

Towards a responsible talent management model

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to critically examine talent management practices and strategies from ethical and responsible management perspectives.

Design/methodology/approach – It achieves its aim through conceptual analysis by theorising through the lenses of talent philosophies, the organisational justice theory, the stakeholder theory and extant literature.

Findings – A responsible talent management construct and mode to guide the practice of talent management in a socially responsible way is developed. It argues that inclusivity; corporate responsibility; and equity and equal employment opportunity are the key underlying principles of a responsible talent management system. This study further argues that responsible talent management practices promote achievement of multilevel sustainable outcomes such as decent work, employee well-being and organisational well-being.

Practical implications – Emphasising responsible management and ethical concerns in organisational talent strategies and practices is non-negotiable, given the current level of interest in sustainable work and employment and in the quest to achieve sustainable human and organisational outcomes through management and organisational practices.

Originality/value – The development of a responsible talent management construct and model is original and novel and is expected to shape thinking and drive new research directions in the field of talent management. It further contributes directly to knowledge and practice by demonstrating how organisations can manage their talents in a responsible way.

Keywords Multilevel, Well-being, Decent work, Responsible talent development, Responsible talent management, Responsible talent strategy

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

The availability of talented employees is a resource that allows organisations to achieve sustainable and competitive advantage and growth through their optimal utilisation. Consequently, talent management (TM) has gained considerable attention among organisations, with many adopting different philosophies or strategies for the management of their talented employees. Generally, talent strategies and practices are based on two main philosophies: the exclusive approach and the inclusive approach. Evidence shows an exclusive TM approach which argues that only few in the workforce are talented (Becker *et al.*, 2009; Meyers, 2016; Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014), and hence the so-called “superhero employees” thesis is more prevalent in practice than in the inclusive TM approach which maintains that all workers have some specific talents that can contribute to success in an organisation (Buckingham and Vosburgh, 2001; Cappelli and Keller, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013; Meyers, 2016; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013).

Unfortunately, only 13 per cent of organisations that use the exclusive talent approach are able to accurately identify talented employees (Karakowsky and Kotlyar, 2012). As a result, about only 20 per cent of employees are classified as top talent, whereas 80 per cent of employees are excluded from accessing the organisational TM system (Swailes, 2013). This



suggests that a vast majority of the workers are denied the opportunity to realise their hidden potentials and become star performers. Recently, a hybrid talent philosophy or strategy (see King and Vaiman, 2019; Meyers, 2016; Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014; O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2019; Stahl *et al.*, 2012) has also emerged to bridge the gap between the exclusive and the inclusive TM philosophies with the aim of addressing ethical problems within the exclusive approach by emphasising inclusivity of talents through the integration of both approaches. This means that the way organisations conceptualise and practise TM as one of the strategic resources in the current dispensation can make it either responsible or irresponsible. According to Carroll *et al.* (2020), being responsible means addressing stakeholders' concerns in terms of an organisation's accountability, obligations and duties to both society and stakeholders (in this case, employees).

Surprisingly, however, there is a lack of or less interest in responsible and ethical aspects of TM (Anlesinya *et al.*, 2019a; Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005; Bierema, 2009; Swailes, 2013; O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2019; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013). Laasch and Conaway (2015) define responsible management (RM) as encompassing sustainability, stakeholder value (responsibility) and ethics. Anlesinya *et al.*'s (2019a) recent systematic review of strategic TM research reveals that only two research articles have focused explicitly on social and ethical aspects of TM strategies. Their review further shows that the focus of the two papers have been on how the narratives of scarcity and war of metaphors ignore social and ethical dimensions of TM system, and the influence of inclusive strategic talent development approach on pro-environmental culture and environmental sustainability of organisations. This means that even though there is a significant amount of work on TM (see Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Anlesinya *et al.*, 2019a, 2019b), and on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and related topics (see Jamali and Karam, 2018), they were examined largely in isolation, with no significant interest in their potential complementary and integrative roles.

This gives credence to Thunnissen *et al.*'s (2013) assertion that, even though the TM field is developed from a broad range of human resource management (HRM) and organisational behaviour theories, most scholarly works only investigate TM from a single and biased perspective, something they described as a crucial gap in the TM literature. Consequently, Anlesinya *et al.* (2019a), in their review, conclude that there is a paucity of research in the area of social and ethical dimensions of strategic TM and, consequently, call for more research on how ethical and RM practices can be incorporated into TM strategies. Hence, this research has responded to these research calls and concerns by exploring how organisations can integrate ethically and socially RM practices into TM strategies to develop a new construct and model to manage talents in a responsible way.

To achieve this, we use conceptual analyses and theorise through the lenses of TM philosophies (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Marescaux *et al.*, 2013; Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014; Swailes *et al.*, 2014), the organisational justice theory (Adams, 1965; Greenberg and Baron, 2003), the stakeholder theory and CSR (Carroll, 1979; Freeman, 1984) and extant literature. In particular, we use the organisational justice theory to explore the extent to which exclusive TM creates injustices and how inclusive TM generates perceived fair employment practices. The stakeholder theory unpacks the responsibility of firms to identify and develop talents and improve the well-being for all employees – a key stakeholder in an organisational TM system, whereas the inclusive and hybrid talent philosophies explore how TM can create positive experiences with respect to perceived decent work and improved well-being for all employees in an organisation and not just for a few elite employees considered as “talented” with implications for achieving sustainable firm outcomes. Our approach has responded to Greenwood and Miller's (2010) call for scholars to employ multiple theoretical lenses to

comprehensively investigate the nuances and complexities of an organisation and its behaviour and practices and further to extend [Thunissen et al.'s \(2013\)](#) pluralistic analysis of TM which also argues that the use of multiple perspectives can potentially provide a rich and complete view of organisational TM challenges.

By so doing, a new construct “responsible talent management (RTM)” and a new theoretical model “responsible talent management model” have been advanced from the intersection of TM and RM practices, and related fields. The RTM construct and model, which is original and novel, argues that organisations’ talent attraction, development and its retention management practices must be underpinned by the principles of corporate responsibility; inclusivity; and equity and equal employment opportunity. This new construct and theoretical model will not only shape thinking and practices of TM systems in organisations, but also instigate new lines of research enquiry from multidisciplinary perspectives on TM practices and strategies.

This research further makes an important contribution by making a strong case for a more responsible approach to TM. In their systematic review of strategic TM, [Anlesinya et al. \(2019a\)](#) posit that because ethics, sustainability and RM have become inevitable in modern workplace management, they “foresee organisations being held responsible for how they have been effective in integrating ethical standards and sustainability principles into the design and implementation of their talent strategies” (p. 309). Hence, this research does not only enlighten practitioners on the value of RTM but also demonstrate how to achieve it in their TM systems through embedding the RTM principles into TM systems to create a hybrid talent strategy. A hybrid approach to talent, in our view, has more potency to address the needs of organisations and their employees by effectively solving the ethical problems of an exclusive talent strategy.

Moreover, recent systematic reviews reveal that multilevel research in the TM field is limited ([Anlesinya et al., 2019c](#)). We, therefore, responded to [Anlesinya et al.'s \(2019c\)](#) recent call for multilevel TM research and further extends [Thunissen et al.'s \(2013\)](#) work on the multilevel and multi-value of TM by arguing that RTM improves perceived decent work, employee well-being and organisational well-being directly. Furthermore, employee perception of decent work and employee well-being serve as mechanisms through which RTM leads to improvement in organisational well-being in terms of strong financial performance and competitiveness; attractive reputation and social legitimacy; talent retention; and learning and innovation.

The next section discusses the theoretical foundations which inform the development of the theoretical construct and model, followed by a presentation of the RTM construct and model, a discussion and, finally, ends with considered implications and a conclusion.

Theoretical foundations

Talent management and talent philosophies

TM became popular following the publication of *The War for Talent* by [Chambers et al. \(1998\)](#), the consultants of McKinsey and Company, which highlighted the critical talent problems that companies face in their quest to achieve a sustainable competitive edge, and consequently, it has inspired interest among practitioners and researchers. Although TM as a field has evolved in the past decades, scholars are yet to reach consensus on clear-cut definitions as the concept has been defined severally by different scholars ([CIPD, 2009](#); [Collings and Mellahi, 2009](#); [Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014](#)). [Collings and Mellahi \(2009\)](#) define strategic TM as one of those:

HRM-related activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions that differentially contribute to the organization’s sustainable competitive advantage, the development of

a talent pool of high-potential and high-performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents, and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization (p. 305).

This definition formed the conceptual basis for our analysis.

It is important to recognise that talent strategies are influenced by each organisation's TM philosophy. HRM philosophies are:

[...] general statements of how the organization regards its human resources, what role the resources play in the overall success of the business, and how they are to be treated and managed (Schuler, 1992, p. 21).

The TM field is dominated by tensions with respect to the nature and value of talent and TM (Dries, 2013), resulting in different TM philosophies. While some argue that talent is scarce, hence, only a few of the workforce are talented (Becker *et al.*, 2009; Meyers, 2016; Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014), others maintain that all workers have some specific talents that can contribute to success in an organisation (Buckingham and Vosburgh, 2001; Cappelli and Keller, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013; Meyers, 2016). The variations in opinion concerning talent have resulted in the exclusivity versus inclusivity tension or debate in the TM field. Second, the stable and enduring trait of talent versus developing potential offers tension or debate in the field by focussing on the extent to which talent can be taught or learned (Cohn *et al.*, 2005; Dries, 2013; O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2019). Based on these two key tensions in the field, Meyers and van Woerkom (2014, p. 192) have introduced four talent philosophies that vary in their "perception of talent as (a) rare (exclusive) or universal (inclusive), and (b) stable or developable: the exclusive/stable; exclusive/developable; inclusive/stable; and inclusive/developable talent philosophy." Generally, however, the key philosophies in the field are the exclusive TM philosophy and the inclusive TM philosophy.

The exclusive TM philosophy, as stated briefly above, is of the view that only a few employees have talent, and therefore it advocates for these few talented employees, who are also normally referred to as star performers or "A" players, high potential, high performers or strategically important employees, to be given specific and differential treatment and opportunities to grow and develop (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013; Meyers, 2016). Thus, proponents of the exclusive talent philosophy argue that organisations' TM effort should focus on a select few, on an elitist proportion of employees and align these with a subjective dimension of talent, which focuses on the organisation's attention on "valuable, scarce, imitable, and difficult-to-replace individual employees" (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013, p. 327).

This philosophy, which is also known as exclusive-subjective (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013), is consistent with resource optimisation theory in the strategic management literature (Majumdar, 1998) and the Matthew effect or Mathew effect of accumulated advantage in the sociology literature; it is coined based on the ideas of the Parable of the Talents or Minas in the Biblical Gospel of Matthew (Bothner *et al.*, 2011; Merton, 1968), in which disproportionate investments are seen to generate greater aggregate returns (Cappelli and Keller, 2014). A key argument in support of this TM philosophy is that it makes organisations incur significant and needless costs if they are to make investments in all employees (Lepak and Snell, 2002).

However, an inclusive TM philosophy is:

[...] the recognition and acceptance that all employees have talent together with the ongoing evaluation and deployment of employees in positions that give the best fit and opportunity (via participation) for employees to use those talents (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013; Swailes *et al.*, 2014, p. 5; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013).

It argues that TM programmes and opportunities should focus on the entire population of employees in the organisation and not just a few workers (Buckingham and Vosburgh, 2001; Cappelli and Keller, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013; Yost and Chang, 2009). The main assumption of this TM approach is that every individual worker has a talent or can become a talent and needs to be encouraged to achieve his/her potential. Hence, it is the responsibility of the organisation to ensure provision of equal opportunities to all employees to allow them realise their potential. Evidence suggests that the majority of institutions uses the exclusive perspective of TM (Swailles, 2013; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013). However, CIPD's (2012) study indicates that the inclusive perspective of TM is also fairly common. Specifically, three-fifths of organisations have adopted exclusive TM, whereas two-fifths have used the inclusive perspective.

Finally, a hybrid talent philosophy has also emerged and is concerned with bridging the gap between exclusive TM and inclusive TM philosophies (DeLong and Vijayaraghavan, 2003; King and Vaiman, 2019; Malik and Singh, 2014). King and Vaiman (2019) define the hybrid philosophy of TM as an:

[...] integrative and inclusive philosophy of TM whereby the organisation's full workforce is seen as organisational talent in complement to the differentiated identification of specific workforce segments and individuals who are identified as having higher relative potential to contribute to the firm's performance and advantage through active development, retention and deployment in strategic positions (p. 196).

We, therefore, argue that a hybrid talent strategy is characterised by slightly higher human resource-related investments in high performers or high potential employees, while at the same time investing broadly in the development and utilisation of talent within the organisation. The implications of TM philosophies from RM perspective are discussed later in the study.

Stakeholder theory and organisational justice theory

The stakeholder theory and the organisational justice theory are used to explore organisations' responsibility to and treatment of their employees – their key stakeholders. Corporate responsibility or CSR of a firm encompasses “the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society has of organizations at a particular time point in time” (Carroll, 1979, p.500). It refers to “actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firms and that which is required by law” (McWilliams and Siegel, 2001, p. 117). It is an intervention which can positively affect the success of firms while addressing social causes such as employee development and welfare (Anlesinya, 2019). In Epstein's (1987) view, CSR is the product of social responsibility, responsiveness and business ethics. A key theoretical framework that supports CSR is the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984).

From the perspective of the stakeholder theory, one of the important stakeholders of organisations is their employees. Employees use their energy, creative ideas, skills and experience to achieve the objectives of their organisations. Organisations that are CSR-oriented may have a greater disposition in attracting talented employees and in securing their engagement to improve their overall performance and sustainability. This is especially so for employees who expect a greater degree of ethics and socially responsible practices from corporations (Harrison, 2003). A recent review by Voegtlin and Greenwood (2016) shows that CSR is regarded as a tool for promoting RM of workers. The next theory looks at RM of talents from the aspects of justice and fairness.

The organisational justice theory (Adams, 1965; Greenberg and Baron, 2003) is concerned with people's perceptions of fairness in their employment relationship. Organisational justice is made up of three main components. These include distributive, procedural and interpersonal justice (Demirel and Yücel, 2013; Greenberg and Baron, 2003). Procedural justice refers to the extent to which those affected by allocation decisions perceive them to have been made based on fair means and rules (Cropanzano and Greenberg, 1997). Distributive justice relates to people's perceptions of the equality in sharing of resources between people (Greenberg and Baron, 2003) and the perceived equality of the amount of rewards employees receive (Folger and Konovsky, 1989). Interactional justice looks at the interpersonal aspect of decision-making, particularly the fairness of decision makers' behaviour. It includes the decision maker's provision of a satisfactory explanation of the allocation decision as well as treating employees with respect when implementing a decision (Greenberg and Baron, 2003).

The organisational justice theory has significant implications for a firm's TM conceptualisation, implementation approach and practices. Juxtaposing the propositions of the organisational justice theory with TM approaches, it is clear that inclusive TM and, more especially, the hybrid talent approach ensure equal access to TM opportunities for all employees, whereas the exclusive TM approach rather creates more inequality gaps among the workers in organisations, thereby raising major ethical problems.

Responsible talent management model

The need to ensure that TM practices adhere to ethical principles and comply with RM practices to improve the collective well-being of employees and sustainable firm outcomes is no longer negotiable because of the global interest in issues of ethics and sustainability in organisations, as evidenced by the initiatives of the sustainable development goals. Hence, organisations are in need of new knowledge and theoretical models or approaches to manage their talents in a responsible way. Accordingly, by theorising through the lenses of TM philosophies, the organisational justice theory, the stakeholder theory and CSR, as well as extant literature, we develop a *RTM construct and model* to strongly advocate for the integration of socially RM practices with TM practices.

The construct of RTM is defined as *TM practices and strategies that emphasise an organisation's responsibility to identify, develop, and nurture the unique and diverse talents of all workers by expanding access to available talent development opportunities, by fairly managing their weaknesses and by recognising their contributions while giving them equal opportunities to flourish as valued employees to ensure their commitment to the organisation so as to achieve mutual sustainable outcomes for employees and their organisation*. This definition which is rooted in the organisational justice theory, the stakeholder theory, CSR and inclusive TM, places the construct in a broader perspective, and responds to Collins *et al.*'s (2011) call for counterbalance in TM discourse from varied viewpoints and traditions, and Greenwood and Miller's (2010) call for the use of multiple theoretical lenses in TM research as well as Thunnissen *et al.*'s (2013) call for a balanced approach to TM.

The model (Figure 1) emphasises the need to develop talents of all employees in a manner that is fair and equitable while supporting the dignity and quality work for all workers. Consequently, the key underlying principles of RTM are inclusivity; corporate responsibility; equity and equal employment opportunity. The following discusses these principles generally and how they can be integrated into TM practices for talent attraction, talent development and talent retention management. We further discuss how RTM can create sustainable values for both employees and organisations.

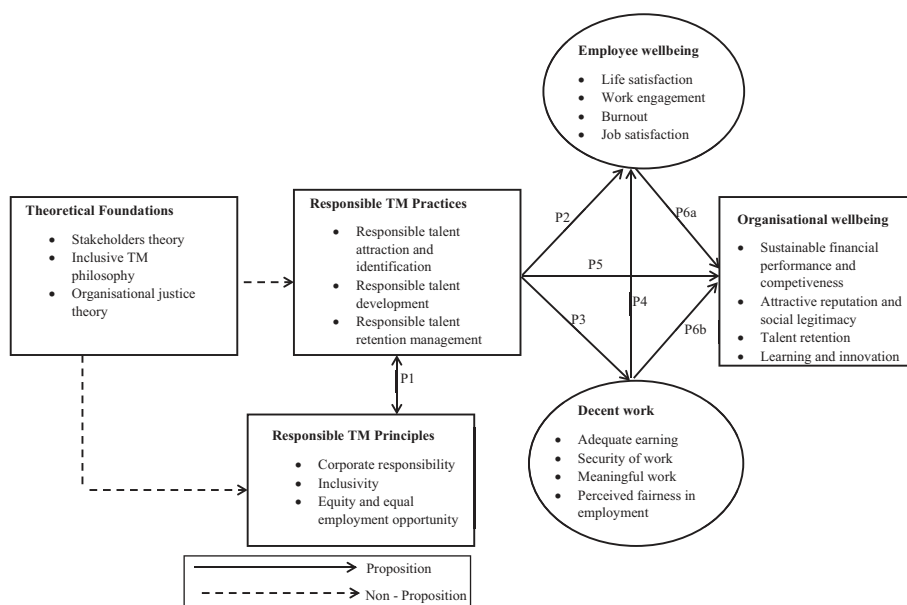


Figure 1. Responsible talent management model

Source: Authors' own model developed from extant literature

Responsible talent management principles

Inclusivity. The exclusive TM philosophy or strategy is based on the notion of ABC in TM, popularised by Jack Welch's vitality curve, which considers that few employees are star performers (the A players), while most are stuck in average performance (the B players) and others are really bad performers (the C players). This indirectly implies that the performance of employees in organisations is dispositional, and so organisations should hire A players and get rid of C players (Axelrod et al., 2002). The exclusive TM strategy, which is the dominant approach in organisations, focuses on A players, whereas inclusive TM, which regards all employees as being talented, is in the minority. Unfortunately, as indicated earlier, Karakowsky and Kotlyar's (2012) study of more than 200 HR professional in Canada revealed that although 85 per cent of the sampled organisations have implemented TM programmes, only 13 per cent were able to accurately identify high potentials. Similarly, Swailes (2013) found that only 20 per cent of top employees are classified as top talent. This means that 80 per cent of employees are excluded from organisations' TM system. Moreover, given the view that the potential of people often are hidden, it means that the majority of talented workers is assumed not to be talented (Gladwell, 2008). Hence, Pfeffer (2001) has warned that exclusive TM can lead to "self-fulfilling prophecy in reverse", whereby the "non-talented" will not be given necessary support, and will end up becoming poor performers. This means that the practice of exclusive TM clearly denies a vast majority of workers the opportunity to realise their hidden potentials, to become star performers and have a dignified employment and flourish as valued employees. This clearly suggests that exclusive TM is not a responsible approach as it promotes the denial of organisations' responsibility to provide equal opportunity for all workers to develop their potentials to the fullest.

Consequently, the foremost principle of RTM is inclusivity. This principle requires organisations to open up TM systems to all employees and not just a few elitist workers, as every individual worker has a specific talent that needs to be identified, nurtured and developed to benefit both the worker and the organisation. In this way, most people's hidden talents are more likely to be unearthed and developed to make useful contributions to the organisation while promoting dignity in employment and well-being of workers.

It is, however, important to recognise that in employment relationships, not all employees contribute the same value to the firm or are expected to contribute the same (Tsui and Wu, 2005). There are employees who significantly create more values to the growth and sustenance of an organisation than average employees (Aguinis and O'Boyle, 2014). In spite of this, inclusive TM is a "timely response to pressing issues such as the overall talent scarcity, the hard-to-predict market dynamics, and the trend towards more inclusive HRM" (Meyers, 2016, p. 1). Inclusive TM also acknowledges that there is the likelihood of employees with specific talents that are not required by a particular firm. In such a circumstance, the organisation should support the employee to exit by assisting in finding employment outside which matches with the talents he or she possesses (Swales *et al.*, 2014) so that their talents do not go waste (Meyers, 2016).

Furthermore, it should be noted that making investment in all the workers equally, irrespective of the values added, can put substantial financial burden on organisations (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014). Hence, inclusivity in the sense of a hybrid TM is required. In a hybrid TM system, the two TM approaches are used but for different groups of workers (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014; Stahl *et al.*, 2012). In hybrid TM, inclusivity should be interpreted as a TM system that recognises investment in star performers while at the same time instituting systems to develop the strength of all other workers at the various levels of the organisation, and thus be integrative. The aim is not to ignore employees who are not currently performing above average employees.

Corporate responsibility. Society demands the consideration of honesty, transparency and ethical values in business management. This is based on the view that the traditional stockholder theory, which emphasises the maximisation of value for stockholders and the pursuit of financial objectives, is insufficient in the current dispensation. This argument supports the modern stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) that advocates the satisfaction of all stakeholders, including employees. As a result, social expectations (welfare, health, happiness and personal or professional satisfaction) play a key role in how employees perceive their work environment and their future development within the company, leading to positive social change (Aguilera *et al.*, 2007, p. 6). Hence, organisations are required "to make choices and take actions that will contribute to the welfare and interests of society as well as the organization" (Daft, 2010, p. 138).

However, strategic HRM literature generally has been criticised for its overemphasis on economic and short-term performance objectives while neglecting the goals of other stakeholders such as employees. Similarly, some scholars such as Becker and Huselid (2006) and Marescaux *et al.* (2013) maintain that exclusive TM is biased, as it concentrates only on giving positive experience to "talented workers" while ignoring the potential negative consequences on the "non-talented employees." Meanwhile, exclusion from a firm's talent pool does negatively affect employee morale (McDonnell, 2011).

Again, exclusive TM, as earlier argued, promotes the denial of organisations' responsibility of fair and equal opportunities to the vast majority of workers preventing them from developing their potentials to the fullest and become star performers, thereby suggesting an apparent contradiction between exclusive TM and CSR of firms. The reason behind this that employee-oriented CSR practices provide equal opportunity and promote

the welfare of all employees, whereas exclusive TM focuses on the well-being of a few selected employees labelled talented employees.

Consequently, Lacey and Lopez (2014) argued that it is hypocritical for organisations that pursue CSR to meet stakeholders' needs while simultaneously pursuing exclusive TM targeting the well-being of few employees. While evidence suggests that employees also have the responsibility to develop their talents for future career and job changes (Anlesinya *et al.*, 2019a), it does not absolve organisations of their responsibility to develop employees' talents, especially, as TM is mainly concerned with addressing organisational needs (Garavan *et al.*, 2012). According to Pruis (2011), TM does not represent a "pro-bono" investment on the part of organisations but an investment in organisational needs. This essentially means that organisations have a key responsibility to develop the "right talents in the right people, at the right time, in the right way, to ensure their talent pipeline has an abundant supply of talents" (Wang-Cowham, 2011, p. 392). In addition, employers have a moral responsibility to care for their employees and offer "opportunities for employee development to form part of the overall package of care" (Swales, 2013, p.37). Legally, firms need to also comply with regulatory requirements as dictated by national laws and labour laws in some countries and sectors such as the public sector which frequently frowns on any form of discrimination. The preceding discussion is, therefore, largely consistent with Carroll's (1979) conceptualisation of firms' CSR as consisting of economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities.

Thus, RTM is a major way by which organisations can discharge their responsibility to all employees by meeting their obligations of ensuring fair labour practices and employee development opportunities to allow them grow and realise their potential while simultaneously increasing their talent pool membership. However, it is appropriate to maintain a balance between the demands of a firm's stakeholders and the economic costs incurred. Hence, a more responsible approach to TM requires striking an effective balance between the needs of the employees, other stakeholders and the business itself. This twin-goal of meeting stakeholders' needs while taking into consideration its economic costs justifies the pursuit of hybrid TM as a more responsible approach. This is because it allows the organisation to discharge its social responsibility to all workers and ensure that employees on whose shoulder the organisation stand are given slightly more attention to generate resources to empower the others who currently are not above average performers.

While many firms may be thriving with exclusive TM, hence, the reason for its dominance, they may be underutilising their potential; their full potential can be realised through a more inclusive and integrative talent strategy, as it provides the opportunity to put leverage on the strengths of both approaches. This is consistent with Meyer's (2016) study of 321 HR managers in 49 countries which indicates that inclusive and exclusive approaches are regarded as having relatively equal merit. Furthermore, the unseen costs associated with exclusive TM such as high turnover rates (Pfeffer, 2001) and disengagement (O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2019) have not been adequately considered when acclaiming its superiority over the inclusive approach.

Equity and equal employment opportunity. From the organisational justice theory's perspective, we propose equity and equal employment opportunity as another key principle of RTM. Organisational justice theory is concerned with people's fairness perceptions in their employment relationship with respect to procedures, interpersonal treatment and outcomes (Adams, 1965; Greenberg and Baron, 2003). The demonstration of procedural, distributive and interpersonal justice in the practice of TM can determine positive employee outcomes. Firms adopting the exclusive TM forget the fact that the success of the organisation is largely dependent on the contribution and support other employees provide

to “talented employees.” In a survey of 358 lawyers and stakeholders in the law profession in 12 European and Latin American countries, [Lopes \(2016\)](#) found that high performers have a:

[...] narrow focus on legal skills as the driver for innovative solutions for clients, but lack strength in interpersonal competencies. In contrast, their peers have more adaptable mindsets and are more relational and focused on quality (p. 207).

This means that firms’ long-term competitiveness is highly dependent on the commitment and the contribution of “B” players as well ([Delong and Vijayaraghavan, 2003](#)). Consequently, [Delong and Vijayaraghavan \(2003\)](#) argue that “[...] our understandable fascination with star performers can lure us into the dangerous trap of underestimating the vital importance of the supporting actors” (p. 96). Unfortunately, the contributions of the majority of the workers not included in the organisations’ talent system are not fairly recognised. This violates the propositions of the organisational justice theory and fair employment practices and is consistent with [O’Connor and Crowley-Henry’s \(2019\)](#) claim that exclusive TM can result in lack of justice, with wide ranging negative consequences.

Accordingly, some researchers ([Beechler and Woodward, 2009](#); [Guthridge et al., 2008](#)) have argued that the critical contributions of other employees to star performers should duly be recognised. Relatedly, [Lacey and Groves \(2014\)](#) argue that TM policies and programmes that “segment selected employees for special treatment often risk violating fundamental assumptions of equity, fairness, and impartiality” (p. 402). RTM, therefore, provides organisations with the opportunity to benefit from the contributions of all employees for their long-term success by ensuring equal opportunity for the development of all employees and by fairly recognising their contributions. However, [O’Connor and Crowley-Henry \(2019\)](#) assert that in reality, many organisations cannot provide all their employees with all the support and outcomes they may perceive they deserve, and that not every employee may like to be part of the talent pool. For this reason, we contend that the hybrid approach can better enable organisations to treat all employees fairly. Based on the discussions on RTM principles, we argue that:

- P1.* Inclusivity, corporate responsibility, and equity and equal employment opportunity are the key underlying principles of a RTM system, and the more an organisation embodies these principles, the more it will manage talents in a socially responsible way.

Responsible talent management practices

While some scholars advocate for the “best fit” approach, which requires an alignment between TM and organisational environments and do not recommend specific TM practices ([Stahl et al., 2012](#)), generally, TM practices include talent attraction and identification, talent development and talent retention management ([Anlesinya et al., 2019b](#); [Tarique and Schuler, 2010](#)). RTM practices’ discussions are guided by these three practices.

Responsible talent attraction and identification. Talent attraction and identification involves:

[...] reputation management (practices and activities aimed at enhancing employer’s image as an employer of choice or great employer) and talent pool management (how and who to select from an organisation’s pool of talented employees) ([Anlesinya et al., 2019b](#), p. 448).

Responsible talent attraction from the inclusivity perspective is based on the belief that each worker has a talent or unique strength that can be used to make significant contributions to the organisation and should therefore be given the necessary support and opportunity to develop their unique talents/strengths ([Devins and Gold, 2014](#)). It believes organisational

TM system should be made more accessible to all workers so as to build the career of the individual employee (Cerdin and Brewster, 2014). Because it requires an organisation to support and develop the careers of all employees, it results in building an attractive employer brand for the organisation (Königová *et al.*, 2012; Chhabra and Shama, 2014). Moreover, a key principle of responsible talent attraction is equity and equal opportunity. From the perspective of the organisational justice theory, workers want fairness in the procedures that are used in the classification of workers to benefit from the organisations' TM. Organisations that fail to ensure fairness in their TM system will create a situation where the excluded employees may feel not being treated fairly and respectfully.

In organisations where exclusive TM is practised, performance appraisal and intelligence assessments are the major methods that are used to classify workers as being talented or not talented. Unfortunately, this approach has several inherent limitations, which increase biases, subjectivity, political considerations and inequity in classifying workers as "A" or "B" player (Dries and De Gieter, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013; Lopes *et al.*, 2015; Swailes, 2013). Some appraisers tend to deliberately distort appraisal scores when they have a high need for power, purportedly to gain control over the organisation and its resources or have low self-efficacy (Tziner *et al.*, 1997).

In addition, performance appraisal sessions are frequently used as:

[. . .] fault-finding exercise by senior managers to somehow defend the decision of promotion or monetary rewards. Those who got recognised kept on wondering whether it is their political skill or true credentials that helped them to move ahead of others (Sarkar, 2016, p. 8).

Moreover, appraisal results, to some extent, are mere reflections of workers' experience with their assigned job but not of their talent (Silzer and Church, 2009; Yost and Chang, 2009). Similarly, intelligence assessments or test scores often fail to comprehensively capture the mental ability of people coupled with inherent biases in test scores because of cultural differences, poor validity and reliability, familiarity with the test materials and differences in the definition of intelligence (Neisser *et al.*, 1996). The collective effect of these weaknesses inherent in talent classification systems is inequality and perceived unfair treatment among employees, especially among the excluded ones, as their hidden potentials may not be identified. Consequently, Nijs *et al.* (2014) have advised against basing:

[. . .] talent-identification decisions solely on performance scores – which only reflect currently deployed abilities – because they only evidence what is manifest at the present time. Such decisions lack the power for predicting the sustained interpersonal and intrapersonal excellence in which organizations are interested.

Clearly, the decision and procedurals concerning the designation of an employee as talented or not talented in exclusive TM are mostly influenced by political considerations instead of strategic values. This means that exclusive TM unreasonably and unfairly denies workers the opportunity to grow and develop their career, and thus to be irresponsible and unsustainable. Hence, responsible talent identification, by emphasising the opening up of the talent system to all workers, gives equal treatment and opportunity to every employee to have his or her potential be identified for nurturing and development. In this way, management would be demonstrating their commitment to the performance of their social responsibility of identifying and developing their HR in a manner that is fair, just and dignifying.

Responsible talent development. Talent development focuses on the:

[. . .] planning, selection and implementation of development strategies for the entire talent pool to ensure that the organisation has both the current and future supply of talent to meet strategic

objectives and that development activities are aligned with organisational talent management processes (Garavan *et al.*, 2012, p. 6).

A responsible talent development from the perspective of inclusivity encourages institutions to make genuine efforts to develop the talent of all workers by shifting the focus of talent development to learning-oriented development instead of performance-oriented (Garavan and McGuire, 2010). The aim of learning-oriented talent development practice is to allow workers to:

[...] reveal the full extent of their work-related abilities even if they fall outside the top 10% threshold, but at least in this scenario the employees' abilities are being recognised to the fullest (Swales *et al.*, 2014, p. 532).

Similarly, Garavan and McGuire (2010) maintain that HRD should focus on sustainability and CSR as a way of improving efficiency and effectiveness. This means responsibility to develop the talent and unique strengths of all employees to sustain the HR base of the organisation while improving employment experience for employees. This is reinforced by Ibeh and Debrah's (2011) findings that organisations should improve access to talent development opportunities by providing constant support to individual employees to realise their potentials.

Likewise, the principle of equity and equal opportunity based on organisational justice theory requires that TM systems should treat all workers equally by providing them with equal resources and opportunities to fully develop their potential, as some may have their talents wasted because of lack of supports and equal resources. This is consistent with Pfeffer's (2001) assertion that "people who receive less coaching, mentoring, training, and fewer challenging job assignments will – other things being equal – learn less and be less able to perform at a higher level" (p. 254). It further gives credence to Wooten and Cobb's (1999) assertion that career development interventions and organisational practices are prone to perceptions of fairness in all forms: distributive, procedural and interactional. Hence, provision of equal opportunity to all employees to learn, grow and strive to fulfil their potential (Walker and LaRocco, 2002) is a key characteristic of an RTM system.

Responsible talent retention management. Exclusion from an organisation's TM signals to employees that the organisation does not care about their potential to grow and become top performers. Moreover, the exclusive TM's signalling that others are:

[...] inferior is dehumanising and exclusion could have non-trivial effects if the excluded feel that the organisation expects less of them; an action that could trigger negative emotional states. Exclusion could be read as suppressing opportunities to flourish or to express individual identity and authenticity (Haslam, 2006; Swales, 2013, p. 37).

Earlier, Walker and LaRocco (2002) have observed that once employees are designated with the title of top talent, they "may develop a self-image and self-confidence that comes with higher pay, perks, recognition, and rapid promotions" (p. 12). These higher status employees tend to receive more support than others within the organisation, thereby implying that employees who are not considered as talented will not receive a similar level of respect and dignity (Lacey and Groves, 2014; Swales, 2013). Such practices raise major ethical problem in employment relationships by creating perceived inequality in sharing of resources and are at variance with the requirements of the organisational justice theory for all employees to be fairly compensated (Greenberg and Baron, 2003; Folger and Konovsky, 1989).

Thus, there is a lack of justice and fairness in exclusive TM (O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2019; Marescaux *et al.*, 2013). Meanwhile, as a key stakeholder, employees are entitled to fair treatment, as lack of fairness can negatively affect positive employee

experiences (McDonnell, 2011), and if the excluded employees are hurt by TM actions aimed at improving firm performance, the improvement which might be marginal, then there is an ethical problem (Swaiiles, 2013).

However, in RTM, the focus is on managing the weaknesses of all workers while developing their unique strengths. It also concentrates on ensuring that every worker can flourish by striving to eliminate talent differentiation and their unintended negative effects, while ensuring that employee's contributions are fairly and equally recognised. This can make the workers reciprocate by becoming committed to the organisation. This is in line with the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) which posits that the relationships among people and organisations are created as a result of exchange of goods: material and non-material (Farganis, 2011). Because of the mutual beneficial nature of the relationship between parties, a social exchange relationship tends to create obligations between the individuals involved, leading to reciprocal and collective efforts (Blau, 1964).

Furthermore, organisations that are committed to employee-focused CSR programmes signal their desire to promote dignity and equal treatment for workers. This is because empirical evidence has shown that internally perceived CSR strongly impacts on employee commitment (Mory *et al.*, 2016) and engagement (Ferreira and de Oliveira, 2014), among other positive employee outcomes. Thus, responsible talent retention management describes organisations' commitment to their employee retention through the institution of transparent talent identification; inclusive development; fair compensation and recognition system; and creation of supportive organisational climate that treats workers with respect and dignity.

Responsible talent management outcomes

Sustainable employee outcomes: employee well-being and perceived decent work

RTM practices can be used to achieve sustainable employee outcomes such as employee well-being and perceived decent work. Employee well-being based on Grant *et al.*'s (2007) conceptualisation consists of:

- psychological well-being (e.g. work engagement, life satisfaction);
- physical well-being (e.g. absence of burnout); and
- social well-being (e.g. perceived fairness).

As noted earlier, exclusive TM does not give all employees the opportunity to flourish, as it ignores potential negative consequences on employees excluded in the TM system (Marescaux *et al.*, 2013; McDonnell, 2011), thereby potentially impairing employee well-being.

Through the lenses of organisational justice and stakeholder theories, we argue that organisations that invest by making TM opportunities more accessible to all employees can be said to be concerned with improving their well-being (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013). Employees often quit their organisation to pursue personal realisation and happiness when they feel unjustly treated by organisational practices (Au and Ahmed, 2014), suggesting that fairness and equity in a TM system is necessary to improve employee well-being (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013; Gelens *et al.*, 2013).

This is supported by Kumasey *et al.*'s (2019) finding that distributive and procedural justice in management practices can improve employee engagement and commitment, and they consequently call on organisations to invest in practices that enhance perceived equality in the distribution of resources within organisations. Relatedly, Mory *et al.* (2016) suggest that internal CSR impacts strongly on employee commitments. Likewise, in Portugal, Ferreira and de Oliveira (2014) reveal that employees who are exposed to internal

CSR are more engaged in their works. Equally, [Ford et al. \(2010\)](#) found that a hybrid talent strategy ensures fairness and enhances employee motivation. [Meyers \(2016\)](#) also posits that inclusive talent strategy does not “waste” talents by focusing on only a few elitist employees but by developing all employees’ potentials to the fullest, leading to improvement in their general well-being. This result is further reinforced by [Meyers and van Woerkom’s \(2017\)](#) recent findings, based on field experiment data from 116 Dutch working people, that strength interventions (the main theoretical basis for inclusive TM) that have a significant effect on general well-being (psychological capital and life satisfaction) and work-related well-being (increased work engagement and decreased burnout) directly or indirectly through positive affect. This means that RTM is a critical instrument that organisations can leverage to improve general and job-related well-being for all workers. Consequently, we argue that:

P2. RTM practices will significantly enhance employee well-being.

Decent work is described as a work that guarantees workers’ freedom, equity, security and dignity in employment relationship ([ILO, 1999](#)). Organisational practices affect employees’ perception of the nature and quality of work they are engaged in ([Boxall and Purcell, 2016](#)). This means that organisations from the stakeholder and organisational justice theoretical perspectives have responsibilities to engage in TM practices that guarantee workers’ dignity, security and fairness in their employment relationship to improve decent work opportunities. [Huang \(2013\)](#) posits that organisations must not strive to achieve decent work to meet the needs of external stakeholders such as regulators but essentially to satisfy internal stakeholders – employees’ intrinsic conditions such as ethical values. This supports [Jiang and Yang’s \(2010\)](#) assertion that decent work is a moral necessity that prevents workers from working in unacceptable working conditions that can impair their general well-being. Recently, [Guest \(2017\)](#) posits that well-being-oriented HRM practices normally emphasise investment in the development of the potential of workers. It also ensures that employees work under a good working condition. In line with the preceding discussions, we argue that RTM practices can create a decent work environment for employees in terms of security of employment and adequate earnings, and among others. Thus,

P3. RTM will be associated with improved perception of decent work among employees.

In [Cooke et al.’s \(2019, p. 125\)](#) view, perception of decent work improves well-being of workers, “which will, in turn, enhance their identification with the employing organization and their engagement at work.” Earlier, [Kahn \(1990\)](#) posits that meaningful work, safety and availability of resources and supports to cope with life are critical conditions for improving well-being (work engagement). Decent work is characterised by these conditions and therefore can improve employee well-being. Consistent with the preceding, we contend that RTM practices are concerned with improving decent work perceptions to improve well-being of employees. Its inclusivity requires organisational TM to concentrate on enhancing the fit between workers and their work, thereby promoting meaningfulness in all forms. Based on this, we argue that by developing the potentials of all employees in a manner that is fair, which in turn guarantees them with adequate earnings and security in the workplace, will make them develop a sense of dignity in their employment, thereby improving employee perception of decent work, and consequently leading to improvement in their well-being.

P4a. Perceived decent work will have a positive effect on employee well-being.

P4b. Perceived decent work will mediate the relationship between RTM and employee well-being.

Sustainable firm outcomes: organisational well-being

Organisational well-being is operationalised as consisting of sustainable financial performance and competitiveness (financial well-being), attractive reputation, retention and social legitimacy (social well-being) and learning and innovation (psychological well-being). A firm that engages in RTM practices will improve social perception of its identity and employment practices and enhance its reputation and attractiveness to attract more qualified and committed employees and socially conscious investors for its long-term success.

This is consistent with empirical findings (Vihari and Rao, 2018) that implementation of sustainable HRM practices enhances employer attractiveness. Relatedly, Story *et al.* (2016) show that internal CSR improves organisational attractiveness and reputation. Recently, Abugre and Anlesinya's (2019) study of MNC firms in Ghana showed that firms' CSR practices significantly create enhanced human capital, economic and reputational values of firms. Similarly, Savanevičienė and Vilčiauskaitė's (2017) qualitative analysis of ten firms in Lithuania revealed that inclusive talent strategy facilitates achievement of strategic objectives and sustainable firm performance. Earlier, Van der Sluis and van de Bunt-Kokhuis (2009) posited that hybrid talent strategies can improve organisational well-being because they afford organisations the opportunity to reap the benefits of both approaches. Meyers (2016) also maintains that when the specific talents of each individual worker are leveraged, they will naturally learn quicker and in turn improves sustainable performance. This is similar to Lopes' (2016) study of 358 lawyers and stakeholders in 12 European and Latin American countries which revealed that employees included in exclusive TM have a:

[...] narrow focus on legal skills as the driver for innovative solutions for clients, but lack strength in interpersonal competencies. In contrast, their peers have more adaptable mindsets and are more relational and focused on quality (p. 207).

This suggests that sustainable innovation and long-term competitiveness may not come from "talented" but other employees which some firms consider as average performers.

Consequently, we argue that RTM is a critical approach for improving well-being of firms because of its ability to make important contributions towards enhancing the competitiveness, performance, learning and innovation, attractiveness, retention and long-term sustainability. Thus, we argue:

P5. RTM practices will significantly enhance the well-being of organisations.

Mediation role of employee well-being and perceived decent work

The "search for a link between HRM and performance has been pursued at the expense of concern for employee well-being" and "what is needed is a different approach to HRM that is more likely to enhance employee well-being, but which may also offer an alternative route to high performance" (Guest, 2017, p. 22). Organisations can only require their workers to improve performance if they (the employers), demonstrate that they are committed to the welfare and needs of the employees. This implies that employees should be treated fairly and with due consideration for their well-being (Paauwe, 2009). RTM from the stakeholder theory's perspective emphasises the responsibility of organisations to improve the well-being of employees to enhance organisational well-being. Macke and Genari's (2019) posit

that improvement in job-related well-being such as work engagement and job satisfaction often contribute significantly towards promoting a profitable and sustainable firm performance. The reason behind this is that happy employees are more proactive, creative, innovative, engage in extra-work performance behaviours and are eager to excel, leading to firms enjoying sustainable competitive advantage (Bakker and Bal, 2010). This therefore gives credence to Swailes *et al.*'s (2014) assertion that inclusive TM is "far more virtuous because it is done to advance the well-being and fortunes of others, even though the organisation may benefit from their enhanced performance" (p. 535). This means that RTM will improve employee well-being, which in turn will lead to improvement in organisational well-being. Similarly, employees who perceive their work to be decent and meaningful are expected to contribute meaningfully towards enhancing organisational well-being. According to Kubo (2018), decent work improves performance; as a result, organisations and their shareholders have an incentive to maximise "social good" for employees, because it can improve their competitiveness and performance. Hence:

P6. (a) Employee well-being and (P6b) perceived decent work will mediate the relationship between RTM practices and organisational well-being.

Discussion

It has been estimated that only a few (10-20 per cent) workers are rightly classified as talented employees in an exclusive TM system (Karakowsky and Kotlyar, 2012; Swailes, 2013), with a vast majority denied the opportunity to realise their hidden potentials and become top performers, thereby raising significant RM and ethical problem concerning TM practices in most organisations. Unfortunately, there is less interest in social and ethical aspects of TM (Anlesinya *et al.*, 2019a; Swailes, 2013; O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2019; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013). Hence, we critically examine how organisations can manage talents responsibly and ethically through the theoretical lenses of an inclusive TM philosophy (Marescaux *et al.*, 2013; Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014; Swailes *et al.*, 2014), the organisational justice theory (Adams, 1965; Greenberg and Baron, 2003), the stakeholder theory (Carroll, 1979; Freeman, 1984) and extant literature.

We argue that the practice of exclusive TM strategies tends to facilitate irresponsible management and unfair employment practices. This is because it leads to the shirking of the organisation's responsibility to most of its workers in terms of providing them with fair and equal opportunities to develop their potentials to the fullest and become star performers, and accordingly, limits most workers' ability to have a dignified employment and flourish as humans. Consequently, by drawing on the outlined theories and extant literature, we have developed an RTM construct and model to strongly advocate for the integration of RM practices into TM practices. The core tenets of RTM imply that organisations seeking to make their TM practices and strategies responsible and ethical, must integrate the ideas of inclusivity, corporate responsibility and equity and equal employment opportunity into their talent attraction and identification, talent development and talent retention programmes.

The *inclusivity* principle is based on the notion that everyone has a talent and can become talented. When this principle is embedded in TM practices of attraction, development and retention, it can significantly reduce talent deficits as it creates opportunities for organisations to create a larger pool of talented workers, particularly in regions hard hit by talent shortages. The thinking of this principle is consistent with the inclusive TM philosophy (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014; Swailes *et al.*, 2014), which argues that TM programmes should focus on the entire population of employees in the organisation and not

just few workers. The inclusion in the sense of a hybrid TM approach is, however, required (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014; O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2019). As noted earlier, inclusivity, in this sense, should be interpreted as a TM system that recognises investing in star performance while at the same time instituting systems to develop the strength of all other workers in the organisation, and thereby not to ignore employees who are not currently performing above average employees.

The second principle is *responsibility*; it requires organisations to regard the development of all workers' talent as an obligation and it is in accordance with the stakeholder theory and CSR of firms (Carroll, 1979; Freeman, 1984). Effective integration of this principle into TM practices can significantly enhance the ability of organisations to reduce turnover by retaining socially conscious talents as most employees like to work for socially responsible organisations. This is consistent with empirical evidence that (Ferreira and de Oliveira, 2014; Mory *et al.*, 2016) internally perceived CSR creates strongly committed employees and facilitates employee retention. It is also consistent with the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) that organisations that are CSR-oriented may have greater disposition in attracting talented employees and securing their engagement. Hence, it is suggested that organisations pay more attention to employee-centred CSR practices, as employees increasingly expect a higher degree of ethics and socially responsible practices from corporations to secure their commitment (Epstein, 1987; Harrison, 2003).

Moreover, the key argument in support of the exclusive TM philosophy that it is costly for firms to invest in all employees (Lepak and Snell, 2002) is largely not justified, the reason being that such human capital investments rather help increase employees' identification with organisation and retention, and also elicit positive reciprocal responses and collective efforts from workers to sustain organisational operations in the long term. Similarly, such thinking further denies employees the benefits of the responsibility in their organisation towards their career advancement and the realisation of their full potential. However, the twin-goal of meeting stakeholders' need while taking into consideration its economic costs justifies the pursuit of hybrid TM as a more responsible approach.

The third *principle is equity and equal employment opportunity*; it states that there should be a transparent talent identification system, inclusive development, fair compensation and recognition system, thus treating workers with respect and dignity. This is consistent with Pfeffer's (2001, p. 254) assertion indicated earlier that "people who receive less coaching, mentoring, training, and fewer challenging job assignments will – other things being equal – learn less and be less able to perform at a higher level." This principle, which is rooted in the organisational justice theory (Adams, 1965; Greenberg and Baron, 2003), is therefore concerned with people's fairness perceptions in organisational TM practices. It suggests treating all workers equally by providing them with equal resources and opportunities to develop their potentials and have their contributions adequately and fairly recognised to elicit their commitment and retention. This is in line with prior studies (Kampkötter, 2017; Palaiologos *et al.*, 2011) that revealed significant influence of justice in HR practices on sustainable employee outcomes.

Furthermore, we argue through the lenses of the organisational justice theory, the stakeholder theory and the inclusive TM philosophy that RTM, by emphasising responsibility, inclusivity, fairness and justice or equal employment opportunity in TM practices can enhance perceived decent work and improve well-being of all employees, which will in turn lead to improvement in organisational well-being in terms of sustainable performance, competitiveness, social legitimacy attractive reputation, talent retention and learning and innovation. In addition, the indirect effect of RTM on organisational well-being,

we contend, is that RTM practices contribute directly in enhancing organisational well-being.

These findings are similar to previous evidence that fair employment practices (Gelens *et al.*, 2013), CSR practices (Mory *et al.*, 2016), hybrid talent (Ford *et al.*, 2010) and inclusive talent strategies (Meyers, 2016; O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2019) affect employees' job-related well-being, and further give credence to Guest's (2017) assertion that well-being-oriented HRM practices improve the perception of decent work opportunities among workers, and increased perceived decent work is associated with higher well-being (Cooke *et al.*, 2019). It is also consistent with findings that sustainable HRM practices (Lis, 2012; Vihari and Rao, 2018), CSR practices (Abugre and Anlesinya, 2019) and inclusive talent strategy (Lopes, 2016; Thunissen *et al.*, 2013) affect organisational well-being measures.

The means that RTM is a critical tool for enhancing firms' sustainability because of its ability to improve work experience and well-being of workers to ensure financial prosperity, legitimacy and innovativeness of firms in ever-challenging and competitive business environment.

Implications, future directions and conclusion

Practical implications

The practical implications of our study include, first, that responsible talent identification is based on the notion that talent exists at all level, and so managers need to increase person – job fit through the use of competency profiles to identify and develop employees' talents while instituting fair and transparent systems for identifying those with disproportionate contributions for differentiated TM interventions. In particular, because performance appraisal is mainly used to identify training needs, recognise employees' contributions and classify employees as talented or not, we recommend strict adherence to all forms of justice, i.e. distributive, procedural and interactional in organisational performance appraisals. We believe in so doing, organisations will expand equitable access to TM opportunities while discharging their responsibility to support career growth and talent development of all employees to improve their perception of decent work and well-being, which in turn will lead to improvement in the well-being of the organisation, because happy employees are great assets for achieving financial prosperity, sustainable innovation and competitiveness.

Furthermore, responsible talent development requires managers to emphasise more experiential learning through job rotation, coaching and mentoring as these employee development techniques facilitate experience-based learning and help organisations to learn about employees' strengths in diverse contexts (Eriksson and Ortega, 2006; Garavan and McGuire, 2010) for their hidden talents to become manifested and nurtured for the benefit of both parties. Job rotation helps workers to build and develop their skills and knowledge (Campion *et al.*, 1994) by avoiding the challenges of "stickiness" that ties people to the same job for very long period with the accompanying danger that their talent becomes suppressed (Osterman, 1994; Pil and MacDuffie, 1996). Moreover, to ensure that organisations help all employees to develop their potentials to the fullest, there is the need to build a network of experienced coaches and mentors who can help manage employees' weakness while maximising their unique strengths (Anlesinya, 2018).

Finally, while RTM principles generally project inclusive TM as an RTM approach, its implementation, in reality, can raise three main issues. The first issue is the economic burden of making wholesale investments in all employees equally, irrespective of their different contributions to the competitiveness of the organisation. The second is the need to maintain a suitable equilibrium regarding the demands of organisations' stakeholders and the economic costs incurred. The third is whether TM is different from HRM. According to

some scholars (Iles *et al.*, 2010), TM and HRM are essentially the same. On the contrary, others maintain that TM is a distinct field from HRM in that it follows the requirements of a “decision science” where investments are made in the areas that generate the biggest profits (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2007; Collings and Mellahi, 2009). According to Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016), to discriminate exclusive TM from the inclusive conceptualisations and to get more clarity in the TM debate, inclusive TM approach should be labelled as HRM or as strength-based approach. In their views, using “clear, distinctive terms and definitions can give scholars and practitioners direction in their war for talent” (p. 50). Based on the above three main issues, we recommend that the principles of RTM should be incorporated into a hybrid TM system to allow organisations to leverage on the strengths of both TM approaches: inclusive TM, for developing the talents or strengths of all workers, and exclusive TM, for giving slightly higher attention to employees who differentially added value to enhance the well-being of organisations. In this way, no one will be left behind, and talents wasted.

Contributions and future directions

Theoretically, our study extends the existing literature by developing both an *RTM construct and model*, which are original and novel, and are expected to shape thinking and drive new research directions in the TM field. It further contributes directly to knowledge and practice by demonstrating how organisations can manage talents in a responsible way. However, a key limitation to this study is its conceptual nature, so the model requires empirical verification. We, therefore, call for future empirical studies to validate it to enhance our understanding of its practical utilities and challenges in organisational settings. Such studies should also look at boundary conditions at various levels and other mechanisms that can alter and facilitate the relationship between RTM, employee well-being, decent work and organisational well-being.

The RTM construct can be measured with scales; as a result, survey data can be collected from organisations. While employee well-being and organisational well-being can be measured with existing standardised scales, existing questionnaires may be insufficient for measuring RTM, as they largely fail to consider its key underlying principles. This provides opportunity for RTM scale development. In doing so, we particularly recommend operationalising RTM as a bundle of practices and rather viewing the construct as a narrow or single practice. Although a qualitative approach is particularly suitable for exploring the first research proposition, we believe using multi-method and mixed research approaches can provide better and useful insights on all the research propositions. For the multilevel propositions, hierarchical linear modelling techniques should be used because of their ability to assess and integrate individual- and organisational-level variables in analysis.

In conclusion, giving the generally low attention to responsible and ethical aspect of TM, we believe the proposed RTM construct and model are expected to help organisations in integrating responsible and ethical principles into the design and practice of TM to ensure that all workers flourish as humans, while making contributions to long-term sustainability of organisations.

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