters deep commitment.



These practical steps reframe TM not just as a functional HR task but as a strategic capability that supports resilience, knowledge continuity, and sustainable performance in high-skill, high-impact environments.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review has synthesized evidence from 72 peer-reviewed articles published largely between 2013 and 2025. It offers a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between talent management (TM) practices and employee retention (ER) within knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs). The findings affirm that TM is not merely a HR activity but a strategic enabler of organizational resilience, competitive advantage, and knowledge continuity in today's rapidly evolving, post-pandemic economy.

The analysis shows that effective TM practices such as talent acquisition, leadership development, succession planning, flexible work arrangements, and performance-based recognition are vital in influencing employees' intention to stay. These interventions together with important mediating variables such as perceived organizational support (POS), psychological empowerment, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment greatly influence employees' intention to stay or otherwise. Additionally, factors like digitalization, employee value alignment, and inclusive leadership further reinforce the TM-ER relationship. This is particularly so in sectors where knowledge and innovation are central to success.

From a theoretical perspective, the review highlights foundational frameworks such as Social Exchange Theory (SET), Resource-Based View (RBV), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Organizational Support Theory (OST), Job Embeddedness Theory, and Conservation of Resources Theory (COR). However, findings suggest a need for theoretical integration that combines relational, motivational, and strategic perspectives to fully capture the complex dynamics of TM and ER in knowledge-based contexts.

The review shows that despite the abundant data, several gaps persist. For instance, there remains a scarcity of longitudinal and mixed method designs studies. This has limited causal inference and the ability to trace retention patterns over time. Furthermore, there is limited representation of low and middle-income countries (LMICs), especially in Africa and Latin America. This hinders the global generalizability of current findings. Again, review shows that intersectional perspectives that examine how gender, ethnicity, disability, and caregiving responsibilities intersect with TM access and outcomes are also critically under researched. Finally, review shows that the implications of AI-enabled and predictive TM systems for employee agency, trust, and ethics remain under-theorized and under-researched.

Regarding the practical implications of the findings, the review posits the need for a holistic, digital adaptive talent management process that aligns with the requirements of multigenerational workforces and fast-moving knowledge dependent environments. The review urges organisations to embed employee retention within every stage of the talent lifecycle, from employer branding to succession planning. It also suggests the need to leverage people analytics and ethical AI to predict risks and personalize development. Finally, the review encouraged the creation of a values-based Employee Value Proposition (EVP) based on inclusion, purpose, and growth, to ensure engagement and loyalty.



Attracting, engaging, and retaining critical knowledge talent will become a defining capability for organizational survival and success as the future of work becomes more complex, automated, and distributed globally. Future research and HR practice must co-evolve, combining evidence-based strategy, human-centred leadership, and technological innovation to position TM as a pillar of strategic foresight and sustainable organizational culture, in addition to being a tool for policy.

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