

Integrating Talent Management in Public Schools: A Study of Implementation Practice in Türkiye

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Article history	<p>This study explores the implementation of Talent Management (TM) in a Turkish public middle school, presenting a structured, seven-stage model designed to address complex management challenges. The TM framework includes goal-setting and strategy development, identification of key positions, competency analysis, talent selection and placement, training and development, performance evaluation, and strategies for retention and commitment. While TM is traditionally associated with the private sector, this study examines its applicability and effectiveness in public education, considering the legal, administrative, and structural constraints. Utilizing a design-based research approach, the study customizes TM strategies to align with the school's specific workforce needs and institutional context. Findings indicate that TM initiatives enhance collaboration, facilitate knowledge exchange, and foster collective action. The study underscores that effective TM practices can contribute to educational efficiency, improving both staff performance and institutional sustainability. The study also highlights the broader implications of TM for public-sector institutions, particularly in adapting strategies to new generations of educators who prioritize innovation, personal growth, and meaningful professional involvement. By demonstrating that well-structured TM approaches can enhance both individual and institutional outcomes, this research offers a scalable framework for future applications in public education. The findings emphasize the need for context-specific TM strategies that align with institutional priorities and workforce dynamics, ensuring long-term educational development and sustainability.</p>
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Introduction

Organizations today face complex, context-specific challenges that extend beyond traditional management solutions. Conventional strategies based on material incentives like rewards and punishments are increasingly inadequate for addressing dynamic institutional needs. A global study by the Hay Group (2002), covering 330 companies across 50 countries, revealed that employees now seek workplaces that value their skills and contributions rather

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than relying solely on financial compensation. In this evolving context, Talent Management (TM) has emerged as a strategic framework that aligns individual competencies with institutional goals.

TM is a comprehensive approach encompassing the strategic planning, development, and retention of human capital (Rothwell, 2015). While extensively studied in private-sector contexts (Riccio, 2010; Sonia et al., 2015), TM has gained growing relevance in public and nonprofit settings, particularly in education (Smylie & Wenzel, 2006). Private schools often have the flexibility to design HR strategies aligned with institutional needs, whereas public schools operate under centrally regulated systems with limited resources and standardized staffing, making it difficult to attract, develop, and retain talent effectively (Thunnissen & Buttiens, 2017; Kravariti et al., 2023).

These structural limitations are particularly evident in Turkish public schools, where teacher appointments, promotions, and transfers are largely governed by seniority rather than merit or performance. Consequently, schools face persistent challenges such as high teacher turnover, low motivation, professional burnout, limited career progression, and weak communication between staff and administrators (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020; Aytaç & İpek, 2021). Such issues hinder institutional development and diminish educational quality.

TM offers a systemic response to these challenges through the identification of high-potential individuals, competency-based role assignments, continuous professional development, and retention strategies aimed at boosting engagement. Especially in public-sector contexts, inclusive TM models support both individual growth and institutional sustainability by fostering a performance culture rooted in equity and collaboration (Kaliannan et al., 2023; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020). These models can help schools overcome bureaucratic rigidity and better mobilize internal capacities.

This research examines the effective implementation of TM in a Turkish public middle school. It proposes a structured, seven-stage TM model tailored to the administrative and contextual realities of public education, targeting both individual-level (teachers and administrators) and organizational-level (school-wide) development. By doing so, the study contributes to a relatively underexplored area in the literature, offering a context-sensitive TM framework for K–12 public schools. The guiding research question is: “How can TM practices be implemented to address the challenges faced by administrators in a public middle school in Türkiye?” The study also engages with ongoing scholarly discussions on the limitations of TM in public institutions, where balancing individual development and organizational impact remains a critical challenge (Thunnissen & Gallardo-Gallardo, 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020; Cross Walker, 2020).

Literature review

Talent management

The concept of TM, as defined by Pillay et al. (2008), encompasses the collective capabilities, experiences, competencies, attitudes, and behaviors that translate into organizational performance. It involves employees at every level, focusing on identifying key positions and recruiting high-potential individuals to ensure their ongoing commitment. This approach integrates a unique human resource architecture that enhances individual and organizational learning, contributing to comprehensive career development (Collings &

Mellahi, 2009). TM, therefore, emerges as a strategic response to managerial talent development challenges.

In academic discourse, TM is viewed as a structured process for aligning human resource strategies with both current and future organizational needs (Dries, 2013; Silzer & Dowell, 2010). Effective TM fosters productivity and long-term institutional success, as highlighted by McDonnell (2011) and Baporikar and Smith (2019), who emphasize its role in sustaining motivation and performance in educational institutions. TM's evolution has expanded its scope beyond talent acquisition to encompass skill development, employee engagement, and continuous learning. It enhances organizational efficiency by fostering a culture of growth and adaptability. Given its proven impact across various sectors, the following section examines how TM principles can be effectively integrated into educational settings.

Talent Management in Education

The shift from traditional personnel management to a multifaceted approach in the 21st century has been driven by global competition, demographic changes, and evolving job market expectations (Fajčíková et al., 2018). This transformation has prompted the adoption of competitive strategies across sectors, including education. While TM research initially emerged from business contexts (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Tansley, 2011), its application has expanded to service sectors particularly healthcare and education in response to the growing demand for skilled professionals (Gerhardt & Karsan, 2022; Mitosis et al., 2021).

Research highlights TM's contributions to improving teaching quality, enhancing organizational commitment, and supporting institutional reform (Baporikar & Smith, 2019; Davies & Davies, 2011; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Assigning high-performing individuals to key positions and investing in their development reinforces commitment and institutional stability (Rhodes, 2012). In higher education, TM influences recruitment, employee engagement, professional development, and access to research resources (Sonia et al., 2015). These findings suggest that TM is not merely reactive, but a strategic approach for cultivating a responsive and dynamic educational environment (Baporikar & Smith, 2019).

However, applying TM in public institutions requires a context-sensitive approach due to structural differences in governance, organizational purpose, and operational frameworks. While private sector organizations function within flexible, performance-driven environments conducive to agile TM, public institutions are constrained by centralized governance, seniority-based promotion systems, and strict regulations (Kravariti & Johnston, 2020; Thunnissen & Buttiens, 2017). These limitations restrict the autonomy of public institutions in selecting, developing, and rewarding talent. Unlike the performance-centered culture of the private sector, TM in the public sector demands a more balanced, equity-oriented model aligned with meritocratic principles and public service accountability. TM must therefore be reconceptualized not only as an HR function but also as an adaptive management strategy responsive to legal, bureaucratic, and institutional contexts.

TM approaches are commonly classified as “exclusive” or “inclusive,” reflecting differing views on how talent is defined and supported within organizations (Kaliannan et al., 2023; Rezaei & Beyerlein, 2018). Exclusive models focus on high-performing individuals with leadership potential, while inclusive models aim to develop all employees, fostering equity, participation, and institutional learning (Debebe, 2023; Swailes et al., 2014). In public institutions where bureaucratic constraints, political sensitivities, and principles of equality



prevail an inclusive approach is often more appropriate (Kravariti & Johnston, 2020; Kravariti et al., 2023; Thunnissen & Buttiens, 2017; Thompson, 2017). This model aligns with the participatory and merit-based ethos of public education systems and promotes sustainable institutional development. Accordingly, this study adopts an inclusive TM framework that involves principals, vice principals, department heads, and teachers throughout all stages of the TM process.

Talent Management in the Turkish Education System

TM implementation in Türkiye's education system presents a varied landscape. While private sector institutions have successfully adopted TM strategies, their application in public education remains limited due to centralized governance, hierarchical structures, and bureaucratic regulations.

Teacher and principal appointments in Türkiye are determined through standardized exams and interviews, with job transfers primarily based on seniority. This system has been criticized for lacking objective performance criteria, complicating TM processes such as talent identification, placement, evaluation, and retention. These rigid procedures hinder the implementation of merit-based TM strategies that aim to recognize and nurture individual talent. In contrast, private educational institutions with greater operational autonomy exhibit stronger potential for TM integration. Research shows that private schools are better positioned to adopt TM strategies due to their flexibility in recruitment and professional development policies (Aytaç, 2014; Dilber, 2022; Tabancalı & Korumaz, 2014).

Despite structural constraints, studies involving academics, administrators, and teachers in Türkiye (Aytaç & İpek, 2021; Erol & Uçar, 2021) indicate that TM remains a viable framework for educational institutions. Although bureaucratic and hierarchical barriers persist, there is increasing recognition of TM's potential to improve workforce efficiency, strengthen institutional commitment, and enhance educational quality in both public and private schools.

Conceptual framework: Stages of talent management implementation

TM practices vary across organizations due to differences in structure, objectives, and management frameworks, making a single TM model impractical. Studies (McCauley & Wakefield, 2006; Phillips & Edwards, 2008; Capelli, 2008) describe TM as a multi-stage process, with models ranging from four to ten stages. Thunnissen et al. (2013) note that approximately 70% of TM models include planning, recruitment, development, and retention as core components.

Garrow and Hirsh (2008) emphasize that TM strategies must align with organizational goals, whether for competitiveness, service quality, or institutional development. However, in public schools particularly in Türkiye, business-oriented TM models often fail to address educational leadership needs (Turan, 2014; Davies & Davies, 2011). Administrative structures, legal constraints, and socio-economic conditions necessitate a tailored TM approach in educational settings.

This study builds on key literature (Capelli, 2008; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Phillips & Edwards, 2008; Davies & Davies, 2011; Thunnissen et al., 2013; Yapp, 2009) to identify seven essential stages of TM implementation in schools. The process begins with Goal and

Strategy Determination, where objectives are set, and TM strategies are aligned with educational priorities. Identification of Key Positions follows, ensuring that critical roles and required competencies are clearly defined. Competency Determination then establishes the necessary skills for these roles, forming the basis for recruitment and professional development. Talent Selection and Placement focuses on appointing suitable candidates to key positions, ensuring alignment with institutional goals. Training and Development strengthens staff capabilities, fostering professional growth and enhancing overall institutional expertise. Performance Management involves evaluating staff contributions, guiding promotions, and structuring reward systems based on role effectiveness. The final stage, Retention and Commitment, emphasizes retaining skilled personnel to maintain institutional stability and continuity. In public education, where bureaucratic constraints and rigid appointment policies can impact workforce management, this stage is crucial for sustaining a motivated and high-performing team. These interdependent stages form a cohesive TM framework tailored to school settings, ensuring both theoretical robustness and practical applicability. By integrating these stages, TM can effectively address the unique workforce challenges in educational institutions.

Method

Research design

This study was conducted in a state school over the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 academic years, employing a Design-Based Research (DBR) approach over 20 months to implement TM practices. DBR was chosen for its focus on practical application and iterative refinement rather than binary success or failure (Wang & Hannafin, 2005). TM, recognized as a modern and strategic approach (Keser Özmantar, 2018), was integrated into the design to address school management challenges.

DBR follows a cyclic process of design, testing, evaluation, refinement, and development, engaging researchers and practitioners in solving real-world educational problems (Nieveen, 2007). In this study, TM principles were applied to address administrative challenges in a public middle school, aligning with both theoretical frameworks and practical demands. Given the multifaceted nature of school leadership and the absence of universal solutions, innovation was essential making DBR a fitting methodology (Keser Özmantar, 2018). Literature also emphasizes the context-dependent nature of TM in education, reinforcing the need for a pragmatic, flexible, and theory-informed DBR approach (Wang & Hannafin, 2005).

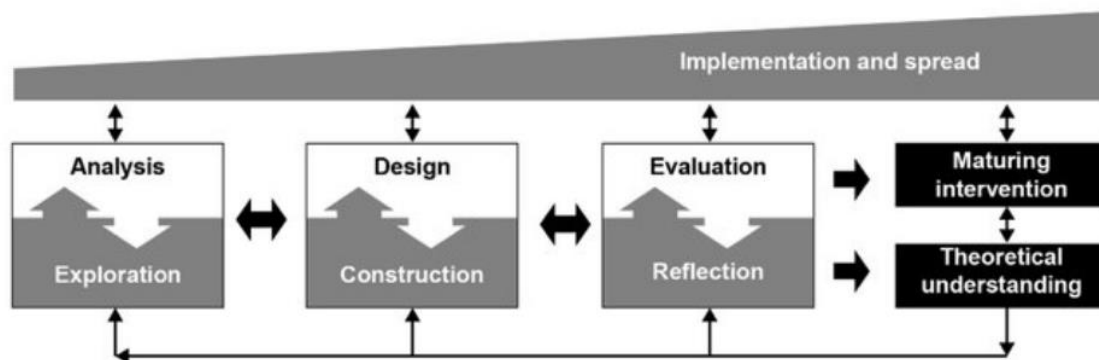


Figure 1. Model for conducting design research (McKenney & Reeves, 2018)

Following McKenney and Reeves' (2018) DBR model (see Figure 1), this study progressed through three key phases over a 20-month period:

- (1) **Analysis/Exploration:** A comprehensive literature review on TM and school management was conducted to identify key administrative challenges. Semi-structured interviews were held with the school's five administrators and two lead teachers to explore existing problems. These issues were categorized under six main management domains, forming the foundation for intervention planning.
- (2) **Design/Construction:** Based on theoretical inputs and field data, TM strategies were co-developed by researchers and school stakeholders during structured workshops. These strategies included goal and strategy setting, identifying key positions, competency mapping, internal talent selection, training design, and retention planning. Practitioners were involved in scenario development and task distribution to ensure practical feasibility.
- (3) **Evaluation/Reflection:** The implementation was continuously monitored through observations, meeting minutes, and interviews. Administrators and researchers collaboratively evaluated the process and revised TM strategies where outcomes did not meet expectations. Legal and institutional constraints were also considered during these adjustments. A final evaluation meeting was conducted to consolidate outcomes.

Data collection tools and procedures

A defining feature of DBR is its focus on addressing complex, real-life problems through close collaboration with practitioners (Brown, 1992). In this study, we examined managerial challenges faced by school principals, grounding them in the broader literature. To systematically investigate these issues, we categorized the multifaceted responsibilities of school leaders into six domains: educational services, student affairs and procedures, personnel management, general services, financial resource management, and school-family relations. This framework guided the development of a semi-structured interview protocol.

To enrich our understanding, we incorporated additional data sources, including meeting minutes from teachers' coterie meetings, departmental meetings, and committee and team meetings held during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 academic years. These documents offered contextual insights into school operations and strategy.

Based on the challenges identified across the six domains, TM-related goals and strategies were collaboratively developed. The design process involved identifying key roles, defining required competencies, sourcing and placing internal talent, conducting training and development activities, and implementing retention and commitment strategies. Documentation from each stage was systematically collected and analyzed.

Researchers maintained continuous communication with administrators, collecting data through note-taking, semi-structured observations, and institutional document reviews. This iterative and multi-sourced process supported a comprehensive understanding of the managerial landscape and informed DBR-driven interventions.

In accordance with ethical research standards, all participants were informed about the study's purpose, scope, and voluntary nature, and written consent was obtained prior to data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout. Ethical

approval was granted by the Gaziantep University Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee on 18.02.2021 (Approval No: 19703).

Research site

The selected research site was a public middle school located in an urban area of Türkiye, chosen through purposive sampling due to its well-documented management difficulties and readiness to engage in collaborative improvement efforts. The school had been experiencing several administrative challenges, including low teacher motivation, lack of coordination among departments, limited strategic planning, and an overreliance on traditional hierarchical management structures. These issues, identified during preliminary interviews and document reviews, made the school an appropriate context for implementing and examining a structured TM process.

Table 1. Demographic information of academic personnel

		(f)	(%)
Gender	Male	24	38%
	Female	39	62%
Age	20-30	40	63.5%
	31-40	19	30.2%
	41+	4	6.3%
Education level	Graduate	61	97.8%
	Postgraduate	2	2.2%
Tenure in profession	0-5	41	65%
	6-10	15	23.8%
	11+	7	11.2%
Tenure in the school	0-5	54	85.7%
	6+	9	14.3%

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the staff at the research site. The average age of the staff is 31 years, with a predominance of female employees holding bachelor's degrees. Notably, for many, this school represents their first professional engagement. Additionally, the school employs two male secondary education graduates in support service roles.

The school's administrative team consists of five staff members. Among them, four have served at the school for over five years, indicating a deep familiarity with the school's environment and operations. One administrator, holding a master's degree in educational management, is expected to bring a professional depth to the school's administration. The presence of three administrators with more than ten years of seniority underscores the experienced nature of the school's management team in educational processes.

TM is an approach that necessitates the involvement of an organization's senior management and all levels that support the upper management in the administrative process. Especially since this approach requires the support, interest, and coordination of the upper management, it can be said that the training attended by the employees in the school will significantly contribute to assisting the personnel at the lower levels. In this context, Table 2 includes the trainings that employees have already received prior to the research.

Table 2. Trainings attended by the school's educational staff

Trainings Attended by Teachers	Trainings Attended by School Administrators
	Conscious and Safe Use of the Internet
	Interdisciplinary Approach to Computational Thinking
	Development of Remote Education, Design and Management Skills
	STEM Education
	Museum Education
Cyber Security	Investigation Techniques
Computer Networks	Design Skill Workshops
Internet of things	Robotics Coding
Digital initiatives	Project Consulting
Special Education Services	Classroom Management
Speech and Diction	
Intelligence Games	
e-Guidance	
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	
Approach to Children from Fragmented Families	

While teachers and school administrators share common training sessions, teachers also participate in activities that are differentiated by their subject areas. These trainings were expected to contribute to the selection of personnel for key positions, assisting in the resolution of problems within the school, and were anticipated to facilitate the implementation of certain TM stages.

Data analysis

In this study, the interviews conducted to pinpoint the problems in school management were analyzed deductively, using the predetermined stages of TM (defining goals and strategies, identifying key positions, determining required competencies, selecting and placing talent, training and development, performance management, and fostering retention and commitment) as categories. In the course of identifying the challenges encountered at the research site and devising solutions, various documents (such as meeting minutes and goals and strategy tables) along with observation forms were examined inductively. This approach helped to determine their relevance to the TM process, shedding light on how each element contributes to the overarching strategy of managing talent within the school.

Validity and Reliability Measures

To ensure validity, several strategies recommended by Creswell (2014) were employed. First, prolonged engagement was established through a 20-month period of continuous involvement with the school's management team. This extended immersion supported an in-depth understanding of the institutional context and enhanced the credibility of the findings by minimizing potential misinterpretations.

Second, the positionality and expertise of the researchers served as an additional validity source. One researcher brought firsthand administrative experience within the school, while the other contributed deep disciplinary knowledge as a subject-matter expert. As Creswell emphasizes, clarifying the researchers' background helps readers evaluate the lens through which the data are interpreted.

Third, methodological triangulation was achieved by collecting data from multiple sources including interviews, observations, and document reviews. In addition, member checking was conducted by sharing findings with participants to verify the accuracy of interpretations and ensure representativeness of their perspectives (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2015).

To ensure reliability, the data analysis was guided by a detailed conceptual framework. Coding was conducted collaboratively and reviewed by multiple coders to reach consensus and enhance consistency. Finally, by providing a transparent and systematic account of the data collection and analysis processes, the study offers a clear basis for replication in comparable settings.

Findings

This section presents findings related to a seven-stage TM creation process. These stages include defining goals and strategies, identifying key positions, determining necessary competencies, selecting and placing talents as well as creating a talent pool, training and development, performance management, and fostering retention and commitment.

Defining goals and strategies in the context of talent management

At this stage, the school administration's challenges were categorized into six areas: education and instruction, human resources, student affairs, general services, financial resources, and school-parent management. To address the 24 identified issues, researchers and school administrators collaboratively defined goals and strategies within the TM framework. The distribution of these solutions across categories is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The number of defined goals and strategies for each problem area

Category	Problem Areas (PA)	Goal	Strategy
Education and instruction	(PA1) Ineffectiveness in social and cultural activities	7	8
	(PA2) Lack of materials	2	3
	(PA3) Shortcomings in planning	1	1
	(PA4) Insufficiency in educational guidance activities	1	2
Human resources	(PA5) Inadequate staff for professional development	2	4
	(PA6) Carelessness in duties among staff	1	1
	(PA7) Negative attitudes towards the administration	1	3
	(PA8) Late assignment of temporary staff	-	-
	(PA9) Low motivation among staff	2	9
	(PA10) Lack of collaboration among personnel	1	3
	(PA11) Issues related to authority	1	2
Student affairs	(PA12) High student population	1	2
	(PA13) Student absenteeism	1	2
	(PA14) Undisciplined behaviours	1	3
	(PA15) Low academic performance	3	8
	(PA16) Students from low-income families	1	3
General services	(PA17) Physical issues with the building	1	3
	(PA18) Excessive responsibilities and workload	1	4



	(PA19) Delays in obtaining materials	1	3
	(PA20) Ensuring security	1	3
Financial resources	(PA21) Dependence on a single regular source of income	2	3
	(PA22) Insufficient financial support from parents		
	(PA23) Ineffectiveness of the school-parent association	-	-
School-parent management	(PA24) Lack of parent involvement	2	4

Two areas were excluded from the goal-setting and strategy development phase for different reasons. PA8 (Late assignment of temporary staff) is a process managed centrally by the Provincial Directorate of National Education, which limits the school's ability to intervene directly. In the case of PA23 (Ineffectiveness of the school-parent association), the school administration noted that addressing this issue would require long-term community engagement and structural changes that extended beyond the temporal and operational scope of the TM implementation cycle.

In Table 3, it is noted that no strategy was identified by the school management for problem areas PA8 and PA23, hence these sections have been left blank. For PA21 and PA22, a joint goal and strategy were established as these two problem areas were combined. Table 5 exemplifies the specific goals and strategies determined to address the issue of student absenteeism (PA13). Additionally, the TM stages relevant to this issue have been outlined in Table 4.

Table 4. Defined goal, strategies and TM stages for addressing student absenteeism problem

Goal	Strategy	Talent management stages
Goal 13. Reducing the number of absent students	<p>Strategy 1: An attendance recovery team will be designated as a key position, and talented personnel will be assigned to it.</p> <p>Strategy 2: Home visits will be conducted according to the plan prepared by the attendance recovery team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying key positions Selecting and placing talents Determining necessary competencies Performance management

To achieve the goal of reducing student absenteeism, the *Attendance Recovery Team* would be responsible for selecting and assigning skilled personnel to this specific task within the school. This team would then conduct home visits to encourage students to attend school. All these TM efforts would be monitored and controlled through performance management. The example shown in the table, which includes a defined goal, strategy, and TM process for a specific problem area, has been similarly developed for each identified problem.

Identification of key positions and classification of employees

In order to achieve the goals and strategies identified in the previous stage, a meeting was held with school management to determine key positions. The meeting concluded with the designation of department heads, an academic achievement committee, a project team, an attendance recovery team, an assessment and evaluation team, a distance education team, a school counselling and psychological advisory board, social activities team, and a school development team as key positions. To clarify which employees would be assigned to these key positions, a classification of the staff was conducted. This classification was based on the method derived from Jack Welch's vitality curve (Capelli and Keller, 2017), which categorizes personnel into A, B, and C classes. The allocation of staff to key positions, in accordance with their classification, is illustrated in Figure 2.

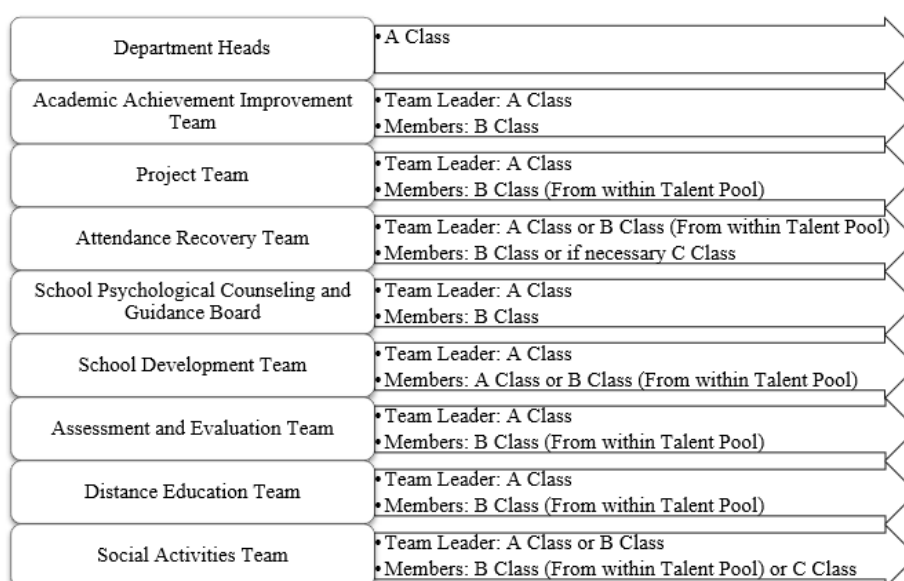


Figure 2. Classification of personnel to be assigned to key positions

Determining the required competencies

To determine the competencies of personnel to be assigned to key positions, attributes such as knowledge, skills, experience, development potential, and areas of interest of high-performing individuals were considered. In this context, work was carried out with the school administration to identify A and B class personnel. The school administration was asked, "What competencies should the personnel employed to solve the identified problem areas possess?" The responses provided by the school administration were evaluated by the researchers, and the competencies determined for A and B class personnel are listed in Table 5. As class C personnel were not placed in critical positions, no competency determination was conducted for them.

Table 5. Competencies for A and B class employees

Class A Personnel	Class B Personnel
Should be proficient in using digital tools	Should be able to use digital tools
Must utilize different methods and techniques	Must be knowledgeable about different methods and techniques
Should have submitted at least one project or activity proposal in their field	Should have an experience gained through project involvement
Must actively participate in school activities	Must be willing to participate in school activities
Should possess a sense of duty and responsibility and demonstrate it through their behavior	Should be conscious of their duties and responsibilities
Must contribute to school development activities	Should be willing to contribute to school development activities
Must have achieved an increase in the success of the classes they teach within their subject area	Must work to increase the success of the classes they teach within their subject area
Must collaborate with management, staff, and families	Should be willing to collaborate with management, staff, and families
Should participate in professional and personal development activities	Should be willing to participate in professional and personal development activities
Must be a role model in behavior and attitude	Should be mindful of their behavior and attitude
Should reflect the school's core values in their conduct	Must accept the school's core values
Must have a good understanding of regulations and conduct their work within this framework	Should have knowledge of regulations

Table 5 indicates that while Class A and Class B personnel share common competencies, there are also distinct areas of expertise expected from each. Class A personnel are expected to transform their competencies into behaviors and to motivate other staff members around these activities. On the other hand, it is deemed sufficient for Class B personnel to individually possess the identified competencies.

Talent selection, placement, and talent pool development

In the fourth stage, a selection process was conducted to identify employees with the necessary competencies and to place them into key positions. School management was asked to nominate three candidates for each key position. These candidates were then ranked based on their competencies. Following this, a comprehensive evaluation of all the nominated individuals was carried out, culminating in the selection of the most talented individuals for the roles. Details of the process are provided in Table 6.

Table 6. The selection, placement, and talent pool development

Key positions	Candidate 1.	Talented Personnel (Class A) Key Position Team Leader	Indispensable for the Institution
	Candidate 2.	Has the potential Key Position Member (Class B)	Talent Pool
	Candidate 3.	Has the potential Key Position Member (Class B)	

Table 6 classifies candidates for key positions according to their demonstrated talent and potential. The top-ranked candidate is designated as Talented Personnel (Class A) and assigned as the department head and team leader in key positions. The subsequent candidates are recognized as having potential and are appointed as team members in key positions. These individuals are also included in the talent pool, ensuring a reservoir of capable staff for future organizational needs and opportunities.

Training and development

In this stage, work has been conducted with the school management to determine how training and development activities would be structured. The training and development processes for talented employees include: participating in school management meetings, writing a project related to their field, engaging in an activity of interest, receiving education on different approaches in their field, providing training to other employees within the institution, coaching personnel within the talent pool, participating in national and local workshops.

Efforts were made to identify in-service training activities needed to address challenges in school management. The administration conducted reviews on relevant platforms and compiled a list of required trainings. As recorded in departmental meeting minutes, each department was expected to participate in at least two trainings during the year. Talented staff were also encouraged to take part in activities beyond their primary areas of expertise. In response to the hybrid nature of the 2020–2021 academic year, it was decided that all staff would receive training on remote education. Talented individuals who had previously implemented remote teaching on their own initiative were assigned to lead these sessions within the school. The finalized list of training and development activities is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Planned training activities

Type of training	Field	Participants	Providers of the trainings
In-service Training	Assessment and Evaluation Digitalization IQ Games Project Consulting Social Media Usage Participation in Workshops Distance Education	Class A talented personnel (mandatory) Class B potential personnel (mandatory) Class C personnel (optional) All educational personnel (mandatory)	Ministry of Education Universities Online Training Sites Intelligence Games Federation Ministry of Education Class A talented employees
On-the-Job Training	Writing Projects Participating in managerial meetings Participating in social and cultural activities Assigning duties within the school	Class A talented personnel Class B potential personnel	Ministry of Education Universities Online Training Sites School Management
Coaching	Assisting in Project Writing Assisting in Participating in Social and Cultural Activities		School Management Class A talented employees

Table 7 outlines the planned training and development activities, detailing the type of training, focus areas, target participants, and responsible facilitators. These activities aim to support the professional growth of all teaching staff, with particular attention to the development of talented personnel through close collaboration with the school administration. Coaching and in-house training are used to foster the growth of both talented staff and other employees, ensuring equitable access to professional development opportunities.

During the implementation of the TM framework, several challenges typical of public-sector settings emerged, including limited managerial autonomy, bureaucratic rigidity, staff hesitancy due to unfamiliarity with TM, and time constraints. In response, the school administration prioritized internal resource use, embraced participatory planning to increase staff buy-in, and phased the implementation process to allow for gradual adaptation.

Performance management

Performance management is a critical stage in evaluating the contributions of talented employees towards achieving the institution's goals. In collaboration with the school administration, the performance management process at the school was broken down into various stages. The defined performance management system was developed by considering the achievement of targets set for solving the school's problems. The stages of the school's performance management process are illustrated in Figure 3.

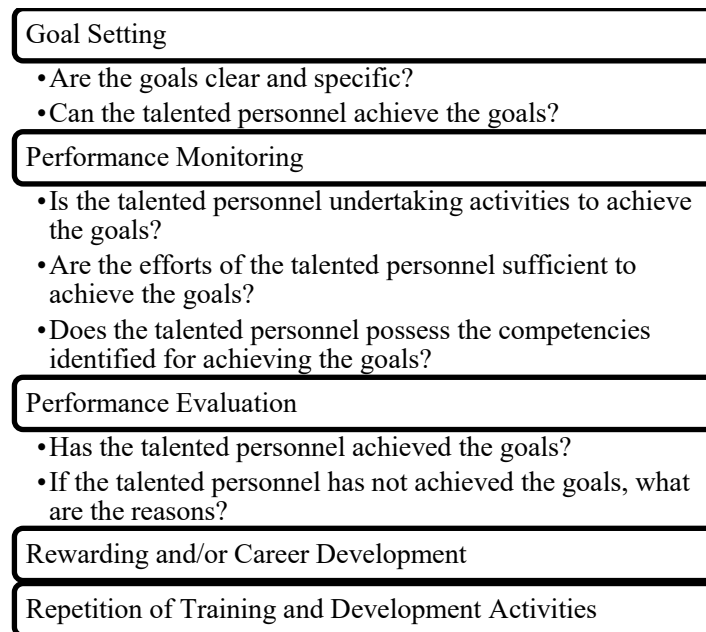


Figure 3. Stages of the school's performance management process

Of the 18 personnel placed in key positions, 7 received formal recognition for achieving their performance goals, and 2 were appointed to leadership roles, indicating a measurable impact of the TM process on institutional capacity. These recognitions were based on documented outputs such as project delivery, mentoring, and student achievement gains.

As part of its performance management efforts, the school administration first set goals to address identified problems. Based on these goals, key positions were created, talented personnel were assigned accordingly, and their work was closely monitored with regular feedback. The achievement levels of these individuals were later evaluated. For those who met targets and demonstrated high performance, the principal initiated official procedures to award certificates of achievement excluding generic ministry-issued recognitions. Additionally, career planning was carried out for two high-performing individuals: one was appointed as a deputy principal within the school, while the other was assigned to the same role at a newly opened school in the area, in line with the objective of balancing student distribution.

Retention and commitment

During the research process, efforts were made in collaboration with the school administration to retain identified talented employees and to ensure their commitment to the institution. As a result of this work, actions determined to maintain talented employees and increase their loyalty were listed in Table 8.

Table 8. Retention and commitment initiatives

For talented employees	For the entire institution
Continuous communication between the school principal and talented personnel	Respect for diversity
Updating goals according to the requests of talented personnel	Increasing collaboration within the institution
Supporting talented personnel during the goal achievement process	Conducting social activities within the institution
Trust and respect for talented personnel	Enhancing the institution's resources

Involving talented personnel in the decision-making process	Continual development of the institution
The performance process being a guide	
Sharing, appreciating, and rewarding the work of talented personnel within the institution	

In the retention and commitment phase, the actions listed were implemented by the school administration. The fundamental values of the school, such as respect for basic rights and freedoms, respect for nature and the environment, respect for and consideration of diversity, openness to change and development, working collaboratively, being responsive and problem-solving, recognizing and valuing talents, and deriving strength from laws have been the primary resources throughout this process.

Discussion

School management involves a range of interrelated domains including education, human resources, student affairs, administration, finance, and school-family relations each presenting unique challenges. Among the strategies to address these complexities, TM has gained recognition as a promising approach. This study examined the application of TM in a public middle school, highlighting its contribution to operational efficiency and educational quality. This discussion reflects on the findings to explore TM's broader implications for school improvement and institutional development.

The findings contribute to the broader TM literature, reinforcing its practical value in school management. Our research aligns with prior studies suggesting that well-implemented TM strategies can effectively address organizational challenges (Berger & Berger, 2004). The study emphasizes that guiding talented employees improves staff morale and motivation, supporting the view that skilled individuals not only perform well but also inspire peers. By integrating identification, development, and retention strategies, the study mirrors Vnoučková et al.'s (2015) perspective on TM as a driver of institutional growth. The emphasis on developing and retaining talent underscores TM's role in building a committed and motivated workforce in schools.

This study also resonates with broader organizational trends, particularly the evolving concept of 'talentism', which redefines strategy and value creation. Klaus Schwab's assertion that "Talentism is the new capitalism" (Arcus, 2015) underscores the rising importance of human capital. While the private sector often addresses talent gaps through recruitment, the World Economic Forum (2019) emphasizes that developing existing employees is more cost-effective and sustainable. In education, this shift highlights the need for inclusive and sustainable TM strategies, as illustrated in our study.

The "Reskill - Upskill" approach encapsulates this shift, prioritizing talent development over external hiring. Our study underscores the importance of inclusive TM processes, particularly in public schools, where recruitment and dismissal are centrally regulated. Implementing structured TM strategies in such contexts not only addresses immediate challenges but also fosters long-term leadership capacity, promoting sustainable and effective school management.

Despite these positive outcomes, the implementation process involved several challenges commonly encountered in public-sector institutions, such as limited managerial flexibility, staff resistance, and constraints in financial and human resources (Thunissen & Buttiens,



2017; Kravariti & Johnston, 2020). Rather than acting as barriers, these obstacles catalyzed context-specific innovations that shaped how TM was applied. For instance, limited autonomy in recruitment led to the creation of an internal talent pool based on observed competencies and commitment. Staff resistance was addressed by involving teachers in the planning process and acknowledging their contributions throughout implementation. These adaptive strategies not only aligned with the principles of inclusive and participatory TM (Cross Walker, 2020), but also reframed structural limitations as opportunities for institutional learning and renewal. In this regard, the challenges of the public education system became key drivers of TM innovation, enhancing both its relevance and transferability in similar contexts.

The importance of nurturing talent in education is further underscored by specific TM practices and their role in cultivating future leaders a central focus of this study. In educational organizations, TM often includes assigning leadership roles in departments, committees, or regional administration to help talented individuals develop managerial skills (Davies & Davies, 2011). However, international studies that comprehensively address all stages of TM implementation remain limited.

This gap highlights the innovative nature of our study, which offers a detailed roadmap for implementing TM in public schools. Emphasizing strategic planning and execution, the research provides a practical model for integrating structured TM practices. Consistent with global trends, the study illustrates the benefits of developing existing personnel over relying solely on external recruitment. This sustainable approach addresses immediate challenges while preparing institutions for future demands by fostering skilled, adaptable leaders.

Although the study was conducted in a middle school with a relatively young teaching staff, the TM model developed here holds potential for adaptation in schools with varying demographic and organizational profiles. For instance, in schools with more experienced teachers or traditional work cultures, TM could begin with mentoring programs and gradually expand to distributed leadership. In under-resourced or rural schools, inclusive TM might focus on strengthening internal capacity through localized professional development and collaborative problem solving. These examples illustrate the model's flexibility and relevance across diverse school settings, making it a viable strategy for institutional growth in both centralized and decentralized systems.

The study also provides insight into how TM strategies align with the expectations and working styles of younger, digitally native educators. The demographic profile of the implementation site adds an important layer of analysis, illustrating how contemporary TM practices can respond to the evolving needs of the education workforce.

A significant portion of the staff at the research site belonged to Generation Z (63.5% aged 20–30, Table 1), characterized by an achievement-oriented mindset, critical approach to work, preference for meaningful engagement, and desire for challenging tasks (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). These traits aligned well with the TM strategies implemented, fostering an environment in which younger teachers embraced challenges, learned from mistakes, and pursued success. Given the interpersonal, organizational, and procedural challenges in TM practices (Rezaei & Beyerlein, 2018), the predominance of young teachers likely supported a culture of adaptability and experimentation key to navigating new strategies and addressing obstacles. Despite the added workload associated with TM implementation, their resilience

and problem-solving capacity facilitated the process, highlighting the importance of aligning TM practices with workforce characteristics.

Beyond individual staff characteristics, systemic factors also shape TM effectiveness. Kravariti & Johnston (2020) emphasize the need to consider both internal and external parameters for successful public sector TM applications. In bureaucratic and regulatory environments, such as public schools, innovative practices may face structural constraints (Thunnissen & Buttiens, 2017). Therefore, TM success depends not only on staff commitment but also on senior management support, particularly in navigating external influences such as political cycles, fiscal constraints, legislative frameworks, and public accountability.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in addressing these complexities. Research indicates that TM supports career development and leadership advancement by facilitating the filling of key positions and providing structured growth opportunities (Kock & Burke, 2008; Glenn, 2012). In this study, administrators actively supported TM implementation, ensuring alignment with school policies and procedures. Five administrators participated in all phases of the DBR process, engaged in training, and played a central role in addressing institutional challenges. This involvement not only enhanced their own leadership capacities but also illustrated how committed leadership contributes to institutional problem-solving through TM. Their engagement aligns with literature emphasizing the importance of leadership and management support in sustaining effective TM strategies, especially within public-sector contexts shaped by external constraints.

Building on effective leadership and management support, this study aligns with Cross Walker's (2020) view of fostering a dynamic, change-oriented workforce in the public sector. The findings indicate that formal rewards and the development of communities of practice can facilitate TM implementation. In the examined public-school setting, TM was reinforced not only through recognition and rewards during the retention and commitment phase, but also through an inclusive strategy that engaged the entire teaching staff rather than a select few. This broad participation laid the foundation for communities of practice, enabling collaboration, idea exchange, and progress toward shared goals (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). The inclusive nature of TM observed here reflects the public sector's emphasis on equality, illustrating how a collective, participatory approach can enhance TM effectiveness in educational institutions.

This comprehensive TM approach, combining recognition and inclusivity underscores the relevance of the DBR methodology in this context. Implementing a seven-stage TM process, starting with goal identification and strategy development, requires a tailored application for each institution. DBR's flexible and iterative structure makes it well-suited for such adaptations. Framed by McKenney and Reeves' (2018) model, this study allowed for continuous refinement in response to school-specific challenges, ensuring that TM implementation remained both practical and effective.

This research addresses gaps identified by Cross Walker (2020) and Kaliannan et al. (2023) by offering a comprehensive TM framework that integrates both individual and organizational dimensions. By detailing each implementation stage, the study contributes to academic discourse and practical applications of TM in educational settings. This context-specific approach not only enhances theoretical understanding but also provides concrete strategies for public schools, reinforcing the value of tailored TM solutions in institutional development.



In addition to qualitative insights, several process indicators were used to monitor TM outcomes. For instance, during the two-year research period, staff-initiated school projects increased from 5 to 19, and teacher participation in decision-making committees reached 85%. Moreover, two Class A talents were promoted to administrative roles based on performance and contributions. These indicators demonstrate that TM implementation yielded not only perceptual but also tangible, observable outcomes, making the model's impact traceable at both individual and institutional levels.

Implications and further research suggestions

This study's examination of TM in a public middle school in Türkiye yields several key conclusions and implications, offering insights for future research. The findings highlight TM's multidimensional impact, demonstrating how it benefits not only talented individuals but also the broader organizational ecosystem. In public schools, effective TM strategies contribute to improved educational outcomes, increased employee satisfaction, and enhanced institutional performance, underscoring TM's role as both a strategic necessity and a long-term investment in education.

A key takeaway is the importance of aligning TM approaches with workforce demographics. This study, conducted in a school predominantly staffed by Generation Z teachers, underscores how demographic factors influence TM effectiveness. Young teachers' adaptability, engagement, and openness to collaboration created a favourable environment for TM implementation, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies in public education, where balancing equity and efficiency is critical.

The study also highlights the effectiveness of an inclusive TM approach in fostering collaboration and shared learning. By engaging the entire staff, TM enhanced engagement, knowledge-sharing, and collective action, reinforcing its viability in public-sector settings. Furthermore, the study provides a model for TM adaptation in public schools, illustrating how balancing internal needs with external constraints, securing management support, and leveraging TM for leadership development can lead to successful implementation. This success suggests TM's broader applicability across the public sector where unique challenges shape public education.

Based on the findings, several structured recommendations can be proposed for practitioners and policymakers. School administrators should prioritize the creation of internal talent pools by identifying and developing high-potential staff members using inclusive and transparent criteria. TM practices should be embedded in routine planning and decision-making structures through formal roles and recognition mechanisms. Ministries of education should develop flexible TM frameworks that allow local adaptation while ensuring equity and sustainability across schools. Furthermore, the integration of TM strategies with existing in-service training and leadership development programs can enhance long-term institutional capacity.

Beyond addressing immediate managerial challenges, a well-executed TM strategy contributes to long-term organizational growth and sustainability. This study advances the literature by offering new insights into TM applications in public education, a relatively underexplored area. Future studies should examine TM's broader applicability across diverse public-sector institutions, considering how demographic and institutional factors shape its implementation. Additionally, longitudinal research is needed to explore TM's long-term impact on organizational performance and employee well-being, further enriching our

understanding of TM's role in public administration.

Finally, several limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. This study was conducted in a single public school with a predominantly young teaching staff, which may limit the generalizability of the results. The research period was confined to 20 months, constraining the ability to evaluate long-term outcomes. Moreover, centralized regulations in the public education system restricted flexibility in areas such as recruitment and resource allocation. These contextual constraints, while highlighting the real-world complexity of TM implementation, also point to important avenues for future inquiry.

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Informed Consent: *All participants were informed about the purpose of the research and expectations; and they have volunteered to participate in the study.*

Data availability: *This is a qualitative study and data were collected via interviews. Some data (verbal accounts) were already presented in the manuscript. All two authors agree and are prepared to share the data upon request.*

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