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Unlocking Workforce Potential: Strategies for Boosting Manufacturing Firm Performance in Enugu State

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Abstract: Manufacturing firms in Enugu State, Nigeria, continue to face persistent challenges in productivity, customer satisfaction, and asset utilization, largely due to inadequate talent management practices. This study examined the relationship between talent management and organizational performance in selected manufacturing companies within the state. Specifically, the study investigated the effects of talent acquisition on customer satisfaction, the influence of talent development on return on assets (ROA), and the impact of talent deployment on productivity. The study population comprised 840 employees across five manufacturing firms (Innoson, Emenite, Juhel, Bon Industries, and B.O. MBA). Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample of 271 respondents was proportionally drawn, with 212 completed questionnaires returned, yielding an 83.79% response rate. Data were collected via structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and Structural Equation Modeling in IBM SPSS AMOS 26.0 with Maximum Likelihood estimation. Findings indicated significant positive relationships between talent acquisition and customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$), talent development and ROA ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$), and talent deployment and productivity ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$). Collectively, talent management practices accounted for 47% of the variance in firm performance. The study concluded that strategic talent management substantially enhances customer satisfaction, financial performance, and operational productivity in manufacturing firms. It recommended that organizations institutionalize integrated talent frameworks, adopt competency-based recruitment, implement continuous learning programs, and employ data-driven deployment strategies to sustain competitive advantage.

Keywords: *Talent management, Organizational performance, Manufacturing firms, Enugu State, Nigeria, Customer satisfaction and productivity*

1. Introduction

Talent management has become a critical strategic priority for organizations striving for sustainable competitive advantage in today's complex and dynamic business environment. Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin, and Michaels (1998) argue that the "war for talent" represents one of the most pressing challenges for contemporary organizations. This challenge is particularly pronounced in manufacturing sectors, where technical expertise and operational precision directly affect organizational performance.

Talent management refers to systematic processes for attracting, developing, engaging, and retaining individuals with essential

competencies that drive organizational success. Collings and Mellahi (2009) note that effective talent management extends beyond conventional human resource practices, encompassing strategic workforce planning and capability development. Manufacturing firms face unique challenges in this regard due to rapid technological advancements and evolving skill requirements.

Empirical studies consistently highlight strong links between talent management practices and enhanced organizational performance. Boudreau and Ramstad (2005) emphasize that talent constitutes a strategic organizational asset requiring deliberate management, much like other critical resources. This perspective is particularly relevant in manufacturing industries, where human capital significantly influences operational efficiency, innovation, and customer satisfaction.

In developing economies, the adoption of structured talent management practices has been slower than in advanced markets, often constrained by limited resources and low awareness of strategic benefits. Nevertheless, Anlesinya, Amponsah-Tawiah, Adom, Damoah, and Dartey-Baah (2021) observe that organizations in emerging markets increasingly recognize talent management as pivotal to national competitiveness and economic development, driving greater interest in adapting these practices to local contexts.

Nigeria's manufacturing sector has historically contended with infrastructure deficits, policy inconsistencies, and skill mismatches. Oseghale, Malik, Nyuur, Pereira, and Ellis (2018) note that these challenges are further intensified by rapid technological changes demanding new competencies and adaptive capabilities. Despite these obstacles, some Nigerian manufacturing firms are increasingly adopting strategic talent management approaches to mitigate operational inefficiencies and strengthen competitiveness.

Enugu State, situated in southeastern Nigeria, hosts diverse manufacturing activities across sectors such as automotive, pharmaceuticals, and consumer goods. The state's industrial landscape mirrors national trends, characterized by both growth opportunities and persistent operational challenges. Understanding the influence of talent management on performance outcomes in this context offers valuable insights for both practitioners and researchers.

The link between talent management and organizational performance operates through multiple mechanisms. Becker and Huselid (2006) demonstrate that strategic human resource practices enhance performance by improving employee capabilities, motivation, and organizational structures, resulting in measurable gains in financial, operational, and customer-focused outcomes. Manufacturing organizations, in particular, benefit from systematic talent management because of their reliance on technical expertise and operational precision. Lepak and Snell (1999) emphasize that manufacturing firms must balance efficiency with flexibility, making effective talent deployment essential for organizational success, especially as processes become more complex and technology-dependent.

Despite growing recognition of the strategic importance of talent management, research gaps persist regarding its implementation and effectiveness within Nigerian manufacturing contexts. Many existing studies focus on service industries or fail to account for regional and sector-specific factors that shape talent practices. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the relationships between talent management dimensions—talent acquisition, development, and deployment—and performance outcomes in manufacturing firms in Enugu State.

This research contributes both theoretically and practically to understanding talent management in developing economy contexts. By examining the effects of talent acquisition, development, and deployment on customer

satisfaction, return on assets (ROA), and productivity, the study provides comprehensive insights into optimizing human capital investments for competitive advantage.

The **main objective** of the study is to assess talent management and performance in manufacturing firms in Enugu State, Nigeria. The **specific objectives** are to:

1. Determine the extent to which **talent acquisition** affects **customer satisfaction** in manufacturing firms in Enugu State.

2. Assess the impact of **talent development** on **return on assets (ROA)** in manufacturing firms in Enugu State.

3. Examine how **talent deployment** influences **productivity** in manufacturing firms in Enugu State.

The study is guided by the following **research questions**:

1. What are the effects of talent acquisition on customer satisfaction in manufacturing firms in Enugu State?

2. How does talent development influence return on assets (ROA) in manufacturing firms in Enugu State?

3. In what ways does talent deployment affect productivity in manufacturing firms in Enugu State?

The study tests the following **hypotheses**:

H_1: Talent acquisition has a significant impact on customer satisfaction in manufacturing firms in Enugu State.

H_2: Talent development has a significant impact on return on assets (ROA) in manufacturing firms in Enugu State.

H_3: Talent deployment has a significant impact on productivity in manufacturing firms in Enugu State.

2. Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Framework

Talent Management and Organizational Performance

The relationship between talent management and organizational performance has garnered significant scholarly attention over recent decades. Thunnissen, Boselie, and Fruytier (2013) highlighted through a comprehensive review that talent management is a maturing field, increasingly supported by empirical evidence demonstrating its impact on performance. Their findings indicate that organizations implementing systematic talent management practices consistently outperform competitors across multiple performance dimensions.

Modern talent management encompasses four interrelated components: talent acquisition, development, engagement, and retention. Lewis and Heckman (2006) provided an early comprehensive framework emphasizing that effective talent management requires coordinated implementation across all components rather than isolated practices.

The strategic importance of talent management has intensified due to skills shortages, demographic shifts, and technological disruptions. Scullion and Collings (2011) argued that these environmental pressures render talent management a critical capability for organizational growth and sustainability. In manufacturing, rapid technological advancement necessitates continuous capability development, making talent management a central driver of operational success.

Research consistently demonstrates positive associations between talent management practices and organizational outcomes. Kontoghiorghes (2016) found that organizations with high-performance cultures underpinned by talent management report higher employee satisfaction, motivation, and commitment, which translate into measurable gains in financial, operational, and customer-focused performance metrics. Pawar, Cahyono, Indrati, Siswati, and Loupias (2022) further confirmed that talent management

exerts cascading effects across organizations, emphasizing the importance of holistic implementation rather than fragmented interventions.

Talent Acquisition and Customer Satisfaction

Talent acquisition forms the foundation of effective talent management systems. Schuler, Jackson, and Tarique (2011) define it as strategic processes for identifying, attracting, and hiring individuals whose skills and competencies align with organizational objectives. Modern talent acquisition goes beyond traditional recruitment to include workforce planning, employer branding, and comprehensive selection strategies.

The relationship between talent acquisition and customer satisfaction operates through multiple mechanisms. Employees with appropriate skills and cultural alignment are better positioned to understand and meet customer needs. Namasivayam, Guchait, and Lei (2014) demonstrated that empowered employees aligned with organizational culture deliver superior customer service. Structured recruitment that prioritizes customer-oriented competencies fosters organizational cultures centered on customer value creation.

The quality of new hires directly affects customer satisfaction through improved service delivery, relationship management, and operational reliability. Saks (2006) highlighted that engaged employees exhibit higher customer orientation and service quality—particularly critical in manufacturing, where product quality, delivery reliability, and technical support influence customer experiences. External factors such as labor market conditions, economic trends, and industry dynamics also shape the effectiveness of talent acquisition, necessitating adaptable and strategic approaches. Technological tools, including digital platforms, applicant tracking systems, and analytics, increasingly enable efficient identification and selection of high-quality candidates, providing competitive advantages in talent markets.

Talent Development and Return on Assets

Talent development refers to structured efforts to enhance employee skills and capabilities through training, mentoring, education, and career planning. De Vos and Dries (2013) argue that development initiatives create mutual value by strengthening organizational capabilities while advancing individual career goals. These programs directly influence financial performance by improving resource utilization and operational efficiency.

The link between talent development and return on assets (ROA) operates through improved productivity and innovation. Well-trained employees optimize equipment use, identify process improvements, and minimize production waste, translating into enhanced asset utilization and financial performance. Deery and Jago (2015) report that organizations with systematic development programs experience reduced recruitment costs, improved retention, and stronger succession pipelines, producing long-term competitive advantages. Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2011) further highlight that development programs enhance decision-making, problem-solving, and adaptability, creating multi-dimensional value for organizations.

Effective development programs must consider organizational context, industry characteristics, technological demands, and competitive dynamics. Aligning development initiatives with strategic priorities ensures relevance and maximizes employee learning outcomes. Measuring the impact of talent development requires a combination of traditional financial metrics and assessments of intangible benefits, capturing the full spectrum of organizational value created.

Talent Deployment and Productivity

Talent deployment involves strategically placing individuals in roles where they can maximize contributions to organizational objectives. Schiemann, Seibert, and Blankenship (2018) emphasize that effective

deployment optimizes human capital utilization while supporting employee growth.

The relationship between talent deployment and productivity is grounded in resource optimization principles. Employees performing roles aligned with their strengths and interests demonstrate higher engagement and performance, resulting in measurable productivity gains. Factors such as organizational structure, job design, and management practices significantly influence deployment effectiveness. Flexible deployment strategies that adapt to business needs and employee aspirations outperform rigid assignment approaches.

Afram, Manresa, and Mas-Machuca (2022) show that strategic deployment enhances performance through increased employee motivation, engagement, and organizational citizenship behaviors. The use of data and analytics to assess individual capabilities supports informed deployment decisions, maximizing both individual and organizational outcomes. Beyond immediate productivity gains, strategic deployment strengthens long-term organizational agility by cultivating versatile, adaptable workforces—critical for success in dynamic, technology-driven manufacturing environments.

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory (HCT) offers a foundational lens for understanding the relationship between talent management and organizational performance. Initially developed by economists such as Gary Becker, the theory posits that investments in education, training, and employee development enhance individual productivity and capabilities, creating organizational value. At its core, HCT conceptualizes human capital as a critical production factor that can be developed and leveraged to achieve competitive advantage.

Modern applications of HCT extend beyond economic productivity to include broader organizational and strategic outcomes. Pasban and Nojedeh (2016) observe that human capital investments generate value not only through productivity gains but also by enhancing innovation capacity, improving customer relationships, and fostering organizational adaptability. In manufacturing contexts, where technical expertise and operational precision are essential, HCT underscores the importance of continuous skill development to optimize efficiency and performance outcomes.

The integration of psychological empowerment with HCT, as proposed by Spreitzer (1995), further explains how human capital investments influence motivation and performance. This perspective highlights that talent development contributes value not only by enhancing capabilities but also by fostering employee engagement and empowerment. HCT is particularly useful for analyzing talent management in developing economies, where resource constraints necessitate careful prioritization of human capital investments based on expected returns and strategic impact.

Resource-Based View

The Resource-Based View (RBV) complements HCT by providing a strategic framework for understanding talent management as a source of sustainable competitive advantage. RBV asserts that competitive advantage arises from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). Human capital, when effectively managed and developed, possesses these characteristics and can serve as a critical driver of organizational success.

From the RBV perspective, talent management practices enable organizations to develop and leverage human capital resources that competitors cannot easily replicate. Gallardo-Gallardo (2018) emphasizes that tacit knowledge, relationships, and organizational routines cultivated through strategic talent management become embedded assets, reinforcing sustained competitive advantage. In manufacturing,

technical expertise, process knowledge, and operational capabilities are particularly valuable and difficult-to-replicate resources; effective talent management ensures these competencies are maintained and adapted to evolving technological and market demands.

RBV encourages organizations to view human capital as a strategic asset rather than a mere operational cost. Aligning talent management practices with organizational strategy maximizes value creation and strengthens long-term competitiveness. Ulrich, Kryscynski, Brockbank, and Ulrich (2017) further highlight that treating talent as a strategic capability, rather than an administrative function, allows organizations to implement integrated talent management systems that drive sustainable performance outcomes.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a survey research design, utilizing structured questionnaires to collect primary data from the selected sample. The survey approach was considered appropriate because it enables systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data regarding the impact of talent management on manufacturing firm performance in Enugu State. This design allows for standardized data gathering from multiple respondents, facilitating statistical analysis and hypothesis testing, in line with recommendations by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019).

The study was conducted in Enugu metropolis, covering the capital city and surrounding local government areas—Enugu East, Enugu North, and Enugu South. This metropolitan area represents a major hub for industrial development, commerce, and administration in Enugu State. The concentration of manufacturing firms within this region makes it particularly suitable for investigating talent management practices and their performance implications.

Population and Sample

The study population comprised 840 employees from five manufacturing firms: Innoson Vehicle Manufacturing (n = 172), Emenite Nigeria Limited (n = 252), Juhel Nigeria Limited (n = 204), Bon Industries (n = 92), and B.O. MBA Industrial Food Chemicals (n = 120). Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination method, supplemented by Yamane's (1967) formula at a 95% confidence level, a total sample size of 271 was calculated. The sample was proportionally allocated across the firms to ensure representation of employees from all organizations.

Table 3.1: Population and Sample Distribution

Firm	Total Population	Allocated Sample
Innoson	172	52
Emenite	252	76
Juhel	204	61
Bon Industries	92	28
B.O. MBA	120	36
Total	**840**	**253**

Data Collection

Primary data were obtained using structured questionnaires distributed to employees across all organizational levels and departments. The questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree) to capture respondents' perceptions of talent management practices and their impact on organizational performance.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Maximum Likelihood estimation in IBM SPSS AMOS 26.0. This approach aligns with the recommendations of Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2019) for investigating complex relationships among latent constructs and multiple performance indicators.

4. Results

Data Presentation and Analysis

Response Rate and Demographics

A total of 253 questionnaires were distributed with 212 successfully retrieved, representing

an 83.79% response rate. This response rate exceeds the 70% threshold recommended for survey research and provides sufficient data for reliable statistical analysis.

Table 4.1: Response Rate and Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Response Rate	Distributed	253	100.0%
	Returned	212	83.79%
	Not Returned	41	16.21%
Age Distribution	18-25 years	23	10.8%
	26-35 years	20	9.4%
	36-45 years	118	55.7%
	46-55 years	32	15.1%
	Above 55 years	19	9.0%
Gender	Male	172	81.1%
	Female	40	18.9%
Education	Secondary School	45	21.2%
	Diploma/Certificate	47	22.2%
	Bachelor's Degree	34	16.0%
	Master's Degree	45	21.2%
	PhD/Doctorate	41	19.3%
Experience	Less than 1 year	35	16.5%
	1-3 years	80	37.7%
	4-6 years	49	23.1%
	7-10 years	11	5.2%
	More than 10 years	37	17.5%
Position	Senior Staff	46	21.7%
	Managerial Role	47	22.2%
	Junior Staff	107	50.5%
	Executive Role	12	5.7%

Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Table 4.2: Talent Management Practices Assessment

Variable	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
Talent Management	Organization effectively manages talents to improve performance	16 (7.5%)	56 (26.4%)	36 (17.0%)	55 (25.9%)	49 (23.1%)
	Talent practices contribute to organizational goals	50 (23.6%)	15 (7.1%)	28 (13.2%)	83 (39.2%)	36 (17.0%)
	Talented employees are utilized beneficially	110 (51.9%)	24 (11.3%)	12 (5.7%)	36 (17.0%)	30 (14.2%)
	Skills matched with appropriate roles	30 (14.2%)	50 (23.6%)	26 (12.3%)	61 (28.8%)	45 (21.2%)
	Investment in talent development programs	37 (17.5%)	11 (5.2%)	49 (23.1%)	18 (8.5%)	97 (45.8%)
Talent Acquisition	Recruitment helps hire customer-focused people	57 (26.9%)	30 (14.2%)	59 (27.8%)	14 (6.6%)	52 (24.5%)
	Quality hires impact customer satisfaction	38 (17.9%)	57 (26.9%)	27 (12.7%)	20 (9.4%)	70 (33.0%)
	Hiring focuses on excellent customer service	26 (12.3%)	13 (6.1%)	25 (11.8%)	119 (56.1%)	29 (13.7%)
	Customer satisfaction from skilled recruitment	39 (18.4%)	34 (16.0%)	40 (18.9%)	39 (18.4%)	60 (28.3%)
	Right acquisition leads to better customer relations	52 (24.5%)	69 (32.5%)	31 (14.6%)	10 (4.7%)	50 (23.6%)

Talent Development	Training improves performance and financial results	50 (23.6%)	24 (11.3%)	49 (23.1%)	58 (27.4%)	31 (14.6%)
	Development increases asset value	11 (5.2%)	55 (25.9%)	43 (20.3%)	43 (20.3%)	60 (28.3%)
	Training contributes to profitability	78 (36.8%)	38 (17.9%)	19 (9.0%)	26 (12.3%)	51 (24.1%)
	Skills development improves resource efficiency	16 (7.5%)	13 (6.1%)	44 (20.8%)	21 (9.9%)	118 (55.7%)
	Development impacts ROA positively	36 (17.0%)	17 (8.0%)	126 (59.4%)	14 (6.6%)	19 (9.0%)
Talent Deployment	Skill-based assignment improves efficiency	35 (16.5%)	55 (25.9%)	24 (11.3%)	48 (22.6%)	50 (23.6%)
	Proper placement boosts productivity	44 (20.8%)	43 (20.3%)	14 (6.6%)	81 (38.2%)	30 (14.2%)
	Effective deployment reduces project delays	69 (32.5%)	15 (7.1%)	35 (16.5%)	40 (18.9%)	53 (25.0%)
	Working in areas of excellence enhances quality	23 (10.8%)	85 (40.1%)	30 (14.2%)	51 (24.1%)	23 (10.8%)
	Effective deployment increases team productivity	46 (21.7%)	27 (12.7%)	56 (26.4%)	70 (33.0%)	13 (6.1%)

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Descriptive Statistics and Normality Assessment

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Construct	Indicator	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Talent Management	TM1	3.43	0.66	-0.89	-0.52
	TM2	3.90	0.73	0.28	0.67
	TM3	2.86	0.91	0.19	1.48
Talent Acquisition	TA1	3.49	0.79	-0.96	0.84
	TA2	3.99	1.04	-0.36	1.65
	TA3	3.58	0.70	-0.91	0.89
Talent Development	TD1	2.72	0.72	0.78	1.99
	TD2	3.24	0.52	0.02	1.92
	TD3	4.17	1.02	-0.53	0.40
Talent Deployment	TP1	3.21	1.08	0.73	-0.92
	TP2	3.36	0.87	0.41	1.65
	TP3	3.31	1.02	-0.49	1.42

All indicators fell within acceptable ranges of skewness (±1) and kurtosis (±2), confirming approximate normality assumptions needed for Structural Equation Modeling analysis.

Correlation Analysis

Table 4.4: Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Talent Management	1.00			
2. Talent Acquisition	0.41**	1.00		
3. Talent Development	0.70**	0.45**	1.00	
4. Talent Deployment	0.37**	0.63**	0.71**	1.00

**p < 0.01

All constructs demonstrated positive correlations, indicating consistent directional relationships. The highest correlation was between Talent Development and Talent Deployment (r = 0.71), while the weakest was between Talent Management and Talent Deployment (r = 0.37).

Structural Equation Modeling Results

Model Fit Assessment

Table 4.5: Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Threshold	Interpretation
Chi-Square/df (CMIN/DF)	1.08	< 3.00	Acceptable fit
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.93	≥ 0.90	Good fit
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.95	≥ 0.90	Good fit
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.04	< 0.08	Acceptable fit
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	0.07	< 0.08	Acceptable fit
Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	0.95	≥ 0.90	Good fit
Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI)	0.86	≥ 0.85	Acceptable fit

The model demonstrated acceptable to good fit across all indices, supporting the appropriateness of the structural model for hypothesis testing.

Path Analysis Results

Table 4.6: Structural Path Coefficients

Hypothesized Relationship	β (Estimate)	SE	C.R.	p-value	Result
Talent Management → Performance	0.47	0.03	5.36	***	Supported
Talent Acquisition → Customer Satisfaction	0.69	0.07	7.45	***	Supported
Talent Development → Return on Assets	0.58	0.04	4.24	***	Supported
Talent Deployment → Productivity	0.49	0.04	7.20	***	Supported

*** $p < 0.001$

All hypothesized relationships were statistically significant, with critical ratios greater than 1.96 and p-values below 0.001. Talent Acquisition exhibited the strongest impact on customer satisfaction (β = 0.69), whereas overall Talent Management had a moderate effect on organizational performance (β = 0.47).

Test Of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H_1: Talent Acquisition has a significant impact on Customer Satisfaction of manufacturing firms in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Result: β = 0.69, SE = 0.07, C.R. = 7.45, p < 0.001

Decision: The hypothesis is accepted as the relationship is statistically significant.

Conclusion: Talent Acquisition significantly and positively affects Customer Satisfaction in manufacturing firms.

Hypothesis Two

H_2: Talent Development has a significant impact on Return on Assets (ROA) of manufacturing firms in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Result: β = 0.58, SE = 0.04, C.R. = 4.24, p < 0.001

Decision: The hypothesis is accepted based on statistical significance.

Conclusion: Talent Development significantly improves Return on Assets in manufacturing firms.

Hypothesis Three

H_3: Talent Deployment has a significant impact on Productivity of manufacturing firms in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Result: β = 0.49, SE = 0.04, C.R. = 7.20, p < 0.001

Decision: The hypothesis is accepted due to statistical significance.

Conclusion: Talent Deployment has a positive and significant effect on Productivity in manufacturing firms.

5. Discussion Of Findings

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the influence of talent management practices on organizational performance in Nigerian manufacturing firms. These results align with existing theoretical and empirical literature, while offering novel insights relevant to both scholars and practitioners.

The analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between **talent acquisition** and **customer satisfaction** ($\beta = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$), confirming theoretical expectations and extending evidence to developing economy manufacturing contexts. This finding supports Saks (2006), who emphasized the role of employee engagement in fostering customer-focused behaviors. The strong effect suggests that manufacturing firms adopting strategic talent acquisition practices are likely to achieve substantial improvements in customer satisfaction.

This relationship operates through multiple mechanisms. Luna-Arocas and Morley (2015) highlighted that talent management influences job satisfaction, which subsequently impacts service quality. In manufacturing contexts, customer satisfaction is shaped not only by direct service interactions but also by product quality, delivery reliability, and technical support capabilities, adding complexity to this relationship.

The study also found a significant impact of **talent development** on **return on assets (ROA)** ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$), providing empirical support for Human Capital Theory. Consistent with Ekhsan, Parashakti, Sudiro, and Ashford (2020), talent management enhances performance through employee empowerment and capability building. In manufacturing firms, asset utilization is directly linked to employee competencies and operational expertise, making talent development particularly critical.

The magnitude of this effect indicates that investments in talent development can yield substantial financial returns. As argued by Deery and Jago (2015), employee development programs create value through improved productivity, reduced errors, and enhanced innovation, positioning talent development as a strategic investment rather than an operational expense.

Furthermore, **talent deployment** demonstrated a significant positive relationship with **productivity** ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$), validating principles of resource optimization inherent in effective human capital management. This finding extends research by Afram, Manresa, and Mas-Machuca (2022) on the impact of employee empowerment to manufacturing contexts in developing economies. Strategic deployment ensures that employees are matched to roles that leverage their skills, enhancing operational efficiency.

This relationship aligns with the concepts of person-job fit and optimal resource allocation. Spreitzer (1995) emphasized that psychological empowerment, including proper role assignment, improves motivation and performance. In manufacturing, deployment is particularly important as operational outcomes depend heavily on aligning individual capabilities with production requirements and technological demands.

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that talent management functions as an **integrated system** rather than as isolated practices. Correlations among talent management dimensions (ranging from 0.37 to 0.71) suggest synergistic effects when practices are implemented comprehensively, supporting Lewis and Heckman's (2006) argument for coordinated talent management approaches.

The variance explained in firm performance (47%) indicates that talent management is a significant driver of organizational outcomes, while acknowledging the influence of other factors. This supports Resource-Based View (RBV) predictions that human capital can serve as a source of competitive advantage when effectively managed, particularly in manufacturing contexts where technical

expertise and operational capabilities are valuable and difficult to replicate.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of talent management on the performance of manufacturing firms in Enugu State, Nigeria, providing empirical validation for theoretical links between human capital practices and organizational outcomes. Structural Equation Modeling was used to examine the effects of talent acquisition, development, and deployment on customer satisfaction, return on assets, and productivity, respectively.

The results show that talent management significantly influences multiple dimensions of performance. **Talent acquisition** strongly affects customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.69$), indicating that strategic recruitment practices directly shape service quality and client relationships. **Talent development** significantly enhances return on assets ($\beta = 0.58$), demonstrating the financial value of systematically investing in employee skills and operational expertise. **Talent deployment** positively influences productivity ($\beta = 0.49$), highlighting the importance of optimal role assignment and effective resource utilization.

The study contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it offers empirical support for Human Capital Theory and the Resource-Based View in Nigerian manufacturing contexts. Practically, it demonstrates that comprehensive talent management can drive measurable performance improvements, even in challenging operational environments. The results also underscore the integrated nature of talent management, with combined implementation of acquisition, development, and deployment practices generating greater benefits than isolated interventions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for manufacturing firms, policymakers, and researchers:

1. **Strengthen Strategic Recruitment Processes:** Manufacturing firms should implement structured, competency-based recruitment systems focused on identifying candidates with both technical expertise and customer service orientation. Investments in employer branding and recruitment technologies can enhance the attraction of high-quality talent.

2. **Invest in Continuous Employee Development:** Firms should allocate dedicated budgets for training, create performance-linked development opportunities, and establish clear career progression pathways. Development programs should align with technological advancements and strategic business objectives to maximize operational and financial returns.

3. **Improve Talent Deployment Mechanisms:** HR departments should develop competency assessment tools, implement role-matching systems, and adopt flexible deployment frameworks. Regular reviews ensure optimal utilization of human resources as business needs evolve.

4. **Adopt Integrated Talent Management Frameworks:** Organizations should implement cohesive systems combining acquisition, development, and deployment practices, rather than isolated initiatives. Integrated frameworks should align with strategic goals, organizational culture, and local context factors to maximize effectiveness.

Overall, the findings highlight that strategic talent management is a critical pathway for manufacturing firms in developing economies to achieve competitive advantage and sustainable growth. Systematic investment in human capital can yield measurable improvements in customer satisfaction, financial performance, and operational efficiency, establishing employees as a core strategic asset in an increasingly competitive environment.

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