

# Talent Pool Attraction and Retention Strategies: Case of Tunisian International Companies

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.914MG00234>

Received: 03 December 2025; Accepted: 08 December 2025; Published: 10 December 2025

## ABSTRACT

The present work aimed to explore new talent management practices that attract and retain internal and external talent to meet competition and increase business productivity. The theme and problem addressed in this research offer insights into aspects that have, to date, been little explored. In response to this issue, we conducted 45 semi-structured interviews with human resources managers and talent pools from five Tunisian international companies specializing in IT and telecommunications (Sofrecom, Vermeg, Leoni, Orange Group, and Ooredoo). The data were analyzed using NVivo 10 through a thematic content analysis approach. The findings could inform the development of effective support strategies for talent pools to maximize their potential and ultimately reinforce their retention.

**Keywords:** Innate talent, acquired talent, talent management practices, talent attraction, talent retention.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1998, the McKinsey consulting group coined the term “war for talent” and asserted that a fundamental belief in the importance of talent is necessary to achieve organizational excellence (Michaels et al., 2001). Talent management is a priority for human resources (HR) professionals seeking to access talent in the war for talent (Volini et al., 2019), as it enables the building and maintenance of a pool of future leaders (Collings et al., 2019; Mäkelä et al., 2010). Over the last few years, there has been a notable increase in the number of books and articles in the field of talent management, which is increasingly seen as a high priority issue for organizations worldwide (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2007; Cappelli, 2008; Miralles, 2007; Mundschauf, 2013; Martin, 2014; Peretti, 2011; Pachulski, 2010; Thévenet and Dejoux, 2010). Effective talent management is considered a key determinant of organizational success (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Iles et al., 2010), and it is essential to the survival and sustainability of organizations (Lawler, 2008).

Furthermore, the war for talent has led to a situation where Company A hires a high-level employee from Company B, and vice versa, resulting in a lose-lose situation. Today's talent management has moved beyond the battle and now focuses on how to engage and retain valuable employees by offering them compelling experiences. Talent acquisition, which is an integral part of talent management, is now being challenged to think differently about recruiting and selecting workers. Once a person is hired, talent management becomes the organizational architect of employee experience, integrating the physical environment, technology, and culture (Morgan, 2017) to create fertile ground for sustainability (Savitz and Weber, 2006). Therefore, the current context leads us to believe that the major challenge facing all companies today is not only identifying the talent pool but also attracting and retaining it, given that talented workers are currently seeking personal fulfillment and demanding good working conditions. The objective of this article was to implement a talent management strategy that attracts and retains scarce skills.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: in the first part, we present the nature of “innate and acquired” talent and how talent management processes work. In the second part, we outline the research methodology used. Then, the results drawn from the empirical study are discussed in the third part. Finally, the last part presents the theoretical and managerial contributions, limitations, and prospects of this research.

## Theoretical framework

### Innate talent or acquired talent

The innate versus acquired perspective addresses the controversy of whether talent is innate or acquired (Dai, 2009; Dai and Coleman, 2005). Proponents of the innate approach believe that talent is largely innate (Tsay and Banaji, 2011). They carefully seek out, select, and recruit individuals who are considered to be highly talented (Cappelli, 2008; Dries, 2013), which is, according to Dries (2013), because some decision-makers within the organization believe that people are born with talent and that the likelihood of people changing over time is low. Such assumptions tend to have implications for how talent can or cannot be managed. Thus, Buckingham and Vosburgh (2001) and Davies and Davies (2010) explain that while skills and knowledge are relatively easy to teach, talent is a much more enduring and unique characteristic, and therefore almost impossible to learn or teach.

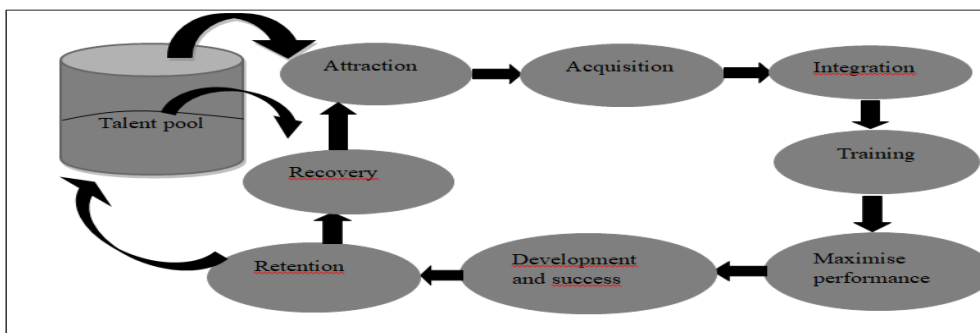
However, the acquired perspective views talent as the result of deliberate practice and continuous learning from experience. Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) argue that, despite all the myths surrounding talent, it still depends on experience and effort. Although not everyone has the same ultimate potential, there appears to be some consensus in the literature on the importance of deliberate practice (Ericsson, 2006) and experience (Briscoe and Hall, 1999). Meyers et al. (2013) argue that talent can be developed, and talent management could be heavily focused on employee training and development, with selection decisions based on candidates' experiences and prior learning.

Most specialists in the field of talent management agree that talent comprises both innate and acquired components, although they differ greatly in the importance they attach to each (Walker et al., 2010). Consequently, the definitions of talent used by the above researchers can be placed on a continuum, ranging from innate to acquired talent. In addition, talent in the workplace depends not only on innate factors but also on latent (hidden, untapped), intermediate (concerted, deliberate), and evolving (experience-based) elements (Silzer and Church, 2010). Furthermore, some employees may develop their talent through learning, which is the greatest contributor to their talent development. Indeed, one cannot deny that, regardless of the talent, they need training to work effectively in a company, but above all, to learn more quickly and complete the job efficiently. Furthermore, regardless of someone's skill level, their performance can be improved through training programs. Thus, on the continuum of innate and acquired, talent leans more toward the acquired continuum.

### Talent management process

The talent lifecycle encompasses all stages of interaction between an organization and its human capital. This ranges from creating a talent brand that attracts the right talent to acquiring, integrating, developing, deploying, retaining, and even recovering talent. This process is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Talent life cycle



Source: Schiemann (2013)

As shown in Figure 1, attracting and retaining talent within organizations has become a key characteristic of organizational competencies for ensuring a sustained competitive advantage. Therefore, Boxall and Steenveld (1999) indicate that investing in the talent pool is associated with attracting, deploying, retaining, and developing human resources that can give the organization a competitive advantage. Thus, these authors assert that statistics show that 43% HR professionals (including talent development manager, talent acquisition manager, career manager, compensation manager, and training manager) engage in recruiting key talent, whereas 55% continue to develop talent internally, and 35% are likely to recruit talent internally, with an emphasis on retaining talented employees. Recruiting, engaging, and retaining talented employees have become emerging priorities for organizations; therefore, they should give greater attention to the talent management strategies they adopt (Rowland, 2011).

In conclusion, the talent management process consists of five main stages: attracting, selecting, engaging, developing, and retaining talented employees. For companies to gain a competitive advantage, the demand for human capital will continue to drive talent management (Gallard-Gallardo et al., 2020).

### **Talent Attraction**

Some researchers believe that attracting and retaining talent, with a focus on the exclusive individuals model, are the two fundamental requirements of talent management (Iles et al., 2010). These authors argue that the first step talent management should focus on is the identification of the “talent pool,” which can be both internal and external to the organization. In addition, the “employer brand” and “employee segmentation” should focus on attracting talented employees. Furthermore, talented individuals join organizations they find attractive and bring added value to them (Glen, 2007).

Nonetheless, creating a high-quality brand for the company can be a challenging task. As a result, companies must be innovative in creating a high-quality brand and be committed to bringing the best to the organization. Most of the world's top companies continually recruit new talent. They are continuously looking for talent, which means that they do not only recruit when a position opens; they recruit when they find talent. This does not mean that they do not focus on talent development; they can recruit talent whenever they see them for strategic positions (Chambers et al., 1998). We can therefore make the following proposition:

**P1: Brand image attracts and retains the talent pool within the company.**

### **Talent acquisition**

The “war for talent” has focused on acquiring and assimilating the most talented employees in the labor market. According to Huselid (1995), human resources play a critical role in the effectiveness and performance of an organization. Likewise, Bhatnagar (2004) asserts that talent has become the main differentiating factor in human capital management and the exploitation of competitive advantage. Better talent acquisition enables increased engagement of talented employees and their productivity within the company.

Today, we live in a highly competitive environment, which is why it is essential to maximize the engagement, motivation, and retention of the work team through a diligent talent acquisition process. It is critical to implement a well-defined talent recruitment process and execute it from start to finish, which will yield consistent and compliant results and provide a competitive advantage in the war for talent (Ronn, 2007). We can therefore formulate the following proposition:

**P2: Talent acquisition enhances the engagement of talented employees’ engagement and the company’s productivity.**

### **Developing talent**

To achieve high potential within the organization, the potential of talented employees must be realized. Talent development should be linked to learning plans and development programs. Appropriate combinations of learning and development are therefore necessary at the relevant stages of a talented employee's career to realize

their full potential in the future. Talent development can be valuable for a company that is growing slowly, but it can even pose risks for fast-growing companies. To develop talented employees, companies need to implement informal and formal learning programs (Areiqat et al., 2010). In addition to skills and knowledge, talent development depends on changes in performance, perception, and behavior (Charan et al., 2001). In this case, talent management must continuously develop its highest-performing employees for potential new positions, identify their knowledge gaps, and implement training initiatives to enhance their skills and ensure they remain with the company (Carins, 2009).

For example, in Europe and the United States, corporate universities have become one of the most vital sources of corporate development and training, and these universities are recognized as an essential aspect of strategic organizational creation (Holland and Pyman, 2005). Thus, a corporate university is an “in-house” training program that provides formal learning and knowledge creation within the organization. For Holland and Pyman (2005), corporate universities are catalysts for human resource development, and the emergence of these universities underscores their importance in the field of human resource strategy development, ultimately contributing to the success of talent management within organizations. Glen (2007) points out that despite the existence of organizational development and assessment programs, most talented individuals remain unknown within their organizations; Therefore, organizations must implement an effective development and assessment plan to identify opportunities as a key element of talent management for the achievement of their mission, which must also take advantage of excellent on-the-job development opportunities and offer not only effective mentoring and coaching but also high-quality assessment activities.

Additionally, Williamson (2011) suggested that a new concept of talent development can be achieved through the use of the talent matrix. The author argues that evaluating performance and potential, and classifying employees into A, B, C, and D player types, enables the design of training programs customized to each employee type. For example, A players should be offered the highest level of development, B players' development should focus on interactive skills, C players should be given challenging goals and be closely monitored, and there should be a clear path of separation for D players. We can therefore suggest the following proposition:

**P3: Talent development through training is a tool for attracting and retaining talented employees.**

***Retaining talent***

Due to the economic slowdown, workforce reductions, and the brain drain abroad, using strategies that prevent organizations from losing knowledge has become a critical concern for existing businesses. Whelan and Carcary (2011) indicate that Generation Y shows less loyalty to their employers, and many employees lose their talents to rival headhunters.

In this context, several factors must be implemented to retain talented employees in the company. For example, hygiene factors, such as benefits, compensation, and location, directly affect professional success, as well as intrinsic rewards that indirectly reduce talent loss (Whelan and Carcary, 2011). Some companies believe that talent attraction and retention are the two fundamental requirements of talent management (Iles et al., 2010). Nevertheless, others believe that they only need to attract and develop talent, but pay no attention to retaining talented employees. These groups invest in talent; however, when it comes to capitalizing on their investment, the talent leaves their organization. Every company needs to know why its talent leaves and find a solution to address the loss of talented employees. Thus, there are similarities and differences between organizations' strategies for retaining talented employees. Each country has its own specific strategy for retaining talented people:

- In Brazil, France, and the Netherlands, they stimulate passion.
- In Japan, they intimidate people with confidence and respect (a good working relationship).
- In Italy, they rely on performance evaluations.

- In South Korea, companies retain employees based on objectives and performance.
- In Canada, it depends on employee satisfaction, motivation, retirement benefits, the long-term success of the organization, etc. (Hughes and Rog, 2008).

Based on the literature review, each country could use various strategies to retain its talent (Poorhosseinzadeh and Subramaniam, 2012). Table 1 summarizes the different phases of the talent management process explained above (Thévenet and Dejoux, 2012).

Table 1: The talent management process

|                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Attract</b>                                                     |
| Develop an attractive employer brand image                         |
| Identify internal talent to develop                                |
| Analyze current and future talent needs                            |
| <b>Recruit</b>                                                     |
| Incorporate talent into the company's social responsibility policy |
| Recruit continuously                                               |
| Target the world with global virtual games                         |
| Develop new arguments live from Generation Y                       |
| <b>Retain</b>                                                      |
| Understanding motivational factors                                 |
| Turning managers and senior staff into talent developers           |
| Investing in working conditions quality and daily recognition      |
| <b>Develop</b>                                                     |
| Focus on the individual                                            |
| Generalize development tools                                       |
| Set levels of responsibility and results                           |
| Evaluate and train continuously                                    |
| Manage conflicts                                                   |
| Learn to value yourself                                            |

Source: Thévenet and Dejoux (2012)

As shown in the table above, several steps are involved in building a well-defined talent management process. The goal of implementing this process is to develop the skills of talented employees, enabling them to achieve exceptional performance and compete in the external market.



## The benefits of focusing on attracting and retaining talent

According to Schneider (1987), organizations attract, select, and retain people who share their values. Research has focused on these phases from the perspective of the fit between individuals and organizations. Regarding attraction, Turban (2001) claims that candidates' familiarity with the recruiting organization is positively correlated with their attraction to the company. He confirms that familiarity has direct and indirect effects on the attractiveness of potential employers. Additionally, Judge and Bretz (1992) assert that the alignment of values between students and hypothetical organizational contexts is positively related to their predicted job choice decisions. According to Cable and Judge (1996), candidates choose to join organizations they believe are suitable for them. A study by Albinger and Freeman (2000) suggests that an organization's reputation is fundamental for attracting top talent. These authors reveal that companies with a well-established brand image in the job market attract many talented new candidates. Additionally, O'Neal and Gebauer (2006) argue that monetary and non-monetary factors attract talented employees to some organizations. These factors influence individual choices regarding job opportunities within an organization and the decision to accept a position in a particular organization. Besides, other factors, such as work-life balance, competitive compensation, and challenging work, are attractive to employees.

In addition, one of the primary concerns for many organizations is employee retention. According to De Long and Davenport (2003) and Schramm (2006), retention is a strategic opportunity for many organizations to maintain a competitive workforce. Thus, retaining a talented workforce enables many HR director to consider various practices within the company to retain talent in the labor market, both within and outside the organization (Kaliprasad, 2006). Retention is improved when employees are offered excellent compensation, significant benefits, a favorable work culture, training programs, career advancement opportunities, and a good work-life balance (Messmer, 2006). Farley (2005) asserts that organizations that represent best practices in Human resources management (HRM) consider employee retention a strategic issue for the organization. The author notes that these organizations have well-defined plans that prioritize the skills they want to retain and the job offer that best suits their objectives. The company's human resources, which comprise the management team, employee communications, public relations, and line management, collaborate to solve the problem cooperatively (Patel, 2002). We can therefore make the following proposition:

**P4: Attracting and retaining talent are two talent management practices that enable companies to compete.**

## METHODOLOGY

We adopted an exploratory qualitative approach to achieve this research's objective, aiming to attract and retain talent within the company. As part of our qualitative research, we opted for data triangulation, which involves semi-structured interviews, collecting internal and external documents, and undertaking field observations. The objective of data triangulation is to identify new talent management practices to attract and retain talented employees (Hentz, 2012).

The first phase of data collection focused on field observation. During our initial visits to international companies, we sought to understand the company culture and its employees. We held meetings with HR directors, who presented their talent pool and the definition they use to identify talent. The second phase of this qualitative study focused on document collection. This phase required the data to be examined and interpreted to make sense of it and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007). These documents provide an overview of the company, its activities, and its progress in the field of talent management, ensuring that the interviews run smoothly. The final phase involved semi-structured interviews, which are the primary source of data collection.

During the semi-structured interview, we used two interview guides, prepared in advance. The interviews in our qualitative study lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. The first interview guide consisted of several questions that were addressed to 20 human resources professionals, including the HR director, talent development manager, talent acquisition manager, career manager, compensation manager, and training manager. These interviews focused on finding individual development plans for the talent pool to attract and retain rare skills. A

second series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with 25 talented employees from the international companies studied. We selected individuals who are IT engineers (business managers, IT architects, web developers, etc.).

The interviews were conducted face-to-face on-site and online for talents who had moved internationally. As part of this research, we made recordings using a tape recorder, which made it easier to transcribe the interviews. The interview guides for this research consisted of two parts. The first part covered general information about the interviewees (last name, first name, age, level of education, and position held). The second part covered talent management practices studied by Tunisian international companies, including talent acquisition, training programs, performance and potential assessments, career development, compensation, and work culture.

Our chosen field of research consists of five international companies based in Tunisia that specialize in information technology. These companies have begun working on talent management in the last two years. This is a topical issue that concerns all Tunisian companies, which have been suffering from a brain drain abroad and a shortage of talent on the Tunisian market, particularly in the IT sector, since the January 14, 2011, revolution. Our survey, which focused on identifying a talent management strategy that attracts and retains talent, was conducted on a sample of five companies: three in the IT sector (Vermeg, Sofrecom, and Leoni) and two in the telecommunications sector (Orange and Ooredoo). Table 2 illustrates the characteristics of our research sample. Following the qualitative data collection phase, we performed a thematic content analysis using NVivo 10 software.

Table 2: Characteristics of respondents

|            | Talent pool characteristics   |                                                                                                                                                                                     | Characteristics of HR Managers |                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Enterprise | Number of talents interviewed | Function                                                                                                                                                                            | Number of HR managers surveyed | Function                                                                                                                                                 |
| Sofrecom   | 5 respondents                 | Two division managers<br><br>Director of Consulting and Sales<br><br>Director of Research and Innovation<br><br>Director of Business Unit                                           | 4 respondents                  | HR Business Partner<br><br>HR Director<br><br>Talent Acquisition Manager<br><br>Career Manager                                                           |
| Vermeg     | 4 respondents                 | Technical Architect<br><br>Insurance and Finance Software Manager<br><br>Java Research and Development Engineer<br><br>Manager - Business Expert for Banking and Insurance Software | 5 respondents                  | HR Director<br><br>Talent Development Manager<br><br>Recruitment Manager<br><br>Training Manager<br><br>Head of Internal Communications and HR Marketing |
| Leoni      | 3 respondents                 | Project Manager                                                                                                                                                                     | 6 respondents                  | HR Business Partner - Training Department                                                                                                                |

|         |               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |               |                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         |               | Production Control and Logistics Manager<br><br>Engineering Department Manager                                                                                                                                                                                    |               | HR Business Partner - Recruitment Department<br><br>Talent Development Manager<br><br>HR Director<br><br>Career Development Manager<br><br>Payroll Manager |
| Orange  | 5 respondents | Business Development Manager<br><br>Administrative, Purchasing, and Logistics Director<br><br>Telecommunications manager-Engineer<br><br>Technical Support Engineer<br><br>IT Consultant                                                                          | 3 respondents | Head of Training and HR Development<br><br>Head of Recruitment<br><br>Head of Talent Development                                                           |
| Ooredoo | 8 respondents | Web and mobile developer<br><br>Cybersecurity engineer<br><br>IT consultant<br><br>Telecom and network engineer<br><br>Quality engineer<br><br>Manager - Business expert for telecommunications and insurance software<br><br>IT architect<br><br>Project manager | 2 respondents | Human Resources Manager<br><br>Head of Social Services, Health, and Occupational Safety                                                                    |

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research enabled us to identify six themes related to new talent management practices, which we will list and explain using verbatims from the semi-structured interviews.

### Talent recruitment

To begin with, most interviewees indicated that “*talent recruitment is carried out by talent acquisition managers. These managers are responsible for employment marketing initiatives, branding campaigns, employee*



*engagement programs, and loyalty programs...*" YR (HR Director, Leoni). **Talent acquisition managers** implement talent-specific recruitment strategies and use sourcing and headhunting to identify the best talent on the job market. *"...I was recommended by someone who works at Orange, and I applied for a vacant position. The Orange group generally recruits through headhunting, recommendations, and internal mobility. These recruitment tools are effective and successful."* SH (Talent Engineer, Orange). In addition, talent acquisition managers may be involved not only in the search and selection of talented candidates but also in developing company policy for identifying and evaluating talent pools.

Furthermore, the results of our empirical research indicate that **employer branding** establishes the organization's identity as an employer, covering its value system, policies, and behaviors to attract, motivate, and retain current and potential employees. Indeed, the companies studied presented various tools that help identify brand image, such as social media, brand ambassadors, and the company's strong employability. One respondent stated that *"... Sofrecom really attracted me with its international brand image, its 'process' and communication within the workplace. In 2017, it was trendy to work for a company in the IT sector..."* MS (Talent Engineer, Sofrecom). With a strong brand image shared on social media, a company can increase the number of applicants, reduce recruitment costs, and stand out from its competitors. Social media is becoming the primary tool for helping companies attract and retain top talent.

Social media can be used as an opportunity to showcase the company's work culture, highlighting its strengths and inspiring future employees. *"With the rise of digital technology and social media, candidates almost automatically research the company before applying. Having a good image on the internet is also essential to avoid losing potential applicants..."* MS (HR Director, Orange).

This finding aligns with the work of Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), which indicates that employer branding promotes, both within and outside the company, a clear vision of what makes a company different and desirable as an employer. According to Minchington (2007), in today's business world, employer branding is a competitive advantage for acquiring, developing, and retaining talent. Promoting the brand within the organization will increase employee loyalty, while promoting the brand externally will make it more attractive to potential employees. For example, Jenner and Taylor (2008) place particular emphasis on defining employer branding as a company's efforts to communicate to external and internal audiences what makes that company a desirable and distinguished employer.

Moreover, some interviewees stated that managers can foster a climate of trust by **supporting recruits** during the post-acquisition period. This strategy helps motivate and retain talented employees within the company. In the same vein, one of the HR managers interviewed added that *"for key positions, and more specifically for talents, the integration phase is different. There is more support from their line manager and more specific training, implying that their integration is continuously monitored..."* RT (talent development manager, Leoni). Thus, the mentor's goal is to help new talent become independent professionals, increase their motivation, and learn new work techniques. According to Nikandrou et al. (2000), post-acquisition talent management is responsible for establishing relationships of trust with colleagues and subordinates in the acquired company, which can be extremely challenging, as in many cases, they must deal with employees' concerns, uncertainties, and negative reactions.

## Training program

To begin with, most respondents indicated that **certified training** is the primary tool for attracting and retaining talent in the job market. *"Today, Orange offers certified training for its talent pool, which greatly motivates them at work. Besides, our talented employees share their certified diplomas on LinkedIn, which attracts external talent..."* HK (Talent Engineer, Orange). Indeed, promotions and annual bonuses can motivate talented employees. However, these long-term rewards are often only effective if short-term gains offset them. Short-term gains may include training certificates. Training talented employees increases their satisfaction, facilitates skills updating, enhances their sense of belonging, strengthens their commitment to the organization (Bushardt et al., 1994), and boosts the organization's competitiveness (Burden and Proctor, 2000; Hughey and Mussnug, 1997).

In addition, HR managers at the surveyed companies indicated that their companies have implemented a new strategy to attract and retain talent, focusing on **funding academic training**. *"... three years ago, Vermeg funded my evening classes in MBA. This training helped me advance my career, which is why I am still loyal to this company."* KH (Talent Engineer, Vermeg). According to the results of this research, HR managers in the IT field indicated that they are currently funding evening classes for their talented technicians who wish to obtain an engineering degree. Funding academic courses gives talented employees a sense of belonging to the company. The company's commitment to meeting its employees' training needs has a positive impact on employee satisfaction, which leads to increased employee motivation and retention (Mak and Sockel, 1999; Ranft and Lord, 2000). This commitment results in employees being exposed to high-quality job-related training, leading to improved employee morale, a greater sense of achievement and fulfillment among employees (Elizur, 1996), and finally, increased organizational competitiveness.

Furthermore, some respondents stated that *"the talent development manager provides each talent with the tools they need to develop their career. They work with each talent on an individual training plan (mentoring, coaching, group program)..."* FA (talent development manager, Orange). These **individual training programs** (ITPs) aim to broaden the perspectives of talents, improve their understanding of various activities, and share their experiences. They enable talented employees to work with executives, acquire knowledge through exposure to leadership practices and strategies, and develop their individual talents to their full potential. As such, an ITP helps improve retention of top employees, as these plans directly address the expectations of high-performing employees: acquiring new skills on the job (Trevor et al., 1997) and receiving individualized attention (Lombardo and Eichinger, 2000). In addition, ITPs provide a structure through which employees receive managerial mentoring, ensuring that the objectives of personalized development plans are achieved, which improves retention of top talent by offering the learning and development opportunities sought by high performers (Allen et al., 2010; Wang-Cowham, 2011). In other words, ITPs have strong potential to create company-specific human capital (Coff and Kryscynski, 2011).

### Performance and potential assessment

The results of this qualitative study indicated that the evaluation phase also allows for **performance bonuses** to be offered: *"the distinction between the best and worst performers is made in terms of the variable portion (the bonus), set according to the manager's assessment at the end of each year. Talented employees are the most distinguished in terms of compensation."* YR (HR Director, Leoni). This performance bonus encourages talented employees to increase their productivity at work, thereby building loyalty. In the same vein, Trevor et al. (1997) assert that there is a clear link between high salary growth and low staff turnover in the working group. Indeed, top performers expect to earn significantly more than the average employee. As Baldwin et al. (2013, p. 262) eloquently put it, *"Nothing is likely to burn out your star performer more than equal rewards, where everyone gets the same regardless of performance."*

### Career development

Firstly, the interviews conducted showed that, for most interviewees, **internal mobility** is a tool for attracting and retaining talent. In this context, one of the HR managers interviewed stated that *"... I would rather talk about internal recruitment than internal mobility because talent who see that the company focuses on internal recruitment believe that they can advance their careers either horizontally or vertically; there are talented individuals who have changed jobs as their careers have evolved: you can progress in different areas: management, project management, or expertise. Last year, 13% of our employees, or 128 people at Orange, progressed in their careers..."* MC (Talent Recruitment Manager, Orange). As long as talent benefits from internal mobility, it is always possible to retain and develop them. When companies prioritize internal mobility, they inspire dedication and loyalty, preserve knowledge, retain rare skills, create talent agility within the organization, and strengthen the corporate culture.

Then, *"We encourage internal mobility using skill-up software. We enter the job description into the software, which then identifies the required talent at the company level. It is a factor that helps retain talent at Sofrecom."* AT (HR Manager, Sofrecom). This internal mobility allows talented employees to find their niche and excel at building fruitful relationships. Horizontal movement will thus enable companies to discover hidden talents and

prepare employees for vertical promotions. The solution for retaining the best talent does not necessarily involve climbing the corporate ladder.

Talented employees seek to advance within the company through internal mobility, a dynamic process that allows talent to move from one role to another. This new approach to career management helps retain talented employees and ensure the overall success of the company. Block (1978) argues that the existence of a formalized internal mobility policy reduces voluntary staff turnover. Other studies indicate that internal mobility can be a source of increased satisfaction and commitment (Brett, 1982; Grusky, 1966; Pruden, 1973; Veiga, 1981), which could reduce the intention to leave and decrease staff turnover. For many years, intra-organizational mobility has been considered a substitute for staff turnover (Anderson et al., 1981; Baysinger and Mobley, 1984; Gustafson, 1982; March and Simon, 1958; Mobley, 1982).

Finally, the international companies in our research have increased the number of **assignments abroad**. *"... there is also international and inter-subsidiary mobility, which occurs when an engineer wants to work overseas. International mobility means moving to Sofrecom France to retain talent who want to work abroad. We refer to this strategy as 'talent sharing'. It involves mobility lasting between 3 and 12 months, which helps retain talent."* BF (talent development manager, Sofrecom). This strategy helps attract talent and retain existing employees by offering them new travel opportunities, new challenges, and experiences to advance their careers.

## Remuneration

To begin with, the interviews we conducted revealed a distinction in terms of remuneration between talented employees and other employees within the company. *"The gap between high and low performers is reflected primarily in the variable component of pay, which is determined annually based on the manager's evaluation. Those identified as high-potential employees receive the most significant differentiation in compensation."* YR (HR Director, Leoni).

**An individualized compensation strategy** for talented employees is critical for several reasons. This strategy is one of the main tools for motivating talented individuals and improving their performance levels. For this reason, the companies studied in our research have implemented an individualized compensation strategy that combines **performance bonuses**, which are the variable component of the salary, and **fixed salary increases** based on the job range specified in the salary scale. *"... For the fixed portion, we differentiate between high-performing and low-performing employees because we have a merit-based salary increase policy, which allows managers to distinguish between talented and untalented employees based on their salary range."* AH (HR Director, Orange). Various studies indicate that the distribution of rewards within a company is crucial to employee attitudes and behaviors involving satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work performance (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998; Greenberg, 1990).

Moreover, more than half of respondents assert that talented employees at surveyed companies are also attracted by **social benefits** such as tuition reimbursement, health insurance benefits, workplace wellness benefits, and transportation benefits. These benefits help ensure a good work-life balance. *"Working conditions are favorable at Sofrecom. There are agreements with gyms, health insurance, and insurance covering parents."* HY (Talent Engineer, Vermeg). Sutton (1985) claim that companies offering higher levels of insurance and retirement benefits generally have lower staff turnover rates.

Ultimately, the minority of talented employees surveyed reported that they had benefited from the **stock option plan**. One of the HR managers of the companies surveyed stated that *"... we are currently pursuing a new strategy to attract and retain the best talent, which involves a stock option plan, a contract between the talent and the company manager that gives the talent pool the right to purchase company shares at a reduced price. This strategy is used to attract and retain the best talent."* MS (talent development manager, Vermeg). Indeed, stock options are considered an effective tool not only for retaining employees but also for compensating existing employees and attracting new talent to the market. Dunford et al. (2008) claim that stock options affect executive turnover rates. The widespread use of stock options has been attributed to various factors, including favorable accounting and tax treatment, incentives for attracting and retaining talent, employee motivation, and cash conservation (Hall and Murphy, 2003; Huddart, 1994).

## Work culture

The results of our exploratory investigation indicate that a strong relationship between managers and talented employees is crucial for company productivity. A working relationship based on understanding and trust can make talented employees more effective and reduce turnover rates within the company. One talented employee stated that *“a good manager is someone who has a genuine management style: conciliatory and caring, which gives a sense of recognition to talent...”* FA (talent development manager, Orange). Managers must therefore maintain and encourage healthy relationships with talented employees to promote efficiency in the workplace. *“Today, people don't leave their company, they leave their manager...”* MA (Talent Engineer, Vermeg). This finding aligns with that of Shoaib et al. (2009), who argue that one of the most influential factors affecting retention is the relationship between a talented employee and their manager. Managers are the “human face” of an organization. When employees receive support, they are less likely to leave an organization and feel more engaged thanks to good relationships and open communication with their manager (Greenhaus, 1987).

## CONCLUSION

Today, we are witnessing a new era in HRM termed “talent management,” which means that it is constantly evolving. Furthermore, this evolution must be beneficial for both the company and its human capital. In other words, talent management creates a win-win situation that aligns the expectations of talented workers and their companies more closely together. As part of this research, 45 semi-structured interviews enabled us to shed light on the new talent management practices applied by talent acquisition managers and talent development managers whose goal is to attract and retain rare skills. This research is considered the first in Tunisia to focus on talent management, which has been experiencing a shortage of skilled labor in the job market since the Tunisian revolution.

In short, our research article proposes a clarification of the concept of talent, suggesting that it is a combination of innate and acquired abilities. In the same vein, Csikszentmihalyi (1998) summarized this idea by stating that talent is not a gift but a potential that must be cultivated to bear fruit. Furthermore, within the theoretical context of this research, we presented the talent management process, which involves attracting, recruiting, developing, and retaining talent, as studied by Thévenet and Dejoux (2012). Moreover, we focused on attracting and retaining talent to address the labor market's talent shortage.

In this context, numerous researchers have demonstrated that the fit between individuals and the organizations they work for has a significant impact on the acquisition and retention of talented employees (Cable and Judge, 1996, 1997; Chatman, 1991; Ehrhart and Ziegert, 2005; Kristof, 1996; Schneider, 1987; Schneider, 1998; Turban and Keon, 1993; Van Vianen, 2000). The qualitative study in this research has enabled us to identify new talent management practices designed to retain and attract talent, both within and outside the company. These talent management practices focus on talent acquisition, individual training programs for talented employees, high performance bonuses for talented employees awarded during the performance appraisal phase, career development based on internal mobility and assignments abroad, an individualized compensation strategy based on fixed salary increases, benefits, and stock options, and finally, a work culture based on communication, support, and mutual respect between managers and their employees.

As any research, this article has some limitations. This research was conducted in a country with a specific work culture and economy, and with unique characteristics in terms of talent management. It is therefore difficult to generalize the relevance of talent management to other contexts, particularly developed countries. To overcome this limitation, it would be important to conduct a comparative study in a developed country with a culture different from that of Tunisia. Also, other sectors of activity could be examined.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.



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