

Talent Management, Talent Retention and Succession Planning in Universities: An Integrated Theoretical Framework for Sustainable Academic Excellence

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Abstract: - This paper examines the interrelationships between talent management (TM), talent retention (TR) and succession planning (SP) in the context of Malaysian higher education, with particular reference to UTMSPACE as a representative institutional context. Drawing on the Talent Management in Education Model by Davies and Davies, Das's Talent Retention Criteria Model and Rothwell's Succession Planning Performance Model, the study develops an integrated theoretical framework that positions TM as primary strategic driver, TR as a critical mediating mechanism and SP as the key organisational outcome for ensuring leadership continuity in universities. Within this framework, TM is conceptualised as a holistic and systematic process encompassing talent identification, performance appraisal, targeted development initiatives, and the cultivation of a supportive talent culture aimed at building a strong pool of high-potential academics. TR is articulated through multiple interrelated dimensions, including compensation, rewards and recognition, promotion and growth opportunities, participation in decision making, work-life balance, work environment, training and development, leadership and job security, highlighting the combined influence of financial and non-financial factors on academics' intention to remain in the institution. SP is framed as a systematic, long-term organisational process that identifies key positions, assesses current and future role requirements, evaluates individual performance and potential, addresses development gaps through targeted leadership development, and incorporates continuous program evaluation. By synthesising these three established bodies of literature, the paper proposes an integrated TM, TR and SP framework tailored to the university context, arguing that strategic and coherent TM practices, when reinforced by effective retention strategies, are critical to sustaining robust SP pipelines and long-term academic leadership continuity. The paper contributes conceptually by offering a theoretically grounded model that can guide future empirical research and inform institutional policy and leadership development strategies in an increasingly competitive higher education environment and ensuring academic leadership continuity in an increasingly competitive higher education environment.

Keywords: *Talent Management, Talent Retention, Succession Planning, Higher Education & UTMSPACE, Malaysia*

1. INTRODUCTION

Talent Management (TM), Talent Retention (TR), and Succession Planning (SP) are widely recognised in the human resource and higher education literature as essential mechanisms for sustaining organisational performance and leadership continuity. Talent Management (TM) is commonly defined as a holistic process aimed at attracting, developing, and retaining high-performing individuals who can make significant contributions to the organization (Norzaini Azman & Ibrahim Komoo, 2020). Talent Retention (TR) is intended to encourage talented employees to remain with the organization for a longer period and is a strategy used to retain them (Edward Sembiring & Nur Damayanti, 2023), while Succession Planning (SP) refers to a systematic approach to identifying and developing internal talent to fill critical positions as they become vacant (Bano et al., 2022). Although these

constructs are theoretically interconnected, existing scholarship has largely examined them as discrete or sequential practices rather than as an integrated strategic system. Collectively, however, all three are crucial for ensuring continuity of operations and long-term organisational sustainability.

Within this broader human capital discourse, TM has emerged as a central pillar of the 21st century human capital management (Masitah Mohammad Yusof et al., 2018), reflecting a broader shift from viewing human resources as administrative inputs to recognising talent as a key source of sustained competitive advantage. It is an integration of organizational processes, programs, and activities developed and implemented to attract, recruit, develop, and retain talent to achieve organizational objectives and strategies. In this context, human capital is a vital resource for organizations to remain competitive, beyond dependence on capital, land, or other tangible assets. Accordingly, TM supports organizations to compete globally and maximize the benefits of current technological advancements (Piansoongnern et al., 2011). Prior studies have consistently shown that effective TM enhances organisational adaptability, competitiveness, and performance in dynamic environments (Cappelli, 2008; Schuler et al., 2011).

These strategic imperatives are particularly salient in higher education. Over the past few decades, global university systems have undergone profound changes driven by structural transformation aimed at improving performance, increasing quality, and promoting greater competitiveness, transparency, and sustainability. These changes emphasize performance and accountability, which has led to the introduction of university league rankings, the development of key performance indicators (KPIs), and clear human resource strategies to address underperformance. This transformation, which focuses on a performance-oriented paradigm, aims to improve the capabilities of individuals within organizations, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of both individuals and institutions. Performance-based human resource management is increasingly viewed as an essential approach to building accountability, productivity, and intellectual growth within the university system to ensure its sustainability (Gu & Levin, 2021).

However, despite its prominence, the TM literature often rests on a critical implicit assumption: that talented individuals, once identified and developed, will remain within the organisation. This assumption under-theorises the conditions under which talent is actually retained and is particularly problematic in knowledge-intensive organisations such as universities, where academic mobility, external opportunities, and non-financial motivations strongly influence career decisions. As a result, investments in TM may not translate into long-term organisational capability if retention dynamics are insufficiently addressed.

Parallel to the TM literature, research on TR highlights a multidimensional set of factors including compensation, recognition, career progression, work-life balance, leadership quality, and job security that jointly influence employees' intention to stay. Yet, retention models are often operationalised independently of long-term leadership and succession considerations, focusing primarily on reducing turnover rather than sustaining institutional capability over time. Similarly, SP has been extensively theorised as a forward-looking mechanism for leadership continuity through systematic identification of key roles, assessment of performance and potential, and targeted development interventions (Rothwell, 2011). However, many succession models assume stable internal talent pools and do not sufficiently account for retention dynamics that determine whether identified successors remain available. This theoretical fragmentation limits the explanatory power of TR theories in contexts such as universities, where retaining talent is meaningful only insofar as it supports academic leadership continuity and institutional memory.

Against this backdrop, TM has increasingly been positioned as a strategic response to intensifying competition, performance-based accountability, and leadership capacity challenges in Malaysian higher education institutions. Empirical studies suggest that comprehensive TM initiatives—such as continuous professional development and structured career pathways—are positively associated with improved retention outcomes (Shahrizan Adzham Ahmad & Al-Hasan Al-Aidaros, 2017) and leadership effectiveness at the university level (Ghazali et al., 2021). Despite this growing recognition, empirical research on TM within Malaysian universities remains relatively limited.

One of the few studies examining TM implementation in Malaysian universities is that of Abdullahi, Raman, et al. (2022) who identified three main factors shaping TM effectiveness at the university level. First, integrating TM with staff performance (EP) practices was found to reduce negative workplace behaviour. Second, TM practices were shown to enhance organisational outcomes through increased employee engagement (EE). Third, EE was identified as a mediating mechanism between TM practices and staff performance. These findings indicate that TM influences performance not only directly but also through relational and motivational pathways. Consequently, universities are encouraged to invest in TM strategies that deliberately strengthen employee

engagement. However, this stream of research continues to conceptualise retention primarily as an outcome variable rather than as a strategic mediating mechanism that conditions the effectiveness of TM investments.

Taken together, the literature reveals a significant conceptual gap: while TM, TR, and SP are individually well-developed, there is a lack of integrative theoretical frameworks that explain how these constructs interact as a coherent strategic system in universities. Existing models tend to privilege one dimension that is talent development, retention, or succession, without adequately theorising their dynamic interdependencies, particularly in the context of higher education institutions operating under competitive and performance-driven conditions.

Addressing this gap, this concept paper proposes an integrated theoretical framework that positions TM as the strategic driver, TR as the mediating mechanism, and SP as the primary organisational outcome for sustainable academic leadership. By synthesising and critically engaging with established TM, TR, and SP theories, the paper aims to advance conceptual clarity and provide a foundation for future empirical research and policy-relevant applications in higher education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The higher education sector has undergone significant transformations in recent decades, driven by globalisation, performance-based governance, market competition, and heightened accountability demands. Within this landscape, universities increasingly recognise the importance of strategic human resource management (HRM) as a critical lever for sustaining institutional performance and long term competitiveness. In this context, TM, TR and SP have emerged as central but often fragmented strategies for addressing the evolving needs of academic institutions and academic workforce challenge.

TM encompasses a systematic and a comprehensive approach to attracting, developing, and retaining high-performing staff, ensuring that institutions have the right people in place to meet their academic and operational objectives. TR focuses on sustaining human capital by encouraging talented individuals to remain within the institution, thereby preserving institutional knowledge and capability. SP seeks to ensure leadership continuity through the identification and development of future leaders for critical roles. Although these three domains are theoretically interrelated, the literature has largely treated them as discrete functional practices rather than as an integrated strategic system, particularly within higher education contexts.

This section delves into the importance of these three interconnected areas, focusing on how universities in Malaysia can enhance their TM practices to retain key personnel and plan for future leadership transitions. Through a critical review of existing literature, this paper explores the key theories that underpin effective TM, retention strategies, and SP, while also addressing the unique challenges faced by Malaysian higher education institutions. Rather than presenting these constructs in isolation, the review foregrounds their interdependencies and highlights the conceptual fragmentation that motivates the need for an integrated theoretical framework.

2.1 Talent Management (TM)

Talent management (TM) is widely conceptualised as a strategic process of identifying, attracting, developing, and retaining high-potential individuals to meet the current and future needs of an organisation. In today's globally competitive environment, TM is frequently framed as a source of sustained competitive advantage because it is embedded in human capabilities that are difficult to imitate or replicate (Scullion & Collings, 2011; Abdullahi et al., 2022). Empirical studies demonstrate that systematic TM practices, including talent identification, performance appraisal, training, and development enhance employee capability and organisational performance across sectors (Taha et al., 2015).

One of the most influential TM Framework in higher education is the model by Davies and Davies (2010), which emphasises three core components: talent identification, talent development, and talent culture. Talent identification involves recognising critical positions, assessing performance and potential, and forecasting future leadership needs using structured and objective tools (Davies & Davies, 2010; Annakis & Esposto, 2016). This approach adopts a forward-looking orientation by anticipating an organisation's future talent requirements through the systematic forecasting of critical skills, attitudes, and behaviours, supported by advanced assessment technologies such as psychometric testing, work simulations, and assessment centres (Schuler et al., 2011). Within the Malaysian context, the effectiveness of talent identification is further shaped by strong top management support and an organisational culture that promotes continuous learning and development (Shahrizan Adzham Ahmad & Al-Hasan Al-Aidaros, 2017; Tajul Nizam Ibrahim et al., 2024). This forward looking approach

represents a key strength of the model, particularly for universities facing demographic shifts and leadership succession challenges.

Performance appraisal functions as a key mechanism in talent identification because it evaluates current performance, potential, and readiness to assume critical roles in the future. Effective appraisal requires clear, objective performance standards that are aligned with the organisation's strategic goals (Mirsepassi, 2000; Moghtadaie & Taji, 2016). The literature identifies a range of appraisal tools such as competency-based assessment, 360-degree feedback, behaviourally anchored rating scales (BARS), and management by objectives (MBO)—designed to enhance objectivity and developmental feedback (Kevin Murphy et al., 2019; Klieger et al., 2018). Using a structured combination of these techniques helps to reduce rater subjectivity, provide more comprehensive feedback, and support employee career development planning.

However, the literature also highlights persistent challenges in performance appraisal, such as rating inaccuracy, rater bias, unclear performance standards, and a lack of transparency in the process (Pulakos, 2009; Masitah & Mohamed, 2020). Unfair or non-objective evaluations can undermine motivation, job satisfaction, and the relationship between employees and supervisors, while simultaneously increasing turnover intentions (Tuan Normy Shareena Tuan Abdullah, 2014; Zaleha Yazid et al., 2017). In universities, performance appraisal for academics is particularly critical because it is directly linked to teaching, research, and achievement of institutional goals, including peer review, citation performance, and publication productivity (Moghtadaie & Taji, 2016; Zarina, 2013).

From a development perspective, TM literature strongly supports deliberate investments in training, mentoring, coaching, and career development pathways as mechanisms for enhancing motivation, competence, and engagement (Thunnissen et al., 2013; Davidson, 2013). Empirical evidence from Malaysia suggests that comprehensive talent development initiatives contribute positively to job satisfaction and retention, particularly in banking and manufacturing sectors (Shahrizan Adzham Ahmad & Al-Hasan Al-Aidaros, 2017). Yet, the transferability of these findings to universities remains under-theorised, as academic careers are shaped by distinctive professional norms, intrinsic motivations, and external labour markets.

Talent culture, the third pillar of Davies & Davies model, refers to the cultivation of an organisational culture that supports engagement, continuous learning, fairness, recognition, and strong ethical values. A positive and supportive has been shown to enhance commitment, reduces turnover, and underpins high-performing leadership (Davies & Davies, 2010; Jackson & Parry, 2010; Sharkey & Eccher, 2011). In the context of Malaysian universities and the national research ecosystem, talent development systems are further supported by government policies through the establishment of research universities and substantial investment in R&D aimed at nurturing young research talent and strengthening innovation hubs (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010; Azman et al., 2016). A holistic talent development system typically involves collaboration between universities, knowledge-sharing programmes, joint projects, and sustained investment in research and training (Dass Mohan et al., 2015; Alsakarnah et al., 2023). Nevertheless, existing TM models tend to assume that well-designed talent systems will naturally lead to retention, without sufficiently theorising the conditions under which talented academics choose to stay or leave.

Overall, the literature indicates that TM is a necessary but insufficient condition for sustaining organisational performance. TM initiatives alone do not guarantee talent retention or leadership continuity unless they are reinforced by complementary retention mechanisms and aligned with succession planning processes (Hasan Abdulla & Mohd Noor, 2020). In institutions such as UTMSpace, TM is therefore a critical issue, as long-term success depends on the organisation's ability to attract, develop, and retain academic talent capable of driving excellence in teaching, research, and service at both national and global levels.

2.2 Talent Retention (TR)

Talent retention (TR) is a critical dimension of human resource management that encompasses the strategies and practices used to retain talented, high-performing employees over the long term. Effective TR reduces the financial and operational costs associated with recruitment, selection and onboarding, while sustaining productivity, customer satisfaction and a positive organisational culture (Moghtadaie & Taji, 2016; Srihandayani & Kusnendi, 2020). High turnover not only entails direct costs such as advertising, selection processes and initial training that can reach up to twice an employee's annual salary (Ibrahim, 2023) but also the loss of valuable tacit knowledge and expertise, which can weaken organisational performance and competitiveness. In higher education institutions, TR is especially crucial because academic staff are key assets who shape teaching quality, research output and institutional reputation. Evidence from Malaysian universities indicates that institutions with higher

levels of TR report stronger research publication rates, better teaching quality and higher student satisfaction (Shahrizan Adzham Ahmad & Al-Hasan Al-Aidaros, 2017).

The literature consistently highlights compensation as one of the most salient drivers of TR. Competitive and fair pay, together with appropriate financial benefits, is strongly linked to job satisfaction, organisational commitment and lower turnover intentions (Trevor et al., 1997; Braun et al., 2013; Masum et al., 2015). Studies show that compensation is cited more frequently than other factors such as promotion or job opportunities as a key retention determinant among academics in Malaysian universities (Zamri, 2023). When staff perceive their salary as commensurate with their responsibilities and in line with market rates, they are more likely to remain loyal and to demonstrate higher levels of performance and engagement (Sinniah et al., 2019). Conversely, inadequate or inequitable pay is associated with dissatisfaction, reduced morale and higher staff mobility, underscoring the need for universities to design compensation systems that are both competitive and perceived as fair. However, retention research increasingly recognises that financial incentives alone are insufficient to sustain long-term commitment in professional and knowledge-intensive occupations

Beyond pay, rewards and recognition both financial and non-financial play a pivotal role in motivating staff, enhancing satisfaction and strengthening loyalty. Rewards and recognition systems that acknowledge individual and team contributions have been shown to foster a positive work culture, increase organisational commitment and reduce turnover (Nazir et al., 2016; Papa et al., 2020). For academics, recognition from leaders, colleagues, students and external stakeholders reinforces a sense of professional value and belonging, encouraging them to remain with the institution (Abdullahi et al., 2021; Dun & Hasan, 2024). Structured recognition programmes, clear criteria and consistent application are particularly important to ensure fairness and merit-based acknowledgement, while complementary non-financial rewards such as flexible working arrangements, additional leave or development opportunities contribute to a more holistic and sustainable TR strategy.

Career advancement, promotion opportunities and broader prospects for growth also emerge as central elements of TR. Transparent and strategic career development systems, including succession planning, internal promotion pathways and meaningful job assignments, signal to employees that their long-term contributions are valued (Phillips & Gully, 2015; Awis et al., 2019). Empirical studies show strong positive correlations between promotion opportunities, job satisfaction and retention among academics, suggesting that staff are more likely to remain where they can see clear progression in role, responsibility and recognition (Pergamit & Veum, 1999; Meyer et al., 2003; Gordon & Adler, 2017). In competitive higher education environments, universities that actively identify, support and advance high-potential academics are better positioned to retain key talent and sustain institutional excellence.

Employee participation in decision-making and a supportive work-life interface further underpins effective TR. Involving staff in organisational decisions enhances their sense of ownership, trust and psychological empowerment, which in turn boosts motivation and reduces turnover intentions (Hewitt, 2002; Noah, 2008; Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). Work-life balance is especially salient for academics who juggle multiple roles in teaching, research, administration and community engagement. Studies in Malaysian public universities indicate that the ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities significantly influences job satisfaction and decisions to stay (Khairunneeza et al., 2017). Policies that support flexible work arrangements, manageable workloads and respect for non-work roles are therefore important levers to maintain wellbeing and long-term commitment.

The broader work environment, training and development, leadership and job security also interact to shape TR outcomes. A supportive physical and psychosocial work environment characterised by safety, comfort, collegial relationships and constructive human resource policies is strongly associated with job satisfaction and retention (Hayes et al., 2015; Abu Al Rub et al., 2016; Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). Continuous training and development signal organisational investment in employees' futures, enhancing skills, employability and loyalty (Messmer, 2000; Tomlinson, 2002; Azman et al., 2016). Effective leadership that communicates clearly, recognises contributions and nurtures future leaders through structured succession planning is equally crucial in retaining academic talent (Lagace, 2016; Awis et al., 2019; Keerio & Ahmad, 2023). Finally, job security remains a foundational concern: perceptions of stable employment, supportive supervision and achievable performance expectations are strongly linked to commitment and reduced turnover among academics (Salisu et al., 2016; Zamri, 2023).

Synthesising these findings, TR is conceptualised not merely as an outcome of human resource practices but also as a mediating mechanism linking talent management (TM) and succession planning to organisational effectiveness, as suggested by Das's (2013) Talent Retention Theory. When organisations provide supportive work environments, competitive and fair rewards, meaningful development opportunities, participative decision-

making and a sense of security, employees are more likely to respond with higher loyalty and commitment. This perspective is particularly valuable for universities, as it positions retention as a mediating force that conditions the effectiveness of TM investments and the feasibility of succession planning. In academic institutions such as UTMSPACE, TR stabilises the academic workforce, ensures continuity of expertise and fosters the sustained development of human capital. As such, TR functions as a critical bridge between strategic TM initiatives and long-term organisational sustainability, reinforcing the need for holistic, employee-centred human resource strategies in higher education contexts.

2.3 Succession Planning (SP)

Succession planning (SP) is a structured organisational process that focuses on identifying and preparing potential successors for key positions to ensure business continuity and smooth leadership transitions. In higher education institutions (HEIs), SP is a strategic mechanism to evaluate internal staff and equip them for critical leadership roles, thereby safeguarding institutional stability and performance (Rothwell, 2015; Chia et al., 2021). Although SP is an emerging research area in HEIs globally, studies in Malaysian universities remain limited, despite government initiatives since 2016 to formalise succession programmes for academics (Ministry of Higher Education, 2017; Keerio & Ahmad, 2023).

Historically, the idea of SP can be traced back to Henri Fayol's early management principles, which emphasised that organisations must deliberately plan leadership succession to avoid disruption and ensure that key responsibilities are not assigned to unqualified individuals (Abdellah, 2021; Abdul Shukor & Hussain, 2019). Contemporary perspectives conceptualise SP as a systematic, well-defined procedure in which critical roles are identified, and staff are aligned with ongoing development plans to support continuous growth (Desarno et al., 2019; Montoya, 2018). Rather than focusing solely on top-tier positions, recent perspectives argue that SP should be embedded as part of a long-term leadership development strategy that also includes middle management and supervisory roles (Avalos, 2020; Garcia, 2021). This broader view strengthens leadership pipelines across levels and reduces vulnerabilities during organisational restructuring or strategic change.

SP delivers multiple organisational benefits. It ensures the availability of qualified candidates for critical roles, promotes workplace diversity, supports staff growth, and complements other human resource mobility initiatives (Desarno et al., 2019; Owolabi & Adeosun, 2021). Empirical evidence suggests that around 40–65% of organisations use some form of formal SP procedures, reflecting its growing strategic relevance (Upadhyaya & Lele, 2022). In universities, SP helps retain institutional knowledge, technology, and culture, while reducing the costs and adjustment challenges associated with hiring external candidates who may require lengthy socialisation into the organisational context (Mustafa Kamil, 2015; Ng'andu & Nyakora, 2017). SP also reduces the likelihood of early failure among externally recruited leaders in the first two years, increases acceptance and trust in successors, and contributes to institutional stability during leadership transitions (Berchelman, 2005; Wallin, 2007).

Rothwell's (2015) Seven-Pointed Star Model provides one of the most comprehensive theoretical frameworks for SP, conceptualising it as an ongoing talent development cycle rather than a one-off event. The model emphasises key elements including top management commitment, systematic assessment of current and future work, evaluation of individual performance and potential, closing development gaps, and ongoing programme evaluation. Commitment from senior leadership is especially critical, as SP must be aligned with organisational strategy and supported through clear action plans, written procedures, and transparent communication of expectations and anticipated outcomes (Abdellah, 2021; Betts et al., 2008). Evaluating current work involves identifying core leadership positions, clarifying role requirements, and mapping the competencies and skills necessary for progression, thereby linking SP directly to career pathways and retention of skilled staff (Y. Kim, 2017; Bano et al., 2024).

Performance appraisal and potential assessment form the backbone of SP decision-making. SP assumes that staff must first demonstrate mastery in their current roles before being considered for advancement, with evaluations often based on observed behaviours, empirical evidence of performance, and broader indicators such as aspirations, thinking style, commitment, and organisational loyalty (Y. Kim et al., 2014). From a human capital perspective, SP functions as a mechanism for identifying and mobilising high-potential talent, thereby enhancing both individual career development and organisational performance (Pennell, 2010; Patidar et al., 2016). Empirical studies show that a well-designed SP system can improve financial performance, reduce turnover intentions, and strengthen competitive advantage by ensuring a ready pool of capable leaders (Rothwell, 2015).

A defining feature of contemporary SP is its forward-looking orientation, which involves assessing future work requirements and future individual potential in alignment with organisational strategy. This includes scenario planning, anticipating changes in the external environment, and aligning SP with institutional mission, vision, and strategic plans—particularly in universities, where academic futures are shaped by values, traditions, technological trends, and market conditions (Rothwell, 2011; Norzaini Azman et al., 2012; Chia & Razak, 2023; Darvish & Temelie, 2014). Decisions about internal versus external successors are especially salient in HEIs, where internal candidates may offer strong loyalty and contextual understanding, but institutions sometimes still favour external hires (Lynch, 2009; Grossman, 2014; Seniwoliba, 2015). In the Malaysian context, leadership succession frequently involves nominating internal academic candidates for structured leadership development programmes coordinated by AKEPT prior to final appointments, reflecting an emerging hybrid approach to SP (Bano et al., 2024).

Closing development gaps and evaluating SP programmes are crucial for sustaining an effective succession pipeline. Professional development initiatives—such as leadership training, mentoring, coaching, and targeted courses—are designed to address competency gaps identified during performance and future-role assessments (Rothwell, 2015; Abdellah, 2021). Organisations that fail to invest in leadership development risk losing critical knowledge and experiencing productivity declines when senior leaders retire (Chavez, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2014). In Malaysia, the Ministry of Higher Education and AKEPT play key roles in fostering academic leadership through structured training and career development programmes (Chia & Razak, 2021; Bano et al., 2024). Overall, SP serves not only as a strategic planning tool but also as a motivational signal to academic staff by clarifying career trajectories, enhancing commitment, and reinforcing retention, thereby contributing to long-term institutional sustainability in higher education.

3. CONCEPTUAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE LITERATURE

Synthesising the literature on Talent Management (TM), Talent Retention (TR), and Succession Planning (SP) reveals a critical conceptual insight: while each construct is well theorised individually, their interrelationships remain underdeveloped, particularly within higher education contexts. TM frameworks primarily focus on building talent capability, TR theories emphasise sustaining employee commitment, and SP models concentrate on leadership continuity. However, these bodies of literature are rarely integrated into a single explanatory framework.

The review suggests that TM creates leadership capacity, TR preserves that capacity, and SP institutionalises it over time. Without effective TR mechanisms, TM investments risk being lost through academic turnover; similarly, SP initiatives are unlikely to succeed if identified successors are not retained long enough to assume leadership roles. This interdependence is particularly pronounced in universities, where academic career trajectories are long-term and leadership development unfolds over extended periods.

In the Malaysian higher education context, this conceptual fragmentation is further compounded by centralised governance structures, performance-based accountability systems, and national leadership development initiatives coordinated by agencies such as AKEPT. These contextual features highlight the need for an integrated framework that explicitly positions TR as the mediating mechanism linking TM and SP, rather than treating retention as a secondary outcome or implicit assumption.

Accordingly, the literature reviewed in this section provides a strong theoretical justification for the development of an integrated TM–TR–SP framework tailored to universities. Such a framework offers conceptual clarity, addresses limitations in existing models, and provides a coherent foundation for future empirical research and policy-oriented interventions aimed at sustaining academic leadership and institutional excellence.

4. CONCEPTUAL APPROACH AND FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT This paper adopts a conceptual research approach grounded in theory synthesis and integrative framework development rather than empirical hypothesis testing. Specifically, the study systematically reviews, compares, and synthesises three established theoretical models: Davies and Davies' (2010) Talent Management in Education Model, Das's (2013) Talent Retention Criteria Model, and Rothwell's (2015) Succession Planning Performance Model to construct a unified framework suitable for the higher education context.

The framework development followed three conceptual steps. First, the core assumptions, constructs, and mechanisms of each model were examined to identify their primary focus and theoretical contributions. Davies and Davies' model provides a strategic lens on how talent is identified, developed, and embedded within organisational culture; Das's model explicates the motivational and relational conditions that sustain employee retention; and Rothwell's model explains how retained talent is systematically prepared for future leadership roles.

Second, points of convergence and limitation across the three models were critically analysed. While each model is robust within its domain, the analysis revealed that they are often applied independently in both research and practice. In particular, TM models tend to assume retention, retention models rarely extend to leadership succession, and SP models often presume stable internal talent pools without fully theorising retention dynamics.

Third, an integrative logic was applied to reposition the three models into a sequential and interdependent system whereby Talent Management functions as the strategic driver, Talent Retention operates as the mediating mechanism, and Succession Planning represents the long-term organisational outcome. This conceptual integration responds directly to the structural and governance realities of Malaysian universities, including performance-based accountability, centralised leadership development, and extended academic career trajectories.

5. AN INTEGRATED TM-TR-SP FRAMEWORK FOR UNIVERSITIES



Figure 1.1 Talent Management Framework

Source: *The Talent Management in Education Model* (Davies & Davies 2010), *The Employee Retention & Job Satisfaction Model* (Das 2013) dan *The Seven-Pointed Star Model* (Rothwell 2011, 2013, 2015)

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed integrated theoretical framework, which positions Talent Management (TM), Talent Retention (TR), and Succession Planning (SP) as a coherent and mutually reinforcing system for sustaining academic leadership and institutional excellence in universities.

At the foundation of the framework is the Talent Management in Education Model (Davies & Davies, 2010), which conceptualises TM as a strategic, institution-wide process comprising talent identification, talent development, and talent culture. Talent identification encompasses systematic performance appraisal and potential assessment as the main drivers of organisational success, ensuring that high-potential academics are recognised and nurtured. Talent development involves strategic, long-term planning to accelerate the growth of academic staff through lifelong learning, professional development and participation in professional bodies, supported by a conducive organisational environment. Talent culture emphasises embedding TM as a pervasive organisational norm so that talent-related practices are integrated into all aspects of institutional work. This model is also aligned with Groves (2007), who stresses the importance of identifying and developing talented staff, planning for succession, establishing mentoring relationships and building a leadership development culture in organisations.

Davies and Davies (2010), Behrstock and Clifford (2009) and Fullan (2001) outline eight key components of TM in education: preparation, recruitment, appointment, induction, professional development, incentives and compensation, work environment and performance management. These components reflect a comprehensive and coherent talent pipeline that begins before recruitment and continues through to ongoing development and performance management. The present study adopts this model as the foundational lens for understanding how universities can systematically attract, develop and deploy academic talent in pursuit of institutional excellence in teaching, research and service.

Building on this foundation, Das's (2013) Talent Retention Criteria Model is positioned as a mediating layer within the framework, linking TM strategies to SP performance. The model explains how TM investments translate into sustained academic commitment through interrelated retention conditions, including compensation, rewards and recognition, promotion and growth opportunities, participation in decision-making, work-life balance, work environment, training and development, leadership quality, and job security. Compensation is viewed as a primary driver of retention, while rewards and recognition signal appreciation and enhance loyalty. Promotion and growth opportunities create a clear career trajectory, whereas participation in decision making fosters a sense of ownership and strengthens relationships between management and academics. Work-life balance, a supportive work environment and continuous training and development further encourage academics to remain in the institution, while leadership style and job security shape their long-term commitment. The model

is consistent with findings by Bartrop-Sackey et al. (2022), Theron et al. (2014) and Matongolo et al. (2018), who emphasise strategic rewards, fair promotion systems, conducive working conditions and formal recognition as crucial retention strategies for high-potential academics. In this framework, TR is not treated as a passive outcome but as an active mechanism that stabilises the talent pool created by TM initiatives

At the apex of the framework is Rothwell's (2015) Succession Planning Performance Model, which conceptualises SP as a continuous, future-oriented cycle. Rothwell's (2015) Succession Planning Performance Model conceptualises SP as a systematic seven-step process: securing organisational commitment, assessing current work, evaluating individual performance, assessing future work requirements, assessing future individual potential, closing development gaps and evaluating the succession planning programme. Commitment from decision makers is essential to institutionalise SP as a formal programme. The assessment of current and future work clarifies key leadership positions, competency requirements and emerging organisational needs, while performance and potential assessments help build a talent inventory for future leadership roles. Development gaps are then addressed through continuous leadership development initiatives, and the overall SP programme is subject to ongoing evaluation and refinement. This model is consistent with Orellano and Miller's (1997) three basic principles of SP identifying key positions, anticipating vacancies and identifying suitable staff for those positions as well as Jinda and Shaikh's (2020) emphasis on organisational future orientation, the "3C" fit (competence, connection and culture), integrated learning experiences, talented staff involvement and broader leadership networks. The Seven-Pointed Star Model by Rothwell (2015) has also been acknowledged and applied in Malaysian universities, reinforcing its relevance to the present context. The framework explicitly assumes that effective SP is contingent on the successful retention of identified talent over time, particularly in universities where leadership readiness develops gradually across academic careers.

The integrative contribution of this framework lies in its explicit articulation of causal and temporal linkages among TM, TR, and SP. TM creates leadership capability; TR preserves and stabilises that capability; and SP institutionalises it through structured preparation for future roles. This integrated or interdependence framework is particularly pertinent to Malaysian universities such as UTMSPACE, where building and sustaining a robust academic leadership pipeline depends on the alignment of TM practices, effective retention strategies and structured, evidence-based SP processes.

The integration of these three theories demonstrates that when employee needs are met through effective TM strategies, motivation and job satisfaction improve. This, in turn, increases TR and ensures that organizations have prepared candidates ready to assume critical roles when needed (Harun Samsuddin et al., 2023). By providing a positive work environment and clear career development opportunities, organizations can boost employee commitment and reduce turnover rates.

Ultimately, this theoretical framework offers clear guidance for organizations on how to integrate TM, employee motivation, and strategic planning to achieve long-term success. Through a holistic and continuous approach to TM, organizations can achieve competitive excellence, operational stability, and sustainable performance.

6. CONCLUSION

This concept paper advances the literature by repositioning Talent Management, Talent Retention, and Succession Planning as an integrated strategic system rather than as isolated human resource practices. Drawing on established models by Davies and Davies (2010), Das (2013), and Rothwell (2015), the paper demonstrates that sustainable academic leadership cannot be achieved through fragmented initiatives. Instead, universities must align talent identification, development, and culture-building efforts with retention mechanisms that stabilise human capital and succession processes that institutionalise leadership continuity.

Taken together, the documents position TM, TR and SP as an integrated system rather than isolated HR practices. Strategically designed TM anchored in rigorous talent identification; rich development opportunities and a pervasive talent culture create a pool of capable academics and emerging leaders. When combined with supportive conditions captured in the TR model (for example, fair rewards, meaningful career prospects, participative climates and a positive work environment), these practices foster higher levels of loyalty, commitment and intention to stay, thereby stabilising the academic workforce. Stable retention, in turn, strengthens SP by ensuring that internal successors are available and sufficiently developed to assume critical roles, reducing disruption, safeguarding organisational culture and supporting long-term institutional sustainability. In the specific context of Malaysian higher education and institutions such as UTMSPACE, this integrated TM, TR and SP framework is presented as crucial for building a resilient academic leadership pipeline

capable of sustaining excellence in teaching, research and service in an increasingly competitive and dynamic environment.

In the Malaysian higher education context, characterised by centralised governance, performance-based accountability, and long academic career horizons, this integrated framework offers both theoretical and practical value. The framework provides a conceptual foundation for future empirical testing, guides institutional policy design, and supports leadership development strategies tailored to universities such as UTMSPACE. By explicitly modelling how TM drives TR and how retained talent enables effective SP, the framework responds to a critical gap in existing scholarship and contributes to more coherent and sustainable approaches to academic talent management.

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