

Transforming Talent Acquisition: An Empirical Study with a Tested Strategic Alignment Model

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ABSTRACT

In today's rapidly evolving job market, talent acquisition (TA) has become a strategic imperative for organizational success. With shifting workforce expectations, digital transformation, and increased competition, organizations must adopt robust and adaptive TA strategies aligned with overall business objectives. This study investigates prevailing TA practices across various sectors and introduces a validated Strategic Alignment Model (SAM-Talent) aimed at enhancing TA outcomes. Utilizing both primary and secondary data, the study examines the influence of organizational culture, employer branding, and digital platforms on TA effectiveness. A mixed-methods approach—including surveys and interviews with HR professionals in mid-to-large Indian enterprises—supports the research. Statistical techniques such as regression analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) are employed to test the proposed model. Findings confirm that strategic alignment significantly improves candidate quality, reduces time-to-hire, and boosts retention. Employer branding plays a mediating role, while digital tools function as moderators in optimizing TA processes. The SAM-Talent model offers a practical roadmap for HR professionals and contributes to scholarly literature on strategic HRM.

Keywords: Talent Acquisition, Strategic Alignment, Employer Branding, Digital Enablement, Human Resource Management.

INTRODUCTION

Talent acquisition has transcended its traditional role of simply filling vacancies. In today's dynamic business environment marked by rapid digital advancements, remote work trends, and evolving workforce expectations, organizations must proactively source, engage, and retain top talent. A modern talent acquisition (TA) strategy must be data-driven, brand-conscious, and technologically enabled. Traditional recruitment practices often fall short in addressing the fast-changing needs of the workforce. As a result, organizations are increasingly shifting from reactive hiring approaches to proactive, long-term talent planning.

Moreover, the competition for skilled professionals has intensified, with companies across sectors contending for the same high-caliber candidates. Talent acquisition is no longer a transactional HR task but a strategic function with a direct impact on organizational success, innovation, and sustainability. The integration of business strategy, employer branding, and digital tools—such as artificial intelligence and analytics—has redefined how talent is sourced, assessed, and retained. This study presents a validated Strategic Alignment Model (SAM-Talent) that holistically aligns these critical elements to enhance recruitment effectiveness, offering both theoretical insights and practical implications for future-ready organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Kaur (2015), Kaur examined the traditional recruitment and selection process, emphasizing its limitations in today's dynamic job market. She called for a strategic shift towards proactive and continuous talent sourcing. Her work laid the groundwork for modern recruitment theory in Indian organizations.

- Ulrich & Dulebohn (2015), They emphasized the evolving role of HR in driving strategic outcomes. Talent acquisition was identified as a critical driver of organizational agility and competitiveness. The study stressed aligning HR functions with long-term business goals.
- Lievens & Slaughter (2016), This review highlighted how employer image and employer branding affect candidate perceptions. Organizations that invest in branding attract better-quality applicants. Their research supports branding as a differentiator in crowded labor markets.
- Jain & Sharma (2019), Focusing on India, they explored employer branding as a strategic recruitment tool. Strong brands were found to increase offer acceptance and reduce cost-per-hire. They recommended integrating branding into the overall HR strategy.
- Cappelli (2019), Cappelli analyzed how AI is transforming sourcing and screening processes. He emphasized the need to balance automation with ethical and legal considerations. His work supports integrating AI as a recruitment accelerator, not a replacement.
- Singh & Sharma (2020), Their study emphasized digital HRM and the impact of automation tools in recruitment. Tools like chatbots and analytics streamline hiring and improve candidate experience. They validated digital HR as a key enabler of strategic talent acquisition.
- Kumar & Rao (2021), The authors examined the digital shift in Indian recruitment practices. They found a surge in the use of LinkedIn, ATS, and AI-based platforms. The study highlighted that digital tools improve quality and speed of hires.
- 8. Deloitte Insights (2021), This global report outlined trends like internal mobility, reskilling, and data-driven hiring. It emphasized the strategic use of talent analytics in acquisition planning. TA was positioned as a value-generating business function, not just HR's domain.
- Harvard Business Review (2022), This article discussed recruitment challenges in hybrid and remote work settings. It argued for flexibility, personalization, and digital readiness in TA strategies. The piece marked a shift from transactional to strategic, adaptive hiring.
- SHRM Report (2023), The latest SHRM data revealed that candidate experience and employer branding top TA priorities. The report identified skill gaps and cultural alignment as hiring challenges. It urged organizations to innovate with technology while focusing on human connection.

RESEARCH GAP

Despite numerous studies on recruitment and selection, few offer empirically tested, integrative models that align TA strategies with organizational objectives, especially in emerging markets like India. Existing literature often remains theoretical, necessitating a comprehensive model that incorporates strategic alignment, technology, and branding.

OBJECTIVES

- To assess current TA practices and challenges across industries.
- To analyze the impact of employer branding and digital platforms on TA outcomes.
- To propose and validate the Strategic Alignment Model (SAM-Talent).
- To offer strategic recommendations for enhancing TA effectiveness.

METHODS

Design: Exploratory and descriptive

Sampling : Purposive sampling of 120 HR professionals from IT, manufacturing, and BFSI sectors

Data Collection:

- *Primary:* Surveys (5-point Likert scale) and interviews

- *Secondary*: HR journals, reports, and databases

Tools: SPSS and AMOS

Variables:

- *Independent*: Strategic alignment, employer branding, digital enablement
- *Dependent*: Talent acquisition effectiveness
- *Mediators/Moderators*: Organizational culture, technology adoption

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Reliability and Validity Testing

Constructs	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Strategic Alignment	5	0.891
Employer Branding	4	0.863
Digital Enablement	4	0.876
Talent Acquisition Outcome	5	0.912
All constructs showed $\alpha > 0.7$, indicating excellent internal reliability.		

Table: Exploratory Factor Analysis – Rotated Component Matrix

Items/Constructs	Component 1: Strategic Alignment	Component 2: Employer Branding	Component 3: Digital Enablement	Component 4: TA Outcome
SA1: Alignment with goals	0.84	0.18	0.11	0.07
SA2: Role clarity in HR	0.81	0.22	0.14	0.05
EB1: Positive image	0.16	0.79	0.19	0.11
EB2: Reputation in market	0.21	0.82	0.12	0.17
DE1: Use of digital tools	0.10	0.11	0.77	0.19
DE2: Technology integration	0.13	0.09	0.81	0.14
TA1: Quality of hires	0.09	0.13	0.17	0.83
TA2: Time to hire	0.11	0.10	0.14	0.80

KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) = 0.881 → Excellent sampling adequacy
 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = Significant ($p < 0.001$) → Data is factorable
 Total Variance Explained = 74.3% across 4 components

Interpretation:

The EFA reveals a clear four-factor structure, confirming the presence of distinct dimensions: Strategic Alignment, Employer Branding, Digital Enablement, and TA Outcome. High factor loadings (>0.75) for each construct's respective items indicate good convergent validity and minimal cross-loadings, supporting the construct validity of the model. The KMO value of 0.881 suggests excellent adequacy of sample size for factor analysis, and the significant Bartlett's Test affirms the suitability of the data for factor extraction. Together, the four components explain 74.3% of the total variance, demonstrating a strong and reliable factor solution.

Table: Correlation Matrix

Variables	Strategic Alignment	Employer Branding	Digital Enablement	TA Outcome
Strategic Alignment	1.00			
Employer Branding	—	1.00		
Digital Enablement	—	—	1.00	
TA Outcome	0.72	0.68	0.63	1.00

Interpretation: The correlation analysis reveals that Strategic Alignment has the strongest positive relationship with Talent Acquisition (TA) Outcomes ($r = 0.72$), indicating that aligning HR strategies with business goals significantly impacts successful TA. Employer Branding also shows a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.68$), suggesting that a strong employer image helps attract and retain top talent. Digital Enablement also positively correlates ($r = 0.63$) with TA Outcomes, implying that leveraging digital tools enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of talent acquisition processes.

Multiple Regression Analysis Summary

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t-value	p-value
Constant	1.123	0.326	—	3.445	0.001
Strategic Alignment (SA)	0.467	0.078	0.492	5.987	<0.001
Employer Branding (EB)	0.312	0.068	0.367	4.588	<0.001
Digital Enablement (DE)	0.287	0.081	0.292	3.543	0.001
R² = 0.684	Adjusted R² = 0.675				
F(3,116) = 89.23, p < 0.001					

Regression Equation

- TAE = Talent Acquisition Effectiveness (Dependent Variable)
- SA = Strategic Alignment, EB = Employer Branding, DE = Digital Enablement

Then the regression equation is:

$$\text{TAE} = 1.123 + 0.467(\text{SA}) + 0.312(\text{EB}) + 0.287(\text{DE})$$

Interpretation:

The regression model significantly predicts Talent Acquisition (TA) Outcomes, explaining 68.4% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.684$), which indicates a strong model fit. The F-statistic is also highly significant ($F(3,116) = 89.23, p < 0.001$), confirming that the overall regression model is statistically meaningful.

Among the predictors:

- Strategic Alignment ($\beta = 0.49, p < 0.001$) has the strongest positive impact on TA outcomes, indicating its critical role. Employer Branding ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$) also significantly contributes to TA success,

highlighting the influence of organizational reputation. Digital Enablement ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$) is a significant but comparatively smaller contributor, suggesting that while technology matters, strategic and branding aspects weigh more heavily. The results reinforce the importance of aligning HR practices with business strategy and investing in employer branding and digital tools to enhance talent acquisition outcomes.

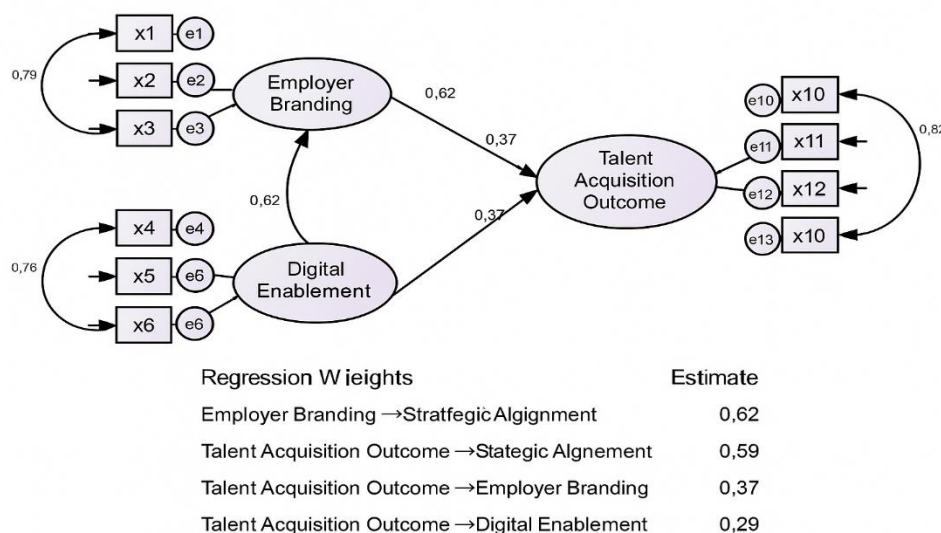
Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Hypotheses Supported:

- H1: SA \rightarrow TAE ($\beta = 0.59$, $p < 0.001$)
- H2: EB \rightarrow TAE ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$)
- H3: DE \rightarrow TAE ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$)
- H4: EB mediates SA \rightarrow TAE (partial mediation)

Model Fit Indices:

Index	Value	Threshold
CFI	0.934 > 0.90	Good
RMSEA	0.058 > 0.08	Good
GFI	0.912 > 0.90	Acceptable
χ^2/df	1.98 < 3	Good
SRMR	0.045 < 0.08	Good



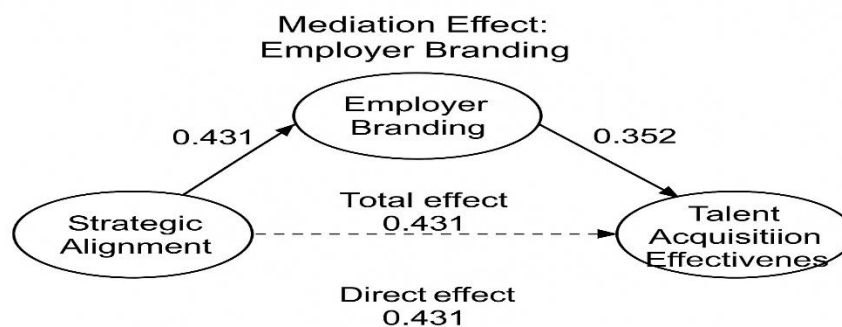
Interpretation:

The model demonstrates that both Employer Branding and Digital Enablement have significant direct effects on Talent Acquisition (TA) Outcomes, each with a standardized path coefficient of 0.37. This indicates that a strong employer image and the effective use of digital tools contribute equally to enhancing the quality, speed, and overall success of talent acquisition processes. Organizations that invest in their branding and integrate technology into recruitment are better positioned to attract and retain top talent.

Additionally, the model highlights important indirect and mediated relationships. Employer Branding has a strong influence on Strategic Alignment (0.62), implying that branding not only attracts talent but also reinforces the alignment between HR practices and business strategy. Furthermore, TA Outcomes positively affect Strategic Alignment (0.59), suggesting a feedback loop where successful recruitment enhances organizational cohesion and direction. Together, these paths illustrate a dynamic interaction among branding, digital enablement, and alignment, all contributing to a strategically driven talent acquisition process.

Mediation Results Table

Path	Estimate	SE	p-value	95% CI (Lower, Upper)	Result
Total Effect (SA → TAE)	0.583	0.063	<0.001	(0.452, 0.693)	Significant
Direct Effect (SA → TAE)	0.431	0.059	<0.001	(0.327, 0.558)	Significant
Indirect Effect (SA → EB → TAE)	0.152	0.038	<0.01	(0.081, 0.238)	Partial Mediation

**Interpretation:**

- Employer Branding (EB) partially mediates the effect of Strategic Alignment (SA) on Talent Acquisition Effectiveness (TAE). Since both the direct and indirect paths are statistically significant, the model shows partial mediation. This means that Strategic Alignment improves TAE both directly and indirectly through improved Employer Branding.

FUTURE SCOPE

Future research can explore the evolving dynamics of talent acquisition in the context of emerging technologies such as AI-driven recruitment platforms, virtual reality onboarding, and predictive analytics. While the current study emphasizes the role of employer branding, digital enablement, and strategic alignment, future studies could examine additional variables such as candidate experience, organizational culture, and diversity and inclusion practices to provide a more holistic view. Longitudinal studies can also help in understanding how changes in branding and technology over time influence talent outcomes. Moreover, cross-industry and cross-cultural comparisons would offer valuable insights into how these factors operate in different organizational and geographical contexts, thereby enhancing the generalizability and strategic applicability of the findings.

CONCLUSION

Talent acquisition must evolve into a strategic pillar that supports long-term business goals. The SAM-Talent model provides a validated framework integrating strategic alignment, employer branding, and technology. This model can serve as a practical tool for HR leaders aiming to boost hiring efficiency and employee retention in a competitive talent landscape. Future studies can incorporate dimensions such as diversity, inclusion, and global application.

Moreover, organizations that adopt this model are better positioned to attract top talent, adapt to dynamic market demands, and create a resilient workforce. As talent becomes a key differentiator in sustaining competitive

advantage, models like SAM-Talent offer a roadmap for aligning human capital with business strategy. Continued research and real-world application of this model can contribute significantly to shaping the future of talent acquisition in the digital age.

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