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THE IMPACT OF TALENT MANAGEMENT, ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE AMID AND POST- COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR MEDIATING ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

In today's hypercompetitive business environment amid the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic, there is an urgent need for organizations to maximize their flexibility and capabilities to be able to operate in continuously and rapidly changing markets. Organizations must embrace effective methods and practices to not only cope with shifts in their corresponding markets, but to recreate their markets and identify new opportunities. This research seeks to contribute to the expanding body of literature exploring crucial organizational performance determinants amid and post-COVID-19 era. The study synthesizes the key research findings in the context of talent management, entrepreneurial orientation, and organizational learning as an influencer and to propose a conceptual model depicting these factors as key concepts to enhance organizational performance in the current turbulent business world. It also attempts to synthesize the knowledge from the aforementioned fields to gain a better understanding of the potential mediating role of organizational learning.

Keywords: Human Resources Management, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Organizational Learning, Organizational Performance and COVID-19 Pandemic Impact.

Introduction

The new era of the world is characterized by fast, continuous developments and changes that strongly influence every aspect of life, which lead to fierce competition among organizations and force them to achieve their short and long-run goals in a hyper-competitive global business environment. Indeed, today's turbulent workplace creates opportunities that organizations should pursue ahead of their competitors and crises that organizations must wisely handle to avoid, or at least mitigate, the negative impacts thereof. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, represents one of the most difficult challenges the contemporary world has ever encountered, resulting in approximately 5.82 million deaths and 414.53 million infected cases worldwide as of February 17, 2022 (Bui *et al.*, 2021; WHO, 2022). The pandemic created a global economic shock, and numerous businesses either suffered tremendous losses or went out of business (Faulks *et al.*, 2021). In a report prepared by the Congressional Research Service, the pandemic was found to have the largest impact on global economic growth in the last century, leading to an annualized rate of about - 3.2% and a 5.3% reduction in global trade (Jackson & Nelson, 2021). In a recent report by Mickinsey & company

(2022), the top three risks to domestic growth in 2022 will be supply-chain disruptions, inflation, and labor shortages associated with COVID-19 pandemic.

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Interestingly, while some organizations and sectors are suffering surviving the current situation, others are prospering and making notable profits. For this reason, organizational performance, especially in and post times of crisis, has gained increasing importance and widespread attention from researchers and practitioners actively investigating efficient, effective, and innovative methods and procedures to achieve business excellence. For example, organizational performance in post-COVID-19 era has been explored in several contexts such as higher education (Camilleri, 2021), medical tourism (Ghasemi *et al.*, 2021), Eco-Smart Tourism (MR Othman, *et al.*, 2022), supply chain management (Nisar *et al.*, 2022), and international airports (Shamohammadi *et al.*, 2022).

According to the resource-based view of organizations, it is vital for businesses to develop valuable resources that are difficult for competitors to replicate, in order to maintain a long-term competitive advantage (Jayaraman *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, the interest in a number of modern concepts and practices, such as entrepreneurial orientation (EO), organizational learning (OL), talent management (TM) and Organizational Performance (OP) has intensified, because these concepts capitalize on human capital as an organization's most valuable asset and on an organization's ability to learn, adapt to changing business environments, and be proactive (Allameh & Khalilakbar, 2018; Narayanan *et al.*, 2019). The aim of this research paper is therefore to propose a conceptual research model of the main determinants of firm performance amid and post crisis times and gain a better understanding of the potential mediating role of organizational learning. This study will specifically focus on EO, OL, and TM, because of growing interest in these variables as enablers of organizational agility and flexibility when facing a turbulent business world. To the

best of the researcher's knowledge, no previous studies have been conducted to investigate the combined influence of TM and EO on organizational performance with OL as a mediating mechanism. Indeed, due to contradictory findings in the literature, researchers have called for additional investigation into the processes through which TM and EO influence OP (Abu-Rumman *et al.*, 2021; Kravariti & Johnston, 2020; Shan *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, this study focuses on firm performance during and post the pandemic of COVID-19 in order to identify factors that may enable firms to not only restore their pre-crisis performance level but also boost their organizational resilience to handle internal and external crises more effectively; better harness the power of their workforce; and spot and seize opportunities in their environments. The proposed conceptual model can be empirically validated in the future research.

Literature Review

Organizational Performance

OP is 'at the heart of firm's survival' and is an extensively researched phenomenon in business and management literature (Singh, Darwish, & Potočnik, 2016, p. 214). Today's organizations operate in a cut-throat competition that requires them to constantly work on improving their performance (Sivathanu & Pillai, 2019). OP refers to 'the transformation of inputs into outputs for achieving certain outcomes' (Hurduzeu, 2015, p. 219). Researchers have used subjective and objective measures of OP (Núñez-Pomar *et al.*, 2016).

A number of studies have examined OP and its antecedents in a variety of contexts. For example, Alayoubi, Al Shobaki, and Abu-Naser (2020) randomly surveyed supervisors at three universities in the Gaza Strip and concluded that six strategic leadership practices-strategic orientation, investment of strategic capabilities and talents, development of human capital, strengthening organizational culture,

emphasizing ethical practices, and implementation of balanced regulatory control-positively impacted the quality of the educational services (measured as responsiveness, safety, empathy) at all three universities. Nugroho, Suharnomo, and Yuniawan (2020) proposed and empirically validated a model using data from managers and formal learners at service training companies in Central Java and Yogyakarta, Indonesia and found that leadership commitment and training programs were both positively associated with creative knowledge internalization behavior and improved OP. A quantitative study by Nafei (2016) assessed data from employees at industrial companies in Egypt and observed a positive relationship between OP and TM practices (i.e., planning, recruitment, compensation and rewards, performance management, employee empowerment, employee engagement, and organizational culture). Using data collected from employees at the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources in Kurdistan, Iraq, Anwar and Abdullah (2021) explored the impact of human resource management (HRM) practices on OP and found that decentralized decision-making was positively associated with OP. Shahzad *et al.* (2020) disseminated an online questionnaire to employees at different Pakistani superstores and concluded that three types of organizational compatibilities—namely technological, operational, and cultural compatibility—were utilized to promote organizational green supply chain management efforts, which consequently promoted OP measured in terms of operational and environmental performance; the researchers also concluded that information technology (IT) capabilities positively influenced the two OP measures.

Talent Management (TM)

Since the 2001 publication of *The War for Talent* by Michaels *et al.* (2001), there has been growing interest in the concept of TM

(Son *et al.*, 2020). According to Collings and Mellahi (2009, p.304), TM refers to 'activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions that differentially contribute to the organization's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high-potential and high-performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents, and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization'. Generally speaking, the ability to develop a pool of talented, high-performing employees is a strategic capability and a priority for businesses (Ahmad *et al.*, 2015). This highly contextual concept is also a dynamic and evolutionary capability that creates a sustainable competitive advantage by continually matching and reconfiguring organizational human resources according to the needs of the organization (Harsch & Festing, 2020).

The core TM practices are the attraction, selection, development, and retention of talent (Harsch & Festing, 2020). Talent attraction and selection refer to attracting and hiring the most talented, qualified job applicants to fill available vacancies (Khaki *et al.*, 2017). Talent development refers to a continuous process of implementing different learning strategies and training to sharpen employee skills and competencies to meet a company's current and future needs (Khaki, Khanzadeh, & Rad, 2017; Sivathanu & Pillai, 2019). Finally, talent retention refers to the retention of high-performing employees within an organization.

There is considerable interest in the notion of TM in the extant literature. Based on a number of established theories—specifically the resource-based view, social exchange, perceived organizational justice, and congruence theories—Narayanan, Rajithakumar, and Menon (2019) proposed a conceptual model reflecting a positive role

for TM on employee retention and mediating roles for organizational justice-measured as distributive justice, procedural justice, informational justice, and interpersonal justice-and talent perception congruence in the association between TM and employee retention. Sivathanu and Pillai (2019) adopted the grounded theory approach to propose a conceptual model that explained the game-changing role of TM technology to promote OP using talent analytics, strategic HRM and development of high performing talent pool as mediators. Son *et al.* (2020) conducted a longitudinal survey of 444 firms from 2007-2013 to explore the double-edged effect of TM and concluded that TM enhanced innovation and increased voluntary employee turnover and that the latter relationship was moderated by the level of HRM investment. Salau *et al.* (2018) evaluated survey data from the staff of a private technology-driven university in Nigeria and determined that talent development and retention were significant determinants of the innovation performance of the academic staff.

Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO)

Initially introduced by Miller and Friesen (1982), EO is a widely accepted predictor of firm performance, because it allows organizations to seize unfolding opportunities in their environment and develop new, unique capabilities by creating new knowledge (Engelen *et al.*, 2015; Real *et al.*, 2012). EO is 'an organizational process whereby an organization combines the existing resources and creates new solutions to develop its products, move towards new markets and provides customers with new services' (Allameh & Khalilakbar, 2018, p.472). This concept includes three dimensions: risk-taking, innovativeness, and proactivity (Keh *et al.*, 2007; Núñez-Pomar *et al.*, 2016). Risk-taking indicates an organization's propensity to take bold actions, such as entering new, previously unknown markets or devoting

considerable resources to projects with uncertain results or a high cost of failures (Vij & Bedi, 2012). Innovativeness refers to a 'firm's tendency to engage in creative processes, experimentation of new ideas, which may result in the institution of new methods of production and/or bringing new products or services to current or new markets' (Keh, Nguyen, & Ng, 2007, p.595). Proactiveness reflects 'entrepreneurial willingness to dominate competitors through a combination of proactive and aggressive moves, e.g., introducing new products or services ahead of competition and acting in anticipation of future demand to create change and shape the environment' (Keh, Nguyen, & Ng, 2007, p.595).

Generally speaking, firms with high EO constantly assess their environments to spot opportunities as they surface and strengthen their competitive capabilities, which promotes their performance as a result (Keh *et al.*, 2007). This is well-supported in the extant literature. For instance, using a stratified sample of 18 sports companies, Núñez-Pomar *et al.* (2016) explored the impact of EO on the performance of Spanish sport services and concluded that risk-taking and innovativeness were significant predictors of subjective performance measures (perceived market effectiveness, perceived financial performance, and perceived customer satisfaction) for small firms; whereas in terms of the objective measures (i.e., ROI in this study), innovation and risk-taking were both significant predictors for large companies, and innovation, risk-taking, and proactiveness were significant for small firms. In addition, Engelen *et al.* (2015) collected survey data from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in six countries and found that four transformational-leadership behaviors of top management-providing an appropriate model, articulating a vision, showing supportive leader behavior, and having high performance expectations-strengthened the positive association between EO and

firm performance. Hutahayan (2019) also evaluated data from interviews and surveys of entrepreneurs operating SMEs that produced Indonesian special food in East Java, Indonesia and discovered, among other findings, a significant association between EO and business performance. These results are consistent with the findings of other studies (e.g., Ahmad *et al.*, 2015; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005)

Organizational Learning (OL)

Jerez-Gómez, Céspedes-Lorente, and Valle-Cabrera (2005, p.716) referred to OL as 'the capability of an organization to process knowledge—in other words, to create, acquire, transfer, and integrate knowledge, and to modify its behavior to reflect the new cognitive situation, with a view to improving its performance'. Businesses can achieve OL by institutionalizing and promoting a variety of individual learning activities (Park & Kim, 2018). Indeed, through knowledge acquisition, distribution, interpretation, and organizational memory, OL can help organizations identify and flexibly adapt to changes in their environments, which in turn gives them a sustainable competitive advantage (Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2011).

There is abundant research investigating the association between OL and OP. Jiménez-Jiménez and Sanz-Valle (2011) empirically validated the direct impact of OL on OP and the indirect impact through innovation using data from Spanish manufacturing-and-services firms; the researchers further reported moderating effects of company age and size such that the impact of OL on both OP and innovation was greater for small companies and increased with firm age (i.e., the OL of older firms had a greater impact on both variables), they also found that OL had a stronger influence on the performance of manufacturing organizations than services firms; and finally, they observed that the effect of OL on both variables

became more intense in environments with increased turbulence. Bilan *et al.* (2020) recently explored firm sustainability using a sample of general managers of Malaysian manufacturing companies, and found that OL played a mediating role in the relationships between each of organizational capabilities, corporate governance, and firm sustainability; the study further revealed that innovative culture moderates and strengthens the relationship between OL and firm sustainability. Lastly, Real, Roldán and Leal (2012) combined the resource-based view and the knowledge-based view and argued that organizational skills and capabilities are the source of each organization's competitive advantage, and organizations can thus use OL to improve their performance and sustain their competitive advantage.

Methodology & Discussions

Research Propositions

Influence of Talent Management on Organizational Performance

Currently, TM is considered an essential aspect of strategic management aimed at identifying core roles that are critical to an organization's survival and growth (Afshari & Hadian Nasab, 2020). It is a dynamic capability that is crucial for long-term, sustainable, successful operations in highly paced, quickly changing marketplaces with a diverse set of players (Harsch & Festing, 2020). The influence of TM on organizational performance has caught the attention of researchers. For example, using data from 520 executives, Ahmad *et al.* (2015) examined the impact of TM on the performance of companies associated with the Malaysian government and found a significant positive association between the two. Similar findings were reported in other studies (e.g., Nafei, 2016; Son *et al.*, 2020; Salau *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, According to Hancock and Schaninger (2020) the pandemic of COVID-19 proves that talent is essential for organizational success.

With this in mind, we propose the following:

Proposition 1: Talent attraction positively impacts organizational performance amid and in the post- COVID-19 era.

Proposition 2: Talent retention positively impacts organizational performance amid and in the post- COVID-19 era.

Proposition 3: Talent selection positively impacts organizational performance amid and in the post- COVID-19 era.

Proposition 4: Talent development positively impacts organizational performance amid and in the post- COVID-19 era.

Influence of Entrepreneurial Orientation on Organizational Performance

The impact of EO on OP is a topic that is gaining an increasing amount of attention from practitioners and academics. Li *et al.* (2021) asserted that EO is an effective way to resolve business failures in both emerging and emerged economies, especially during and after pandemics; the researchers also found that EO had a direct positive impact and additional indirect impacts in relation to the intellectual property (i.e., trade secrets, patents, trademarks, and copyrights) and types of innovation (i.e., incremental, radical, disruptive, and architectural innovation) of Ghanaian SMEs in the food processing industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. Bui *et al.* (2021) proposed that franchisee EO should hold a significant positive influence on Franchisee performance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With this in mind, we propose the following:

Proposition 5: Innovation positively impacts organizational performance amid and in the post- COVID-19 era.

Proposition 6: Proactiveness positively impacts organizational performance amid and in the post- COVID-19 era.

Proposition 7: Risk-taking positively impacts organizational performance amid and in the post- COVID-19 era.

Organizational learning as a Mediator

The importance of TM practices, which allow a pool of high-performing employees to be maintained, to maximize OL capability is well-documented in the extant literature (Afshari & Hadian Nasab, 2020). For example, Khaki, Khanzadeh and Rad (2017) assessed survey collected data from employees of an information technology organization of the Mashhad municipality in Iran and found that OL mediated the positive relationship between TM and the employees' innovative behavior. Afshari and Hadian Nasab (2020) analyzed data collected from employees at a Ports and Maritime organization and concluded that TM had a significant effect on OL capability and intellectual capital.

EO has also been found to promote OL. For instance, Allameh and Khalilakbar (2018) collected and evaluated survey data from Iranian SMEs and found that EO positively impacted learning orientation and OL. In addition, Real, Roldán, and Leal (2012) analyzed survey data collected from the chief executive officers or highest ranking officials at 140 Spanish companies and reported that OL mediated the association between EO and perceived business performance.

The positive link between OL and Op is well supported in the literature (Bilan *et al.*, 2020; Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2011). Moreover, in times of crisis, such as during the COVID 19 pandemic, researchers have focused on OL, for example, as a way to strengthen the healthcare system by creating learning organizations (Alonazi, 2021); promote adjustments to distance education during the pandemic among STEM and social science faculty at a large state university (Donnelly *et al.*, 2021); build school teachers innovation capabilities (Supriadi *et al.*, 2020); and maintain sustainable economic performance among Russian companies (Faulks *et al.*, 2021). Thus, we expect OL to function as an intermediary mechanism through which

TM and EO enhance OP. Based on the aforementioned studies, we propose the following:

Proposition 8: Organizational learning mediates the relationship between talent management strategies and organizational performance.

Proposition 9: Organizational learning mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and organizational performance.

Conclusion and Future Research

In today's fluctuation of the global markets, it is essential that organizations search for innovative means and practices to promote their efficiency, effectiveness, agility, and performance. This research has successfully proposed a conceptual framework that is helpful for researchers and practitioners alike. The current review-based study conclusively offers insight into the critical roles of TM strategies, EO, and OL, when the latter is used as a mediator, in boosting OP during and after the global COVID-19 pandemic. Survival and competitiveness of a company can be enhanced by focusing on and cultivating employee talent, organizational learning, innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactivity.

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Organizational performance during a worldwide epidemic has been examined in this study, but its findings can be applied to any type of crisis. Besides, while some of the proposed relationships, such as TM-OL-OP, have not been previously examined to the best of the researchers' knowledge, other associations, such as EO-OP, have inconsistent findings. Thus, this research aims to fill a gap in the literature by investigating OL as mediating mechanism by which TM and EO may enhance OP. The proposed relationships should be empirically validated in future research. It is recommended that the relationships in developed and developing countries and across different industries be tested.

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