

Talent Management Approaches in the Kenyan Banking Sector: The Role of Organizational Characteristics

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Abstract: Kenya's banking sector is navigating a turbulent era where competition is fierce and the way banks manage talent may determine their survival. Both established giants and agile newcomers face the same question: which talent management (TM) approaches best sustain competitive advantage amid de-globalization, re-shoring, digital disruption, and shifting demographics? While most prior studies—largely from developed economies—highlight organizational size, little is known about how the combined influence of size and age shapes TM adoption in emerging markets. This study addresses that gap by examining Kenyan banks across three tiers. A cross-sectional survey of 456 employees yielded 399 valid responses, analyzed through structural equation modeling (SmartPLS 4.0). Findings reveal that larger and older banks tend to adopt hybrid TM approaches that blend inclusive and exclusive practices, whereas smaller and younger banks favor inclusive approaches. This study enriches TM scholarship by providing evidence from a resource-constrained, developing economy and offers practical guidance for aligning TM strategies with organizational size and maturity in an era of shifting global dynamics.

Keywords: Talent management approaches, Organizational size, Organizational age, Kenyan banking sector

1. Introduction

In the constantly changing business environment, organizations face unprecedented challenges brought about by globalization, technological advancements, demographic shifts, and changing global business patterns including de-globalization and re-shoring (Collings, Mellahi and Cascio, 2019; Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020; D'Ambrosio and Lavoratori, 2025). To navigate these complexities, talent management (TM) has become a significant strategic priority, focusing on attracting, developing, and retaining talent. TM is broadly defined as a structured process for attracting, identifying, developing, engaging, retaining, and deploying employees who drive organizational success (Collings, Mellahi and Cascio, 2019).

Organizations adopt varying approaches to TM, typically classified as exclusive, inclusive, or hybrid (Anlesinya, Dartey-Baah and Amponsah-Tawiah, 2019). Exclusive TM focuses on high-potential and high-performing employees, allocating significant resources to their development and to critical roles (Dang *et al.*, 2020; Wiblen and McDonnell, 2020). Inclusive TM emphasizes equal opportunities and engagement for all employees, fostering fairness and cohesion across the workforce (Swales, Downs and Orr, 2014; Mousa *et al.*, 2022). Hybrid TM combines elements of both, strategically targeting high-performing employees while nurturing the broader talent pool to ensure flexibility and resilience (Anlesinya, Dartey-Baah and Amponsah-Tawiah, 2019; King and Vaiman, 2019; Holck and Stjerne, 2020).

Organizational characteristics, particularly size and age, influence the adoption of these approaches. Large and mature organizations, with greater resources and complex structures, often adopt hybrid or exclusive TM to maximize the contributions of critical employees (Lenton, 2021; Vukotić, Karabašević and Mirčetić, 2022). In contrast, smaller or younger organizations tend to adopt inclusive TM approaches, focusing on workforce cohesion and engagement (Anlesinya, Dartey-Baah and Amponsah-Tawiah, 2019; Lenton, 2021). Additionally, sectoral differences matter: public sector organizations often lean toward exclusive TM (Nosan and Nazarenko, 2021).

Despite extensive research on TM in developed economies, there are limited studies that examine how organizational size and age influence TM adoption in developing economies, particularly in the banking sector. Existing studies (Lenton, 2021; Vukotić, Karabašević and Mirčetić, 2022) primarily focus on large organizations or specific industries, leaving gaps in understanding medium-sized firms, younger organizations, and public sector entities. Moreover, most studies do not simultaneously explore the combined effect of size and age on the adoption of inclusive, exclusive, and hybrid TM approaches.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring the role of organizational characteristics—size and age—in shaping TM approaches in the Kenyan banking sector. Using data from 38 commercial banks, both public and private,

the study examines how these characteristics influence the adoption of hybrid, inclusive, and exclusive TM approaches. By focusing on a developing economy, the study contributes to the broader TM literature, providing insights into how resource constraints and organizational maturity shape strategic talent decisions. The findings have practical implications for managers seeking to align TM strategies with organizational size, age, and contextual needs.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: a theoretical foundation and hypothesis development followed by the methodology, results and finally, discussion and conclusion.

2. Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored on Social Exchange Theory (SET), initially developed by Homans (1958) and further elaborated by Blau (1964), which provides a framework for understanding the reciprocal relationships between organizations and employees. SET posits that individuals and organizations engage in exchanges where benefits are provided with the expectation of reciprocity, and these relationships are maintained when perceived rewards outweigh the costs (Gouldner, 1960; Cropanzano and Folger, 1991). In the context of TM, SET emphasizes that employees respond positively to fair and supportive organizational practices with engagement, loyalty, and enhanced performance, whereas perceived inequities may result in dissatisfaction or turnover. This perspective is particularly relevant for examining organizational size and age, as these characteristics influence the allocation of resources, decision-making processes, and the perceived fairness of TM practices. For example, larger and older organizations are more likely to adopt hybrid or exclusive TM approaches, concentrating resources on critical roles or high-performing employees, whereas smaller or younger organizations may favor inclusive TM approaches to build trust and engagement across the workforce.

While SET explains the social relational mechanisms behind TM, the Resource-Based View (RBV) offers a complementary perspective by highlighting the strategic role of organizational resources in shaping TM practices. According to RBV, organizations achieve a competitive advantage by leveraging valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources, including human capital (Barney, 1991; Collings, Mellahi and Cascio, 2019). Larger and more mature organizations typically possess greater financial, structural, and human resources, allowing them to implement resource-intensive TM approaches, such as exclusive or hybrid systems targeting high-potential employees. In contrast, smaller or younger organizations may lack such resources, making inclusive TM approaches that maximize the contribution of all employees more practical and sustainable.

Together, SET and RBV provide a robust theoretical foundation for this study. SET explains how relational dynamics, fairness, and reciprocity shape employee responses to TM practices, while RBV clarifies how organizational resources determine the feasibility and strategic selection of TM approaches. By integrating these perspectives, this study links organizational characteristics (size and age) to the adoption of hybrid, inclusive, and exclusive TM approaches, providing a theoretical justification for the hypotheses. In particular, larger and older organizations are expected to leverage their accumulated resources to adopt hybrid or exclusive TM approaches, while smaller and younger organizations are likely to rely on inclusive approaches that foster workforce engagement and cohesion. This dual-theory approach strengthens the explanatory power of the study, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of both the social and structural mechanisms that influence TM strategy adoption.

3. Talent Management Approaches

Talent management (TM) has emerged as a critical strategic priority for organizations navigating rapid technological advancements, demographic shifts, and evolving global economic dynamics such as de-globalization and re-shoring (Collings, Mellahi and Cascio, 2019; Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020; D'Ambrosio and Lavoratori, 2025).

These shifts compel organizations to rethink workforce strategies to maintain competitiveness, flexibility, and resilience. TM is broadly defined as a systematic process of attracting, selecting, developing, engaging, retaining, and deploying employees who drive organizational success (Collings, Mellahi and Cascio, 2019). Implementation varies across organizations, giving rise to three primary approaches: exclusive, inclusive, and hybrid (Anlesinya, Dartey-Baah and Amponsah-Tawiah, 2019; King and Vaiman, 2019).

Exclusive TM focuses on high-potential and high-performing employees, often allocating significant resources to their development and retention (Wiblen and McDonnell, 2020). Organizations that adopt exclusive TM approaches tend to focus on developing employees deemed talented, allocating more resources for their training and development (Wiblen and McDonnell, 2020). These employees are often treated as more valuable

and assigned roles critical to organizational success (Dang *et al.*, 2020; Kamoche and Leigh, 2021). This strategy is common in large organizations with substantial resources, which are able to invest heavily in a select group of employees (Vukotić, Karabašević and Mirčetić, 2022).

Inclusive TM, in contrast, emphasizes equal opportunities for all employees, fostering a culture of fairness, engagement, and collaboration (Mousa *et al.*, 2022). This approach is especially prevalent in smaller organizations or public sector entities with limited resources and strong commitments to equality and diversity (Nosan and Nazarenko, 2021). Inclusive TM is also increasingly adopted by organizations seeking to enhance employee engagement and organizational culture (Swales, Downs and Orr, 2014).

Hybrid approaches combine elements of both exclusive and inclusive approaches, targeting specific employee segments for strategic roles while maintaining a foundational talent pool to ensure organizational flexibility and resilience (King and Vaiman, 2019). Hybrid TM is gaining popularity as organizations attempt to balance developing high-performing individuals with nurturing the wider workforce (Anlesinya, Dartey-Baah and Amponsah-Tawiah, 2019). This approach is particularly effective in complex, dynamic environments, enabling organizations to respond to changing market conditions while sustaining a strong talent pool (Holck and Stjerne, 2020). The choice of TM approach is shaped by organizational characteristics such as size, age, and sector. Larger organizations with complex structures and substantial resources are more likely to adopt exclusive or hybrid TM approaches, leveraging high-potential employees to drive strategic objectives (Vukotić, Karabašević and Mirčetić, 2022). Smaller organizations, often constrained by resources, tend to adopt inclusive approaches to build cohesion and engagement (Lenton, 2021). Similarly, organizational age influences TM strategies: younger firms may favor inclusive TM to cultivate a fair and engaged culture, whereas mature organizations may lean toward exclusive approaches to sustain competitive advantage (Lenton, 2021)

4. Organizational Characteristics and TM Approaches

Empirical studies have highlighted the influence of organizational characteristics on the implementation of TM approaches. For instance, Dang *et al.* (2020) found that public banks in Vietnam tended to adopt inclusive TM, viewing it as an extension of traditional HR practices, whereas private banks favored exclusive TM, targeting high-potential and high-performing employees through specialized development programs. Similarly, Wiblen and McDonnell (2020) demonstrated that the meaning ascribed to "talent" within an organization shapes its TM approach: organizations emphasizing high potential and performance tend to adopt exclusive or hybrid approaches, while those discouraging workforce differentiation favor inclusive TM. Anlesinya and Amponsah-Tawiah (2020) advocate for a hybrid TM approach that balances the development of top performers while nurturing the development of the rest of the workforce across all levels.

Organizational characteristics, particularly size and age, play a significant role in determining the adoption of TM approaches. Larger organizations, with greater resources and complex structures, are more likely to adopt exclusive and hybrid TM approaches, focusing on high-performing employees to drive strategic goals (Vukotić, Karabašević and Mirčetić, 2022). In contrast, smaller organizations often adopt inclusive TM approaches to foster a cohesive and engaged workforce (Lenton, 2021).

Beyond organizational size, age also plays a critical role. Younger firms, particularly startups, may prioritize inclusive TM to foster a culture of fairness and employee engagement, while mature organizations may lean toward exclusive TM to sustain competitive advantage (Lenton, 2021). In addition, the sector (public or private) can further shape the choice of TM approach. Public sector organizations favor inclusive TM approaches due to their commitment to equality and diversity (Nosan and Nazarenko, 2021).

While these trends are well documented in developed economies, the influence of size, age, and sector on TM approaches in developing economies, including Kenya, has received limited attention.

5. Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical foundation and literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed. Each hypothesis explicitly examines the influence of organizational size and age on the adoption of different talent management (TM) approaches.

H1: Organizational size and age are positively associated with the adoption of a hybrid talent management approach.

H2: Organizational size and age are negatively associated with the adoption of an inclusive talent management approach.

H3: Organizational size and age are positively associated with the adoption of an exclusive talent management approach.

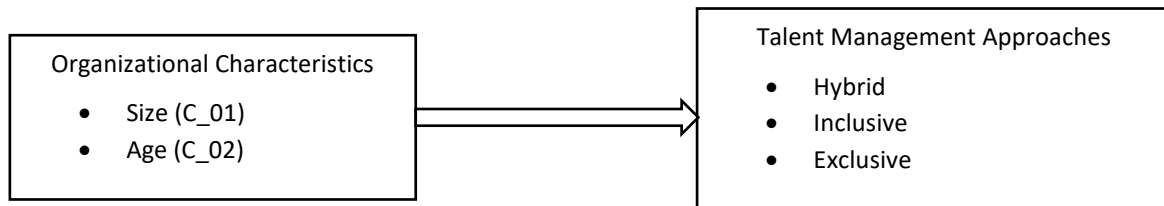


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

5.1 Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the influence of organizational characteristics (size and age) on the adoption of talent management (TM) approaches—hybrid, inclusive and exclusive—within the Kenyan banking sector. The study targeted all 38 commercial banks in Kenya, encompassing both public and private institutions, thereby ensuring comprehensive coverage of the sector.

5.2 Sampling and Data Collection

A multistage sampling technique was used to select participants. Banks were first categorized into three tiers (1, 2 and 3) based on the Central Bank of Kenya classification system, which uses a weighted composite index (WCI), that includes net assets, customer deposits, capital reserves, market share, and loan accounts (CBK, 2022).

Tier 1 banks had a WCI above 5%, Tier 2 banks between 1 and 5%, and Tier 3 below 1%. Within each tier, participants were randomly selected using proportional allocation, ensuring representation across all categories. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed in KoboToolbox. The questionnaires were distributed with the assistance of branch managers and relationship managers, who shared them via official email and WhatsApp. Due to data privacy laws, the authors were not given the respondents contacts. Out of the target population of 456 respondents, 399 responses were received, representing an 87.5% response rate. The survey captured key organizational characteristics, including size (number of branches) and age (years of operation), as well as the adoption of hybrid, inclusive and exclusive TM approaches.

Table 11: Descriptive Statistics for Bank characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Bank tier	Tier 1	262	65.7%
	Tier 2	74	18.5%
	Tier 3	63	15.8%
	Total	399	100%
Duration of bank existence in years	Under 10 years	11	2.8%
	11 - 20 years	43	10.8%
	21 -30 years	29	7.3%
	31- 40 years	58	14.5%
	Over 40 years	258	64.7%
	Total	399	100%
Number of bank branches	Below 10	14	3.5%
	10-20	48	12%
	21 - 30	48	12%
	31 - 40	10	2.5%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
	Above 40	279	69.9%
	Total	399	100%
Ownership of the bank	The State	13	3.3%
	Privately Owned	310	77.7%
	Both the state and privately owned	76	19%
	Total	399	100%
Branches outside Kenya	Yes	298	74.7%
	No	101	25.3%
	Total	399	100%
Talent management approach	Exclusive approach	66	16.5%
	Inclusive approach	162	40.6%
	Hybrid approach	171	42.9%
	Total	399	100%

The descriptive analysis from 399 observations reveals key structural and operational characteristics. The majority of banks (65.7%) fall under Tier 1, with Tier 2 and Tier 3 banks representing 18.5% and 15.8%, respectively. Most banks in the sample are well-established, with 64.7% having operated for over 40 years, while only 2.8% are relatively new (under 10 years old). In terms of branch networks, 69.9% of banks have an extensive presence, operating more than 40 branches, compared to a small fraction (3.5%) with fewer than 10 branches. Ownership is predominantly private (77.7%), with only 3.3% being fully state-owned, while 19% have mixed public-private ownership. A significant proportion (74.7%) of banks maintain an international presence, operating branches outside Kenya. Regarding talent management, the hybrid approach (42.9%) is the most common, closely followed by the inclusive approach (40.6%), whereas the exclusive approach is the least adopted (16.5%). Overall, the findings suggest that the banking sector is characterized by large, long-established, privately owned institutions with a strong international footprint, primarily employing hybrid or inclusive talent management approaches.

5.3 Measures

Organizational characteristics were measured using two items: “for how long has your bank been in existence?” (age) and “how many branches does your bank have?” (size).

Talent management approaches were measured using items adapted from established literature: Hybrid TM had 6 items (e.g., “In my organization, while all positions/roles are valued, certain critical roles play a significant role in achieving business objectives”) (Anlesinya, Dartey-Baah and Amponsah-Tawiah, 2019; King and Vaiman, 2019). Inclusive TM had 2 items (e.g., “My organization does not differentiate employees on the basis of talent and contribution”) (Mousa *et al.*, 2022). Exclusive TM had 3 items (e.g., “My organization values the work and contribution of talented employees more”) (Dang *et al.*, 2020; Wiblen and McDonnell, 2020).

Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

5.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SmartPLS version 4.0, following a two-step approach: (1) measurement model assessment and (2) structural model assessment, where hypotheses were tested using bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples, generating path coefficients and p-values.

To evaluate the validity, reliability, and collinearity of the data, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using SmartPLS version 4.0. Following established guidelines, convergent validity and composite reliability were assessed, with Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability values required to exceed 0.70 (Sheko and Spaho, 2018). Additionally, discriminant validity was evaluated based on the criterion that the average variance extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.5 (Hair, 2014). The results of the analysis met all the required threshold

values, confirming the validity and reliability of the data. The outcomes for reliability, discriminant validity, and convergent validity are summarized below:

Table 2: Assessment of the Measurement Model

Construct	Factor loadings	VIF	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Organizational characteristics			0.725	0.878	0.782
C_01 (Size)	0.913	1.479			
C_02 (Age)	0.856	1.479			
Exclusive Talent Approach			0.837	0.891	0.734
d_01	0.908	2.014			
d_06	0.931	2.728			
d_07	0.714	1.841			
Inclusive Talent Approach			0.721	0.724	0.588
e_04	0.517	1.058			
e_05	0.954	1.058			
Hybrid Talent Approach			0.835	0.876	0.543
f_01	0.81	1.984			
f_02	0.67	1.799			
f_03	0.827	2.194			
f_04	0.732	1.823			
f_05	0.648	1.605			
f_06	0.719	1.764			

After confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model, we proceeded to evaluate the significance of the path coefficients. This was achieved using a bootstrapping procedure, which involved generating 5,000 subsamples from the original dataset. The results support Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2, while Hypothesis 3 is not supported. Specifically, the findings indicate that organizational characteristics (size and age) have a positive and significant influence on the adoption of the hybrid talent management (TM) approach ($\beta = 0.149$, $p < 0.002$). This supports Hypothesis 1, which posits that organizational size and age influence the adoption of hybrid TM. Similarly, Hypothesis 2 is supported, as organizational characteristics demonstrate a significant negative influence on the adoption of the inclusive TM approach ($\beta = -0.140$, $p < 0.003$). However, Hypothesis 3 is not supported and is therefore rejected. The results show that organizational characteristics do not significantly influence the adoption of the exclusive TM approach ($\beta = -0.073$, $p > 0.325$). The p-value is greater than 0.05, indicating that the relationship is not statistically significant.

Below is the structural model and the summary of the hypotheses.

Structural Model

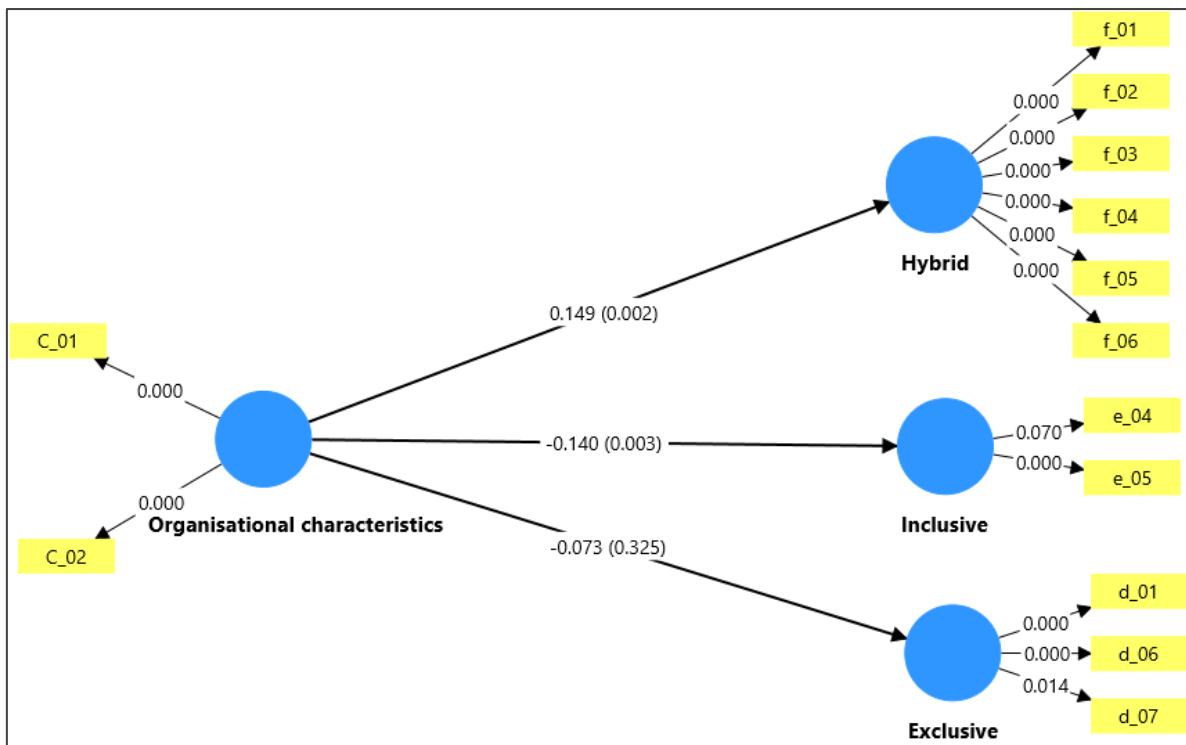


Figure 1: Path Diagram C_01 (Size); C_02 (Age)

Table 2: Summary of the Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T statistics	Decision
H1: Organizational characteristics -> Hybrid	0.149*** (0.048)	3.075	Supported
H2: Organizational characteristics -> Inclusive	-0.140 *** (0.047)	2.963	Supported
H3: Organizational characteristics -> Exclusive	-0.073 (0.075)	0.985	Rejected

Robust standard errors enclosed in parentheses. *** p < 1%, ** p < 5%, * p < 10%

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of organizational characteristics, specifically size and age, on the adoption of talent management (TM) approaches—hybrid, inclusive and exclusive—within the Kenyan banking sector. The results reveal that organizational size and age significantly influence the adoption of hybrid and inclusive TM approaches, while no significant relationship was found for exclusive TM.

Specifically, organizational size and age were positively associated with the adoption of hybrid TM, supporting Hypothesis 1. This suggests that larger and more mature organizations are likely to adopt hybrid TM approaches, which balance inclusivity and exclusivity. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that larger organizations often implement hybrid TM to optimize both high-performing employees and the broader workforce (Anlesinya and Amponsah-Tawiah, 2020; Holck and Stjerne, 2020). From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with the Social Exchange Theory (SET), which emphasizes that organizations with greater resources can engage in more strategic exchanges with employees, rewarding both critical talent and the general workforce (Blau, 1964). In addition, the Resource-Based View (RBV) explains that larger and older organizations

possess more tangible and intangible resources to implement hybrid TM strategies effectively, thereby leveraging their capabilities for sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991).

Conversely, organizational size and age were negatively associated with the inclusive TM approach, supporting Hypothesis 2. This implies that smaller and younger organizations are more likely to adopt inclusive TM approaches, likely due to their focus on building diverse and collaborative workforces (Swailles, Downs and Orr, 2014; Lenton, 2021). SET offers a useful lens here, suggesting that inclusive TM facilitates reciprocal relationships and trust within organizations that may have fewer formal resources.

Hypothesis 3, which proposed a relationship between organizational size and age, and the exclusive talent management approach, was not supported. This indicates that the exclusive TM approach may be influenced by other factors beyond than organizational size and age, such as organizational culture, leadership style, or strategic priorities (Mousa *et al.*, 2022). This finding suggests the need for further research to identify additional determinants of exclusive TM adoption, particularly in developing economies.

This study contributes to the TM literature by empirically demonstrating the differentiated role of organizational size and age in shaping TM approaches in the context of a developing economy. The findings highlight that: firstly, hybrid TM is a preferred approach for larger and mature banks, offering a balanced strategy that leverages both specialized talent and broader workforce capabilities. Secondly, inclusive TM is more suited to smaller and younger banks, supporting workforce engagement and cohesion in resource-constrained environments.

From a practical perspective, these insights provide guidance for managers and policymakers in the banking sector. Larger banks can focus on hybrid TM to maximize the strategic contribution of key employees while maintaining inclusivity, whereas smaller banks can implement inclusive TM to strengthen employee engagement, enhance employer branding, and attract talent.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. Due to time and resource constraints, the study focused solely on organizational size and age as predictors of TM approaches, potentially overlooking other important factors such as culture and leadership style. Future studies could explore these variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of TM approach adoption. Additionally, the study was conducted within the Kenyan banking sector, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other sectors or regions. Future research could replicate this study in different sectors or countries to validate the findings. Moreover, longitudinal studies could also be conducted to examine how TM approaches evolve over time in response to changes in organizational characteristics.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that organizational size and age are key determinants of TM approach adoption in the Kenyan banking sector, with larger and mature organizations favoring hybrid strategies and smaller, younger organizations favoring inclusive approaches. By integrating SET and RBV, the study provides both theoretical and practical insights into how organizations can align TM strategies with their structural characteristics to achieve sustained performance and competitive advantage.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge Strathmore University for providing ethical clearance and institutional support that enabled this study. Gratitude is also extended to management and staff of the participating commercial banks for their cooperation and time in completing the survey. The authors also thank colleagues and other mentors who provided valuable guidance and feedback during the preparation of this manuscript.

Ethical Declaration: This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research guidelines. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained throughout the study. Ethical clearance for the research was obtained from Strathmore University.

AI Declaration: AI tools (e.g., language models) were not used in the preparation of this manuscript, except for minor language editing. All ideas, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this paper are the original work of the authors.

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