

Foteini Kravariti, Emeka Oruh, Chianu Dibia, Konstantinos Tasoulis,
Hugh Scullion & Aminu Mamman

Weathering the Storm: Talent Management in Internationally Oriented Greek Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Abstract

Purpose – Based on a study of **internationally oriented** Greek small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and using the lens of institutional theory, this article extends our understanding of **the extent to which Greece’s institutional context influences talent management (TM)**. In so doing, we focused on key TM practices employed by SMEs to enhance and sustain TM: talent acquisition, development and retention. **We also explore how these practices are shaped** by the Greek institutional context.

Design/methodology/approach - **Employing** a multiple case-study approach, we conducted 18 interviews in six distinctive SMEs operating in north, central and southern Greece. The data was **thematically** analysed to identify patterns across all SMEs.

Findings - We found that unlike multinational corporations (MNCs), **internationally oriented Greek SMEs** adopt a more inclusive approach to TM practices **as well as that the country’s institutional context presented important yet not deterministic hurdles**. We also found that SMEs adopt an opportunistic approach to talent acquisition by utilising appropriate available sources to reach out for available talent. We provided evidence that SMEs adopt a hybrid approach to talent development in addressing talent scarcity. Finally, we reported that talent retention is significantly appreciated by SMEs, who offer a range of intrinsic and extrinsic incentives to retain their talented workforce.

Originality - In a context of reforms, we report on TM practice in **internationally oriented** Greek SMEs. We also add to the literature on TM in SMEs by providing evidence on the conceptualisation and management of global talent in this context.

Paper type - Research paper

Keywords: Talent management, institutional theory, **international** small and medium-sized enterprises, Greece

Introduction

Given the fiercely challenging global business environment, companies are forced to be pragmatic and strategic in order to remain competitive (Newell, 2005). One of the ways they achieve this is by optimising their talented human capital (Carbery, 2015) on a global scale. This area has seen a worldwide renaissance of interest in the worker-workplace equation; all kinds of organisations have recognised the need to manage their workforce effectively, regardless of context-specific economic and workforce conditions (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). In today's hyper-change environment, TM is seen by many organisations as being necessary in order to generate a competitive advantage (e.g. Harsch and Festing, 2020).

The bulk of TM studies are in the context of MNCs (Stahl et al., 2012), although there is currently significant interest in the SMEs context as well (e.g. Festing et al., 2013). Research suggests that the conceptualisation and practice of TM in SMEs is different to that of MNCs. This is due to significant differences between the contexts such as the latter's primary focus on high potentials and high performers (Cappelli and Keller, 2014). SMEs, on the other hand, are typified by an egalitarian culture, lack of stable hierarchical structures and strategic positions, and the enactment of informal and often personalised practices (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). It is therefore necessary for TM to be uniquely conceptualised in this context. In the context of SMEs, TM is viewed as a philosophy relevant for all employees but which focuses mostly on those with high potentials and in critical positions, with the aim to get talents on board, grow their optimal capabilities and retain them (Piansoongnern et al., 2011).

Evidence from European SMEs could advance the academic discourse on how TM is implemented in this context (Skuzza et al., 2016), as well as encourage practitioners to revisit practices related to talent acquisition, development and retention (Kirk et al., 2020). Research on Greek SMEs in particular is necessary for a number of reasons. First, current evidence on TM in European SMEs is concentrated in Germany (e.g. Festing et al., 2013), Spain (e.g. Valverde et al., 2013) and Slovakia (Savov et al., 2020); there has been limited thorough investigation of Greek SMEs, despite the fact that they represent a large share of European firms (Statista, 2021). Second, the aftermath of the 2007/2008 economic recession precipitated significant reforms in employment relations, which distinguished Greece from other Mediterranean countries in terms of legislation (Psychogios et al., 2014). Third, Greece has experienced a significant emigration of its educated youth (Theodoropoulos et al., 2014) but is currently planning to attract young talent back to the country through governmental schemes

(Stamouli, 2020). Fourth, many industries face the major challenge of talent shortage, where there is a mismatch between the competences of graduates and the needs of the labour market, resulting in the talents of many graduates being underutilised (OECD, 2018a). Greek SMEs account for 99% of all organisations operating in the country (Theriou and Chatzoudes, 2015); the institutional context thus has important implications for such SMEs. This study aims to establish the extent to which the Greek institutional context influences the nature and practice of TM among SMEs with an international outlook that operate in the country. The key research objective is:

- *To examine the extent to which Greece's institutional context shapes talent acquisition, development and retention among SMEs in the country.*

Overall, our study contributes to the limited European literature on TM in SMEs by adducing evidence from internationally oriented Greek SMEs, as well as highlighting important lessons on how European SMEs can remain competitive during periods of quick reforms. Drawing on studies focusing on the contextual nature of TM (e.g. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020) and building on institutional theory, we first provide empirical evidence on how internationally oriented Greek SMEs responded to institutional challenges by investing in TM and secondly highlight the changing meaning of talent in SMEs. Empirically, we show how TM practices in SMEs are embedded in the organisational context and how, in practice, hybrid approaches are used. This suggests that in practice, inclusive and exclusive categorisations may become blurred. Finally, we expand the body of knowledge on TM in SMEs by specifying methods of talent acquisition, development and retention.

Theoretical background

Talent management and institutional theory

Existing literature on TM shows that it lacks a robust theoretical and empirical basis (Nijs et al., 2014). There are some theoretical perspectives that could explain how, and why, TM is pursued by organisations; these include the institutional theory, the resource-based view and the human capital theory (Khilji and Schuler, 2017).

In this study, we focus on the institutional perspective, for several reasons. First, differences in institutional settings among countries affect the nature and embeddedness of their people management policies and practices (Paauwe and Boselie, 2003). Vaiman and

1
2
3 Brewster (2015) thus argue that TM strategies need to consider the institutional context in
4 which decisions are made. Second, research studies have shown that institutional forces are a
5 key determinant of TM in SMEs (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017); this perspective is therefore
6 likely to be key for our study. Overall, the use of institutional theory will help to provide a
7 comprehensive picture of the TM phenomenon (Beamond et al., 2016).
8
9

10
11
12
13 Institutional theory was developed to offer a powerful explanation for individual and
14 organisational actions (Dacin et al., 2002). Institutions shape actions by demanding
15 accountability and providing the standards by which people and organisations recognise the
16 achievements of others (Morgan and Hauptmeier, 2014). This being the case, institutional
17 theory was designed to account for the powerful ways in which institutions drive change and
18 shape the contexts in which organisations operate. Specifically, institutional theory suggests
19 that organisations do not operate in vacuums but rather in socially constructed environments;
20 that they seek legitimisation and approval from different stakeholders (Jackson and Schuler,
21 1995), and that their practices conform to a range of sociocultural, technological, legal,
22 economic and other forces (Boon et al., 2009). Institutional forces may also exert different
23 influences on larger vs smaller firms; the former often use formal TM practices that help them
24 to increase their legitimacy and enhance talent attraction, whereas SMEs tend to initiate
25 informal TM practices and acquire talent from informal sources (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017).
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35

36
37 Organisations thus respond to institutional pressures in different ways (Oliver, 1991)
38 and enjoy some leeway in their approach to TM. The role of factors such as human agency,
39 leadership, the financial health of the company and the existence of HR managers should not
40 be overlooked (Boon et al., 2009). In other words, institutional pressures are not deterministic
41 but are rather affected by key decision makers including CEOs and HR managers, and there is
42 scope for strategic choice in terms of the implementation of practices (ibid.). In their responses,
43 organisations may be seen as ‘leaders’, ‘followers’ or ‘laggards’, depending on whether they
44 adopt innovative, reactive or passive responses to institutional pressures (Mirvis, 1997). Thus,
45 by utilising the theoretical perspective of institutional theory and the scope for strategic choice
46 in implementation, this study aims to establish the extent to which the nature and practice of
47 TM among internationally oriented Greek SMEs are influenced by the country’s institutional
48 context. In the following section, we discuss Greece’s institutional environment and broad
49 employee management factors, which may have affected TM in the country’s SMEs.
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Greece’s institutional environment

1
2
3 In 2007/2008, Greece was strongly affected by the global financial crisis, which led to
4 explosive public debt and huge budget deficits, as well as exposing the problem of tax evasion
5 (Eibel, 2015). To avoid default, three MoUs were agreed in 2010, 2012 and 2015 between the
6 Greek government and the European ‘Troika’ (comprised of the European Commission,
7 European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund). These involved multi-billion
8 loan agreements in exchange for changes in economic and financial policies, draconian
9 austerity measures, labour law reforms, and privatisation of state assets (European
10 Commission, 2017). During this period, most macroeconomic, social and health indicators
11 dramatically declined (Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou, 2015). GDP dropped by 25% since 2008
12 (OECD, 2016), and approximately half of private sector workers’ salaries were below the
13 poverty line for a family of four (OECD, 2018b). Furthermore, the shrinking economy
14 dramatically affected employment in the country, raising the youth unemployment rate to 50%
15 by the end of 2015 (OECD, 2018b) and contributing to the ‘brain drain’ emigration of 450,000
16 mostly young and skilled workers.
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27

28
29 The Greek crisis had a strong institutional dimension (Vlados and Chatzinikolaou,
30 2020) due to the country’s weak institutional system. Analysts highlighted a number of ‘civic
31 pathogenies’ including political corruption, populism, clientelistic relations with specific
32 interest groups (Theocharis and Deth, 2015), the asymmetrical institutional framework of the
33 Eurozone (Pagoulatos, 2020), and Greece’s competitiveness model (Pitelis, 2012). Some argue
34 that the country still suffers from ‘institutional deficit’ and view Greece as a rather closed
35 economy whose extractive institutions discourage innovation and entrepreneurship; the
36 country is also seen as suffering from excessive and low-quality regulation, and a slow judicial
37 system (Hatzis, 2018).
38
39
40
41
42
43
44

45 During this important period for Greece, a number of significant institutional changes
46 and restructurings were implemented (Vlados and Chatzinikolaou, 2020). The Troika deemed
47 the Greek labour market to be overly regulated, and in order to rectify the situation, they
48 instituted a set of major labour market reforms (OECD, 2018b). Widescale wage reductions
49 were implemented, collective agreements were frozen and collective bargaining was
50 decentralised (OECD, 2018b). Temporary contracts became more common, dismissals
51 thresholds were relaxed and private employment agencies were allowed to recruit workers to
52 temporary positions (ibid.). As a result, the number of atypical contracts increased, with a
53 growing share of jobs becoming temporary or part-time and paid at the minimum wage, leading
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 to a ‘pandemic of work precariousness’ (Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou, 2015, p. 220). Some
4 believed that Greece had become a laboratory for neoliberal policies (Eibel, 2015).
5
6
7

8 Compared to the institutional environments in other European countries, which
9 supported SMEs in employee management issues (e.g. Germany; see Festing et al., 2013),
10 Greece’s institutional changes drove many Greek SMEs to bankruptcy (Sainis et al., 2017). In
11 response to the challenges of the country’s institutional environment, Greek SMEs used
12 informal practices (Tsilika et al., 2020) in the employee management area. Although empirical
13 studies on Greek SMEs have been limited to HRM areas (see Stavrou and Papalexandris,
14 2016), it has been suggested that the lifeline to sustainability for Greek SMEs was their talented
15 employees, who generally have a good work ethic, are goal-oriented, team players, extroverts,
16 adaptable and intelligent (Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou, 2019). This suggests the need to
17 investigate the role of talents in SMEs in responding to Greece’s institutional environment.
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

26 In conclusion, Greece has been exposed to major structural and institutional changes
27 agreed between the national government and the Troika, geared towards liberalisation,
28 deregulation and labour market flexibility. In this environment, many companies in Greece,
29 including SMEs, responded with restrictive measures (Correia et al., 2015). These included
30 payroll cost adjustments, hiring freezes, redundancies and training budget cuts, reflecting the
31 adjustments businesses made to HRM practices and internal employment systems in order to
32 survive (Teague and Roche, 2014). Unsurprisingly, Greek employees working under these
33 conditions showed lower levels of job satisfaction, commitment and morale (Markovits et al.,
34 2017). Having gone through waves of political, economic and social turmoil (European
35 Commission, 2017), the county has since been on track to recovery (OECD, 2018b).
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43

44 ***Talent management in SMEs***

45
46
47 From an operational perspective, companies either consider all staff as talent who can
48 contribute to organisational goals (i.e. inclusive TM) or exclusively invest in their top
49 performers/potential, from whom they can expect faster and higher returns (i.e. exclusive TM)
50 (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). In the case of SMEs, exclusive TM does not fit with the
51 egalitarian culture, which values teamwork and flexibility; more inclusive approaches to TM
52 are therefore more commonly adopted, reflecting the belief of SMEs in the potential of all
53 employees to add value (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). In Germany, for example, Festing et al.
54 (2013) found that a majority of surveyed SMEs adopted an inclusive TM approach, enacting
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 TM practices that targeted the whole workforce; in Spain, Valverde et al. (2013) suggested that
4 SMEs appear to adopt a hybrid approach.
5
6
7

8 For SMEs, the implementation of informal, flexible and personalised practices gives a
9 much-needed competitive advantage (Dundon and Wilkinson, 2009), as well as reducing costs
10 and securing organisational flexibility (Jack et al., 2006). In addition, SMEs rarely use formal
11 talent identification, preferring to rely on informal practices to identify talented employees
12 (Valverde et al., 2013). This serves to protect employee morale and teamwork (Krishnan and
13 Scullion, 2017), highlighting the fact that a more inclusive approach to TM is a better fit in this
14 context. Informal TM practices are employed by SMEs for the purposes of talent acquisition,
15 development and retention (Sparrow et al., 2014); these shall be examined below.
16
17
18
19
20
21
22

23 ***Talent acquisition in SMEs***

24
25 TM policies increasingly focus on developing both employee value propositions and employer
26 brands in order to source the best talent available (Martin and Sinclair, 2019). Since there is
27 increasing competition for the best talent, developing a strong employer image is essential, and
28 many companies invest heavily in promoting themselves as being one of the best places to
29 work (Sparrow and Makram, 2015).
30
31
32
33
34

35 Although employee value propositions and employer brands are important, they are
36 challenging for SMEs. Although research on talent acquisition in SMEs is limited, studies
37 suggest that SMEs lack visibility, resources (Storey et al., 2010) and legitimacy, thus limiting
38 the information available to their potential talent pool (Williamson et al., 2002). In addition,
39 SMEs tend to recruit in separate talent pools than those of MNCs and large firms (ibid.). They
40 also adopt fit-to-context talent acquisition methods that are not included in the best practices'
41 'package' utilised by MNCs (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). There is also heavy reliance on
42 informal talent attraction, e.g. word of mouth, friends and relatives (Festing et al., 2013).
43
44
45
46
47
48
49

50 ***Talent development in SMEs***

51
52 Talent development is a key element of the TM process (Cappelli, 2009) and should be dynamic
53 and linked with the strategic trajectory of the organisation. A key issue in talent development
54 is whether companies make or buy talent. The latter has become more common but is unlikely
55 to be successful in the long term (Bidwell, 2011). Developing talent internally is effective in
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 addressing both employee and organisational needs (Sparrow et al, 2014); it also enhances the
4 gaining of organisational knowledge (Lepak and Snell, 1999), as well as helping to make
5 succession planning more effective (Gandz, 2006).
6
7

8
9 Talent development is also important in ensuring both the current and future supply of
10 talented employees at the organisational level (Vaiman et al., 2018). It seeks to provide job and
11 career-related competency for individuals and involves a range of practices, including
12 leadership development programmes, mentoring and team working (Bjorkman et al, 2017).
13 Talent development could particularly assist SMEs in training employees to fill various
14 strategic roles as the business expands (Heneman et al., 2000). To date, there is little empirical
15 research on how SMEs develop their talents. This study will explore this area in the context of
16 internationally oriented Greek SMEs.
17
18
19
20
21
22
23

24 *Talent retention in SMEs*

25
26
27 Since talent scarcity and growing competition for talent are growing challenges for employers
28 worldwide, retaining talent is a critical TM challenge (D'Amato and Herzfeldt, 2008). This is
29 actually one of the main reasons why organisations set up and invest resources in TM systems
30 (Holland and Scullion, 2021). It is, however, far from clear as to just how effective companies
31 are in retaining talent and developing effective talent pipelines (Martin and Schmidt, 2010).
32
33
34
35
36

37 The fact that talent is becoming increasingly mobile, together with the erosion of loyalty
38 and traditional psychological contracts, makes talent retention increasingly challenging (Pate
39 and Scullion, 2018). The costs of replacing talent—which may involve loss of expertise and
40 client relationships—can be considerable, and those with the most marketable skills are the
41 most likely to leave first (Holland and Scullion, 2021). An increasing number of organisations,
42 including SMEs, use several strategies to minimise turnover. These include compensation and
43 benefits, organisational environment, promotion of work–life balance (Sparrow et al., 2014)
44 and additional non-monetary rewards (Silzer and Dowell, 2010). There has been little research
45 on the factors affecting talent retention in SMEs; this study will explore this area in the context
46 of internationally oriented Greek SMEs.
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54

55 **Methodology, data collection and analysis**

56 *Method*

57
58
59
60

1
2
3 This study adopted a qualitative multiple case-study approach, which is suitable as it enables
4 researchers to both understand and analyse the nature of particular practices implemented in
5 the real business environment (Holliday, 2002). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a
6 qualitative, exploratory approach to research enables researchers to access new and rich (raw)
7 data, which is necessary for gaining more nuanced insights into the subject of inquiry (Wöcke
8 et al., 2007).
9

10
11
12
13
14
15 Given that that there is no global consensus about the definition of SMEs (Krishnan
16 and Scullion, 2017), when identifying the study sample, we chose to follow similar TM studies
17 completed in the European SME context (e.g. Festing et al., 2013). We adopted the European
18 Commission's (2020) definition, according to which SMEs are considered companies whose
19 balance sheet total is €43 million or less and with a maximum of 250 employees. This definition
20 further distinguishes between micro (maximum 10 employees), small (11-50 employees) and
21 medium (51-250 employees) companies; our sample falls within the medium-sized category,
22 which employs a growing segment of the active European population (Valverde et al., 2013)
23 and whose TM practices are more sophisticated (Festing et al., 2013; Savov et al., 2020).
24
25
26
27
28
29

30
31 We used cluster probability sampling to identify our sampled companies. This method
32 was appropriate because personal contact with the sample was necessary for the completion of
33 interviews (Saunders et al., 2009); it also enabled us to geographically cover the whole country.
34 Greece was divided into the northern, central and southern clusters. In selecting cases for our
35 sample, the inclusion requirements for SMEs were:
36
37
38
39

- 40
41 (1) to be global competitors and operating in Greece,
42
43 (2) to have remained profitable despite the tough economy. either by generating
44 innovative products/services (i.e. leaders) or by adopting innovative technologies
45 (i.e. adopters; Voumvaki et al., 2020),
46
47 (3) to implement TM policies and/or practices,
48
49 (4) to be staffed by between 50-249 employees (European Commission, 2020).
50
51

52
53 We identified six companies that satisfied the inclusion criteria and represented various
54 industries. This increased the reliability and validity of cross-case comparisons (Bryman, 2012;
55 see Table 1). They were all innovative SMEs—either leaders or adopters—with global
56 presence and who worked predominantly with clients outside Greece. In response to Greece's
57 significant 'brain drain', which saw mass emigration of mostly young and skilled individuals
58
59
60

(OECD, 2018b), the distinctive sampled companies implemented TM with the aim to attract, develop and retain talented Greeks with working experience abroad and who could satisfy their global clients' expectations.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Data collection

In line with studies on TM in the context of SMEs (e.g. Chung and D'Annunzio-Green, 2018; Festing et al., 2013), we interviewed the CEO, the HR manager and a line manager of each business, as these individuals are the most knowledgeable about HR-related company issues. In SMEs, top managers have overall control of employee management decisions, which—along with the informal nature of practices—enhance the resilience of growing SMEs to deploy talents (Heneman et al., 2000). They are also viewed as strategic figures in planning and implementing TM practices in SMEs (Cardon and Stevens, 2004), given the business size and the inability to have specialised HR departments (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). Top managers thus make a significant contribution to the enactment of TM practices (Joyce and Slocum, 2012).

Prior to the interviews, several meetings were held with the top management of all the sample businesses in which it was established that the selected interviewees participate in the design and/or enactment of TM. In total, 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted, satisfying the suggested threshold (see Saunders and Townsend, 2016). For the interviews, we used key terminology to ensure shared understanding of core concepts among all participants. We also followed a precise interview protocol, which mirrored our study's objective (Bryman, 2012). The interview protocol began with questions on the companies' backgrounds and then focused on talent acquisition, development and retention practices. The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes each and were conducted in Greek, before being manually transcribed and translated to English by two of the co-authors, who are fluent in both languages and have widely published qualitative studies in high-impact journals. Their multilingual expertise helped to ensure that none of the meaning was lost in translation (Xian, 2008).

Data analysis

1
2
3 To synthesise the data, we employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedure
4 (TAP). This is a qualitative method used for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within
5 data by going back and forth between datasets. Following the pattern of Pratt et al. (2006), we
6 operationalised the process by adopting three key steps.
7
8
9

10
11 First, we created tentative categories using first-order codes, followed by a process of
12 data reduction through open coding. This was achieved by analysing textual content and
13 creating words and phrases that helped to convey the salient, summative, and essence-catching
14 features of interview excerpts (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Pratt et al., 2006) and directly address
15 the question of our study (Patton, 1990). Relying on Miles and Huberman's (1994) qualitative
16 analytical approach, and using the respondents' summary forms, we recorded tentative
17 categories that emerged from the dataset at each point in time. In doing so, we found data
18 excerpts that related to our key research question. In response to this question, provisional
19 descriptions from data excerpts (the closed economy, unwillingness to invest and labour laws,
20 among others) first suggested the country's institutional context, but also other themes
21 including online advertising and referral—which align with known talent acquisition methods
22 (see Table 2). For talent development, the provisional responses uncovered department level,
23 employee level, training method and evaluation, among others, all of which are subject to
24 Greece's institutional constraints (Vlados and Chatzinikolaou, 2020). Following the naming of
25 codes and construction of categories, we reviewed the data carefully to make sure that crucial
26 narratives, accounts and excerpts fit well within each category.
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

40 Secondly, we proceeded to creating theoretical categories by consolidating first-order
41 codes that emerged from the interview data in each category. This captured variables such as
42 'macroeconomic decline', 'recruitment methods', 'idiosyncratic qualities', 'selection method',
43 'training need identification', 'training frequency', 'training target group' and 'on-the-job';
44 among others. As Pratt et al. (2006, p. 240) advised, this step allowed our first-order coding to
45 become 'more theoretical and more abstract'.
46
47
48
49
50

51 We then took the third and final step of the process, consolidating the conceptual
52 categories. This helped to generate theoretical clarification for the manifestation of the
53 phenomenon under inquiry (Braun and Clark, 2006; Pratt et al., 2006). The process enabled us
54 to uncover key themes pertaining to how Greece's institutional context influences talent
55 acquisition, development and retention. We continued to cross-compare and validate the
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 conceptual categories of the process until we finally agreed on these key themes of our study,
4 which are informed by the dataset (Braun and Clark, 2006).
5
6
7

8 [Insert Table 2 about here]
9

10 11 **Findings**

12 13 ***Talent acquisition in the institutional context of Greek SMEs***

14
15 According to our findings, internationally oriented Greek SMEs use a mix of informal
16 recruitment and selection methods to acquire talent, rather than adopting sophisticated methods
17 of talent acquisition as do MNCs (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). All the sampled SMEs invest
18 substantially in advertising vacancies on job websites while simultaneously depending on
19 university contacts, referrals from current staff and recruitment agencies:
20
21
22
23
24
25

26
27 *We initially advertise a job opening online in various job websites as well as we derive*
28 *CVs from universities. We also make this job opening known to our staff with a notice*
29 *on the bulletin board and ask them for referrals. If none of the applicants is qualified,*
30 *we might also use external recruitment agencies (HR Manager C).*
31
32
33
34

35 In addition, the majority of the investigated SMEs primarily use face-to-face interviews
36 to select potential talent. For positions that require particular expertise, they conduct multiple
37 interview sessions, including aptitude tests and telephone interviews:
38
39
40

41
42 *Since people with specific expertise should fill all positions in our company, we follow*
43 *three stages. At a first stage, successful candidates attend face-to-face interviews with*
44 *one of our senior managers who check their technical knowledge through practical*
45 *exercises. I will then face-to-face interview those who successfully passed the first stage*
46 *aiming to determine their communication and technical skills. At a third stage, our*
47 *American partner will complete a telephone interview with the finalists to check their*
48 *capacity and ability to handle challenging technical issues (CEO B).*
49
50
51
52
53

54
55 There could be three explanations as to why SMEs adopt a less strategic approach to
56 talent acquisition, all of which relate to institutional context. The first of these relates to the
57 Greek institutional environment, which is characterised by reforms (Vlados and
58 Chatzinikolaou, 2020), renewal of temporary contracts, relaxed dismissals (OECD, 2018b) and
59
60

1
2
3 increases in the number of temporary or part-time members of the workforce who earn a
4 minimum wage (Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou, 2015). These factors may all serve to deter talented
5 individuals who are considering employment in Greek SMEs. Greek SMEs need to develop a
6 talented workforce who can develop innovative products/services and meet the needs of their
7 global clients (Voumvaki et al., 2020); they must therefore utilise a range of sources to attract
8 scarce talent, often including flexible and personalised approaches (Dundon and Wilkinson,
9 2009). This explains the creative talent acquisition practices commonly used by SMEs to attract
10 talent from diverse talent pools (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017).
11
12
13
14
15
16
17

18 Second, SMEs may lack expertise in acquiring talent (Festing et al., 2013) and adopting
19 a strategic approach in this area. Third, important TM decisions are usually taken by SMEs'
20 top management (Jack et al., 2006). In Greek's institutional context, which drove many SMEs
21 to bankruptcy (Sainis et al., 2017), some internationally oriented SMEs may have prioritised
22 the restructuring of the business over more systematic—yet costly—approaches to talent
23 acquisition.
24
25
26
27
28
29

30 When looking for idiosyncratic qualities in potential talent, the majority of the sampled
31 SMEs looked for individuals who possess a combination of skills (e.g. communication skills,
32 customer-service skills), personality traits (e.g. confident, kind, smiley) and a particular
33 character (e.g. passionate about their job):
34
35
36
37

38 *We are looking for people who are honest, kind and have passion for their job (CEO*
39 *A).*
40
41

42 *Apart from the basic and relevant to the job knowledge, a successful applicant should*
43 *be able to communicate well and demonstrate confidence in doing their job*
44 *appropriately. This is key for our business (CEO C).*
45
46
47

48 *We are searching for warm people. To put it simply, we are looking for smiley people*
49 *(Line Manager E).*
50
51
52

53 *Due to the nature of our job, we are looking for people who possess excellent customer*
54 *service skills (CEO F).*
55
56
57

58 This is evidence that in Greek SMEs, it is an individual's unique attributes, and not the
59 critical position they hold, that mainly define talent. This is in line with the general
60

1
2
3 conceptualisation of talent in the SME context (see Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). One possible
4 interpretation of this rather subjective approach to talent might be that in an institutional
5 environment of reforms such as that of Greece (Vlados and Chatzinikolaou, 2020), what is
6 considered a critical position today might well vary from what will be considered a key position
7 tomorrow. It is also possible to explain that since Greek SMEs work in a volatile environment
8 where changes are common, it is imperative to have a workforce that is good natured, skilled
9 and adaptable.

16 ***Talent development in the institutional context of Greek SMEs***

18
19 When discussing the issue of talent development, the majority of respondents reported that
20 although developmental opportunities are offered to all staff, they are driven by employee
21 and/or departmental training needs. This is consistent with a hybrid approach to TM (Valverde
22 et al., 2013) and suggests that talent development addresses deficits stemming from changes in
23 the institutional environment. The majority of our respondents argued that although all
24 employees receive continuous general training, it is likely that this training will be on an ad-
25 hoc tailored basis:

26
27 *It is a given that we offer opportunities for development to all employees regardless of*
28 *their position, such as general training during the induction period. The nature of the*
29 *training obviously depends on a department's or employee's needs (HR Manager F).*

30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39 An additional point made by all respondents was that training mainly takes place
40 through ad-hoc seminars, followed by coaching and on-the-job training:

41
42
43
44 *All employees are supported to attend external seminars, for example delivered by*
45 *universities. As the manager of the front-office department, I also have the*
46 *responsibility to coach my team and arrange for senior staff to show to new employees*
47 *how to accomplish particular tasks related to their job (Line Manager F).*

48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
Despite the difficulties of Greece's economic climate, the sampled SMEs offered learning and training to their employees not only to meet business needs, but also out of a sense of duty:

In Greece, we believe we must do more to enhance development in talent and innovation. I mean, despite the economic down-turn and other sociocultural norms and

1
2
3 *constraints, we, as international corporations, must do what is needed. We have to lead*
4 *change, and that is why we must invest in talent development (CEO A).*
5
6
7

8 Formal planning and implementation of developmental initiatives are unlikely to be
9 present in SMEs, possibly because their structure and operations largely depend on institutional
10 parameters that interplay. For example, in order to deal with the country's austerity measures
11 and new tax requirements (Tsilika et al., 2020), many Greek SMEs proceeded to strategically
12 restructure their businesses (Sainis et al., 2017), downsizing their training departments and
13 investing less in training. Larger organisations generally adopt a more strategic approach to
14 talent development (Savov et al., 2020). SMEs, however, tended to employ talent development
15 methods that were more flexible and tailored to their own needs (Chung and D'Annunzio-
16 Green, 2018), while at the same time—given the external environmental pressures—also
17 seeking to reduce costs.
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

26 Moreover, the majority of interviewees argued that post-training evaluations take place
27 at the learning level, and are aimed at identifying discrepancies between training expectations
28 and outcomes:
29
30

31
32 *Training is evaluated by both the trainer and the trainees. We ask for this to see if*
33 *trainees improved their performance after successfully completing the training (HR*
34 *Manager A).*
35
36
37
38

39 Investment in talent development is a significant TM practice for internationally
40 oriented Greek SMEs. In an institutional environment known for its draconian austerity
41 measures and labour law reforms (European Commission, 2017), we found evidence that Greek
42 SMEs may have viewed talent development as an alternative to financial incentives. This has
43 also been found in other countries where firms responded to the institutional environment by
44 developing staff internally (Heneman et al., 2000), an effective and cost-efficient approach to
45 addressing talent scarcity (Festing et al., 2013). SMEs may therefore view talent development
46 as a vehicle to address the ever-changing needs of both companies and their staff (Sparrow et
47 al, 2014).
48
49
50
51
52
53
54

55 ***Talent retention in the institutional context of Greek SMEs***
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 In the context of a country with high youth unemployment, significantly depletion of the
4 workforce due to brain-drain, and a considerable portion of private-sector employee salaries
5 below the poverty line (OECD, 2018b), the sampled Greek SMEs highlighted that talent
6 retention was a priority for them. All 18 interviewees claimed that both intrinsic and extrinsic
7 incentives are offered to their whole workforce. While inclusive talent retention methods may
8 be a product of the SME egalitarian culture in general (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017), SMEs in
9 Greece recognise that talented employees are scarce, have been invested in and are at risk of
10 being lost to competitors; businesses were therefore particularly eager to retain talent.
11
12
13
14
15
16
17

18 *When our company is at a stage where it is neither profitable nor productive, then*
19 *employees feel insecure, lose interest and search for jobs in other similar companies.*
20 *Monetary and non-monetary incentives are offered to all employees because they assist*
21 *us in building internal talent capacity (Line Manager C).*
22
23
24
25

26 In addition, performance evaluations are subjective indicators, and an exclusive
27 approach to talent retention could have a negative impact on employee morale (Gallardo-
28 Gallardo et al., 2013). In order for SMEs to retain expertise and client relationships (Holland
29 and Scullion, 2021) while simultaneously protecting employee morale (Krishnan and Scullion,
30 2017), they may have chosen to develop effective talent pipelines (Martin and Schmidt, 2010)
31 by inclusively offering incentives. Unsurprisingly, bonuses, competitive salaries and health
32 insurance packages dominated extrinsic rewards, while intrinsic rewards included training
33 opportunities, promotions, good relationships with top management and recognition. In line
34 with Chung and D'Annunzio-Green's (2018) assertion that SMEs compensate their inability
35 to offer financial incentives with non-financial rewards, our informants reported that for SMES,
36 the importance of intrinsic rewards often outweighs that of extrinsic incentives; this was due
37 in part to the mutual realisation that due to financial constrains (Theriou and Chatzoudes,
38 2015), resources were limited:
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49

50 *In 2011, our company was financially devastated by the 2007/2008 economic recession.*
51 *However, no employee quitted or was made redundant. Although increments in salaries*
52 *or bonuses were impossible, we offered to our personnel additional training*
53 *opportunities. Such an incentive led to 100% talent retention, because our personnel*
54 *appreciated that we support their continuous professional development despite the*
55 *challenging business environment. Good relationships with top management are*
56 *undoubtedly an additional vehicle in retaining our staff (HR Manager A).*
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 *We offer a range of financial and non-financial rewards to our people, e.g. competitive*
4 *salary, health insurance, training opportunities and promotions. Under current*
5 *circumstances, we managed to retain employees mainly by providing them some sort of*
6 *ownership (HR Manager E).*
7
8
9

10
11 *Recognition, training opportunities and bonuses are the key ‘ingredients’ of our*
12 *retention pack (Line Manager A).*
13
14
15

16 Talent retention was regarded as a key issue for the SMEs in the study. This was
17 unsurprising, as regardless of their size, all organisations compete for talent globally (D’Amato
18 and Herzfeldt, 2008). But Greece’s institutional environment also played an important role.
19 The significant decline of macroeconomic indicators (Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou, 2015), as well
20 as the radical labour law reforms (European Commission, 2017), created a large outflow of
21 youth talent to other countries (OECD, 2018b). SMEs with an international outlook therefore
22 invested heavily in incentives to retain talent, including monetary and non-monetary (e.g.
23 bonuses and training opportunities) rewards.
24
25
26
27
28
29
30

31 **Discussion**

32
33 TM is increasingly important for SMEs, as it assists them in attracting, recruiting, developing
34 and retaining talents (Piansoongnern et al., 2011). However, there is still a dearth of research
35 in this area in European SMEs (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). Aiming to contribute to this
36 field, we focused on the major choices made by internationally oriented Greek SMEs with
37 regard to talent acquisition, development and retention, seeking to glean information about how
38 they managed to remain competitive. Drawing on institutional theory, we made a distinctive
39 contribution to the literature on TM in SMEs by providing a comprehensive picture of how the
40 Greek institutional context—an environment of ongoing liberalisation reforms, strict austerity
41 measures and talent scarcity—had a profound yet indeterministic influence on the nature and
42 practice of TM among its internationally oriented SMEs.
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50

51 With regards to talent acquisition in the institutional context, we found that faced with
52 the outflow of youth talent, internationally oriented Greek SMEs employ a variety of informal,
53 cost-sensitive and often personalised methods of talent acquisition. A significant finding that
54 contradicts Valverde et al. (2013) is that the conceptualisation of talent in Greek SMEs was not
55 linked to their key positions but rather to more general criteria, indicating that talent equals the
56 unique attributes of individual employees that fit into a specific life stage of an SME (Krishnan
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 and Scullion, 2017). Both skills (such as customer service and communication skills) and
4 personal traits (such as confidence, honesty and passion) were key criteria in determining
5 talent, suggesting a divergence from the conceptualisation of talent in larger Greek-based
6 companies (see Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou, 2019).
7
8
9

10
11 Our research also highlighted that internationally oriented Greek SMEs invest
12 significantly in informal, cost-effective methods of training and development, despite the
13 highly volatile institutional context forcing many organisations to dramatically reduce their
14 training expenditure. This distinctive group of internationally oriented Greek SMEs continued
15 investing in talent development, driven both by employee and departmental needs. They
16 utilised mainly ad-hoc seminars, coaching and on-the-job training. By embracing internal talent
17 development in difficult times, these SMEs gained the benefits of a high-skilled workforce
18 (Sainis et al., 2017), addressed talent shortages within the sector (Theriou and Chatzoudes,
19 2015) and not least won the appreciation of their workforce. In some respects, investment in
20 talent development was viewed as an alternative incentive offered to talented workers, which
21 could also assist SMEs in addressing wider TM challenges (Sparrow et al., 2014) resulting
22 from institutional forces.
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32

33 Our findings also indicate that talent retention is a key issue for this distinctive group
34 of Greek SMEs, which they seek to address by offering both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives
35 to their workforce. SMEs tend to approach talent retention with an inclusive and egalitarian
36 perspective, geared at for reducing turnover and maintaining a positive relationship with
37 workers (Holland and Scullion, 2021). Having invested substantial effort in attracting and
38 developing talent—in a particularly challenging external environment that discourages
39 entrepreneurship—the SMEs in our study placed strong emphasis on talent retention (Hatzis,
40 2018), ensuring that they held on to talents who could meet their global clients' expectations.
41
42
43
44
45
46
47

48 We have already noted that organisations respond to institutional pressure in different
49 ways (Oliver, 1991), and as Boon et al. (2009) assert, how they implement TM is largely
50 determined by the role of human agency, as well as additional factors such as leadership, the
51 company's financial health and the modus operandi of the HR managers. This was true for the
52 Greeks SMEs in our study, who—despite the challenging business environment of economic
53 hardships and ethical breakdown (Tasoulis et al., 2019)—chose to invest in inclusive TM
54 practices, rather than downsizing and laying off employees. This shows that although
55 institutional pressures matter, they were not entirely deterministic in this case. We conclude
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 that TM decisions are mostly linked to key decision makers, including CEOs and HR managers.
4 The SMEs in our study may thus be regarded as ‘innovators’ compared to other Greek SMEs
5 (Oliver, 1991).
6
7
8

9 **Implications for theory and practice**

10
11 This study provides empirical evidence of TM practice in Greek SMEs who were able to
12 withstand the country’s institutional context. It extends TM literature in that it determines the
13 TM nature and practices embedded in SMEs. Our study has made a theoretical contribution in
14 this context, exploring the practices of talent acquisition, development and retention adopted
15 by the sampled SMEs, all of whom were influenced by the institutional context (Krishnan and
16 Scullion, 2017) yet were able to respond as ‘innovators’, persevering in their emphasis on TM.
17 Our study highlights the distinctive nature of TM in the SME context, shedding light on an
18 important and relatively underexplored area and contributing to knowledge of the discipline.
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

26
27 In addition to the conceptual contribution, our study also highlights important practical
28 implications for stakeholders—SMEs, HR practitioners and policymakers—for how the
29 institutional dynamic may affect TM practices. As our findings suggest, as a response to
30 adversity, successful companies have recognised that building human capacity is key to success
31 (Sainis et al., 2017). This study provides stakeholders with insights into how effective TM
32 practices can be considered a lifeline to organisational sustainability—particularly for SMEs
33 in the contemporary challenging and fiercely competitive business environment (Krishnan and
34 Scullion, 2017). This highlights the potential of inclusive TM practices to be part of an effective
35 workforce management strategy: relative to the prevailing institutional dynamic, stakeholders
36 (policymakers and HR practitioners) must engage in the multiple areas of individual talent
37 acquisition, development and retention.
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46

47 The study also suggests that an inclusive TM approach can be strategic when it fits with
48 the business strategy and organisational culture, and that senior SME managers choose this
49 approach to managing talent because it fits better within their organisational context. Elitist or
50 exclusive TM strategies can undermine employee morale, particularly in the case of untalented
51 workers. Such approaches are therefore inappropriate, and indeed rare, in the SME context
52 (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). Another reason for this is the fact that such strategies carry an
53 additional cost due to the huge investment required for the strategic development of identified
54 talents (Chung and D’Annunzio-Green, 2018).
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

It must, however, be noted that in a volatile business environment, organisational disruption and change can force SMEs into adopting cost-cutting mechanisms that can reduce investment in the training and development of talented employees in key operational areas (Jiang and Iles, 2011). Therefore, in order to ensure that efforts towards talent acquisition, development and retention are not undermined by short-term pressures, SMEs must endeavour to meet their needs in cost-effective ways while at the same time placing egalitarian and inclusive emphasis at the forefront of their TM practice (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). Organisational commitment to egalitarian and inclusive emphasis is crucial in the TM effort; in addition to enhancing employees' buy-in and perception of being valued, it also increases their commitment and retention, as well as the release of the unique knowledge and skills that the talent possesses (Ogbonna and Harris, 2015). In summary, we suggest that inclusive TM is a strategic approach for effective TM implementation in SMEs.

Limitations and directions for future research

The current study shows that contemporary businesses have experienced a transition period, which necessitated considering an inclusive TM approach to help build and sustain human capacity (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). However, our data do not show the extent to which this was influenced by internal and/or external elements. Indeed, this transition may have been caused by a wide range of factors, such as culture, legislation, technology, increased immigration and skill shortage (Holland and Scullion, 2021). Future research could explore the extent to which these or other factors served to impact this transition. At any rate, the SMEs studied have already adapted to the contemporary reality and built effective TM strategies to deal with all of these contextual elements.

Moreover, the sample size of 18 respondents from six distinctive Greek SMEs may be considered relatively small and not representative of all Greek SMEs, which may limit the development of holistic and generalised conclusions from our findings. Additionally, following relevant extant research in the SME context (e.g. Chung and D'Annunzio-Green, 2018), we chose to explore the topic mainly from a managerial perspective; this was because top management can provide valuable insights on HR-related issues—especially in the context of SMEs, where decision-making is centralised (Heneman et al., 2000). Although our rigorous data analysis procedure helped to minimise these shortfalls, we suggest that future studies compare the voices from multiple organisational actors, including talents and non-talents. The present study would also benefit from additional quantitative data from more firms. A study of

1
2
3 Greek subsidiaries of MNCs, for example, would provide an important perspective and help
4 facilitate the generalisation of findings (Wöcke et al., 2007).
5
6

7 8 **Conclusion** 9

10 In conclusion, our paper explored the extent to which the Greek institutional context influences
11 TM among internationally oriented Greek SMEs. In this context, the study contributed to the
12 conceptualisation and definition of TM. It provided empirical evidence that talent in this
13 context was not related to key positions but rather to an individual's unique attributes—a
14 combination of skills, personality and character traits—such as passion for the job and
15 communication skills. The study also established that compared to MNCs, SMEs adopt a more
16 inclusive approach to TM practices; the importance of informal talent practices, which provide
17 flexibility for SMEs, was also noted. The study also highlighted the distinctive nature of the
18 TM issues, challenges and constraints faced by internationally oriented Greek SMEs compared
19 to large firms. The country's financial crisis posed immense challenges to all firms, yet by
20 retaining their TM emphasis in difficult times, the SMEs in our study managed to substantially
21 overcome them.
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31

32 **References** 33

- 34
35 Beamond, M.T., Farndale, E. and Härtel, C.E.J. (2016), "MNE translation of corporate talent
36 management strategies to subsidiaries in emerging economies", *Journal of World
37 Business*, Vol.51 No.4, pp.499-510.
38
39
40
41 Bidwell, M. (2011), "Paying more to get less: the effects of external hiring versus internal
42 mobility", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol.56 No.3, pp.369-407.
43
44
45
46 Bjorkman, I., Ehrnrooth, M., Makela, K. and Sumelius, J. (2017), "Talent Management in
47 Multinational Corporations" Collings, D.G., Mellahhi, K. and Cascio, W.F. (Eds.), *The
48 Oxford Handbook of Talent Management*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.461-477.
49
50
51
52
53 Boon, C., Paauwe, J., Boselie, P. and Den Hartog, D. (2009), "Institutional pressures and HRM:
54 developing institutional fit", *Personnel Review*, Vol.38 No.5, pp.492-508.
55
56
57
58 Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006), "Using thematic analysis in psychology", *Qualitative
59 Research in Psychology*, Vol.3, No.2, pp.77-101.
60

- 1
2
3 Bryman, A. (2012), *Social research methods*. Oxford university press, Oxford.
4
5
6 Cappelli, P. (2009), "A supply chain model for talent management", *People and*
7
8 *Strategy*, Vol.32 No.3, pp.4-7.
9
10 Cappelli, P. and Keller, J.R. (2014), "Talent management: conceptual approaches and practical
11
12 challenges", *Annual Review of Organisational Psychology and Organisational*
13
14 *Behavior*, Vol.1 No.1, pp.305-331.
15
16
17 Carbery, R. (2015), "Organisational learning", Carbery, R. and Cross, C. (Eds.), *Human*
18
19 *Resource Development: A Concise Introduction*, Red Globe Press, London, pp.84-102.
20
21
22 Cardon, M.S. and Stevens, C.E. (2004), "Managing human resources in small organisations:
23
24 what do we know?", *Human resource management review*, Vol.14 No.3, pp.295-323.
25
26
27 Chung, K.L. and D'Annunzio-Green, N. (2018), "Talent management practices in small-and
28
29 medium-sized enterprises in the hospitality sector", *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism*
30
31 *Themes*, Vol.10 No.1, pp.101-116.
32
33
34 Collings, D.G. and Mellahi, K. (2009), "Strategic talent management: a review and research
35
36 agenda", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol.19 No 4, pp.304-313.
37
38
39 Correia, T., Dussault, G. and Pontes, C. (2015), "The impact of the financial crisis on human
40
41 resources for health policies in three southern-Europe countries", *Health Policy*, Vol.119
42
43 No.12, pp.1600-1605.
44
45
46 Dacin, M.T, Goodstein, J. and Scott, W. (2002), "Institutional theory and institutional change:
47
48 introduction to the special research forum", *Academy of management journal*, Vol.45
49
50 No.1, pp.45-57.
51
52
53 D'Amato, A. and Herzfeldt, R. (2008), "Learning orientation, organisational commitment and
54
55 talent retention across generations: a study of European managers", *Journal of*
56
57 *Managerial Psychology*, Vol.23 No.8, pp.929-963.
58
59
60 Dundon, T. and Wilkinson, A. (2009), "Employee participation", Redman, T. and Wikinson,
A. (Eds.), *Contemporary Human Resource Management: Text and cases*, FT, Prentice
Hall, Essex, pp.405-424.

- 1
2
3 Eibel, D. (2015), “The financial crisis, austerity policy and Greece”, *Comparative Economic*
4 *Research*, Vol.18 No.4, pp.5-26.
5
6
7
8 European Commission. (2017), *European economy: The ESM stability support programme:*
9 *Greece, first and second reviews*, Institutional Papers 064, Union Europe, Luxembourg.
10
11
12 European Commission. (2020), “*User guide to the SME definition*”, available at:
13 [https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/conferences/state-](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/conferences/state-aid/sme/smedefinitionguide_en.pdf)
14 [aid/sme/smedefinitionguide_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/conferences/state-aid/sme/smedefinitionguide_en.pdf) (accessed 20 October 2020).
15
16
17
18
19 Festing, M., Schäfer, L. and Scullion, H. (2013), “Talent management in medium-sized
20 German companies: an explorative study and agenda for future research”, *The*
21 *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol.24 No.9, pp.1872-1893.
22
23
24
25 Gallardo-Gallardo, E., Dries, N. and González-Cruz, T.F. (2013), “What is the meaning of
26 ‘talent’ in the world of work?”, *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol.23 No.4,
27 pp.290-300.
28
29
30
31
32 Gallardo-Gallardo, E., Thunnissen, M. and Scullion, H. (2020), “Talent Management: context
33 matters”, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol.31 No.4, pp. 457-
34 473.
35
36
37
38 Gandz, J. (2006), “Talent development: the architecture of a talent pipeline that works”, *Ivey*
39 *Business Journal*, Vol.70 No.3, pp.1-4.
40
41
42
43 Harsch, K. and Festing, M. (2020), “Dynamic talent management capabilities and
44 organisational agility—A qualitative exploration”, *Human Resource Management*,
45 Vol.59 No.1, pp.43-61.
46
47
48
49 Hatzis, A. (2018), “Greece's institutional trap”, *Managerial and Decision Economics*, Vol.39
50 No.8, pp.838-845.
51
52
53
54 Heneman, R.L., Tansky, J.W. and Camp, S.M. (2000), “Human resource management practices
55 in small and medium-sized enterprises: unanswered questions and future research
56 perspectives”, *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, Vol.25 No.1, pp.11-26.
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 Holland, D. and Scullion, H. (2021), "Towards a talent retention model: mapping the building
4 blocks of psychological contract to the three stages of the acquisition process",
5 *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, (in press).
6
7
8
9
10 Holliday, A. (2002), "Distinguishing the voices of researchers and the people they research in
11 writing a qualitative research", Miller, S, K. and Thompson, P (Eds.), *Unity and Diversity*
12 *in Language*, London BAAL and Continuum, pp.125-137.
13
14
15
16 Jack, S., Hyman, J. and Osborne, F. (2006), "Small entrepreneurial ventures culture, change
17 and the impact on HRM: A critical review", *Human resource management*
18 *review*, Vol.16 No.4, pp.456-466.
19
20
21
22 Jackson, S.E. and Schuler, R.S. (1995), "Understanding human resource management in the
23 context of organisations and their environments", *Annual review of psychology*, Vol.46
24 No.1, pp.237-264.
25
26
27
28
29 Jiang, T. and Iles, P. (2011), "Employer-brand equity, organisational attractiveness and talent
30 management in the Zhejiang private sector, China", *Journal of Technology Management*
31 *in China*, Vol.6 No.1, pp.97-110.
32
33
34
35 Joyce, W.F. and Slocum, J.W. (2012), "Top management talent, strategic capabilities, and firm
36 performance", *Organisational Dynamics*, Vol.41 No.3, pp.183-193.
37
38
39
40 Khilji, S.E. and Schuler, R.S. (2017), "Talent management in the global context", Collings, D.
41 G., Mellahi, K. and Cascio, W. F. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Talent Management*,
42 Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.399-420.
43
44
45
46 Kirk, S., Howe-Walsh, L. and Scurry, T. (2020), "Reimagining global talent management?
47 Considering the implications of context for research and practice", available at:
48 [https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/journal/joepp/reimagining-global-talent-](https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/journal/joepp/reimagining-global-talent-management-considering-implications-context-research-and)
49 [management-considering-implications-context-research-and](https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/journal/joepp/reimagining-global-talent-management-considering-implications-context-research-and) (accessed 01 November
50 2020).
51
52
53
54
55
56 Kretsos, L. and Vogiatzoglou, M. (2015), "Lost in the ocean of deregulation? The Greek labour
57 movement in a time of crisis", *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, Vol.70 No.2,
58 pp.218-239.
59
60

- 1
2
3 Krishnan, T.N. and Scullion, H. (2017), "Talent management and dynamic view of talent in
4 small and medium enterprises", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol.27 No.3,
5 pp.431-441.
6
7
8
9
10 Lepak, D.P. and Snell, S.A. (1999), "The human resource architecture: toward a theory of
11 human capital allocation and development", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol.24
12 No.1, pp.31-48.
13
14
15
16 Marinakou, E. and Giousmpasoglou, C. (2019), "Talent management and retention strategies
17 in luxury hotels: evidence from four countries", *International Journal of Contemporary*
18 *Hospitality Management*, Vol.31 No.10, pp.3855-3878.
19
20
21
22 Markovits, Y., Boer, D., Gerbers, S. and van Dick, R. (2017), "The impact of a lasting
23 economic crisis on employee attitudes: a follow-up and extension", *Athens Journal of*
24 *Business & Economics*, Vol.3 No.2, pp.85-100.
25
26
27
28
29 Martin, G. and Sinclair, K. (2019), "Employer branding and corporate reputation management
30 in global companies: theory and practice", Collings, D. G., Scullion, H. and Caligiuri, P.
31 M. (Eds.), *Global Talent Management*, Routledge, New York, NY, pp.144-164.
32
33
34
35 Martin, J. and Schmidt, C. (2010), "How to keep your top talent", *Harvard Business Review*,
36 Vol.88, No.5, pp.54-61.
37
38
39
40 Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994), *Qualitative data analysis: an expanded sourcebook*,
41 Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
42
43
44
45 Mirvis, P.H. (1997), "Human resource management: leaders, laggards, and followers",
46 *Academy of Management Perspectives*, Vol.11 No.2, pp.43-56.
47
48
49 Morgan, G. and Hauptmeier, M. (2014), "Institutional theory in comparative employment
50 relations", Wilkinson, A., Wood, G. and Deeg R. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of*
51 *Employment Relations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.190-201.
52
53
54
55 Newell, S. (2005), "Recruitment and selection", Bach, S. (Ed.), *Managing Human Resources:*
56 *Personnel Management in Transition*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, pp.115-142.
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Nijs, S., Gallardo-Gallardo, E., Dries, N. and Sels, L. (2014), "A multidisciplinary review into
4 the definition, operationalisation, and measurement of talent", *Journal of World*
5 *Business*, Vol.49 No.2, pp.180-191.
6
7

8
9
10 OECD. (2016), *OECD economic surveys: Greece 2016*, OECD Publishing, Paris.
11

12
13 OECD. (2018a), "Skills for jobs", available at:
14 [https://www.oecdskillsforjobsdatabase.org/data/country_notes/Greece%20country%20](https://www.oecdskillsforjobsdatabase.org/data/country_notes/Greece%20country%20note.pdf)
15 [note.pdf](https://www.oecdskillsforjobsdatabase.org/data/country_notes/Greece%20country%20note.pdf) (accessed 09 November 2020).
16
17

18
19 OECD. (2018b), *OECD economic surveys: Greece 2018*, OECD Publishing, Paris.
20

21
22 Ogbonna, E. and Harris, L.C. (2015), "Subcultural tensions in managing organisational culture:
23 a study of an English Premier League football organisation", *Human Resource*
24 *Management Journal*, Vol.25 No.2, pp.217-232.
25
26

27
28 Oliver, C. (1991), "Strategic responses to institutional processes", *Academy of Management*
29 *Review*, Vol.16 No.1, pp.145-179.
30
31

32
33 Paauwe, J. and Boselie, P. (2003), "Challenging 'strategic HRM' and the relevance of the
34 institutional setting", *Human Resource Management Journal*, Vol.13 No.3, pp.56-70.
35
36

37
38 Pagoulatos, G. (2020), "EMU and the Greek crisis: testing the extreme limits of an asymmetric
39 union", *Journal of European Integration*, Vol.42 No.3, pp.363-379.
40
41

42
43 Pate, J. and Scullion, H. (2018), "The flexpatriate psychological contract: a literature review
44 and future research agenda", *The International Journal of Human Resource*
45 *Management*, Vol.29 No.8, pp.1402-1425.
46
47

48
49 Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Sage, London.
50

51
52 Piansoongnern, O., Anurit, P. and Kuyawattananonta, S. (2011), "Talent management in Thai
53 cement companies: a study of strategies and factors influencing employee engagement",
54 *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol.5 No.5, pp.1578-1583.
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 Pitelis, C.N. (2012), "On PIIGs, GAFFs, and BRICs: an insider-outsider's perspective on
4 structural and institutional foundations of the Greek crisis", *Contributions to Political*
5 *Economy*, Vol.31 No.1, pp.77-89.
6
7
8
9
10 Pratt, M.G., Rockmann, K.W. and Kaufmann, J.B. (2006), "Professional identity: the role of
11 work and identity learning cycles in the customisation of identity among medical
12 residents", *The Academy of Management Journal*, Vol.49, No.2, pp.235-262.
13
14
15
16 Psychogios, A., Brewster, C., Missopoulos, F., Kohont, A., Vatchkova, E. and Slavic, A.
17 (2014), "Industrial relations in South-Eastern Europe: disaggregating the contexts", *The*
18 *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol.25 No.11, pp.1592-1612.
19
20
21
22 Sainis, G., Haritos, G., Kriemadis, T. and Fowler, M. (2017), "The quality journey for Greek
23 SMEs and their financial performance", *Production & Manufacturing Research*, Vol.5
24 No.1, pp.306-327.
25
26
27
28
29 Saunders, M.N. and Townsend, K. (2016), "Reporting and justifying the number of interview
30 participants in organisation and workplace research." *British Journal of*
31 *Management*, Vol.27 No.4, pp.836-852.
32
33
34
35 Saunders, M.N., Thornhill, A. and Lewis, P. (2009), *Research Methods for Business Students*,
36 FT Prentice-Hall, London.
37
38
39
40 Savov, R., Lančarič, D. and Kozáková, J. (2020), "Size of the company as the main determinant
41 of talent management in Slovakia", *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, Vol.13
42 No.3, pp.1-14.
43
44
45
46 Silzer, R. and Dowell, B.E. (2010), "Strategic talent management matters", Silzer, R. and
47 Dowell, B. E, *Strategy-Driven Talent Management: A Leadership Imperative*, Jossey-
48 Bass, San Francisco, CA, pp.3-72.
49
50
51
52 Skuza, A., Scullion, H. and Collings, D.G. (2016), "Talent management in Europe", Dickmann,
53 M., Brewster, C. and Sparrow, P. (Eds.), *International Human Resource Management:*
54 *Contemporary HR Issues in Europe*, Routledge, New York, NY, pp.329-353.
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 Sparrow, P., Scullion, H. and Tarique, I. (2014), "Introduction: challenges for the field of
4 strategic talent management", Sparrow, P., Scullion, H. and Tarique, I. (Eds), *Strategic*
5 *Talent Management: Contemporary Issues in International Context*, Cambridge
6 University Press, Cambridge, pp.3-35.
7
8
9
10
11 Sparrow, P.R. and Makram, H. (2015), "What is the value of talent management? Building
12 value-driven processes within a talent management architecture", *Human Resource*
13 *Management Review*, Vol.25 No.3, pp.249-263.
14
15
16
17 Stahl, G.K., Björkman, I., Farndale, E., Morris, S.S., Paauwe, J., Stiles, P., Trevor, J. and
18 Wright, P.M. (2012), "Six principles of effective global talent management", *MIT Sloan*
19 *Management Review*, Vol.53 No.2, pp.24-32.
20
21
22
23
24 Stamouli, N. (2020), "Greece's reverse brain drain: government scheme offers cash to educated
25 Greeks who moved abroad during the crisis", available at:
26 [https://www.politico.eu/article/greece-reverse-brain-drain-skills-young-people-](https://www.politico.eu/article/greece-reverse-brain-drain-skills-young-people-financial-crisis/)
27 [financial-crisis/](https://www.politico.eu/article/greece-reverse-brain-drain-skills-young-people-financial-crisis/) (accessed 11 October 2020).
28
29
30
31
32 Statista. (2021), "Number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the European
33 Union in 2018 by size", available at: [https://www.statista.com/statistics/878412/number-](https://www.statista.com/statistics/878412/number-of-smes-in-europe-by-size/)
34 [of-smes-in-europe-by-size/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/878412/number-of-smes-in-europe-by-size/) (accessed 12 April 2021).
35
36
37
38 Stavrou, E.T. and Papalexandris, N. (2016), "Mediterranean HRM: key trends and challenges",
39 Dickmann, M., Brewster, C. and Sparrow, P. (Eds.), *International Human Resource*
40 *Management: Contemporary HR Issues in Europe*, Routledge, New York, pp.49-70.
41
42
43
44 Storey, D.J., Saridakis, G., Sen-Gupta, S., Edwards, P.K. and Blackburn, R.A. (2010), "Linking
45 HR formality with employee job quality: the role of firm and workplace size", *Human*
46 *Resource Management*, Vol.49 No.2, pp.305-329.
47
48
49
50
51 Tarique, I. and Schuler, R.S. (2010), "Global talent management: literature review, integrative
52 framework, and suggestions for further research", *Journal of World Business*, Vol.45
53 No.2, pp.122-133.
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 Tasoulis, K., Krepapa, A. and Stewart, M.M. (2019), “Leadership integrity and the role of
4 human resource management in Greece: gatekeeper or bystander?”, *Thunderbird*
5 *International Business Review*, Vol.61 No.3, pp.491-503.
6
7
8
9 Teague, P. and Roche, W.K. (2014), “Recessionary bundles: HR practices in the Irish economic
10 crisis”, *Human Resource Management Journal*, Vol.24 No.2, pp.176-192.
11
12
13
14 Theocharis, Y. and Deth, J.W.van. (2015), “A modern tragedy? Institutional causes and
15 democratic consequences of the Greek crisis”, *Representation*, Vol.51 No.1, pp.63-79.
16
17
18
19 Theodoropoulos, D., Kyridis, A., Zagkos, C. and Konstantinidou, Z. (2014), ““Brain drain”
20 phenomenon in Greece: young Greek scientists on their way to immigration in an era of
21 “crisis”. Attitudes, opinions and beliefs towards the prospect of migration”, *Journal of*
22 *Education and Human Development*, Vol.3 No.4, pp.229-248.
23
24
25
26
27 Theriou, G. and Chatzoudes, D. (2015), “Exploring the entrepreneurship-performance
28 relationship: evidence from Greek SMEs”, *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise*
29 *Development*, Vol.22 No.2, pp.352-375.
30
31
32
33 Tsilika, T., Kakouris, A., Apostolopoulos, N. and Dermatis, Z. (2020), “Entrepreneurial
34 bricolage in the aftermath of a shock: insights from Greek SMEs”, *Journal of Small*
35 *Business & Entrepreneurship*, Vol.32 No.6, pp.635-652.
36
37
38
39
40 Vaiman, V. and Brewster, C. (2015), “How far do cultural differences explain the differences
41 between nations? Implications for HRM”, *The International Journal of Human Resource*
42 *Management*, Vol.26 No.2, pp.151-164.
43
44
45
46 Vaiman, V., Sparrow, P., Schuler, R. and Collings, D.G. (2018), *Macro talent management: a*
47 *global perspective on managing talent in developed markets*, Routledge, New York, NY.
48
49
50
51 Valverde, M., Scullion, H. and Ryan, G. (2013), “Talent management in Spanish medium-sized
52 organisations”, *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol.24
53 No.9, pp.1832-1852.
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Vlado, C. and Chatzinikolaou, D. (2020), “Institutional dynamics and economic development
4 in Greece: an acemoglian approach”, *Research in Applied Economics*, Vol.12 No.1,
5 pp.12-32.
6
7

8
9 Voumvaki, J., Koutouzou, A., Sakkas, G., Konstantopoulou, N. and Krompas, I. (2020),
10 “SMEs: Survey of Greek business trends – Special focus: Innovation”, available at:
11 [https://www.nbg.gr/english/the-group/press-office/e-](https://www.nbg.gr/english/the-group/press-office/e-spot/reports/Documents/SMEs_Innovation_en.pdf)
12 [spot/reports/Documents/SMEs_Innovation_en.pdf](https://www.nbg.gr/english/the-group/press-office/e-spot/reports/Documents/SMEs_Innovation_en.pdf) (accessed 11 April 2021).
13
14
15

16
17 Williamson, I.O., Cable, D.M. and Aldrich, H.E. (2002), “Smaller but not necessarily weaker:
18 how small businesses can overcome barriers to recruitment”, Katz, J. and Welbourne,
19 T.M. (Eds.), *Managing people in entrepreneurial organisations: Learning from the*
20 *merger of entrepreneurship and human resource management*, Jai Press, Amsterdam,
21 pp.83-106.
22
23
24
25

26
27 Wöcke, A., Bendixen, M. and Rijamampianina, R. (2007), “Building flexibility into multi-
28 national human resource strategy: a study of four South African multi-national
29 enterprises”, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol.18 No.5,
30 pp.829-844.
31
32
33
34

35
36 Xian, H. (2008), “Lost in translation? Language culture and the roles of translator in cross-
37 cultural management research”, *Qualitative Research in Organisation*, Vol.3 No.3,
38 pp.231-245.
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Table 1. Background of sampled companies

Cases	Industry	Location	Year of establishment	Number of employees
A	Electronics	North Greece	1991	82
B	IT consultancy	North Greece	2003	55
C	Chemicals' manufacturer	Central Greece	1959	100
D	Industrial manufacturer	Central Greece	1962	100
E	MOT centre	South Greece	2003	93
F	Holiday Resort	South Greece	1992	120

Table 2. Coding framework

Research Inquiry	Illustrative Quotes	First-Order Codes	Consolidating Codes - Creating Conceptual Categories	Key Themes
How does Greece's institutional context shape talent acquisition, development and retention among SMEs in the country?	<i>Despite the economic downturn and other sociocultural norms and constraints, we as international corporations must do the needful (CEO A).</i>	Unwillingness to invest Closed economy Labour act	Macroeconomic decline Overwhelming labour law	Institutional Context
	<i>We initially advertise a job opening online in various job websites (HR Manager C).</i> <i>We are looking for people who are honest, kind and have passion for their job (CEO A).</i> <i>Our American partner will complete a telephone interview with the finalists to check their capacity and ability (CEO B).</i>	Advertise online, recruitment, university contacts, agencies, referrals from staff. Passion for job, communication skills, confidence, honesty, customer service skills, kind, smiley Face-to-face and phone interview, aptitude test	Recruitment methods Idiosyncratic qualities Selection methods	Talent Acquisition
	<i>Offer opportunities for development to all employees regardless of position (HR Manager F).</i> <i>Responsibility to coach my team</i>	Department level, employee level Continuous, ad-hoc Everyone, talents managers	Training need identification Training frequency Target group Training method and evaluation	Talent Development

1				
2				
3				
4	(Line Manager F).	On-the-job, coaching, learning, behaviour, reaction, result		
5	<i>Training is evaluated by both the trainer and the trainees (HR Manager A).</i>			
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13	<i>Monetary and non-monetary incentives are offered to all employees (Line Manager C).</i>	Bonuses, laptops competitive pay, health insurance, paid travel expenses, corporate cars, pay increase, gift, overtime pay	Extrinsic reward	
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				
21				
22	<i>Financial and non-financial rewards to our people, e.g. competitive salary, health insurance, training opportunities and promotions (HR Manager E).</i>	Training, promotion, recognition, coaching, additional holidays, job rotation, career progression, flexible workload, collaboration with universities, safe work environment	Intrinsic reward	Talent Retention
23				
24				
25				
26				
27				
28				
29				
30				
31				
32				
33				
34				
35				
36				
37				
38				
39				
40				
41				
42				
43				
44				
45				
46				
47				
48				
49				
50				
51				
52				
53				
54				
55				
56				
57				
58				
59				
60				