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Employee Satisfaction, Talent Management Practices and Sustainable Competitive Advantage in the Northern Cyprus Hotel Industry

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Abstract: In this study, we have examined talent management practices' impact on achieving sustainable competitive advantage in five-star hotels located in the TRNC (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) as well as the mediating effect of employee satisfaction. After the questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability, we used bootstrapping, Mplus and SPSS to conduct an analysis using data from 368 employees from 14 five-star hotels located in North Cyprus. The study's hypotheses were verified through SEM (structural equation modelling). Our results revealed that talent development practices had no effect on the hotels' SCA, whereas talent practices (identify, engage, manage performance and retain) had a significant and beneficial influence on the hotels' SCA. Although in most hotels, talent management practices are the responsibility of the human resource management. The measured constructs specifically were employee responses. The findings of this study provide benefits for numerous stakeholders, including hotel and hospitality service industries and the government. Results can be used as a guideline for building more appealing workplaces for employees and to inform the management on how to encourage employees to be committed to a sustainable service in the hotel business. To acquire a better grasp of the organisational limits of talent management policies, it is crucial to further examine the perspectives of employers who may include hotel owners or top managers. Furthermore, future research may expand the sample and include three- and four-star hotels as well.

Keywords: talent management; sustainable competitive advantage; employee satisfaction; Northern Cyprus

1. Introduction

In 2001, McKinsey, an established and well-respected American management consulting company, emphasised the importance of a talented employee's worth for a company in their well-known report [1]. Since then, the term TM (talent management) has gained increasing importance as a tool for gaining a sustained competitive advantage through human capital [2]. Even though talent management is extremely popular in both business and government sectors, its conceptual and empirical understanding is limited [3]. In line with this limitation, the scope or goals of talent management have not yet been clearly defined, and most organisations consider talent management as an activity that human resources departments carry out [4] as a form of workforce differentiation [5]. However, talent management deals with a handful of employees who are considered 'talent' [6]. The term 'talent' has the ability to provide information about employees who are subjected to certain activities and the nature of those practices [7]. According to the literature, talented employees constitute only 3–5% of the organisation's workforce [8]. Currently, based on human capital science and theory [9], talent management is considered to be a process of identification of employee needs and planning [10]. Consequently, talent management engulfs the identification, development and retaining of employees with talent, and issues,

such as labour relations, human resources, planning, composition and benefits, remain neglected [2]. Overall, talent is viewed as a critical organisational asset that can help boost competitiveness and ensure success [11]. As a result, a lack of clarity about the degree of expertise required to thrive is not exactly what businesses require to stay afloat. Instead, the main differentiator between success and failure is having a careful, cyclical and sustainable talent management process [12]. Talent management's main functions evolve around talented employees and include identifying, developing, engaging, and retaining these individuals and managing their performance. Talented employees are seen as potentially high-performing future leaders and talent management goes beyond typical human resource management procedures by focusing on diversity and expertise [2,13–17].

Employee satisfaction is about an employee's emotional satisfaction or fulfilment as a result of his/her overall positive assessment of job-related experiences [18]. The Service-Profit Chain theory explains that only a satisfied employee can provide a quality service; thus, employee satisfaction is seen as a key to higher company profits and satisfied customers. Accordingly, high employee satisfaction is directly related to higher profits [19].

Due to advancements in technology and ever-increasing global competition, rather than physical or capital resources, humans have become the most strategic resource for an organisation's survival [20]. Committed and satisfied employees serve as a great potential for companies, as [21] many studies confirmed that positive employee satisfaction creates a competitive advantage [22,23]. According to Sheihaki Tash et al. [24], an increase in employee job satisfaction increase the value and advantages for employees and companies. In the 21st century, talent management has been considered one of the most vital human resources tools that are used to increase the job satisfaction of employees [20].

Nowadays, businesses are looking for competitive advantages which can be sustained over time by utilising strategically built resources [7]. In resource-based reasoning, a firm gains and sustains a competitive advantage through creating valuable, scarce, and difficult to imitate or substitute resources [25]. A competitive advantage that lasts a long time is one indicator that a company may have an SCA (sustainable competitive advantage) [26]. The purpose of identification, development, engagement, performance management and talented employee retention tools of talent management is to successfully increase an organisation's efficacy and performance so that it can compete effectively on the global stage [15,16,27].

Previous studies found a correlation between talent management and organisation performance [3,28,29], and some studies still associate talent management with the traditional idea of human resources [21,30]. Furthermore, current personnel management literature rarely highlights the importance of employee satisfaction in achieving an SCA. On the other hand, despite an increase in the conceptual contributions of talent management, academic studies on this construct remain few, particularly in developing countries. For these reasons, the effect of talent management practices (i.e., identify, develop, engage, manage performance and retain) as a source of SCAs is investigated through the mediating role of employee satisfaction in TRNC's five-star hotels, and additionally, to explore the extent of talent management practices in these hotels.

A questionnaire was used to collect relevant data for this study. Thus, the data were analysed using SPSS and Mplus. SEM was used to test the hypotheses presented (structural equation model).

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the concept of talent. Section 3 consists of a review of the literature and the development of hypotheses. Section 4 contains the methodology, which includes pre-testing and pilot studies, data collection, measurement and the analytic strategy. The findings are presented in Section 5, and the study is concluded with a discussion and conclusion in Section 6.

2. The Notion of Talent

Talent, which originated from the Greek word 'Talanton' and the Latin word 'Talenta', is defined as a person's innate capacity to be good at something without being taught [31].

Although talent is defined as an inherent aspect, the approach towards talent varies between organisations and, in some cases, even within the same organisation. For example, some commentators see talent as a set of competencies that are developed and applied to complete the required tasks [32]. Others, on the other hand, view talent as a collective phenomenon based on relationships, teamwork, networks and systematically developed plans [33]. Others describe talent as the personnel who can influence an organisation's performance (a set of outstanding employees in terms of their skills and talents) either immediately or in the long term by showing the greatest levels of potential [34]. Despite this, no agreed definition of talent exists. Some people believe that top achievers are gifted, while others believe that those with "high potential" (HIPO) are also gifted [30]. According to Selzer and Doyle, talent in a business is related to:

- A person's abilities and skills (talents), or what the person can do or offer to the business.
- A set of individuals in the firm influencing superior performance, or
- A specific individual usually implying she has special skills and abilities in some areas [30].

3. Review of the Literature and Hypothesis Development

3.1. Identification of Talent, Employee Satisfaction and SCA

According to the position approach to talent management, identifying talented people is the initial stage in any talent management process [2]. Although identifying talent is an important part of managing it, existing literature focuses on issues of acquiring, developing and retaining talent [35]. The central question in identifying talent for organisations is whether to attempt to identify talent within the organisation or from the outside [36]. External talent identification refers to talent acquisition. Talent is selected and recruited not within the organisation but from the outside [37], and internal talent identification is vice versa. It focuses on selecting talent from within [38]; it includes any efforts aimed at identifying talent among the existing employee pool [31]. In the business world, required skills are typically identified within a company, and if internal talent identification fails, the process continues externally [39]. Nevertheless, early talent identification has become critical for talent planning and growth. As a result, firms frequently express anxiety about a leaking talent pipeline [40]. This can be defined in three different dimensions. The first dimension is determined by the differentiation of positions based on the strength of their influence on organisational performance [41]. Organisations prioritise strategic roles over non-strategic functions [42]. The second dimension is the degree to which formal procedures, which are still the most often utilised techniques for finding talent, are relied upon [43]. The third dimension is the identification of talent, which is about the assessment of input/output [31]. Output-based evaluations are about already completed achievements, whereas input based evaluations focus on what employees bring to their next job (i.e., personal and professional accomplishment) and cross-checking which aspects of those 'talented employees' performance will likely be more essential [2].

As competition intensifies, employee satisfaction has become a major concern for businesses in the service sector, particularly for hospitality businesses, such as hotels [44].

Employee satisfaction is a key driver of employee performance and, consequently, the overall performance of a company [45]. Our study presents the undermentioned hypotheses based on the literature:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Identifying talent positively influences SCA.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Employee satisfaction plays a mediating role in the relationship between identifying talent and SCA.*

3.2. Employee Satisfaction, Talent Development and SCA

Talent development is about striving to find, keep and employ talent with maximised effectiveness to ensure continued success, quality service delivery and maximised performance [46]. If a company wants to be in business for a long time, it must spend on the development of its tangible goods, but more importantly, on its employees. Employees serve as a backbone for every organisation, as they help to increase its value [39]. Furthermore, investing in people is the first step in a sustainable plan where talent is used as a critical component of human capital development [47]. Enterprise talent development is about investigating and growing the human capital of employees so that both their professional skills and their quality of life improve [48]. Talent development has a significant effect on organisational outcomes [39]. According to the firm theory based on talent management, talent is a firm's only resource that can create a competitive advantage; thus, organizations should focus on talent and the capabilities obtained from talent [49]. Management discipline, both in literature and in practice, has long regarded employee motivation and employee satisfaction as significant traits of management, and businesses should pay attention to employees as prerequisites for the success of businesses [50]. Organizations are constantly attempting to gain a lasting competitive advantage in this chaotic climate. To maintain a competitive advantage, businesses must consistently improve their organizational competence. In particular, it is necessary to generate human capital and maintain market sustainability [21]. Therefore, the following hypotheses are presented:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Developing talent positively influences SCA.*

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Employee satisfaction mediates the link between talent development and SCA.*

3.3. Employee Satisfaction, Talent Engagement and SCA

Employee engagement is a constant challenge for businesses all around the world [51]. Therefore, it is considered a critical business driver for corporate success [52]. According to Martel [53], Employee engagement is crucial for high performance on tasks which require speed, flexibility and an innovative approach. Employee engagement can be achieved through enabling participation, trust and giving freedom. When talent management is done effectively, employee engagement increases and organisations experience lower employee turnover. This is because effective talent management is evidence of commitment to human capital. According to Burke et al. [54], talent management can improve employee engagement, which in turn improves client service quality and overall institutional performance. More engaged employees and a lower turnover rate are the results of talent management strategies [55]. In the long run, organisations with high employee engagement and with effective employee management have a distinct competitive edge [56]. Employee engagement leads to creativity, productivity, citizenship behaviour and improved overall outcomes [57]. Only organisations that grasp talent management approaches will see improved results in employee satisfaction [58]. Businesses must reconsider their employee management strategies and how they affect employee engagement [59]. Therefore, we propose the undermentioned hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *Talent engagement influences SCA positively.*

Hypothesis 6 (H6). *Employee satisfaction mediates the link between talent engagement and SCA.*

3.4. Employee Satisfaction, Performance Management and SCA

In today's business world, the focus on organisational performance management has evolved from measuring performance to performance measurement [60]. However, the most difficult part is defining performance measures. The measures should address three important characteristics of performance: effectiveness, efficiency and flexibility. Targets must be set after the performance measures have been defined, and they should

be implemented in collaboration with all relevant departments [61]. Performance management is a continuous process and a crucial function which helps organisations to achieve strategic goals. It identifies, measures and develops individual and team performance and makes sure individual and team goals are aligned with the organisation's strategic goals Aguinis [62]. Thus, talent management is a crucial aspect of performance management since it helps to increase employee competency, dedication and motivation [16]. Personal appreciation is considered to boost employee satisfaction in modern rating systems [63]. An appraisal method which particularly promotes employee development and personal growth can boost employee satisfaction [21]. An organisation's competitive potential can be strengthened by generating skilful employees who are successfully developed and managed, which is the essence of performance management [64]. According to Chi & Gursoy [65], employees who are happy, are more likely to provide guests with a better service and the hotel's performance would also increase accordingly. Therefore, it is vital for management to consider employees as a crucial strategic partner in providing high-quality services to keep its customers and employees happy. Within this context, the undermentioned hypotheses are presented:

Hypothesis 7 (H7). *Performance management has a positive influence on SCA.*

Hypothesis 8 (H8). *In performance management and the SCA relationship; employee satisfaction serves as a mediating factor.*

3.5. Employee Satisfaction, Talent Retention and SCA

Business leaders, human resource professionals and organisational scholars have spent decades trying to determine why workers leave their positions and for good reason: employee turnover, whether useful or ineffective, can be costly and inconvenient [66]. Therefore, in this talent war, limiting employee turnover as much as possible and retaining talented employees is the best strategy for businesses [67]. Talent management is considered an imperative strategy, which enables talented employee retention to achieve a competitive edge [62] and high profitability [25]. Losing talent entails costs, including direct costs (e.g., hiring and training) and indirect costs (e.g., loss of specialised skills, organisational knowledge and employees' networks when they leave). Gaining and maintaining a competitive advantage without retaining the workforce is difficult for businesses [68]. The hospitality industry's labour profile has altered over time as a result of social, economic and political reasons. These include immigration, labour mobility and, most recently, the global economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic [69]. Furthermore, the hospitality business has a high staff turnover rate, which means it frequently loses talent that could help it gain a competitive advantage [70]. Corporations use a variety of practices to keep their employees. Employee retention practices, such as discovering, developing, engaging talent, managing performance, job satisfaction and the role of effective leaders have all been widely debated and implemented [71]. However, if staff are not given enough opportunities to grow, this may lead to low morale, which can lead to resignations [72]. The link between job satisfaction and the desire to stay is mostly explained by the fact that discontent leads to employees looking for better opportunities in other organisations to attain job satisfaction [73]. Our study proposes the undermentioned hypotheses:

Hypothesis 9 (H9). *Retention of talent positively influences SCA.*

Hypothesis 10 (H10). *In the relationship between talent retention and SCA, employee satisfaction is a mediator.*

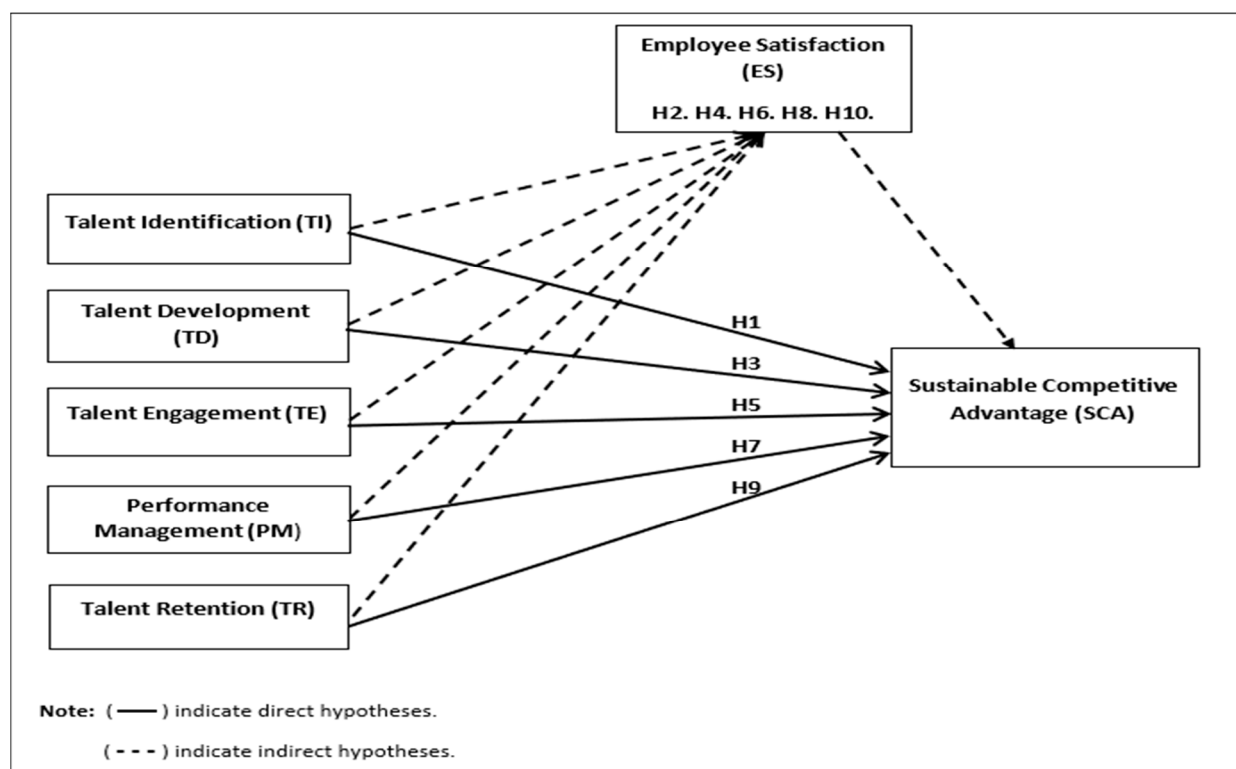Figure 1 illustrates the hypotheses in a research model.

Figure 1. Model of the Research Hypotheses.

4. Methodology

4.1. Pre-Testing and Pilot Study

It is important to conduct a pilot study to ensure the success of a full-fledged study, as pilot studies are a smaller-scaled version of the original study [74]. Pre-testing should be done on scales or items, whether they are adopted or adapted, as it enables to examine whether the questions work with different respondents in a different setting accurately [74]. Therefore, pre-testing of a questionnaire is essential to ensure that there are no ambiguities in the questions and that respondents can comprehend them in the way they were designed and intended; and consequently, reduce biases [75].

The scale items' understandability was tested on a pilot sample of 30 employees, and it is reasonable for pre-testing questionnaires [76]. Therefore, no changes to the questionnaire survey were made, as there was no difficulty in understanding the items.

4.2. Data Collection

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has made significant growth in the tourism sector, with millions of visitors visiting the island each year [77]. In 2018, it drew 1.759 million foreign visitor arrivals (4.7 times its whole population) and produced USD 912 million in net tourism receipts, with a population of 372,486 and a per capita income of USD 13,277 [78]. Data for this study were acquired using a simple random sample technique from the staff of five-star hotel establishments in North Cyprus. The rationale for this requirement is that such hotels have a huge size and financial power, which allows them to execute talent management activities and practices in addition to sustainability initiatives [79]. TRNC Tourism Planning Administration provided a list of five-star hotels [80]. North Cyprus has 22 five-star hotels distributed throughout four regions: 2 in Lefkosa, 15 in Girne, 1 in Gazimagusa, and 4 in Iskele. Due to COVID-19, two hotels have been declared in quarantine, and six more have been shuttered. The researchers determined the ideal sample size using the Raosoft sample size calculator; it had a 95% confidence

and a 5% margin of error. In social sciences research, the aforementioned percentages are acceptable [81].

The total number of employees in the five-star hotels was 6382, with an adequate sample size of 348. At the start of the study, it was stated that there would be no correct or incorrect answers to the questionnaire items. The surveys were self-administered by the respondents. Employee and respondent numbers were proportional for each hotel. The number of people who responded from each hotel was proportional to the number of people who worked there. The data collection process took about five weeks (From December 2020 until the first week of January 2021). In total, 500 surveys were distributed to full-time hotel staff in 14 five-star hotels in North Cyprus. The questionnaire was given to the HR managers of these hotels, who then randomly distributed it to employees using a computer "random number" generator. With 374 replies, respondents were almost 75%. A total of 6 of the 374 replies were removed from the study due to a lack of data. In total, 368 questionnaires were found eligible, with a return rate of 74%. Descriptive data showed that gender distribution was 69.8% male and 30.2% female. In terms of age, 18–30 years of age constituted 51.6% of the respondents, whereas 31–40 years were 39.9%, and 8.4% were over 41 years of age. In terms of experience, employees with 1–3 years of experience constituted 41.6%, 37.2% had 4–7 years of experience, and 21.2% had work experience of eight years or more. In terms of education, the majority of the employees in North Cyprus hotels had a bachelor's degree (71.2%), 23.6% of the respondents were high school graduates with a high school diploma, 3.8% had less than a high school diploma, and 1.4% had a master's degree or a PhD. Northern Cyprus has a high literacy rate, with about 90% of the population having a university degree, according to previous research [82]. This emphasises the country's one-of-a-kind strong demand for university education. Among the participants, 74.2% had a monthly income of more than 3000 Turkish Lira, 20.7% had a monthly income of 2500–2999 Turkish Lira, 3.8% had a monthly income of 2000–2499 Turkish Lira, and the rest had a monthly income of less than 2000 Turkish Lira (1.4%). Statistics for descriptive data of the sample group are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (*n* = 368).

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	257	69.8%
	Female	111	30.2%
Age	18–30	190	51.6%
	31–40	147	39.9%
	41 & above	31	8.4%
Experience (years)	Below 4	153	41.6%
	4–7	137	37.2%
	8 & above	78	21.2%
Educational	Less than high school	14	3.8%
	high school graduate	87	23.6%
	Bachelor/Diploma	262	71.2%
	MSc/PhD	5	1.4%
Income (TL)	Below 2000	5	1.4%
	2000–2499	14	3.8%
	2500–2999	76	20.7%
	3000 & above	273	74.2%

Note: TL, Turkish Lira, 1$ = 7.82 TL.

4.3. Measures

Our model was tested using seven latent variables, five of which represent talent management practices which are talent identification, talent participation, talent development, performance management as well as talent retention. Aside from employee satisfaction, a durable competitive advantage is also important. This study adapted its measurement items from prior studies and a five-point Likert scale was employed. Options ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with one expressing strong disagreement and

five representing strong agreement. Appendix A. shows the constructs, measurement items and authors. Control factors, such as gender, work experience, age, level of education, and income per month were also included.

4.4. Analytical Strategy

SPSS and Mplus were used to analyse the data. According to previous studies, Mplus has a better inspection result when used in complicated process models. Thus, Mplus v8.7 was chosen as the analysis software to investigate employee satisfaction function in mediating the relationship between the talent management practice model's every dimension and the SCA. For the primary variables, SPSS 26 was used to calculate M (mean), SD (standard deviation), Cronbach's alpha and Pearson's correlation. Using Mplus v8.7, CFA (confirmatory factor analysis) was employed to compare measurement models in order to investigate convergent and discriminant validity. The presented hypotheses were tested using SEM (structural equation model), a covariance technique for analysing structural relationships between latent and observable variables in a hypothesis model and controlling measurement error [83]. X^2 (chi-square), CFI (comparative fit index), RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation), TLI (Tucker–Lewis Index) and standardised and root mean square residual fit indices were used to examine how well the hypothesised models fit the data (SRMR).

5. Results and Findings

5.1. The Measurement Model

All constructs were validated and verified through composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, which are accepted parameters for establishing the reliability of a measure [84]. Firstly, CFA was used to determine the measurements' unidimensionality, revealing that the data fit the measurement model. After considering covariance among redundant items (see Figure 2), the CFA findings in Table 2 show the model's goodness-of-fit. We found acceptable values for CMIN/DF = 1.999, CFI = 0.93, MSEA = 0.052, TLI = 0.92, Rand SRMR = 0.053, as recommended in previous research [85–87]. Secondly, Cronbach's alphas of all the constructs were above the acceptable range (0.70), ranging from 0.839 to 0.916. Thus, all the structures were quite reliable. The composite dependability had values ranging from 0.840 to 0.909, exceeding the proposed cut-off value, which was 0.70 [84,88] (For more information, see Table 2). The researchers examined each construct's discriminant and convergent validity, AVE (average variance extracted). The AVE should be ≥ 0.5 to ensure discriminant and convergent validity [88]. The AVE values, as shown in Table 2, varied from 0.569 to 0.720, well over the recommended threshold (0.5). Thus, we concluded that, in terms of convergent validity, the measurement model was accurate.

5.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 3 provides the inferential and descriptive statistics. For all variables, the values of standard deviation, mean, kurtosis, correlation and skewness were within the acceptable range. Moreover, all the variables established normality as the values of skewness and kurtosis were within the acceptable range ($<\pm2$) [89]. In addition, our data were free from multiple linear relationship problems, and the correlation coefficients were less than 0.85 [89,90]. The correlation coefficients were also in the suggested directions. As such, TI, r = 0.443; TD, r = 0.616; TE, r = 0.631; PM, r = 0.520; TR, r = 0.520 demonstrate that talent management approaches connect with employee satisfaction. Talent identification (r = 0.496, $p < 0.001$), talent development (r = 0.666, $p < 0.001$), talent engagement (r = 0.654, $p < 0.001$), performance management (r = 0.567, $p < 0.001$), talent retention (r = 0.569, $p < 0.001$) and employee satisfaction (r = 0.626, $p < 0.001$) are all positively associated with SCA.
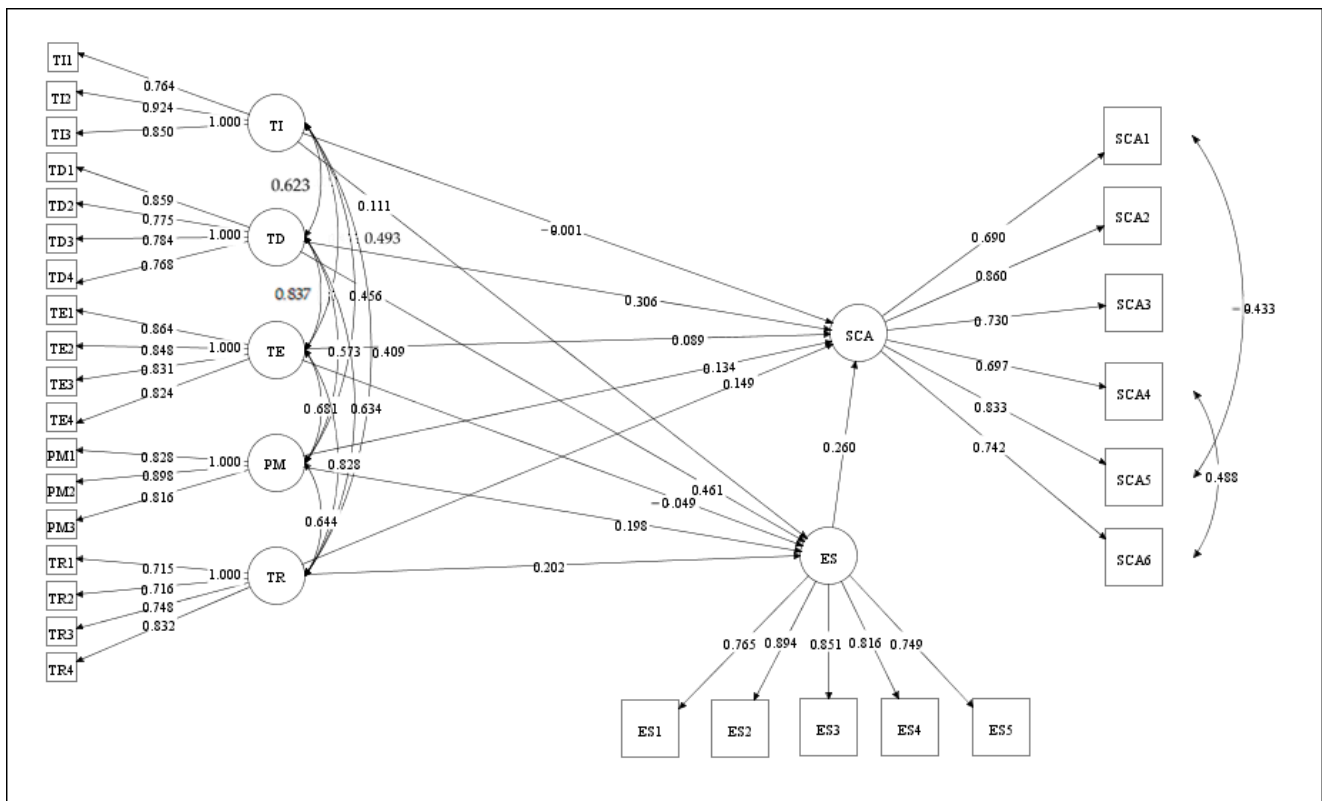
Figure 2. Structural Equation Model.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis, Cronbach's alpha and model statistic.

Constructs	Estimate	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	CR	Goodness-of-Fit Indexes
TI	0.764–0.924	0.879	0.720	0.885	
TD	0.768–0.859	0.906	0.636	0.874	
TE	0.824–0.864	0.874	0.709	0.907	CMIN/DF = 1.999
PM	0.816–0.898	0.883	0.719	0.885	$p = 0.000$
TR	0.715–0.832	0.839	0.569	0.840	TLI = 0.923
ES	0.749–0.894	0.894	0.667	0.909	CFI = 0.933
SCA	0.690–0.860	0.916	0.580	0.892	RMESA = 0.052 SRMR = 0.053
Proposed scope	>0.6	>0.7	>0.5	>0.7	

Notes: AVE: Average Variance Extracted; CR: Composite Reliability.

Table 3. Descriptive and inferential statistics.

Variables	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	TI	TD	TE	PM	TR	ES	SCA
TI	3.826	0.939	−0.901	0.539	1.000						
TD	3.842	0.973	−0.678	−0.122	0.445 **	1.000					
TE	3.910	0.901	−1.099	1.271	0.562 **	0.741 **	1.000				
PM	3.749	1.034	−0.706	−0.168	0.427 **	0.611 **	0.508 **	1.000			
TR	3.764	0.825	−0.498	−0. 432	0.359 **	0.729 **	0.541 **	0.555 **	1.000		
ES	3.809	0.933	−0.722	0.149	0.443 **	0.616 **	0.631 **	0.520 **	0.520 **	1.000	
SCA	3.784	0.919	−0.673	0.151	0.496 **	0.666 **	0.654 **	0.567 **	0.569 **	0.626 **	1.000

Notes: SD: standard deviation; M: mean; ** Significant at the 0.01 level.

5.3. The Structural Model

This study used the Mplus v8.7 tool to estimate parameters and assess mediation, along with bootstrap (*n* = 1000) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for indirect effects. The data were put to the test using a seven-factor model (Figure 2). Based on a number of fit statistics, Table 4 presents that the seven-factor model fits the data well [87,91].

Table 4. Structural model statistics.

Index	CMIN	DF	*p*-Value	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	TLI	CFI	SRMR
	707.862	354	0.000	1.999	0.052	0.923	0.933	0.053
Proposed scope				<3	<0.08	>0.90	>0.90	<0.08

After model testing, the next step was to estimate the structural model's original coefficients (β) and *p*-values. As shown in Tables 5 and 6, the mediation effect was tested.

Table 5. Direct effect for the research mode.

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	S.E.	CR	*p*-Value	Decision
H1	TI → SCA	0.253	0.068	3.736	***	Supported
H3	TD → SCA	0.059	0.044	1.337	0.181	Not Supported
H5	TE → SCA	0.268	0.086	3.115	0.002	Supported
H7	PM → SCA	0.370	0.064	5.790	***	Supported
H9	TR → SCA	0.086	0.038	2.244	0.025	Supported

Notes: (1) Est./S.E. = CR: Critical Ratio; Estimate = Beta (Unstandardized loading); S.E. = Standard Error; (2) *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 6. Mediation test.

					95% Confidence Intervals		
Hypothesis	Path	Beta	S.E.	CR	Upper Limit	Lower Limit	Decision
H2	TI →ES → SCA	0.056	0.067	0.840	0.166	−0.054	Not Supported
H4	TD →ES → SCA	−0.050	0.065	−0.768	0.057	−0.156	Not Supported
H6	TE →ES → SCA	−0.155	0.094	−1.646	0.000	−0.311	Not Supported
H8	PM →ES → SCA	0.000	0.081	0.000	0.133	−0.134	Not Supported
H10	TR →ES → SCA	0.010	0.066	0.156	0.119	−0.098	Not Supported

Notes: (1) Est./S.E. = CR: Critical Ratio; Estimate = Beta (Unstandardised loading); S.E. = Standard Error.

Hypothesis 1 states that identifying talent has a major effect on five-star hotels' SCA. From talent identification to SCA, the path coefficient was significant and positive (β = 0.253, *p* = 0.000). Thus, hypothesis 1 was accepted. Hypothesis 3 states that talent development has a major effect on five-star hotels' SCA. The path coefficient–talent development to SCA (β = 0.059, *p* = 0.181) was not significant. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is ruled out. Hypothesis 5 states that talent engagement has a major effect on five-star hotels' SCA. The path coefficient–talent engagement to SCA was significant and positive (β = 0.268, *p* = 0.002). Thus, hypothesis 5 was accepted. Hypothesis 7 states that performance management has a major effect on five-star hotels' SCA. The path coefficient from performance management to SCA was significant and favourable (β = 0.370, *p* = 0.000). Therefore, hypothesis 7 is accepted. Hypothesis 9 states that talent retention has a substantial effect on five-star hotels' SCA. The path coefficient–talent retention to SCA (β = 0.086, *p* = 0.025) was positive and significant. Thus, hypothesis 9 was accepted.

According to the mediation effect test results, employee satisfaction has no mediating effect between talent management practices and SCA: (TI, SE = 0.067, 95% CI = [−0.054, 0.166]); (TD, SE= 0.065, 95% CI = [−0.156, 0.057]); (TE, SE = 0.094, 95% CI = [−0.311, 0.000]); (PM, SE = 0.081, 95% CI = [−0.134, 0.133]); and (TR, SE = 0.066, 95% CI = [−0.098, 0.119]). All contain zero in the 95% CI. Therefore, H2, H4, H6, H8, and H10 are not accepted.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Companies' ability to find, develop, engage, manage performance and retain talent remains a major strategic challenge for the knowledge economies of the 21st century. The current situation that the world is in today, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, has also further made the environment challenging in terms of talent retention.

Our findings revealed that talent development practices did not affect the SCA because of employees' negative perceptions of the practice. These hotels' talent development procedures should be reframed. Moreover, talent practices (identify, engage, manage performance and retain) were found to have a significant and favourable effect on these hotels' SCA. These practices improved employees' skills, knowledge and competencies, allowing them to function more efficiently and effectively while reducing turnover. At the same time, their companies increased their profitability, sales and market share, thus achieving superior performance and SCA. Despite the large size of firms in North Cyprus (five-star hotels), which is the reason for choosing this type of hotel, most hotels consider talent management practices as a human resources department activity. Employee satisfaction did not appear to be a mediating factor in the relationship between talent management methods and SCAs.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

The findings show that the talent management practice model can help the North Cyprus hotel business gain a sustainable competitive edge. The current findings are relevant to academic studies because they provide a conceptual model for hotel personnel management methods. This study adds to the talent management methods, particularly in terms of monitoring and enhancing human interactions in the hotel workplace, which has proven to be one of the most effective strategies for addressing labour and skill shortages. More importantly, the conceptual model is built on five primary components: to identify, develop, engage, manage performance and retain talent; each of which has been considered an SCA for achieving organisational success.

The findings of this study have ramifications for numerous stakeholders, including the hotel and hospitality service industries and the government. The findings can be used as guidelines for building more appealing workplaces for employees and encouraging them to commit to sustainable service in the hotel business.

The study's significant findings could make a new contribution to the hotel phenomenon. To begin with, most five-star hotels in North Cyprus still regard talent management as a human resource management activity. As a result, hoteliers should concentrate their efforts on implementing talent management practices that stress the relevance of human capital value in creating a sustainable competitive advantage and ensuring success in the markets where they operate. Hoteliers should shift their mindset from discussing talent management practices informally to strategic implementation and integration through decision-making procedures, rather than treating it as a theoretical topic.

Hoteliers in the hotel and tourist industries can attempt to develop and retain talented personnel at all levels by improving the work environment, particularly in terms of clear career routes for talent and possibilities for upward mobility.

Hoteliers must use performance management strategies that enable them to control all essential factors of employee performance, such as abilities, motivation, and working environment, in order to achieve exceptional performance and sustained competitive advantage. Finally, team leaders and managers must demonstrate a good attitude toward service work by treating employees with respect, listening to their thoughts, appreciating their ideas, and going out of their way to ensure that they are satisfied with their work environment.

6.2. Practical Implications

Our findings evidenced (H1) a significant and positive relationship between talent identification (internal and external talent) and SCAs in five-star hotels, which is consistent with the findings of many previous studies [39,92,93].

To have a successful talent management process, a company must identify the key jobs which are vital for the firm and can create SCAs and identify the talent to fill those jobs. Otherwise, putting an ill-suited employee in a vital position may have terrible results (Al Ariss et al., 2014). Furthermore, our findings showed (H3) no evidence of talent development practices in the five-star hotels in Northern Cyprus. This contradicts the previous literature [39,94,95], which stated that talent development practices improve employees' skills, knowledge and competencies, and lead to more effective and efficient performance. Therefore, the researchers recommend that talent development procedures in these hotels be revisited, as the staff appears to have a negative attitude toward the process. Employers in the hotel and tourism industries can attempt to develop and retain talented employees at all levels by improving the work environment, particularly in terms of clear career routes for talent and possibilities for upward mobility, which is consistent with earlier research [96]. Our findings also showed (H5) that talent engagement had a favourable effect on SCAs, which is consistent with earlier research [97,98]. Anwar et al. [99] concluded that increased talent engagement leads to a decreased turnover rate. According to Jakubik and Vakkuri [100], engaged employees contribute more, are happier and more energised, and their companies have higher profitability, sales and market share. Employees who believe they have a sense of belonging are more engaged [101]. The link between performance management and an SCA in five-star hotels was shown to be positive and substantial (H7). This finding is also in accordance with other studies [95,102] claiming that performance management is a critical component in boosting competitive advantage. According to Šikýř [103], employers must use performance management practices that enable them to influence all important determinants of employee performance, such as abilities, motivation and working conditions, to achieve excellent performance and sustained competitive advantage. Talent management in the hotel business, which has a high turnover rate, must have the capacity, experience and expertise to manage employee performance. Similarly, targets and deadlines are communicated to employees in their departments clearly and concisely to decrease employee turnover. Furthermore, our findings evidenced (H9) that talent retention has a significant effect on the dependent variable; most empirical research supports this positive and significant association [30,39,99,104]. Employee turnover is caused by an inability to retain valuable employees (talented) [105], directly affecting organisational costs, productivity and business performance. An organisation that loses skilled employees while gaining a large percentage of novice employees will have a difficult time surviving in the market [106]. Therefore, organisational policies encourage the empowerment of skilled individuals through a fair and reasonable method of rewarding employees and making them feel that their ideas and opinions are acknowledged. A solid work-life balance has also been demonstrated to contribute to talent retention [107]. In the current study, employee satisfaction was not a mediator between the five talent management practice components (i.e., talent discovery, talent engagement, talent development and talent retention and performance management) and SCAs. Thus, H2, H4, H6, H8, and H10 were not accepted. Conversely, the existing research suggests that there is a correlation. Several theoretical and empirical frameworks emphasise the crucial role of talent management practices in employee job satisfaction [108]. In the 21st century, talent management has become a vital tool that human resources embrace to increase employee job satisfaction [109]. This is because it enables organisations to retain competent employees through job satisfaction since this otherwise affects organisational performance and service quality [110,111]. Furthermore, fairness regarding outcomes, procedures, and fair and trustworthy performance appraisal systems are important activities for employee satisfaction and are considered major factors supporting SCA. In other words, talent management boosts employee satisfaction when they are used as a management process rather than a single practice. The literature on talent management may be extended by conducting empirical studies on talent management within the context of non-profit organisations, as well as SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) [112].

Demerouti et al. [113] warned that competitive advantage is a complicated and nuanced concept. Our findings evidence there is no association between the five talent management practices and competitive advantage. One probable explanation of this outcome is that competitive advantage is linked to strategic talent management rather than employee satisfaction. Therefore, when an organisation invests in hotel-specific talents, these skill sets or talents cannot be replicated by their competitors, which leads to higher potential SCA. The conclusion which emerged from this research, that there is no mediator between the five talent management practices and SCA, is a pioneering finding; hence future research needs to focus on other potential mediators and alternatives.

6.3. Limitations and Future Research

This study examines the link between the employee management approaches and SCA in five-star hotels in TRNC. The constructs in this study were measured specifically by collecting data from employees. To better grasp the organisational limits of talent management policies, it is necessary to look at the employer/hotel owner/top management perspective. In particular, the importance of communication between top management and employees was overlooked in this study, and future research should focus on how employee management can be advanced and its effects on job satisfaction and employee retention in the hotel business. Despite talent management being a relatively new area that has attracted the interest of both academics and practitioners, many opportunities exist to explore further in this field. Furthermore, the research could be undertaken in hitherto unstudied industries in TRNC, such as three- and four-star hotels.

Appendix A

Table A1. Measurement and Sources of Items Questionnaire.

Constructs		Items	Source
TI	TI1	In our hotel, the recruitment and selection processes for the talents needed are extremely important.	
	TI2	In our hotel, the identification of employees'' skills are critical for role performance.	
	TI3	Employees are often evaluated to discover newly developed skills and initiatives.	[114,115]
TD	TD1	Development needs are identified for talent.	
	TD2	Identified talent have many opportunities for upward mobility.	
	TD3	Talents have clear career paths in this hotel.	
	TD4	Talents have more than one avenue for promotion.	
TE	TE1	I am motivated about my work in this hotel.	
	TE2	I am prepared to put extra effort into my work in this hotel.	
	TE3	I am completely immersed in my job in this hotel.	[116]
	TE4	I have a strong emotional attachment to my job at this hotel.	

Table A1. *Cont.*

Constructs		Items	Source
PM	PM1	Promotion at the hotel is based on performance rather than seniority.	[15]
	PM2	Targets and deadlines are communicated to department employees in a clear manner.	
	PM3	The hotel has put in place measures to guarantee that both performance and feedback are met.	
TR	TR1	Our hotel uses an effective leadership style and is careful in how it handles employee issues.	[117]
	TR2	Our hotel has a competitive compensation system, in comparison to other businesses in the same sector, which is a motivating factor for employees.	
	TR3	Our hotel has an internal recruitment policy that helps to raise the loyalty and morale of employees.	
	TR4	Our hotel has flexible working hours, which is a motivating factor for employees.	
ES	ES1	There is enough freedom to do what I want in my work.	[118]
	ES2	My work provides assortment of activities that keep me satisfied.	
	ES3	I am satisfied with the opportunities my work provides to interact with others.	
	ES4	My current position satisfies me.	
	ES5	If another work opportunity came itself, I would not contemplate leaving my current position.	
SCA	SCA1	Our hotel provides more services and products than competitors.	[119,120]
	SCA2	Our hotel offer unique benefits than competitors.	
	SCA3	Our hotel's products and services are superior quality than those of our competitors.	
	SCA4	Our hotel is more capable of R&D than the competitors.	
	SCA5	Our hotel has better managerial capability than the competitors.	
	SCA6	The competitors are difficult to take the place of the hotel's competitive advantage.	

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