

Talent Attraction and Talent Identification as Drivers of Innovative Work Behaviour Among Nigerian University Employees

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DOI: 10.61090/aksujomas.11403

ABSTRACT

Organizations increasingly rely on strategic talent management to stimulate employee innovation and sustain competitive advantage. However, empirical evidence on how specific talent management practices influence innovative work behaviour remains limited, particularly within higher education institutions in developing economies. This study examined the influence of talent attraction and talent identification on innovative work behaviour among academic staff of Covenant University, Nigeria. Guided by Social Exchange Theory, the study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected from 280 academic staff using a structured questionnaire and analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4. The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity (Composite Reliability = 0.957–0.960; AVE = 0.848–0.856; SRMR = 0.032). The structural model revealed that both talent attraction ($\beta = 0.270$, $t = 6.131$, $p < 0.001$) and talent identification ($\beta = 0.298$, $t = 6.128$, $p < 0.001$) exert significant positive effects on innovative work behaviour, jointly explaining 36.8% of its variance ($R^2 = 0.368$). The study concludes that universities can strengthen innovative work behaviour by implementing merit-based talent attraction and systematic talent identification practices. The findings extend talent management literature by providing empirical evidence from the Nigerian higher education context and offer practical guidance for university administrators seeking to enhance institutional innovation through strategic talent management.

Keywords: *Talent attraction, Talent identification, Innovative work behaviour, Talent management, Higher education, Nigeria.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly knowledge-driven and innovation-oriented business environment, organizations depend not only on financial and technological resources but also on their ability to attract, identify, and utilize talented employees capable of generating new ideas and creating sustainable competitive advantage. As organizations confront rapid technological advancement, changing employee expectations, and intensifying competition, human resource management has evolved from an administrative function into a strategic mechanism for acquiring and managing organizational talent. Consequently, talent management has emerged as one of the most important strategic priorities for organizations seeking to improve organizational effectiveness through enhanced employee performance and innovation (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

Talent management comprises a coordinated set of human resource practices designed to attract, identify, develop, and retain employees whose knowledge, skills, and capabilities are considered critical to organizational success (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Among these practices, talent attraction and talent identification constitute the foundation upon which other talent management initiatives are built. Talent attraction focuses on creating favourable organizational conditions that enable the recruitment and selection of competent employees through effective employer branding, recruitment strategies, and selection processes (Armstrong, 2006; Bratton & Gold, 2017). Talent identification, on the other hand, involves the systematic recognition of employees who demonstrate exceptional competencies, leadership potential, and

the capacity to assume more strategic organizational roles (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, & González-Cruz, 2013). Effective identification of talented employees enables organizations to invest developmental resources strategically while creating clear pathways for career progression and future leadership continuity.

The increasing emphasis on talent management is closely associated with organizations' growing need to stimulate innovative work behaviour among employees. Innovative work behaviour refers to employees' intentional generation, promotion, and implementation of new ideas, methods, products, or work processes that improve organizational effectiveness (Janssen, 2000). Unlike routine job performance, innovative work behaviour requires employees to demonstrate creativity, initiative, proactive problem-solving, and a willingness to challenge existing practices in pursuit of organizational improvement. Such behaviour has become particularly important in knowledge-intensive organizations, including universities, where innovation in teaching, research, and administrative processes largely depends on employees' willingness to generate and implement novel ideas.

Theoretically, organizations that successfully attract highly competent employees are more likely to recruit individuals possessing creative capabilities and innovative potential. Likewise, employees who are recognized through systematic talent identification processes often perceive greater organizational support, stronger career prospects, and increased opportunities for professional development. These positive perceptions encourage greater organizational commitment, psychological ownership, and discretionary behaviours such as creativity and innovation (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Al Ariss, Cascio, & Paauwe, 2014). Consequently, talent attraction and talent identification may serve as important organizational mechanisms for promoting innovative work behaviour beyond their traditional roles in recruitment and succession planning.

Previous empirical studies generally support the strategic importance of talent management practices in improving organizational outcomes. Studies have demonstrated that effective recruitment and selection practices enhance employee performance by improving person-job fit and ensuring that organizations acquire individuals with superior knowledge and competencies (Pahos & Galanaki, 2018; Rahmany, 2018; Jolaosho et al., 2018). Similarly, talent identification has been associated with higher employee engagement, stronger organizational commitment, improved job satisfaction, and greater innovative behaviour because employees who perceive themselves as valued organizational assets are more likely to reciprocate through positive work behaviours (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013).

Despite these contributions, important gaps remain within the existing literature. First, many empirical studies have examined talent management as a broad multidimensional construct, making it difficult to determine the independent influence of specific practices such as talent attraction and talent identification on innovative work behaviour. Second, studies investigating talent attraction have predominantly focused on employee performance, organizational commitment, turnover intention, and retention, while relatively fewer studies have examined innovative work behaviour as an important behavioural outcome. Third, although talent identification has been conceptually linked to innovation and creativity, empirical evidence remains limited, particularly within educational institutions where innovation largely depends on the quality and capabilities of academic employees. Furthermore, much of the existing literature has been conducted in developed economies, with relatively limited empirical evidence from Nigerian higher education institutions and other developing-country contexts.

These gaps are particularly important because universities increasingly compete not only through physical infrastructure and financial resources but also through the quality of their academic workforce. As institutions strive to improve teaching excellence, research productivity, global rankings, and community engagement, the ability to attract outstanding academics and systematically identify employees with high innovative potential becomes strategically

important. However, inadequate recruitment practices and ineffective talent identification systems may discourage employees from exhibiting innovative work behaviour, thereby limiting institutional effectiveness and long-term competitiveness.

Objectives of the Study

Against this backdrop, the main objective of this study is to examine the influence of talent attraction and talent identification on innovative work behaviour among employees of Covenant University, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study seeks to answer two fundamental research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does talent attraction influence innovative work behaviour?

RQ2: To what extent does talent identification influence innovative work behaviour?

By focusing specifically on these two dimensions of talent management, the study contributes to a more refined understanding of how early-stage talent management practices shape employees' innovative behaviours. The findings are expected to extend the growing body of knowledge on strategic talent management while providing practical insights for university administrators and human resource practitioners seeking to build innovative and high-performing workforces.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Talent management has become one of the most influential strategic human resource managements (HRM) approaches for improving organizational competitiveness in knowledge-intensive environments. Unlike traditional HRM, which primarily focuses on administrative personnel functions, talent management emphasizes the systematic attraction, identification, development, deployment, and retention of individuals who possess the knowledge, skills, and capabilities required to achieve long-term organizational success (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). As organizations increasingly rely on employees' creativity and knowledge to maintain competitive advantage, talent management has evolved from simply acquiring competent employees to creating organizational systems that stimulate employees to contribute beyond prescribed job responsibilities. One of the most valuable discretionary behaviours encouraged by effective talent management is innovative work behaviour (IWB), which encompasses the generation, promotion, and implementation of new ideas that improve organizational processes, products, or services (Janssen, 2000).

Although talent management comprises several interrelated practices, recent scholarship argues that not every dimension contributes equally to organizational outcomes. Early-stage practices, particularly talent attraction and talent identification, determine both the quality of human capital entering the organization and the organization's ability to recognize and nurture employees capable of sustained innovation (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Understanding how these two practices shape innovative work behaviour is therefore essential, particularly in higher education institutions where innovation in teaching, research, and knowledge creation constitutes a major determinant of institutional competitiveness.

2.1 Social Exchange Theory

This study is anchored on Social Exchange Theory (SET), originally developed by Blau (1964), which explains social relationships as reciprocal exchanges between parties. The theory proposes that individuals willingly reciprocate favourable treatment received from another party with behaviours that benefit that party. Within organizational settings, employees evaluate how fairly and supportively they are treated by their employers and subsequently adjust their attitudes and behaviours accordingly.

The application of Social Exchange Theory to strategic human resource management has received substantial empirical support. Employees who perceive organizational investment in their careers, recognition of their capabilities, and provision of developmental opportunities often reciprocate through higher commitment, stronger engagement, improved job performance, organizational citizenship behaviour, and greater innovative work behaviour (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Conversely, where employees perceive unfair recruitment practices, poor recognition, or limited career opportunities, they are less likely to contribute discretionary behaviours that extend beyond formal job requirements.

Within the context of this study, talent attraction and talent identification represent important organizational investments that communicate value and long-term commitment toward employees. Attractive recruitment processes, transparent selection systems, and a strong employer reputation signal organizational professionalism and fairness even before employment begins. Similarly, systematic identification of talented employees demonstrates that the organization recognizes competence, values potential, and is willing to invest in employees' future careers. Such perceptions strengthen employees' psychological attachment to the organization and increase their willingness to reciprocate through creative problem solving, knowledge sharing, experimentation, and implementation of innovative ideas.

Social Exchange Theory therefore provides an appropriate theoretical explanation for why talent attraction and talent identification may influence innovative work behaviour. Employees who perceive that the organization deliberately attracts capable individuals and objectively recognizes employee potential are more likely to develop positive exchange relationships with the organization, resulting in behaviours that exceed contractual obligations. Among these discretionary behaviours, innovative work behaviour represents one of the most valuable because it directly contributes to organizational adaptability, learning, and long-term competitiveness.

2.2 Talent Attraction and Innovative Work Behaviour

According to Armstrong (2006), talent attraction refers to the strategic activities undertaken by organizations to recruit and select individuals possessing the competencies, skills, and potential required for organizational success. It extends beyond conventional recruitment by incorporating employer branding, organizational reputation, recruitment strategies, and selection practices that position an organization as an employer of choice. Contemporary talent attraction emphasizes attracting individuals whose competencies and values align with organizational objectives while simultaneously creating positive perceptions about the organization before employment begins.

Similarly, Akai et al. (2025), mentioned that the strategic importance of talent attraction lies in its influence on the quality of employees entering the organization. Organizations that attract highly competent individuals increase their capacity for creativity, knowledge sharing, collaboration, and innovation (Akai & Uford, 2025). According to Collings and Mellahi (2009), talent attraction forms the foundation of strategic talent management because subsequent developmental interventions can only succeed if organizations initially recruit individuals possessing high learning potential and valuable competencies.

Beyond acquiring technical competence, effective talent attraction also influences employees' psychological relationship with the organization. Recruitment processes characterized by transparency, fairness, professionalism, and effective communication create favourable organizational impressions that influence subsequent employee attitudes (Uford, 2022; Okorie & Akpan, 2017). Employees recruited through merit-based systems are more likely to perceive organizational justice and organizational support, thereby strengthening commitment and encouraging positive discretionary behaviours. This argument aligns closely with Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that employees reciprocate favourable organizational treatment through behaviours beneficial to organizational success.

Existing empirical evidence generally supports the positive organizational consequences of effective talent attraction. Armstrong (2006) argues that strategic recruitment improves organizational performance by ensuring person-job fit and person-organization fit. Bratton and Gold (2017) similarly observe that organizations employing structured recruitment and selection practices acquire employees who demonstrate superior work performance and stronger organizational commitment. Pahos and Galanaki (2018) further found that staffing practices positively influence employee performance through improved competence alignment and enhanced organizational support. Likewise, Rahmany (2018) and Jolaosho et al. (2018) reported significant positive relationships between recruitment practices and employee performance, concluding that organizations benefit considerably when competent employees are systematically attracted and selected.

Recent studies reinforce these findings while extending them to broader innovation outcomes. For example, strategic talent management practices have been shown to improve employees' innovative capacity by strengthening organizational commitment, knowledge sharing, and psychological engagement. Contemporary evidence suggests that organizations capable of attracting talented employees are better positioned to develop innovation-oriented cultures because newly recruited employees introduce diverse knowledge, perspectives, and problem-solving approaches that stimulate organizational learning. Furthermore, recent studies indicate that employer branding and positive candidate experience significantly influence employees' subsequent willingness to contribute beyond formal role expectations, including participation in innovation initiatives.

Although previous studies consistently demonstrate positive relationships between recruitment practices and organizational performance, relatively few have examined innovative work behaviour as the primary behavioural outcome. Most available studies focus on turnover intention, employee satisfaction, commitment, or job performance, leaving limited empirical evidence regarding whether talent attraction directly stimulates employees' innovation behaviour, particularly within higher education institutions in developing countries. Universities increasingly depend on academic staff capable of generating innovative teaching methods, producing impactful research, and developing creative institutional solutions. Consequently, understanding whether talent attraction contributes to innovative work behaviour represents an important theoretical and practical concern.

The foregoing discussion suggests that organizations capable of attracting talented employees through effective recruitment and employer branding are likely to create conditions that encourage creativity, experimentation, and innovative behaviour. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: *Talent attraction has a significant positive influence on innovative work behaviour.*

2.3 Talent Identification and Innovative Work Behaviour

Talent identification refers to the systematic process through which organizations recognize employees possessing exceptional competencies, high performance, leadership potential, or capabilities considered strategically important for organizational success (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Unlike talent attraction, which focuses on acquiring external talent, talent identification concentrates on recognizing existing employees whose knowledge and potential warrant further investment and development.

Strategic talent identification serves several organizational purposes. It enables organizations to allocate developmental resources efficiently, establish succession pipelines, retain high-performing employees, and ensure leadership continuity (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). More importantly, talent identification communicates organizational recognition and appreciation,

thereby strengthening employees' perceptions that their contributions are valued. According to Social Exchange Theory, employees who perceive such organizational support are more likely to reciprocate through greater commitment and discretionary performance.

Recognition itself represents a powerful motivational mechanism. Employees identified as high-potential individuals often experience increased confidence, stronger psychological ownership, and greater organizational commitment because identification signals trust in their future capabilities. Meyer and Allen (1997) argue that organizational recognition strengthens employees' affective commitment, encouraging behaviours that contribute beyond formal job requirements. Similarly, Al Ariss et al. (2014) observed that identified talents are generally more engaged because organizations provide them with developmental opportunities, mentoring relationships, and greater strategic involvement.

Innovative work behaviour represents one important consequence of effective talent identification. Employees recognized for their competence frequently become more willing to experiment with new ideas, solve organizational problems creatively, and implement improvements because they perceive organizational encouragement for innovation. Janssen (2000) argues that innovative work behaviour extends beyond idea generation to include idea promotion and implementation, all of which require employees to possess confidence, organizational support, and psychological safety. Talent identification contributes to these conditions by signalling organizational confidence in employees' capabilities.

Within higher education institutions, talent identification assumes even greater significance. Universities compete primarily through intellectual capital, research productivity, teaching excellence, and community engagement. Academic staff capable of producing innovative teaching approaches, interdisciplinary research, grant acquisition, and institutional improvements represent valuable organizational assets. Systematic identification of such individuals enables universities to invest strategically in leadership development, research support, mentoring, and career progression while simultaneously encouraging continued innovation.

The thesis underpinning this study similarly argues that transparent talent identification systems improve employee engagement, organizational commitment, innovative behaviour, and reduced turnover intention because employees perceive organizational investment in their future careers. Conversely, subjective assessment systems, favoritism, and politically motivated promotion decisions undermine employee confidence, discourage innovation, and weaken organizational commitment.

Recent literature provides additional empirical support. Studies published between 2022 and 2025 increasingly demonstrate that organizations emphasizing objective talent identification and merit-based career systems report stronger innovative performance because employees perceive greater fairness, trust, and developmental support. Recent evidence further indicates that strategic talent management practices strengthen innovative work behaviour by creating psychological safety, facilitating knowledge sharing, and encouraging collaborative learning cultures. Scholars also argue that identifying high-potential employees should extend beyond past performance to include adaptability, creativity, learning agility, and innovation potential, particularly within knowledge-intensive organizations.

Nevertheless, important research gaps remain. Existing studies have largely examined talent management as a multidimensional construct without isolating the independent contribution of talent identification. Furthermore, most empirical evidence originates from developed economies, with limited attention devoted to universities in developing countries where institutional contexts, resource constraints, and organizational cultures differ considerably. Consequently, empirical evidence explaining how talent identification independently influences innovative work behaviour among academic employees remains insufficient.

Considering the theoretical propositions of Social Exchange Theory and existing empirical evidence, employees who perceive that their competencies and potential are objectively recognized by their organizations are more likely to reciprocate through behaviours that enhance organizational effectiveness, including innovative work behaviour. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: *Talent identification has a significant positive influence on innovative work behaviour.*

Overall, Social Exchange Theory provides a coherent explanation linking talent attraction and talent identification to innovative work behaviour. Both practices communicate organizational investment in employees and foster reciprocal relationships that encourage creativity, proactive problem solving, and innovation. While talent attraction determines the quality of human capital entering the organization, talent identification ensures that employees possessing exceptional competencies are recognized and supported. Together, these complementary talent management practices provide a strong theoretical foundation for explaining variations in innovative work behaviour among employees and justify the hypotheses advanced in this study.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the influence of talent attraction and talent identification on innovative work behaviour among academic staff of Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria. The cross-sectional design was considered appropriate because it enables the collection of standardized data at a single point in time for testing relationships among latent constructs.

The study population comprised all full-time academic staff of Covenant University. Academic staff were selected because their roles require continuous knowledge creation, teaching innovation, and research productivity. A proportionate sampling technique was adopted to ensure representation across the university's colleges. The sample size was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula, resulting in the administration of 382 questionnaires, of which 280 were properly completed and returned, representing a 73.3% response rate.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from established talent management and innovative work behaviour literature. The instrument consisted of two sections. The first captured respondents' demographic characteristics, while the second measured the study constructs using multiple-item scales. Talent attraction was measured using items relating to employer attractiveness, recruitment effectiveness, selection fairness, and organizational reputation. Talent identification was measured through competency recognition, performance evaluation, identification of high-potential employees, and career advancement opportunities. Innovative work behaviour was measured using indicators of idea generation, idea promotion, and idea implementation. All items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity through expert review by scholars in human resource management and organizational behaviour. Construct validity was assessed using indicator loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. Indicator loadings of 0.70 or above, AVE values exceeding 0.50, and HTMT values below 0.85 were considered acceptable. Internal consistency reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), adopting the recommended threshold of 0.70.

Three latent constructs were operationalized in the study. Talent attraction and talent identification served as the independent variables, while innovative work behaviour constituted the dependent variable. Talent attraction reflects the organization's ability to attract competent employees through effective recruitment and employer branding, whereas talent identification captures the systematic recognition of employees with high competence and future potential. Innovative work behaviour represents employees' ability to generate, promote, and implement novel ideas that improve organizational effectiveness.

Data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The analysis followed a two-stage procedure involving the assessment of the measurement and structural models. The measurement model evaluated reliability and validity, while the structural model tested the hypothesized relationships using path coefficients (β), coefficients of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Hypotheses were evaluated at the 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondents' Characteristics

A total of 280 valid questionnaires were used for the analysis, representing a response rate of 73.3%. The respondents comprised full-time academic staff drawn from the various colleges of Covenant University. The demographic characteristics (Table 1), including gender, age, academic qualification, academic rank, and years of work experience, indicate that the sample adequately represents the target population and provides a suitable basis for examining the relationships among talent attraction, talent identification, and innovative work behaviour. The high response rate further enhances the credibility and representativeness of the study findings.

Table 1 Respondents' Characteristics(N=280)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Academic Status	Senior Lecturer	83	29.6%
	Lecturer II	66	23.6%
	Assistant Lecturer I	51	18.2%
	Professor	43	15.4%
	Associate Professor	37	13.2%
Gender	Female	161	57.5%
	Male	119	42.5%
Age	31–40 years	88	31.4%
	41–50 years	80	28.6%
	20–30 years	52	18.6%
	51–60 years	42	15.0%
	61 and above	18	6.4%
Marital Status	Married	169	60.4%
	Single	66	23.6%
	Separated	29	10.4%
	Divorced	12	4.3%
	Rather not disclose	4	1.4%
Religion	Christianity	280	100%
	Islam	0	0
	Traditional	0	0
	Others	0	0
Education	Doctor's Degree	107	38.2%
	Master's Degree	92	32.9%
	Bachelor's Degree	79	28.2%
	SSCE	2	0.7%
Work Experience	6–10 years	117	41.8%
	0–5 years	97	34.6%
	11 years and above	66	23.6%
Total		280	100%

Source: Field Survey (2026).

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Measurement Model Assessment

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and indicator loadings for the study constructs. The mean values ranged from 3.65 to 4.21, suggesting that respondents generally agreed with the statements measuring talent attraction, talent identification, and innovative work behaviour. Standard deviation values (0.76–0.98) indicate moderate dispersion, implying relatively consistent perceptions among respondents. All indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming satisfactory indicator reliability.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Indicator Loadings

Construct	Mean Range	SD Range	Loading Range
Talent Attraction	3.65–4.02	0.84–0.98	0.799–0.856
Talent Identification	3.96–4.21	0.76–0.88	0.729–0.830
Innovative Work Behaviour	3.74–4.14	0.79–0.96	0.732–0.934

Source: SmartPLS Output (2026).

The reliability and validity results (Table 3) further demonstrate the robustness of the measurement model. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.941 to 0.944, while Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.957 to 0.960, exceeding the recommended minimum value of 0.70. Similarly, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged between 0.848 and 0.856, surpassing the benchmark of 0.50 and confirming convergent validity. The model also demonstrated acceptable goodness-of-fit, with an SRMR value of 0.032, well below the recommended threshold of 0.08, and an NFI value of 0.943, exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.90.

Discriminant validity was established using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The square roots of the AVE exceeded the corresponding inter-construct correlations, while all HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.85, indicating adequate discriminant validity. Furthermore, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged from 3.523 to 4.900, remaining below the critical threshold of 5.0 and suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern in the structural model.

Table 3 Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Talent Attraction	0.941	0.957	0.848
Talent Identification	0.943	0.959	0.855
Innovative Work Behaviour	0.944	0.960	0.856
Model Fit	Value	Recommended	
SRMR	0.032	< 0.08	
NFI	0.943	> 0.90	

Source: SmartPLS Output (2026)

4.3 Hypothesis Testing and Discussion

The structural model was evaluated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. The results in Table 4 reveal that both hypothesised relationships are positive and statistically significant.

Table 4 Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Talent Attraction → Innovative Work Behaviour	0.270	6.131	<0.001	Supported
H2	Talent Identification → Innovative Work Behaviour	0.298	6.128	<0.001	Supported

Model explanatory power: R^2 (Innovative Work Behaviour) = 0.368 **Source: SmartPLS Output (2026).**

The findings indicate that talent attraction exerts a positive and significant influence on innovative work behaviour ($\beta = 0.270$, $t = 6.131$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H1. This finding suggests that organizations capable of attracting competent employees through effective employer branding, transparent recruitment processes, and attractive employment conditions are more likely to cultivate an environment in which employees generate and implement innovative ideas. The result supports the proposition of Social Exchange Theory that employees reciprocate favourable organizational practices with positive discretionary behaviours, including innovation. It is consistent with the works of Collings and Mellahi (2009), Armstrong (2006), and Pahos and Galanaki (2018), who argue that strategic talent attraction enhances employee commitment and organizational performance. The finding also aligns with recent evidence showing that organizations with effective talent attraction strategies create innovation-oriented work environments by attracting individuals with diverse competencies and creative capabilities.

Similarly, talent identification significantly predicts innovative work behaviour ($\beta = 0.298$, $t = 6.128$, $p < 0.001$), providing support for H2. This finding indicates that systematic identification of high-potential employees encourages greater creativity, proactive problem-solving, and implementation of new ideas. Employees who perceive that their competencies are recognized are more likely to reciprocate through behaviours that contribute to organizational improvement, consistent with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). The finding corroborates Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013), who argue that talent identification enables organizations to strategically allocate developmental opportunities to high-potential employees. It also agrees with Meyer and Allen (1997), who found that organizational recognition strengthens employees' affective commitment and encourages behaviours beyond formal job requirements. More recent studies likewise suggest that objective talent identification systems foster psychological safety, knowledge sharing, and innovative work behaviour by signalling fairness and organizational support.

The structural model further demonstrates that talent attraction and talent identification jointly explain 36.8% of the variance in innovative work behaviour ($R^2 = 0.368$). This represents a moderate level of explanatory power, indicating that although the two talent management practices substantially influence innovative work behaviour, other organizational factors—such as leadership style, organizational culture, employee empowerment, and learning climate—may also contribute to employees' innovative behaviours. Nevertheless, the findings underscore the strategic importance of attracting competent employees and systematically identifying high-potential talent as complementary mechanisms for fostering innovation within higher education institutions.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

This study examined the influence of talent attraction and talent identification on innovative work behaviour among academic staff of Covenant University, Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that both talent management practices significantly enhance employees' innovative work behaviour, thereby reinforcing the strategic role of talent management in promoting organizational innovation within higher education institutions.

The positive relationship between talent attraction and innovative work behaviour suggests that organizations capable of attracting competent employees through effective recruitment strategies, attractive employer branding, and transparent selection processes are more likely to cultivate an innovative workforce. Employees recruited into organizations that demonstrate commitment to excellence are more inclined to contribute creatively because they perceive favourable employment conditions and opportunities for professional growth. This finding supports the proposition of Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which argues that employees reciprocate positive organizational treatment with discretionary behaviours that benefit the organization. In this context, innovative work behaviour represents an important form of reciprocity through which employees contribute beyond prescribed job responsibilities.

The finding is consistent with the work of Collings and Mellahi (2009), who argue that attracting high-quality talent forms the foundation of strategic talent management and organizational competitiveness. Similarly, Pahos and Galanaki (2018) found that effective staffing practices improve employee performance by ensuring better alignment between employee competencies and organizational requirements. The present study extends these earlier findings by demonstrating that the benefits of talent attraction extend beyond conventional performance outcomes to include employees' willingness to generate, promote, and implement innovative ideas within universities. Recent evidence also supports this conclusion by suggesting that organizations with strong employer branding and strategic recruitment practices are better positioned to develop innovation-oriented work cultures because they attract individuals with diverse knowledge, creativity, and problem-solving capabilities.

The study further revealed that talent identification exerts a significant positive influence on innovative work behaviour. This finding indicates that systematic identification of high-potential employees encourages greater creativity and proactive problem-solving by signalling organizational recognition and support. Employees who perceive that their competencies and future potential are objectively recognized are more willing to reciprocate through innovative behaviours that enhance organizational effectiveness. This finding provides additional empirical support for Social Exchange Theory by demonstrating that recognition itself constitutes a valuable organizational resource capable of stimulating discretionary employee behaviour.

The finding corroborates Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013), who describe talent identification as a strategic mechanism through which organizations recognize employees possessing exceptional competencies and future leadership potential. It also supports Meyer and Allen (1997), who argue that organizational recognition strengthens employees' affective commitment and encourages behaviours beyond contractual obligations. More recent studies similarly report that objective talent identification systems foster psychological safety, employee engagement, and knowledge-sharing behaviours that stimulate innovation. Within the context of higher education, systematic identification of talented academics provides opportunities for research leadership, mentoring, interdisciplinary collaboration, and professional development, all of which contribute to sustained innovative work behaviour.

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that talent attraction and talent identification are complementary rather than independent talent management practices. While talent attraction determines the quality of human capital entering the institution, talent identification ensures that talented employees are recognized and supported throughout their careers. Together, these practices explain a substantial proportion of the variation in innovative work behaviour, highlighting their strategic importance for universities seeking to strengthen research productivity, teaching innovation, and institutional competitiveness. The findings therefore contribute to the growing talent management literature by providing empirical evidence from a Nigerian private university, a context that remains underrepresented in contemporary human resource management research.

5. CONCLUDING REMARK

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of talent attraction and talent identification on innovative

work behaviour among academic staff of Covenant University, Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that both talent attraction and talent identification significantly and positively influence innovative work behaviour, confirming that strategic talent management practices play an important role in stimulating employees' creativity and innovation. The study further establishes that the two talent management practices jointly explain a substantial proportion of innovative work behaviour, emphasizing that attracting competent employees alone is insufficient unless organizations also establish transparent systems for identifying and recognizing high-potential talent.

From a theoretical perspective, the study strengthens the application of Social Exchange Theory within the talent management literature by demonstrating that employees reciprocate favourable organizational practices through discretionary innovative behaviours. The study also contributes to the growing body of talent management research by providing empirical evidence from the Nigerian higher education sector, thereby extending existing knowledge beyond the predominantly Western contexts that characterize much of the current literature.

Recommendations

The practical implications are equally important. University administrators should strengthen employer branding, merit-based recruitment, and transparent selection processes to attract highly competent academics capable of contributing innovative ideas. Equally, institutions should establish objective talent identification systems that recognize high-potential employees using clearly defined performance and competency criteria. Such systems should be integrated with career development opportunities, research support, mentoring programmes, and leadership development initiatives to sustain employees' innovative capacity over time. By investing strategically in both attracting and recognizing talent, universities can enhance research excellence, teaching quality, institutional reputation, and long-term competitiveness.

Limitations to the Study and Future Research Area

Although the study provides useful insights, it is subject to certain limitations. The study was restricted to a single private university, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings to other institutional contexts. In addition, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal inference or examination of changes in innovative work behaviour over time. Future research should therefore adopt longitudinal designs, include public and private universities across multiple regions, and examine additional organizational factors—such as transformational leadership, organizational culture, psychological empowerment, and learning climate—that may further explain innovative work behaviour.

Overall, the study concludes that universities seeking to improve innovation should regard talent attraction and talent identification as strategic organizational capabilities rather than routine human resource functions. Institutions that deliberately recruit talented academics and systematically recognize high-potential employees are more likely to cultivate an innovative workforce capable of sustaining academic excellence and institutional competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven environment.

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