

# A Pilot Study on Talent Management, Talent Retention and Succession Planning Among Academic Staff in a Malaysian Higher Education Institution

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**Abstract:** - Talent Management (TM), Talent Retention (TR), and Succession Planning (SP) are increasingly recognised as an integrated strategic triad for sustaining academic talent and ensuring leadership continuity in higher education institutions (HEIs). In the Malaysian higher education context, particularly in institutions such as UTMSPACE and comparable HEIs, intensifying competition and evolving stakeholder expectations necessitate systematic approaches to attracting, developing, retaining, and preparing academic staff for future leadership roles. This paper reports the findings of a pilot study conducted to validate a structured survey instrument measuring TM, TR, and SP among academic's staff. The instrument was developed based on extensive review of literature and s prior surveys and administered in a pilot study involving 17 academics in UTMSPACE. The pilot study aimed to assess the clarity, reliability, and preliminary validity of the instrument. The results demonstrate very high internal consistency across all main constructs, with Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.96, while most sub-dimensions demonstrate good to very good reliability. Nomological validity was supported through significant positive correlations among the key variables, confirming that higher perceptions of one construct are associated with higher perceptions of the others. Overall, these results suggest that the instrument is psychometrically robust and suitable for use in the main study to further examine the interrelationships between TM, TR, and SP in Malaysian higher education settings.

**Keywords:** Pilot Study, Talent Management; Talent Retention; Succession Planning; Academic Staff; Higher Education Institutions; Malaysia; UTMSPACE

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Talent Management (TM), Talent Retention (TR), and Succession Planning (SP) are three interrelated strategies that collectively support the continuity of operations and long-term organisational performance. TM can be understood as a comprehensive process of attracting, developing, and retaining high-performing individuals who can contribute significantly to organisational success (Norzaini Azman & Ibrahim Komoo, 2020). TR, meanwhile, refers to strategies aimed at encouraging talented employees to remain with the organisation over an extended period (Edward Sembiring & Nur Damayanti, 2023), while SP is a systematic approach to identifying and developing internal talent to fill key positions when they become vacant (Bano et al., 2022). Together, these three practices form an integrated human resource strategy that is particularly critical in knowledge-intensive organisations such as universities.

TM has become one of the central tools of 21st-century human capital management, integrating a range of processes and programmes for attracting, recruiting, developing, and retaining talent in line with organisational goals (Masitah Mohammad Yusof et al., 2018). In this perspective, human capital is viewed as a critical resource that enables organisations to remain competitive beyond traditional factors such as capital or physical assets, with TM helping organisations in leveraging technological advances and competing at a global level (Piansoongnern et al., 2011). As a core component of modern human resource strategy, TM focuses on individuals with high performance and high potential (Cappelli, 2008) and has been shown to influence organisational competitiveness and performance in dynamic environments (Schuler et al., 2011). In Malaysia, organisations increasingly recognise TM as essential for competitiveness and sustainability, with comprehensive TM initiatives such as

continuous training and career development linked to improved TR (Shahrizan Adzham Ahmad & Al-Hasan Al-Aidaros, 2017) and to the development of effective leadership frameworks in universities (Ghazali et al., 2021). These developments align with broader global changes in higher education systems which emphasise performance, accountability, and sustainability through performance-based human resource management (Gu & Levin, 2021).

Within Malaysian universities, TM, TR, and SP form a strategic triad for sustaining academic talent and institutional excellence. Empirical studies at the university level have identified key factors in the implementation of TM, including the integration of TM with staff performance (EP) practices and the mediating role of Employee Engagement (EE) between TM and performance outcome (Abdullahi, Raman, et al., 2022). In this context, TR functions not merely as an outcome but as a critical mechanism that links TM investments to effective SP. Effective TR can reduce recruitment and training costs, enhance productivity, and reinforce organisational stability, thereby ensuring that talent developed through TM and prepared via SP remains within the institution. As competition in higher education intensifies, understanding how TM, TR, and SP interact is therefore vital for universities seeking to maintain a strong and sustainable academic workforce.

Despite the growing body of literature examining TM, TR, and SP conceptually and empirically, there remains a notable gap in the availability of validated measurement instruments that capture these constructs in an integrated manner within the Malaysian higher education context. Existing studies often adapt instruments developed in corporate or Western settings, which may not fully reflect the structural, cultural, and governance characteristics of Malaysian universities. Moreover, few studies explicitly report on the reliability and validity of instruments used to measure TM, TR, and SP among academic staff, limiting the robustness and comparability of empirical findings. In response to this gap, the present study undertakes a pilot study to validate a structured questionnaire designed to measure TM, TR, and SP among academic staff in a Malaysian higher education institution. By establishing the clarity, reliability, and preliminary validity of the instrument, this study provides a methodological foundation for subsequent large-scale investigations into talent-related practices and their interrelationships in Malaysian universities.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Human capital is one of the most critical resources for the sustainability and competitiveness of higher education institutions. In the context of Malaysian universities, particularly those involved in professional and lifelong learning such as UTMSPACE, the ability to attract, develop, retain, and prepare future leaders among academic staff is essential for ensuring institutional excellence and continuity. Rapid changes in the higher education landscape, increasing global competition, and rising expectations from stakeholders further intensify the need for systematic and strategic management of academic talent.

Within this context, three closely related constructs form the core focus of this study: TM, TR, and SP. TM emphasises the identification, development, and optimisation of high-potential staff to meet current and future institutional needs. TR focuses on the strategies and conditions that encourage talented academics to remain in the institution over the long term. Succession Planning, meanwhile, ensures that there is a continuous and ready pipeline of capable individuals to assume key leadership and academic roles when needed.

The following subsections elaborate on each of these constructs, drawing on relevant literature and practices in Malaysian higher education institutions. This discussion provides the conceptual foundation for understanding how TM, TR, and SP interact and contribute to the continuity of leadership and the overall performance of UTMSPACE and similar institutions.

### 2.1 Talent Management (TM)

Talent Management (TM) refers to a strategic process of identifying, developing, and retaining high-potential individuals to meet the current and future needs of an organisation (Collings et al., 2017). In the context of Malaysian universities, TM has become a crucial element to ensure that higher education institutions remain competitive at the global level and achieve academic excellence (Omar et al., 2023).

The Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, through the Higher Education Leadership Academy (AKEPT), functions as the central hub for TM in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). AKEPT's core role is to plan strategically to support the Ministry in shaping and strengthening the future of leadership talent within the academic landscape.

AKEPT is responsible for profiling leadership talent, identifying and nurturing individuals with outstanding potential, and ensuring that competency-based TM is institutionalised at all levels, both at institutional and national levels (AKEPT, 2025).

Universities in Malaysia have also implemented various programmes to strengthen TM. For example, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has introduced a Competency-Based Talent Management (CBTM) initiative designed by the Human Resource Division of the Registrar's Department. This initiative ensures that talent is managed based on defined competencies in recruitment, development, performance appraisal, promotion, and succession planning (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2023). In addition, Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP), in collaboration with AKEPT, has organised competency-based TM programmes aimed at enhancing staff competencies and knowledge (Abdul Wahit, 2023).

Such programmes are aligned with the need to develop staff competencies to ensure that universities remain sustainable and competitive (Nasaruddin Mahdzir et al., 2021). At Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), succession planning is supported through a TM system (eTALENT), introduced to identify and nurture leadership talent among academic and administrative staff to ensure a continuous pipeline of quality leaders (Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, 2023). Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), through its Leadership and Talent Development Division, has also taken proactive steps to drive succession planning at the university.

This division is entrusted with identifying groups of institutional talent for succession purposes and with determining leadership competencies and competency gaps among the university's talent pool (Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 2025). Furthermore, the PERMATA Negara Centre at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) is responsible for identifying gifted and talented students from across the country and providing them with opportunities to develop their potential. One of its key initiatives is the Talent Identification and Management Programme, which uses screening tests to identify gifted and talented students (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2025).

Therefore, TM in Malaysian universities plays a vital role in ensuring that higher education institutions can compete globally. Through the initiatives and programmes implemented, universities can identify, develop, and retain the best talent to achieve excellence in both academic and administrative domains (Nasaruddin Mahdzir et al., 2021).

## 2.2 Talent Retention (TR)

In terms of Talent Retention (TR) or staff retention, this is a critical aspect for Malaysian universities to ensure the stability and excellence of higher education institutions. Retaining high-quality staff guarantees continuity of knowledge and experience and enhances the reputation of the university at both national and international levels.

There are many factors that influence TR. Arshad (2013) notes that effective human resource practices such as opportunities for professional development and a conducive work environment play a significant role in retaining employees in an organisation. In addition, management support and recognition of staff contributions also influence their decision to remain with the organisation.

Various initiatives have been implemented by Malaysian universities to increase staff retention rates. For example, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (2023) has developed the eTALENT TM system to identify, assess, and develop staff capabilities to meet current and future organisational needs. Such initiatives demonstrate the commitment of universities to safeguarding staff welfare, which in turn can increase job satisfaction and the intention to remain in service.

Despite these efforts, universities still face challenges in retaining quality staff. Factors such as heavy workload, limited career advancement opportunities, and competition from other institutions may lead staff to seek employment elsewhere. Therefore, it is important for universities to continuously review and improve their staff retention strategies.

TR in Malaysian universities requires a holistic approach, which includes strengthening human resource practices, providing a supportive and healthy work environment, and offering sustained support from top management. With the right strategies, universities can stabilise their workforce, which is crucial for achieving excellence in teaching, research, and service.

TR is also essential in ensuring staff loyalty to the organisation. Effective succession planning will help produce talented staff who remain with the same organisation over a long and continuous period. This is consistent with Bano et al. (2024), who emphasise that staff play a critical role in the sustainability and development of an

organisation. TR has become a major concern across all organisations. HEIs are particularly vulnerable to the loss of highly skilled workers due to an ageing workforce and limited prospects for recruiting and retaining younger, talented individuals. Staff may move to the private sector or to other HEIs that offer better benefits and retention strategies.

Zamri (2023) similarly notes that TR among academic staff in Malaysia is a key issue that can result in loss of talent and experience, reduced productivity, and increased costs associated with recruiting and training new staff. The literature suggests that low salaries and benefits, as well as limited opportunities for career growth, are primary factors contributing to high turnover among lecturers in Malaysia. These factors can lead to reduced job satisfaction and motivation and ultimately drive many lecturers to consider leaving their current institutions.

Therefore, TR is a crucial element in ensuring the stability and excellence of higher education institutions in Malaysia. Although various initiatives have been introduced, universities continue to face challenges such as high workload, limited career progression, and external competition. A holistic TR approach encompassing professional development, a conducive work environment, and effective succession planning is needed to retain quality staff, ensure continuity of leadership, and strengthen institutional competitiveness in the long term.

### 2.3 Succession Planning (SP)

Succession Planning (SP) refers to a strategy designed to identify and develop future leaders to ensure leadership continuity within an organisation (Chia et al., 2021). In the context of Malaysian higher education institutions, systematic and effective SP is crucial for maintaining institutional stability and sustaining long-term academic excellence (Bano, 2018).

An effective SP must also be aligned with the university's strategic goals and supported by top management to ensure its long-term success (Keerio & Ahmad, 2019). SP among academic staff in Malaysian universities plays an important role in ensuring organisational stability, enhancing leadership quality, and sustaining academic excellence. By implementing a more systematic and competency-based approach, Malaysian universities can secure strong leadership continuity and effective academic staff development to meet future challenges (Chia et al., 2021).

In the context of this research, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has implemented various initiatives in TM, SP, and staff retention to ensure continuity of academic leadership and institutional competitiveness. As the professional education arm of UTM, UTMSPACE plays a key role in developing and retaining high-quality academic staff across various lifelong learning programmes (Noor & Ahmad, 2012). UTMSPACE also contributes significantly to academic excellence through TM, SP, and TR initiatives among academic staff. To ensure leadership continuity and institutional competitiveness, various strategies have been implemented, including staff professional development, leadership succession planning, and retention initiatives for high-performing academic staff (Ismail et al., 2021).

Masitah and Mohamed (2020) report that organisations that invest in SP and talent development show improved employee job satisfaction and morale, which in turn enhances productivity and overall organisational performance. SP is therefore a critical component of effective human resource management strategies. In Malaysia, sectors such as the public service, universities, and banking have demonstrated how SP can strengthen organisational stability and operational continuity. Globally, organisations such as GE and Toyota have shown that strong SP helps retain high-quality leaders and ensures uninterrupted operations.

Thus, SP in higher education institutions is a critical aspect of ensuring continuity and excellence in both academic and administrative domains. TM in HEIs requires strategies that focus not only on the selection and development of academic talent, but also on administrative leadership capable of driving institutions towards excellence. Effective TSP in HEIs is key to guaranteeing leadership continuity, reducing the risk of operational disruption, and ensuring that these institutions can continue contributing meaningfully to societal and national development (Begum Ebrahim et al., 2020).

Thus, to sustain academic excellence, Malaysian universities need to adopt a more strategic and integrated approach to TM, TR, and SP. By strengthening all three aspects, universities can ensure leadership continuity, retain high-quality academic staff, and reinforce their competitiveness in the global higher education arena.

The literature reviewed indicates that TM, TR, and SP are conceptually interrelated and strategically important for sustaining academic talent and leadership continuity in Malaysian HEIs. However, despite extensive institutional initiatives and conceptual discussions, there remains a clear gap in the availability of validated

instruments that measure these constructs in an integrated and contextually appropriate manner. Existing studies often adopt instruments developed for corporate or non-local settings, with limited evidence of reliability and validity in the Malaysian higher education context. Accordingly, this study addresses this gap by validating a structured questionnaire designed to measure TM, TR, and SP among academic staff in a Malaysian higher education institution, thereby providing a robust methodological foundation for future empirical research.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A pilot study was conducted prior to the main data collection process to assess the clarity, reliability and preliminary validity of the research instrument. This pilot study involved 17 academics from a HEI that operates and implements programmes comparable to those offered by UTMSPACE. Of the 21 academics invited to participate, 17 responded, resulting in a response rate of 81%.

Conducting the pilot study enabled the researcher to evaluate the validity and consistency of the questionnaire items prior to large-scale administration. Wilson and McClean (2003) pointed out that a pilot study is important for assessing the accuracy of the questionnaire items, serving as a guideline, and avoiding confusion or difficulties in wording. In addition, pilot testing allows researchers to obtain feedback on item clarity, relevance and comprehension, as well as on the overall presentation of the questionnaire, including layout, sectioning, numbering, and formatting.

The questionnaire survey was divided into four (4) sections: General Information (demographic), TM, TR, and SP. A combination of multiple-choice questions and five-point Likert-scale items was employed to capture respondents' perceptions of the three main constructs. To obtain a higher response rate, the questionnaire was designed to be concise, consisting of five (5) pages. All questionnaire items were developed and adapted based on an extensive review of the relevant literature on TM, TR and SP.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 Pilot Study

A pilot study represents the foundation of a sound research design and constitutes an important initial step in empirical research, regardless of the research approach adopted (Hazzi & Maaldaon 2015). The term pilot study is commonly defined as "a small-scale test of the methods and procedures that will be used on a larger scale in the subsequent process..." (Porta 2008). Despite its importance, there is limited consensus in the literature regarding the appropriate sample size required for a pilot study. Billingham et al. (2013) argue that although all studies should have a justification for sample size, some types of studies do not necessarily require a formal sample size calculation. As a general guideline, a pilot sample representing approximately 10 percent to 20 percent of the anticipated main study sample size is considered adequate (Baker 1994).

For the present study, this pilot test was conducted to examine the level of validity and reliability of the survey instrument. Through the pilot testing, the researcher was able to assess respondents' understanding of the questionnaire items, including the accuracy of terms/terminology, sentence structure and language use, as well as the suitability of the formatting and wording employed (Alias 1992). The pilot study also served to identify items that might cause confusion, ambiguity and response difficulty, and to estimate the time required for questionnaire completion. According to Frankel & Wallen (2020), pilot studies play a critical role in enhancing both the validity and reliability of survey instruments.

Female respondents (58.8%) constituted the majority, with most respondents were aged between 31 and 40 years (58.8%). In terms of educational qualifications, 82.4% of respondents held a master's degree, while the majority is employed at the rank of lecturer (82.4%). With respect to length of service, 76.5% of respondents reported between 6 to 10 years of experience, indicating that most respondents possessed substantial familiarity relevant to the assessment of talent-related practices. Refer to Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Summary of Respondent Profile**

Profile	Profile Category	Number of Respondents	Percent (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	7	41.2
	Female	10	58.8
<b>Age</b>	31 to 40 years	10	58.8

Profile	Profile Category	Number of Respondents	Percent (%)
Education	41 to 50 years	7	41.2
	Bachelor's Degree	2	11.8
	Master's Degree	14	82.4
Position	Doctor of Philosophy /equiv.	1	5.9
	Academic Executive	1	5.9
	Lecturer	14	82.4
Length of Service	Senior Lecturer	2	11.8
	1 to 5 years	1	5.9
	6 to 10 years	13	76.5
	11 to 15 years	1	5.9
	16 to 20 years	1	5.9
	More than 20 years	1	5.9

Table 2: Summary of Cronbach's Reliability Test for the Pilot Study

Main Variable	Dimension	Number of Indicators	Cronbach's Alpha	Average Inter-Item Correlation
Talent Management	– (overall)	24	0.969	–
	Performance Appraisal	4	0.986	–
	Potential Identification	5	0.868	–
	Talent Development	3	0.900	–
	Professional Learning	3	0.856	–
	Talent Development Support	3	0.932	–
	Building a Talent Culture	3	0.914	–
	Talent Development System	3	0.781	–
Talent Retention	– (overall)	27	0.961	–
	Compensation	3	0.831	–
	Rewards and Recognition	3	0.802	–
	Promotion and Growth Opportunities	3	0.868	–
	Participation in Decision-Making	3	0.754	–
	Work–Life Balance	3	0.765	–
	Work Environment	3	0.719	–
	Training and Development	3	0.920	–
	Leadership	3	0.650	0.370
	Job Security	3	0.781	–
Talent Succession Plan	– (overall)	21	0.963	–
	Committed	3	0.946	–
	Assessing Current Work	3	0.881	–



Main Variable	Dimension	Number of Indicators	Cronbach's Alpha	Average Inter-Item Correlation
	Individual Performance Evaluation	3	0.902	—
	Assessing Future Work	3	0.905	—
	Assessing Future Individual Potential	3	0.704	—
	Bridging Development Gaps	3	0.828	—
	Programme Evaluation	3	0.613	0.307

Table 2 presents the results of the reliability analysis for the measurement scales used in this pilot study. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for both the main constructs and their respective dimensions. According to George & Mallery (2010), a group of items (i.e., more than 2 items) used to measure a variable can be considered to demonstrate acceptable level of reliability when the Cronbach's Alpha value exceeds 0.70. Referring to Table 2, each group of items used to measure the main variables in this pilot study can be categorised as very good because the values exceed 0.90 (Talent Management = 0.969; Talent Retention = 0.961; Talent Succession Planning = 0.963). These results indicate that the items within each main construct are highly consistent in measuring their respective latent variables, supporting the reliability of the instrument at the construct level.

Reliability tests were also conducted for each dimensional subscale within the three (3) main constructs. Table 2 shows that each group of items used to measure each dimensional variable can also be classified as very good because the Cronbach's Alpha values exceed 0.70. This suggests that the items within each dimension consistently capture the intended aspect of the construct.

Two (2) dimensions ie Leadership (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.650) and Programme Evaluation (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.613) recorded alpha values slightly below the conventional 0.70 threshold. However, these values remain acceptable for a pilot study, as Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.60 are considered adequate in exploratory research and early-stage instrument development (Hair, Black, et al. 2010). Furthermore, both dimensions recorded average inter-item correlations above 0.30, indicating satisfactory internal coherence among the items despite the relatively lower alpha values. Overall, the reliability results suggest that the instrument demonstrates strong internal consistency at both the construct and dimensional levels, making it suitable for use in the subsequent main study

In addition to reliability testing, a nomological validity test was also conducted to measure whether the relationships among the main constructs align with theoretical expectations. According to Hair, Black, et al. (2010), nomological validity is established when the observed relationships among constructs are consistent with those predicted by prior literature. In this study, nomological validity was assessed using correlation analysis to examine the direction and strength of associations among TM, TR and SP at the pilot stage. The results indicate positive and theoretically consistent relationships among the three main constructs, thereby providing preliminary support for the nomological validity of the instrument. These findings suggest that the measurement model behaves in a manner consistent with established human capital and higher education management theories, further supporting the suitability of the instrument for large-scale empirical investigation.

**Table 3: Summary of Pearson Correlation Test for the Pilot Study**

Talent Management	Talent Retention	Talent Succession Plan
	0.716**	0.895**
Performance Appraisal	(0.457, 0.913)	(0.753, 0.982)
	0.761**	0.736**
Potential Identification	(0.604, 0.902)	(0.422, 0.928)
	0.744**	0.843**
Talent Development	(0.521, 0.915)	(0.605, 0.970)
Professional Learning	0.673**	0.709**

	(0.372, 0.881)	(0.427, 0.903)
Talent Development Support	0.780** (0.485, 0.940)	0.888** (0.741, 0.972)
Building a Talent Culture	0.767** (0.550, 0.916)	0.910** (0.789, 0.989)
Talent Development System	0.677** (0.339, 0.920)	0.905** (0.786, 0.973)
Talent Retention	-	0.871** (0.727, 0.964)

Note: Values in brackets are bootstrap correlation values at the 95% confidence interval;  $n = 16$ ;  $**p < 0.01$ .

Table 3 presents the results of Pearson Correlation Tests conducted to examine the relationships among the constructs in this pilot study. The results indicate that all correlations among the main variables and their respective dimensions are positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level, demonstrating strong associations between TM and TR, as well as between TM and SP. These findings are consistent with prior studies that conceptualise TM, TR, and SP as interrelated components of an integrated human capital strategy in higher education institutions. Therefore, it can be concluded that if the level of agreement for any one main variable increases, the level of agreement for the other main variables will also increase.

Specifically, the dimensions of TM—including Performance Appraisal, Potential Identification, Talent Development, Professional Learning, Talent Development Support, Building a Talent Culture, and Talent Development System—exhibit moderate to strong positive correlations with both TR and SP. This suggests that stronger perceptions of TM practices are associated with higher levels of staff retention and more effective succession planning, even at the pilot study stage.

In addition, TR demonstrates a strong and significant positive correlation with SP ( $r = 0.871$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), further supporting the conceptual linkage between retaining academic staff and maintaining a sustainable leadership pipeline. This relationship reinforces the theoretical proposition that effective retention mechanisms serve as a critical conduit through which talent management efforts translate into successful succession outcomes.

To enhance the robustness of the findings, bootstrap correlation analysis with 95% confidence intervals was conducted. As reported in Table 3, none of the confidence intervals include zero, indicating that the observed correlations are statistically stable and unlikely to be attributable to sampling error. This provides additional empirical support for the nomological validity of the measurement instrument.

In summary, the results of the reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) and the nomological validity assessment (Pearson correlation and bootstrap analysis) collectively indicate that the measurement instrument demonstrates satisfactory psychometric properties at the pilot study stage. All constructs and dimensions exhibit acceptable to very good internal consistency and theoretically consistent interrelationships, supporting the validity of the instrument. Accordingly, the groups of items used to measure the dimensional constructs and, by extension, the main constructs of TM, TR, and SP are considered reliable and valid for use in the subsequent main study. These findings provide a sound methodological foundation for further large-scale empirical investigation within Malaysian higher education institutions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the interrelated roles of Talent Management (TM), Talent Retention (TR), and Succession Planning (SP) in sustaining academic talent and leadership continuity within Malaysian higher education institutions, focusing on instrument validation rather than outcome testing, with a particular focus on UTMSPACE and similar institutional contexts. Grounded in contemporary human capital and higher education literature, the study conceptualised TM, TR, and SP as a strategic triad that supports institutional performance, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability. In line with this perspective, a structured survey instrument was systematically developed to measure the three constructs and their underlying dimensions among academic staff.

The pilot study, involving 17 academics from a Higher Education Institution offering programmes comparable to UTMSPACE, was conducted to evaluate the clarity, reliability, and validity of the questionnaire. The findings



demonstrate that the main constructs of TM, TR, and SP exhibit very high levels of internal consistency, while most of sub-dimensions meet or exceed commonly accepted reliability thresholds. Although a small number of dimensions recorded lower Cronbach's alpha values, these remained within acceptable limits for a pilot study when considered alongside satisfactory inter-item correlations, indicating that no substantial revisions to the instrument were required. Furthermore, the nomological validity analysis revealed positive and statistically significant relationships among TM, TR, and SP, consistent with theoretical expectations that stronger talent management practices are associated with higher levels of retention and more effective succession planning. Collectively, these findings confirm that the instrument demonstrates sound psychometric properties and is suitable for use subsequent large scale research.

The study offers several contributions. Conceptually, it reinforces the view that TM, TR, and SP should not be treated as isolated HR practices, but as mutually reinforcing processes that shape the continuity and quality of academic leadership. Empirically, it provides a validated measurement tool tailored to the Malaysian higher education context, enabling researchers and practitioners to systematically diagnose current talent related practices, conduct benchmarking across units or institutions, and monitor the impact of interventions over time. Practically, the findings underscore the importance for university leaders and HR practitioners to adopt an integrated approach: aligning TM with clear career pathways, embedding SP into leadership development frameworks, and designing TR strategies that address workload, recognition, professional growth, and work-life balance.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The pilot study was based on a relatively small sample drawn from a single institution, which limits the generalisability of the findings. In addition, the use of self-reported and cross-sectional data may introduce response bias and does not allow causal relationships to be established. Future research should therefore employ the validated instrument to a larger and more diverse samples across multiple higher education institutions and consider using more advanced analytical techniques (such as structural equation modelling) to test the structural relationships between TM, TR, and SP. Mixed-method designs, incorporating qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus groups, may also provide deeper insights into how contextual factors such as institutional culture, governance, and policy changes shape talent-related practices and outcomes.

In conclusion, this paper has laid an important foundation for examining TM, TR, and SP in Malaysian higher education by offering both a theoretically grounded framework and a psychometrically robust measurement instrument. By applying this tool in the main study and in future research, institutions such as UTMSPACE will be better equipped to understand their talent landscape, design evidence-based strategies, and build a sustainable pipeline of competent and committed academic leaders. In an increasingly competitive and dynamic higher education environment, such an integrated and strategic approach to managing talent is essential for ensuring the long-term viability and excellence of universities.

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