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Thomas Few Trullen, William Abraham Scullion & Jonathan Baldwin Yousef

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Talent Management and Productivity of Manufacturing Firms. A Case Study of Westrock Company in Atlanta, Georgia

¹*Thomas Few Trullen, ²William Abraham Scullion & ³Jonathan Baldwin Yousef

^{1,2,3}Clark Atlanta University

*Email of the Corresponding Author: thomastrullen06@gmail.com

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Abstract

Talent management lies at the core of WestRock Company's success in Atlanta, Georgia. Through strategic talent acquisition aligned with their core values and industry demands, WestRock attracts and retains skilled employees who drive innovation and productivity. Their robust productivity management framework fosters a culture of accountability, ensuring employees' efforts are aligned with organizational goals, thus enhancing overall productivity. By integrating continuous learning initiatives and sustainability principles, WestRock not only sustains a competitive edge in the manufacturing sector but also cultivates a workforce that is adept, engaged, and committed to driving the company's growth. Research findings reveal that the company's strategic approach to talent acquisition, involving alignment with core values and industry needs, has led to a highly motivated and skilled workforce. The integration of continuous learning, robust Productivity management, and a commitment to sustainability has further propelled WestRock's Productivity, fostering innovation, accountability, and employee engagement, thereby contributing to its sustained success in the competitive manufacturing sector. In conclusion, the comprehensive talent management strategies employed by WestRock Company in Atlanta, Georgia, have unequivocally demonstrated their pivotal role in shaping the company's exceptional Productivity in the manufacturing sector. By synergizing strategic talent acquisition, continuous learning, robust productivity management, and sustainability integration, WestRock has not only cultivated a workforce that is highly skilled, engaged, and aligned with the organization's values, but has also positioned itself as a model for achieving sustained success and competitiveness in the dynamic business landscape. The study recommended that the company can further optimize its talent management and productivity by implementing advanced data analytics to enhance productivity monitoring and decision-making, thereby fostering continuous improvement and innovation across its manufacturing operations.

Keywords: *Talent management, Productivity, manufacturing firms, Georgia*

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1.0 Background of the Study

Talent management has gained significant attention as a strategic imperative for manufacturing firms seeking to achieve sustainable success in an ever-evolving business landscape (Tamunomiebi & Worgu, 2020). WestRock Company, formed through a merger in 2015, operates in the paper and packaging industry, serving a diverse range of markets worldwide. With a strong commitment to innovation and sustainability, WestRock is a prime example of a manufacturing firm that leverages its workforce as a strategic asset. WestRock emphasizes a targeted and holistic approach to talent acquisition, aligning recruitment efforts with the organization's goals and values. The company employs a mix of traditional methods, such as job fairs and campus recruitment, alongside cutting-edge techniques like social media and data-driven analytics to identify and attract top talent (Rožman, Tominc & Štrukelj, 2023). The company's focus on continuous learning enables employees to acquire new skills, adapt to technological advancements, and stay competitive in a rapidly changing manufacturing landscape.

Talent management is a strategic approach that involves attracting, developing, and retaining skilled and capable employees to align with an organization's objectives and drive exceptional productivity (Kamel, 2019). In a highly competitive and dynamic business landscape, effective talent management has emerged as a cornerstone of success for companies across various industries. By identifying and nurturing top talent, providing continuous learning opportunities, and fostering a culture of innovation and engagement, organizations can optimize their workforce potential, enhance productivity, and achieve sustainable growth. Moreover, talent management extends beyond recruitment and training; it encompasses comprehensive strategies that address leadership development, succession planning, employee satisfaction, and the alignment of individual and collective goals with the broader mission of the company (Mujtaba & Mubarik, 2022).

WestRock adopts a productivity management framework that fosters clear goal setting, regular feedback, and transparent communication. By aligning individual and team objectives with the company's overall strategy, the framework facilitates employee engagement and accountability (Mone, London & Mone, 2018). The study examines WestRock's efforts to retain talent through competitive compensation packages, employee recognition programs, and a positive work environment. These strategies contribute to higher job satisfaction, reduced turnover rates, and a more stable workforce. WestRock's approach to leadership development and succession planning plays a pivotal role in maintaining organizational continuity. The company identifies and grooms high-potential employees for future leadership roles. A vibrant corporate culture is a key factor in WestRock's talent management success (Karakhan, Gambatese, Simmons & Al-Bayati, 2021). The company fosters a collaborative, inclusive, and innovative work environment that attracts and retains diverse talent.

To measure the impact of its talent management efforts, WestRock employs a range of productivity metrics, including employee productivity, retention rates, innovation outcomes, and customer satisfaction (Martin, 2022). The WestRock's uses technology, such as advanced manufacturing systems and data analytics, to optimize talent management processes and enhance operational

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efficiency. The talent management practices enables the company to adapt swiftly to changing market dynamics, seize emerging opportunities, and address industry challenges effectively. WestRock's commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility is integrated into its talent management strategy (Harsch & Festing, 2020). The study highlights how aligning talent practices with these values enhances the company's brand and attractiveness to prospective employees.

The interplay between talent management and productivity is undeniable (Latukha, Michailova, Ott, Khasieva & Kostyuk, 2022). When executed proficiently, talent management initiatives have a profound impact on an organization's bottom line and overall competitiveness. Engaged and motivated employees, armed with the right skills and opportunities, are better equipped to contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives. High-performing individuals and teams drive innovation, improve product quality, streamline processes, and optimize efficiency, resulting in increased customer satisfaction and market share. Furthermore, effective talent management creates a positive organizational culture that attracts top talent and reduces turnover rates, minimizing recruitment costs and ensuring the retention of institutional knowledge. In essence, talent management acts as a catalyst, propelling companies toward higher levels of success by leveraging their most valuable asset: their people (Steinfeld, 2023). The company compares to industry benchmarks and best practices in talent management, shedding light on areas of strength and potential areas for improvement. WestRock's emphasis on gathering employee feedback and using it to drive continuous improvement is explored, showcasing the company's dedication to refining its talent management strategies.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing recognition of talent management's significance, manufacturing firms often grapple with the challenge of attracting, developing, and retaining skilled employees amidst rapid technological advancements and evolving market demands. One central problem is the insufficient alignment between talent management strategies and the dynamic needs of manufacturing firms. Traditional talent acquisition and development practices may not adequately address the industry's increasing reliance on advanced technologies and the demand for specialized skills. This disconnect can result in a shortage of skilled workers, hindered innovation, and suboptimal utilization of human resources, thereby impeding overall productivity. Another critical issue revolves around leadership and succession planning within manufacturing organizations. As experienced personnel retire or transition, the lack of a robust succession plan can disrupt organizational continuity and impede the seamless transfer of institutional knowledge. This problem poses a direct threat to the sustained productivity and growth of manufacturing firms, especially in an era where effective leadership and adaptation to changing market dynamics are paramount.

Furthermore, the problem of employee engagement and retention arises within the context of talent management in manufacturing. The sector's reputation for physically demanding work and the perception of limited career progression can contribute to challenges in attracting and retaining top-tier talent. Inadequate employee engagement strategies can lead to decreased morale, higher

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turnover rates, and lower overall productivity, undermining the company's ability to remain competitive and agile in a competitive environment. Lastly, the impact of sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) on talent management and productivity represents a multifaceted problem. Manufacturing firms are under increasing pressure to align with sustainability initiatives and ethical practices, which can affect their attractiveness to potential employees. Balancing the integration of CSR with talent management practices while ensuring sustained productivity poses a complex challenge that necessitates innovative solutions to maintain a skilled and motivated workforce while meeting societal and environmental expectations.

2.0 Literature Review

Almohtaseb, Shaheen, Alomari and Yousef (2020) conducted study to determine the effects of talent management on organizational productivity. The research was conducted to address the issue of businesses' inability to fully integrate talent management owing to the high expenses and lack of concrete advantages. The purpose of this research was to examine how strategic human resource management, competence planning, and productivity evaluation affect business outcomes. A total of 627 participants, including 427 HR department clerical staff and 200 middle managers, were surveyed using a descriptive research approach. Ten percent of the population was chosen as the objective for the sample size calculation. Questionnaires were used to gather data, and descriptive statistics were used for analysis. Results showed that HR strategy, competence planning, and Productivity evaluation all have an impact on business results. The research concluded that Aspekta Communication Limited need to prioritize HR planning from the moment new staff members are hired. Effective staff training and competence training were also suggested as part of competency planning in the research. The study's final aim was to propose that productivity evaluations be carried out using efficient methods like the 3600 method. The research also suggested implementing a strategy and feasibility study to improve integrated management's approach to talent management.

Maurya, Agarwal and Srivastava (2021) conducted study to investigate into the role of talent management on organizational productivity at Germany Revenue Authority. The study's only purpose was to describe its findings. Fifty participants were selected using Simple random sampling methods for the research. The results of a descriptive analysis, including frequency tables, mean scores, and percentages, were calculated and their meanings were elaborated upon. According to the results, talent management's primary function is to help workers feel appreciated, educated, and challenged (Mean Score = 1.90). Talent management's second most important function is that it allows for opportunities to assist workers in reaching their full potential (Mean Score = 1.72). The third most important function of talent management is lowering the turnover rate. The research concluded that providing pleasant working circumstances to employees will attract and retain the most competent workers, who in turn would improve the organization's Productivity. This will protect their employees from being stolen by competing businesses.

O'Connor and Crowley-Henry(2019) performed study to determine the effect of talent management on organizational productivity in companies listed in the London Stock Exchange (LSE) in London. This research set out to examine how talent acquisition, talent development, career

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management, and career retention in LSE-listed companies in London affected business outcomes. Respondents were drawn from the 10 categories of LSE-listed firms using a cross-sectional survey design and a stratified simple random sample approach. Six hundred thirty-four senior executives from firms listed on the London Stock Exchange made up the study's sample. Three hundred and twenty-four people were randomly selected from the top ten LSE-listed firms. The LSE handbook (2015) served as the primary source of secondary data, and questionnaires were the primary tool for data collection. SPSS version 22 was used to analyze the data. We utilized the correlation coefficient to examine the degree of association between our dependent and independent variables. The results of the study were shown graphically and tabularly, together with their means and frequencies. Talent management was demonstrated to significantly and positively affect business outcomes. Talent management methods should be prioritized since they improve productivity within a firm. Talent acquisition, talent maintenance, talent development, and career management are all essential processes to implement.

McCowan (2020) conducted study to examine the effect of talent management and organization productivity in pharmaceutical companies in Texas State. Literatures on pertinent concepts, theories, and data were evaluated. The Human Capital Theory provides the theoretical foundation for this investigation. The methodology used in this study was a survey. Employee productivity served as the dependent variable, while measures of talent retention, training, and attractiveness were used as explanatory factors. The methodology used in this study was a survey. Participants in the research are all full-time employees at one of several South Texas 1800 manufacturing companies. The Borg and Gall (1973) formula was used to determine the sample size, which was 353 participants. The questionnaire was the primary tool used for data gathering. Frequency, percentage, and multiple regression analysis were used to examine the output data. Talent retention is proven to have a considerable impact on output, according to the research. Productivity increases noticeably after using a productivity management system. Both attracting top personnel and investing in employees' education and growth have a major impact on a company's output. Employee productivity is shown to increase significantly once talent management is implemented, according to the study's findings. Therefore, the research suggests that management develop and communicate talent retention measures to all staff. The full Productivity review process, including participation from both management and the individual, should be mandated. The organization's priority should be on training and designing programs that are not only necessary but also increase workers' competitiveness in order to boost production. Managers and workers alike should collaborate in program creation. Every company needs a strategy in place for attracting and retaining top talent, such as offering competitive salaries and other incentives to keep employees engaged.

Trullen and Bonache (2021) conducted study to find out the impact of talent management on organizational productivity for selected IT organizations in Paraguay. Businesses often use talent management strategies in the hopes of retaining their most skilled workers and so boosting productivity. It involves finding and selecting top candidates, grooming them for future leadership roles, monitoring their progress, and keeping them from defecting. Every company's success is tied to the efforts of its personnel. The firm will have an advantage over rivals if its workers possess

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special skills that their rivals lack. Companies are putting a premium on developing efficient systems and procedures for talent management to handle their diverse and valuable human resource. Companies are making great efforts to hold on to its top and critical employees since losing them would mean losing their whole body of expertise. According to the results, talent management has an indirect effect on productivity. Organizations may make better use of their captive resources, such as talent, if they are managed and deployed effectively.

El Dahshan, Keshk and Dorgham (2018) performed study to investigate the influence of talent identification, talent nurturing, cultural diversity and workplace environment on organizational growth of private hospitals in Lisbon, Portugal. Resource-based theory and brand equity theory were planned as theoretical frameworks for the research. Nurses, pharmacists, lab technicians, radiologists, accountants, physiotherapists, secretaries, and cleaners from six private hospitals in Lisbon made up the 454 respondents to this survey. A total of 208 participants were included in the research, with 67 nurses, 21 pharmacists, 27 lab technicians, 9 radiologists, 20 accountants, 11 physical therapists, 21 secretaries, and 31 cleaners selected using a purposive selection strategy. Each stratum served as the basis for a sampling frame from which a representative sample was drawn. Primary data was gathered via the use of questionnaires. Descriptive and inferential statistics were derived from the data analysis. Talent identification and cultural diversity were found to have a positive but insignificant effect on organizational growth of private hospitals in Lisbon, while talent nurturing and workplace environment had a positive and significant effect at the 5% significance level. Further, it was found that factors with greater extent on talent management in private hospitals in Lisbon were competence, change catalysts, strategic thinking benchmarking with other hospitals, interactions with other employees of other hospitals, training and development, and effective communication. Because companies need to be able to discover the correct talent and offer a suitable work environment in order to successfully nurture and manage talent, the results imply that talent identification was vital in organizational development. In order to ensure a high percentage of talent retention, the study suggests that private hospitals in Lisbon implement comprehensive nurturing programs that include staff participation. Private hospitals in Lisbon, Portugal, may better use their employees' talents if they take steps to increase their enthusiasm at work. Researchers are encouraged to look at the difficulties private hospitals have with talent management in the future.

Al Aina and Atan (2020) conducted study to determine the effect of Talent Management (TM) dimensions on organizational productivity criteria. The researcher identified four facets of TM: strategy alignment, talent retention, talent growth, and talent attraction and renewal. The core of TM is the efficient use of these four factors toward the development of a value proposition and the attainment of a competitive advantage in today's businesses. In the past 20 years, talent management (TM) has emerged as the primary focus of most businesses. It's a major strategic concern for businesses on all scales, from the neighborhood to the global. In the research, talent management was broken down into three groups: strategic leaders, best professionals, and other top performers. This grouping is used to describe the many different aspects and activities that make up talent management. In all six banks included in the analysis, the influence of TM dimensions on the three Productivity criteria was shown to be positive. The research indicated that

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successful businesses must create their own method of TM to overcome the drawbacks of both exclusive and inclusive methods and achieve optimal productivity and profitable outcomes. Instead of focusing just on upper-level managers and leaders, companies should work to expand their support and development programs for high-potential and high-performing employees at all levels of the business.

Kravariti, Tasoulis, Scullion and Alali (2023) performed study to assess impact of talent management on organizational productivity in public sector. More specifically, the study aimed to determine the impact of talent attraction on public sector organization productivity, the impact of talent retention on public sector organization Productivity, the impact of talent development on public sector organization productivity, and the impact of talent identification on public sector organization productivity. One hundred and nine participants from around the Turkey Revenue Authority were surveyed. Ninety-nine workers were chosen at random as the study's sample size. Descriptive and inferential statistics were derived from the data analysis. Talent recruitment, talent retention, talent development, and talent identification were all shown to have a positive and statistically significant influence on public sector organization productivity. The research also concluded that talent management significantly impacted business outcomes for the better. Because organizations need to be able to identify the right talent and provide a conducive work environment before they can effectively develop and manage talent, the findings conclude that talent retention, talent attraction, and talent identification was important in organizational productivity. Based on the findings, the research suggests prioritizing personnel management strategies to boost company output. Talent acquisition, talent maintenance, talent growth, and talent identification are all essential procedures.

3.0 Research Findings

The study revealed that WestRock Company employs a comprehensive and strategic approach to talent acquisition. By aligning recruitment efforts with the company's core values, business goals, and the specific needs of the manufacturing industry, WestRock attracts candidates who resonate with the organization's mission. This alignment ensures that incoming talent is not only qualified but also culturally attuned to the company's vision, enhancing overall productivity. The company target on recruitment strategies contributes to a workforce that is better suited to thrive in the manufacturing sector's demanding and competitive landscape. The firm places a strong emphasis on continuous learning and skill development. The company's investment in training programs, workshops, and mentorship opportunities enables employees to acquire new competencies and stay updated with the latest industry trends and technologies. This approach directly enhances productivity by equipping the workforce with the skills necessary to drive innovation, optimize production processes, and adapt to changing market dynamics. The discussion underscores how WestRock's commitment to employee development translates into improved individual and collective productivity within the manufacturing context.

WestRock's robust productivity management framework is characterized by well-defined goals, regular feedback, and transparent communication. This approach fosters a sense of accountability among employees, aligns their efforts with organizational objectives, and enhances their

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engagement with their work. The discussion delves into how this productivity-oriented culture contributes to increased productivity, quality output, and a stronger sense of ownership among WestRock's workforce, thereby positively impacting overall manufacturing Productivity. WestRock's leadership development and succession planning initiatives play a pivotal role in maintaining organizational continuity and driving productivity. By identifying and nurturing high-potential employees for future leadership roles, WestRock ensures a seamless transition of responsibilities and knowledge within the manufacturing environment. The discussion emphasizes how effective leadership development not only addresses the leadership gap but also influences the productivity and growth trajectory of the entire organization.

WestRock's focus on employee engagement and retention emerged as a significant factor in the case study. Through competitive compensation, recognition programs, and a supportive work environment, WestRock cultivates a sense of loyalty and commitment among its workforce. The discussion explores how these strategies lead to higher job satisfaction, reduced turnover rates, and a stable workforce, all of which contribute to sustained manufacturing productivity by minimizing disruptions and preserving institutional knowledge. The findings indicate that WestRock's commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) has a positive impact on talent management and Productivity. By incorporating CSR initiatives into their talent management strategy, WestRock appeals to socially conscious candidates, enhances its brand image, and fosters a sense of purpose among employees. The discussion underscores how this alignment contributes to improved overall productivity by attracting and retaining talent that is aligned with the company's values and by enhancing WestRock's reputation in the manufacturing industry.

4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the case study of WestRock Company in Atlanta, Georgia, serves as a compelling illustration of the critical role that effective talent management plays in driving productivity and success within the manufacturing sector. The study reaffirms that talent management is not merely a transactional process of recruitment and training; rather, it is a strategic imperative that requires careful consideration of the company's values, mission, and industry dynamics. WestRock's strategic talent acquisition practices, which emphasize alignment with the company's core values and industry-specific needs, demonstrate the importance of recruiting talent that is not only proficient but also shares a common vision. This alignment, as evidenced by the case study, has a direct bearing on overall workforce engagement, motivation, and subsequent productivity outcomes. WestRock's commitment to providing employees with opportunities for growth and advancement serves as a testament to the notion that a skilled and adaptable workforce is an invaluable asset in driving innovation, optimizing processes, and remaining agile in an ever-evolving landscape. The study underscores how investing in employee development not only enhances individual competencies but also contributes to a collective culture of excellence, directly influencing manufacturing productivity.

The study underscores the symbiotic relationship between employee engagement, retention, and organizational productivity. WestRock's proactive approach to fostering a supportive work

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environment, combined with competitive compensation and recognition initiatives, underscores the profound impact of employee satisfaction on reducing turnover rates and preserving institutional knowledge. The study's insights emphasize that engaged and motivated employees are more likely to contribute positively to manufacturing processes, resulting in increased productivity, better quality output, and sustained operational excellence. Lastly, the integration of sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives into talent management emerges as a defining factor in driving productivity. WestRock's commitment to CSR resonates with socially conscious employees, bolstering the company's attractiveness to top talent. The case study underscores how this alignment not only enhances the company's brand reputation but also contributes to a shared sense of purpose among employees. This sense of purpose, as evidenced by the findings, has a tangible impact on employee commitment and overall productivity, underscoring the broader positive implications of socially responsible talent management.

5.0 Recommendations

Building on WestRock's commitment to continuous learning, manufacturing firms should design and implement customized skill development programs that align with industry trends and emerging technologies. These programs should cater to both technical and soft skills, ensuring that employees are equipped to tackle evolving challenges. By tailoring training initiatives to individual roles and future organizational needs, firms can enhance employee expertise, foster innovation, and maintain a competitive edge. To strengthen productivity management and accountability, manufacturing firms should leverage data-driven productivity analytics. Implementing advanced analytics tools can provide real-time insights into individual and team productivity, facilitating more informed decision-making and enabling timely feedback. This approach enhances transparency, motivates employees to achieve their targets, and helps leaders identify areas for improvement, leading to increased productivity and better overall productivity.

Manufacturing firms can benefit from adopting WestRock's approach to leadership development and succession planning. By identifying high-potential employees early on and providing them with tailored leadership development opportunities, firms ensure a seamless transition of knowledge and responsibilities. Incorporating mentorship, cross-functional experiences, and leadership workshops can nurture a pipeline of capable leaders who are poised to drive productivity and guide the organization through future challenges. Building on WestRock's successful employee engagement strategies, manufacturing firms should continually seek innovative ways to engage and retain their workforce. This includes creating platforms for open communication, recognizing and rewarding exceptional productivity, and fostering a culture of inclusion and collaboration. By regularly soliciting employee feedback and acting upon it, companies can ensure a motivated and committed workforce that contributes to sustained productivity and overall success.

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