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TALENT MANAGEMENT AND OF EMPLOYEE EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO ORGANIZATION IN TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between talent management and employee emotional connection to organisation in technology companies in Rivers State. A cross-sectional survey research design was employed, targeting a population of 52 tech companies registered with the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in Rivers State. Given the manageable population size, a census sampling approach was adopted. Data was collected through both primary and secondary sources and analyzed using frequencies, simple percentages, and weighted mean scores. Spearman Rank Order (Rho) and Linear Regression analysis were conducted to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance, using SPSS software version 25.0. The findings revealed that the dimensions of strategic workforce management HR Analytics, Talent Management, and Workforce Planning positively and significantly contribute to employee emotional connection to organisation. Based on the results, the study concluded that talent management has a substantial positive impact on employee emotional connection to organisation in tech companies in Rivers State. The study recommended that tech companies should invest in advanced talent management such as regular training on data interpretation for HR professionals is suggested to improve the accuracy of insights and subsequent actions.

Keywords: Talent Management, Employee Emotional Connection to Organisation,Emotional Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Strategic workforce management involves aligning HR practices with organizational goals to drive business success (Vance, 2006). On the other hand, employee engagement refers to the active involvement and emotional connection of employees with their work. (Ogedengbe, 2024). Research indicates that effective strategic workforce management practices, including talent management and workforce planning, are crucial for cultivating a high-performance workforce (Zaim *et al*., 2018). Moreover, employee engagement has been linked to various positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, productivity, and retention (Vnoučková *et al*., 2016).

In the international context, studies by scholars like Brown and Mitchell (2020) have shown that strategic workforce management improves employee engagement in developed economies by fostering an innovation-driven culture and providing employees with career development opportunities. However, these studies often assume organizational stability and access to abundant resources—conditions that are not always applicable in developing regions such as Rivers State. The contextual gap is evident, as the unique socioeconomic and organizational challenges in this region remain largely unaddressed. Tech companies in Rivers State face issues such as infrastructural deficits, talent migration, and limited funding, which could influence how workforce management practices are implemented and perceived by employees. The current study addresses these gaps by examining the specific relationship between strategic workforce management and employee engagement in tech companies in Rivers State. Unlike previous research, this study focuses on the dual pressures of managing a highly skilled but mobile workforce while ensuring sustained employee engagement in a challenging operational environment. The point of departure lies in its emphasis on contextual factors unique to the region, such as the local labor market dynamics, the impact of regional economic policies on talent acquisition, and the organizational culture of tech firms in Rivers State.

Furthermore, while existing literature has often treated workforce management and employee engagement as isolated variables, this study adopts a more integrated approach. By linking strategic workforce management to specific dimensions of employee engagement such as motivation, satisfaction, and emotional commitment this study aims to provide a more holistic understanding of the relationship. This perspective offers insights not only into what workforce management practices are effective but also into why they succeed or fail in engaging employees in this specific regional and industrial context. This study's innovative approach also seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical applications by providing actionable recommendations tailored to the realities of tech companies in Rivers State. By addressing these critical gaps, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge and provides a roadmap for organizations seeking to enhance employee engagement through strategic workforce management in an environment characterized by rapid technological change and resource constraints.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide this study:

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between talent management and emotional engagement of tech companies in Rivers State.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between talent management and cognitive engagement of tech companies in Rivers State.

Ho_3: There is no significant relationship between talent management and the behavioral engagement of tech companies in Rivers State.

Talent Management

Talent management is a key dimension of SWM that focuses on identifying, developing, and retaining highly skilled employees to meet current and future business needs. Talent management has become an essential dimension of strategic workforce management, especially within the tech industry where the demand for skilled professionals is high and the competition for top talent is intense. Talent management encompasses the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention, and deployment of individuals who are of particular value to an organization (Cappelli & Keller, 2017). This strategic approach ensures that tech companies have the human capital needed to achieve their business objectives and sustain competitive advantage.

The concept of talent management in the tech industry is multifaceted, involving various HR practices designed to optimize employee performance and potential. It is not merely about filling positions but about managing talent in a way that aligns with the company's strategic goals. This involves creating an environment where top talent can thrive, continuously developing their skills, and ensuring they are engaged and motivated to contribute to the company’s success (Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2019). One of the critical aspects of talent management is talent acquisition. In the tech industry, attracting top talent is challenging due to the high demand for specialized skills such as software development, data science, and cybersecurity. Effective talent management strategies involve proactive recruitment practices, including employer branding, campus recruiting, and leveraging professional networks. These strategies help in building a pipeline of potential candidates who possess the skills and competencies required for the company's growth (Dries, 2013).

Once talent is acquired, the focus shifts to talent development. This includes training and development programs aimed at enhancing employees' skills and preparing them for future roles. Continuous learning and development are particularly important in the tech industry, where rapid technological advancements necessitate ongoing skill updates. Providing opportunities for professional growth not only improves employee capabilities but also boosts job satisfaction and retention. Studies have shown that companies investing in employee development tend to have higher employee engagement and lower turnover rates (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009).

Employee engagement and retention are also critical components of talent management. Engaged employees are more productive, provide better customer service, and are more likely to stay with the company. Effective talent management strategies include initiatives to improve work-life balance, recognition programs, and creating a positive work culture. In the tech industry, where the work environment can be high-pressure, ensuring employee well-being is essential. A study by (Gallup, 2017) highlighted that companies with high employee engagement levels outperform their peers in terms of productivity, profitability, and customer satisfaction. Performance management is another vital element of talent management. This involves setting clear performance expectations, providing regular feedback, and conducting performance appraisals. In tech companies, performance management systems need to be agile and adaptable to the fast-paced nature of the industry. Implementing continuous feedback mechanisms and leveraging technology for performance tracking can help in aligning individual performance with organizational goals (Pulakos, Hanson, Arad, & Moye, 2015).

Succession planning is a strategic component of talent management, ensuring that the organization is prepared for future leadership needs. Identifying and developing potential leaders within the organization helps in maintaining continuity and stability. This is particularly important in the tech industry, where leadership roles require a deep understanding of both technical and business aspects. Effective succession planning involves identifying key positions, assessing potential leaders, and providing them with the necessary development opportunities (Rothwell, 2010).

The integration of talent management with strategic workforce management involves aligning these practices with the overall business strategy. This ensures that talent management initiatives support the long-term goals of the organization. For tech companies, this alignment is crucial given the rapid pace of change and the need for agility. Talent management strategies must be dynamic and responsive to the evolving business environment and technological landscape (Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2019).

Emotional Connection to the Organization

A strong emotional connection to the organization fosters a positive work environment and enhances employee motivation (Haddad & Hornuf, 2018). Emotional connection to the organization refers to the extent to which employees feel a strong affective attachment to their workplace, identifying with its values, mission, and culture (Meyer & Allen, 1991). In the dynamic and often disruptive tech industry, where talent retention is a critical challenge, fostering this emotional connection has become increasingly crucial for maintaining a highly engaged and productive workforce.

The concept of emotional connection is rooted in organizational psychology and has evolved from earlier theories of organizational commitment. (Meyer and Allen's, 1991) three-component model of organizational commitment includes affective commitment, which closely aligns with the concept of emotional connection. This affective component represents an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization.

In tech companies, where innovation and rapid adaptation are paramount, the role of emotional connection in driving employee engagement becomes even more critical. (Kahn, 1990), in his seminal work on engagement, emphasized the importance of psychological conditions that allow people to personally engage in their work roles. Among these conditions, psychological meaningfulness and safety are particularly relevant to fostering emotional connection in the fast-paced and often high-pressure environment of tech companies. Recent research has highlighted the multifaceted nature of emotional connection in the workplace. (Jiang and Men, 2017) propose that emotional connection encompasses not only affective commitment to the organization but also emotional bond with colleagues and emotional engagement with one's work. This holistic view is particularly relevant in tech companies, where collaborative work environments and challenging projects are common.

Transformational leadership, characterized by inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, has been found to be particularly effective in enhancing emotional engagement levels (Breevaart *et al*., 2014). In the tech industry, where visionary leadership is often celebrated, leaders who can create an emotional resonance with their teams are more likely to cultivate strong emotional connections to the organization. The unique culture of tech companies significantly influences the development of emotional connection among employees. (Schein, 2010) emphasizes the importance of organizational culture in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors. Tech companies often pride themselves on fostering cultures of innovation, collaboration, and continuous learning. These cultural elements can contribute to stronger emotional connections by creating an environment where employees feel valued, supported, and aligned with the organization's values and mission.

Relationship between Talent Management and Employee Engagement

The relationship between talent management and employee engagement has been a focal point of research in human resource management due to its significant impact on organizational performance. Talent management involves a comprehensive set of processes that include identifying, attracting, developing, retaining, and deploying individuals who possess the skills and competencies needed to achieve organizational goals. Employee engagement, on the other hand, is characterized by the emotional and cognitive commitment of employees to their work and the organization, leading to higher levels of performance, motivation, and retention. Effective talent management practices are increasingly recognized as essential drivers of employee engagement, as they create an environment where employees feel valued, motivated, and aligned with the organization’s vision and goals.

Several studies have highlighted the strong link between talent management and employee engagement, emphasizing that when organizations invest in their talent, they tend to see higher levels of employee engagement. Talent management practices such as career development opportunities, training and development programs, performance management, and succession planning have been found to significantly influence employee engagement levels. According to (Kumar and Verma, 2023), organizations that implement robust talent management strategies are more likely to foster a culture of continuous learning and growth, which in turn enhances employee engagement. This is because employees perceive that their employers are committed to their professional growth and career advancement, thereby increasing their emotional and cognitive attachment to the organization.

Another dimension of the relationship between talent management and employee engagement is the impact of talent acquisition and retention strategies. Recruitment and selection processes that focus on aligning the right talent with the right roles are crucial for ensuring job satisfaction and engagement. When employees are well-matched to their roles, they are more likely to be engaged, as they feel competent and confident in their job responsibilities. Singh and Sharma, (2024) assert that effective talent acquisition processes that consider not only skills and experience but also cultural fit and employee values can lead to higher engagement levels, as employees feel more connected to the organizational culture and purpose. Retention strategies, particularly those that focus on recognizing and rewarding employee contributions, also play a significant role in enhancing engagement. Organizations that adopt a strategic approach to talent retention by offering competitive compensation packages, providing meaningful work, and ensuring work-life balance—are more likely to retain highly engaged employees. Research by (Patel and Desai, 2023) found that talent retention practices that emphasize recognition, career development, and work-life integration are critical factors in maintaining high engagement levels. Employees who feel valued and appreciated are more likely to demonstrate a strong commitment to the organization and contribute positively to its goals.

Talent development is another crucial component of talent management that significantly affects employee engagement. Opportunities for continuous learning, professional development, and upskilling are critical for keeping employees engaged and motivated. Organizations that invest in training and development programs not only enhance the skills and capabilities of their workforce but also demonstrate a commitment to employee growth and advancement. To Nair and Reddy, (2022), there is a positive relationship between employee development initiatives and engagement levels, as employees who are provided with opportunities to learn and grow are more likely to feel a sense of purpose and belonging within the organization. This sense of purpose fosters higher engagement, as employees are more motivated to contribute to organizational success. Succession planning is also an integral aspect of talent management that impacts employee engagement. Effective succession planning ensures that there is a pipeline of talent ready to take on key roles within the organization, thereby reducing uncertainties and fostering a sense of stability. Employees who see clear career paths and future growth opportunities within the organization are more likely to be engaged. This is supported by recent findings from (Gupta & Arora, 2023), who emphasize that succession planning that involves transparent communication, mentorship, and leadership development programs contributes to employee engagement by providing clarity on career progression and building trust in the organization’s commitment to employee development.

Human Capital Theory (HCT)

Human Capital Theory, developed by (Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz, 1964), posits that employees' knowledge, skills, and experiences are valuable assets that contribute to organizational success. According to HCT, investments in human capital (e.g., training, development) increase employees' productivity and efficiency, leading to improved organizational performance. (Becker, 1964).

Human Capital Theory emphasizes the value of investing in employees to improve their skills, knowledge, and competencies. (Becker, 1964) argued that such investments yield returns not only for the individuals but also for the organizations that employ them. In tech companies, where rapid innovation and technological advancements are crucial, this theory is particularly relevant. Strategic workforce management in this sector involves aligning human capital with the organization's goals, ensuring that employees possess the necessary skills and capabilities to drive innovation and productivity.

Tech companies often implement strategies that align with Human Capital Theory by investing heavily in employee development programs, continuous learning opportunities, and advanced training in emerging technologies. These investments are seen as essential for maintaining a competitive edge in a fast-paced industry. For example, Google's extensive training programs and educational opportunities reflect its commitment to enhancing its employees' human capital, which in turn supports its strategic objectives of innovation and excellence.

Human Capital Theory contributes to this by suggesting that investments in employees' development can enhance their engagement. Engaged employees are more likely to exhibit discretionary effort, take initiative, and go the extra mile behaviors that are critical in tech companies (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). When employees perceive that their organization values and invests in their development, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and commitment, which fosters higher engagement levels. This is particularly relevant in the tech industry, where employee turnover can be high, and retaining top talent is a strategic priority. Providing continuous learning opportunities and career development paths can significantly enhance employee satisfaction and loyalty, leading to higher engagement and retention rates.

The relevance of Human Capital Theory to the present study lies in its focus on the relationship between employee development and organizational outcomes. By understanding how investments in human capital can drive discretionary effort and extra-mile behavior, tech companies can better strategize their workforce management practices to enhance employee engagement. This theory provides a foundational framework for examining how strategic investments in employee development can lead to higher engagement levels, which in turn drive innovation and productivity.

The implications of this theory are significant for tech companies. First, it highlights the importance of viewing employees as strategic assets whose development is crucial for organizational success. Second, it underscores the need for comprehensive training and development programs that keep pace with technological advancements and industry changes. Finally, it suggests that fostering a culture of continuous learning and development can enhance employee engagement, leading to better organizational performance.

METHODOLOGY

Research design is a framework or a plan that is used as a guide to collect and analyze data for study (Baridam, 2001). Cross-Sectional survey research design was adopted for the study which is geared towards the collection of data to gain specific information about a representative sample of a particular group. The National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) recognizes a total of 456 tech companies, however, only 52 of these tech companies are registered in Rivers State. For the sample size, since the population size is not too large, we have decided to census the entire population. Thus, the entire 52 Managing Directors and Human Resource Managers was used as the sample of the study. This study adopted the purposive sampling technique because the researcher relied on her judgment when identifying and selecting the respondents needed for this research work that can provide the best information to achieve the study's objectives. The measurement of instrument in the study was the questionnaire. The data collected from the copies of questionnaire issued out was analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentage, frequencies, tables, and mean). The primary data generated from the respondents was tabulated and analyzed with the use of the four-point Likert scale method (4-point scale). The hypotheses were tested using spearman's rank correlation coefficient with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25.

Results

Relationship between Talent Management and the measures of Employee Engagement.

Correlations on the relationship between Talent Management and the measures of Employee Engagement

			Talent management	Emotional Engagement.	Cognitive Engagement	Behavioural Engagement
Spearman's rho	Talent management	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.130	-.126	-.124
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.003	.000	.000
		N	90	90	90	90
	Emotional Engagement	Correlation Coefficient	-.130	1.000	-.170	-.062
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.	.004	.002
		N	90	90	90	90
	Cognitive Engagement	Correlation Coefficient	-.126	-.170	1.000	-.017
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.004	.	.002
		N	90	90	90	90
	Behavioural Engagement	Correlation Coefficient	-.124	-.062	-.017	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.243	.564	.870	.
		N	90	90	90	90

Table above illustrates the test for the second two set previously postulated bivariate hypothetical statements.

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between talent management and emotional engagement of tech companies in Rivers State.

The SPSS analysis provided examines the correlation between talent management and various measures of employee engagement, including emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, and behavioural engagement, using Spearman's rho.

For **Ho1**, which states: *There is no significant relationship between talent management and emotional engagement of tech companies in Rivers State*, the analysis shows a **correlation coefficient** of **-0.130** between talent management and emotional engagement. This indicates a weak negative correlation between these two variables. The **p-value** (Sig. 2-tailed) for this relationship is **0.003**. Since the p-value is less than the commonly used significance level of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that there is a **statistically significant relationship** between talent management and emotional engagement of tech companies in Rivers State. Although the relationship is weak and negative, it is still statistically significant.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between talent management and cognitive engagement of tech companies in Rivers State.

The correlation coefficient between talent management and cognitive engagement is **-0.126**. This indicates a weak negative relationship between the two variables. The p-value associated with this correlation is **0.000**. Given that the p-value is much less than the typical significance level of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. This means that there is a statistically significant relationship between talent management and cognitive engagement in tech companies in Rivers State. Despite the weak strength of the correlation, it is statistically significant. Thus, Ho5 is rejected, indicating that talent management does indeed have a significant, though weak, relationship with cognitive engagement.

Ho_3: There is no significant relationship between talent management and the behavioral engagement of tech companies in Rivers State.

For **Ho3**, which states: *There is no significant relationship between talent management and behavioural engagement of tech companies in Rivers State*, the correlation coefficient between talent management and behavioural engagement is **-0.124**. This indicates a very weak negative correlation between these two variables. The p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) for this correlation is **0.000**.

Since the p-value is significantly less than the common significance level of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that there is a statistically significant relationship between talent management and behavioural engagement. However, the weak negative correlation implies that while there is a significant relationship, the practical strength of the correlation is minimal.

Relationship between talent management and emotional engagement

The findings from the correlation matrix reveal a significant negative relationship between talent management and emotional engagement, as indicated by the Spearman's rho correlation coefficient of -.130, with a significance value of .003. This implies that as talent management practices increase, there tends to be a slight decline in the emotional engagement of employees. Emotional engagement, which encompasses the affective commitment and enthusiasm employees have toward their work, seems to be inversely affected by the way talent management is structured or implemented in this particular context. This could suggest that certain aspects of talent management, such as employee assessments, career development plans, or reward systems, might not sufficiently cater to the emotional needs of employees, leading to reduced emotional attachment to their roles. These results align with several studies in the literature that discuss the complex relationship between talent management and employee engagement. For example, Collings and Mellahi (2009) assert that talent management strategies often focus on identifying and developing high-potential employees but can sometimes overlook the emotional needs and work-life balance of the broader workforce. Similarly, Dries (2013) suggests that talent management frameworks can, at times, create perceptions of inequity among employees, leading to disengagement on an emotional level, particularly among those who feel overlooked or undervalued in the system. Moreover, the work of King (2017) highlights that while talent management practices are crucial for organizational success, there is a risk that overly structured or rigid talent development programs may inadvertently suppress emotional engagement by limiting the sense of autonomy and emotional freedom that employees feel in their roles. This finding mirrors the slight negative correlation observed in this study. Likewise, the research by Van Zyl et al. (2017) emphasizes the need for talent management programs to be emotionally intelligent, incorporating strategies that nurture emotional well-being alongside skill development. The negative correlation in the present study underscores the importance of considering the emotional dimension when designing and implementing talent management practices. Talent management remains a critical aspect of organizational strategy, the findings of this study suggest that its impact on emotional engagement can be negative if not carefully managed. This highlights the need for a more holistic approach to talent management that not only focuses on employee performance and potential but also considers the emotional connection and commitment employees feel towards their roles and the organization.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between talent management and employee emotional connection to organisation of tech companies in Rivers State has been established in this study. The findings of the study showed that talent management adopted in this study contribute positively and significantly to the measures of employee engagement emotional engagement, cognitive engagement and behavioural engagement. Based on the findings, the study therefore concludes that the strategic workforce management has a significant positive relationship with employee engagement tech companies in Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Organizations should periodically review and adjust their compensation packages to ensure they are competitive within the industry. This includes offering salary increases, bonuses, and benefits that align with employee expectations. Transparent communication about compensation structures can also foster trust and motivation among employees.
2. Leadership plays a significant role in shaping employee experiences and performance. Training programs for managers should focus on developing supportive leadership styles that encourage open communication, feedback, and collaboration. Leaders should be equipped to create an inclusive environment that values employee input and fosters engagement.
3. Organizations should cultivate a culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusion, where all employees feel valued and respected. This can be achieved through diversity training, employee resource groups, and mentorship programs. An inclusive culture can enhance employee morale and engagement, contributing to overall job performance.

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