

Managing talent to compete: Recommendations for enhancing entrepreneurial competences in Spanish SMEs

Gestión del talento para competir: Recomendaciones para potenciar las competencias emprendedoras en las Pymes españolas



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Abstract

In an increasingly volatile and competitive environment, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) must cultivate strong entrepreneurial competences to adapt effectively to ongoing market changes. These competences, grounded in organisational learning, innovation, and customer orientation, are shaped by how firms manage their talent and structure their internal operations. This study proposes an integrated model linking talent management to entrepreneurial competences, identifying cross-functional teams, organisational commitment, and employee professionalism as key mediating factors, while also examining the moderating influence of environmental dynamism. Based on survey data from 1,721 CEOs of Spanish SMEs across major economic sectors, the results show that firms investing in the attraction, development, and retention of talent demonstrate stronger entrepreneurial competences. These effects are further reinforced when collaboration within cross-functional teams and high levels of commitment and professionalism are present—particularly in more stable environments. The findings highlight the strategic value of proactive human capital management, cohesive multidisciplinary teams, and the promotion of commitment and professionalism as essential drivers of innovation and sustained competitiveness in today's dynamic business context.

Keywords: entrepreneurial competences; talent management; cross-functional teams; organisational commitment; employee professionalism; SMEs

JEL Classification: M10; M12

Resumen

En un entorno cada vez más volátil y competitivo, las pequeñas y medianas empresas (pymes) deben desarrollar sólidas competencias emprendedoras para adaptarse de forma eficaz a los continuos cambios del mercado. Estas competencias, basadas en el aprendizaje organizativo, la innovación y la orientación al cliente, se ven condicionadas por la manera en que las empresas gestionan su talento y estructuran sus operaciones internas. Este estudio propone un modelo integrado que vincula la gestión del talento con las competencias emprendedoras, identificando los equipos interfuncionales, el compromiso organizativo y la profesionalidad de los empleados como factores mediadores clave, al tiempo que analiza la influencia moderadora de la dinámica del entorno. A partir de datos de una encuesta a 1.721 directores generales de pymes españolas pertenecientes a los principales sectores económicos, los resultados muestran que las empresas que invierten en la atracción, el desarrollo y la retención del talento presentan competencias emprendedoras más sólidas. Estos efectos se ven reforzados cuando existe colaboración entre equipos interfuncionales y altos niveles de compromiso y profesionalidad, especialmente en entornos más estables. Los hallazgos ponen de relieve el valor estratégico de una gestión proactiva del capital humano, de equipos multidisciplinares cohesionados y de la promoción del compromiso y la profesionalidad como motores esenciales de la innovación y la competitividad sostenida en el actual contexto empresarial dinámico.

Palabras clave: competencias emprendedoras; gestión del talento; equipos interfuncionales; compromiso organizativo; profesionalidad de los empleados; PYMES

Clasificación JEL: M10; M12

Funding data

Funder name: [Universidad Complutense de Madrid](#)

Grant numbers: PR12/24-31559

How to cite this article

Sastre-Castillo, M. Ángel, Rubio-Andres, M., Linuesa-Langreo, J., & Gutiérrez-Broncano, S. (2025). Managing talent to compete: Recommendations for enhancing entrepreneurial competences in Spanish SMEs. *Small Business International Review*, 9(2), e776. <https://doi.org/10.26784/sbir.v9i2.776>

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1. Introduction

In today's competitive and unpredictable business landscape, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) must strengthen their capabilities to meet emerging global challenges. The growing complexity of business practices—driven by globalisation, rapid technological change, and unforeseen events such as health crises or geopolitical conflicts—requires organisations to adapt swiftly and strategically (Ghemawat, 2018). Entrepreneurial competences (EC), encompassing skills, knowledge, and attitudes such as organisational learning, innovation, and strategic orientation, enable firms to identify and exploit opportunities in uncertain contexts (Emele, 2024).

The literature recognises human capital as a fundamental driver of EC, generating both economic and social value when effectively managed (Naghavi et al., 2019). Consequently, talent management (TM) plays a crucial role in developing these competences, as it supports the identification, development, and retention of key employees—particularly in volatile environments. Companies that implement robust TM practices enhance employees' capacity for risk-taking, innovation, and strategic decision-making (Vaiman et al., 2021).

Beyond TM, organisational design and work management systems are also essential (Gratton, 2021). Both influence agility, efficiency, and innovation potential (Gupta et al., 2016; Kuratko et al., 2014), while the structure of teams and processes directly affects creativity, strategic decision-making, and opportunity exploration (Anderson et al., 2014).

Within this framework, cross-functional teams (CFTs) have emerged as strategic assets that enhance SMEs' entrepreneurial capacity by overcoming traditional structural limitations, fostering flexible collaboration, and aligning with talent management strategies. As such, they are vital for business success and corporate entrepreneurship in dynamic environments (O'Connor & Wulf, 2004; Webber, 2002). For these teams to perform effectively, TM must focus on attracting, developing, and retaining skilled employees, thereby promoting engagement, motivation, and cohesion—factors essential for achieving strategic goals (Rauch et al., 2005).

Organisational commitment—defined as employees' emotional identification with corporate objectives—reinforces retention and encourages active participation in strategic initiatives (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Professionalism, combining autonomy, expertise, and responsibility, enables employees to translate strategies into innovative and sustainable results (Nasiri et al., 2024). Together, these variables connect TM with entrepreneurial competences and contribute to competitive advantage in volatile contexts (Tambunan et al., 2024).

Accordingly, this research aims to (1) analyse how TM influences the development of entrepreneurial competences, recognising human capital as a key asset; (2) examine the mediating role of CFTs, organisational commitment, and professionalism in reinforcing these competences; and (3) assess how environmental dynamism (ED) moderates these relationships, shaping the entrepreneurial effectiveness of SMEs.

We therefore propose the following research questions:

RQ1: *How does talent management influence the entrepreneurial competences of SMEs within the current business environment?*

RQ2: *Do multidisciplinary teams, organisational commitment, and professionalism act as mediators in the relationship between talent management and the development of entrepreneurial competences? Are these variables essential for developing entrepreneurial competences?*

RQ3: *Does environmental dynamism moderate the relationship between cross-functional teams and entrepreneurial competences, as well as between commitment and professionalism and entrepreneurial competences?*

To address these research questions and objectives, we conducted a 2024 survey of 1,721 CEOs from Spanish SMEs across key sectors, including industry, construction, commerce, and services. The study aims to provide SMEs with practical insights on how to foster entrepreneurial capabilities through effective talent management.

Following this introduction, the remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature and develops the hypotheses. Section 3 outlines the research methodology, including the sample, variable measurement, and statistical analysis. Section 4 presents the empirical findings. Finally, Section 5 discusses the results and provides conclusions, as well as theoretical and practical implications for SME managers. The article concludes with the study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1 Talent management and entrepreneurial competences

Entrepreneurial competence, defined as the combination of skills, knowledge, and behaviours that enable firms to identify and manage opportunities, is essential for both business creation and adaptation to dynamic environments (Bird, 2019; Tehseen & Ramayah, 2015). These competences include skills such as problem-solving and leadership under uncertainty (Obschonka & Stuetzer, 2017); knowledge involving market awareness and innovation processes; and attitudes such as proactiveness, risk tolerance, and a commitment to continuous learning (Seikkula-Leino & Salomaa, 2021). Together, they enhance innovation, value creation, and organisational resilience. When entrepreneurial competences are combined with an innovative culture, they foster diversification and sustainable competitive advantage (Era, 2024), while environmental dynamism further shapes these abilities (Nikitina et al., 2020).

Developing entrepreneurial competences is therefore vital not only for start-ups but also for established firms seeking long-term competitiveness. Within this framework, talent management (TM)—the strategic process of attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining key employees—serves as a central mechanism for strengthening organisational competitiveness and fostering entrepreneurship (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Closely linked to human resource management, TM focuses on identifying high-potential employees (Elugbaju et al., 2024) and cultivating a skilled, committed workforce capable of addressing complex challenges (Dahiya & Rath, 2021; Malenova et al., 2024).

Recent studies indicate that TM has evolved into a holistic approach encompassing workforce planning, leadership development, and the creation of an inclusive culture (Deng et al., 2024; Joaquim & Figueiredo, 2024). It now plays a key role as a driver of entrepreneurial competences in SMEs (Wang et al., 2020; Odugbesan et al., 2023). Implementing strategic HR practices in SMEs enhances skills development, innovation, and adaptability (Kambarov & Melibayeva, 2025; Mozammel et al., 2024), while dynamic capabilities enable firms to respond rapidly to new opportunities, thereby strengthening entrepreneurial orientation (Ratten, 2020). Well-structured TM frameworks also help SMEs retain high-potential talent and foster the entrepreneurial mindset required for sustained growth and innovation, supporting both transformation and long-term sustainability (Jundulloh & Nasution, 2024).

This relationship between TM and entrepreneurial competences (EC) is particularly relevant for SMEs, which depend heavily on employees' innovative and adaptive capacities due to limited resources and the uncertainty of their operating environments (Abubakar et al., 2023; Ntuli et al., 2024). However, TM practices that focus too narrowly on short-term operational needs may restrict innovation and weaken entrepreneurial potential.

Recent research underscores the importance of TM in cultivating EC, suggesting that organisations should balance role-specific skills with broader creative abilities that encourage innovation and adaptability, while simultaneously fostering an entrepreneurial culture that amplifies the effects of these practices (Dayeh & Farmanesh, 2021; Hadil et al., 2024). Moreover, TM programs emphasising sustainability and innovation have been shown to enhance both organisational commitment and competitiveness, reinforcing the strategic value of human capital development (Ariffin & Agustino, 2024). Strategically designed TM policies also promote internal entrepreneurship and strengthen organisational resilience during economic turbulence, positioning TM as a cornerstone for building and sustaining entrepreneurial competences (Tabavar et al., 2024).

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: *Talent management positively influences entrepreneurial capacity.*

2.2 Cross-functional teams and their mediating effect

Cross-functional teams (CFTs)—comprising members with diverse expertise and backgrounds—have become essential organisational mechanisms for achieving efficiency and adaptability in competitive environments (Kettley & Hirsh, 2000; O'Connor & Wulf, 2004; Pylväs, 2012). Their balanced structures reduce power distance and foster collaboration, even within hierarchical settings (Önday, 2016). Successful CFTs depend on internal cohesion, trust, and effective knowledge flow (Daspit et al., 2013; Ghobadi & D'Ambra, 2012), while well-managed diversity enhances creativity and adaptability (Anderson, 2024). Nevertheless, these same features can create coordination challenges that hinder team effectiveness (Northcraft et al., 1995). Establishing a climate of trust and stability is therefore vital. As Griffin and Hauser (1996) emphasise, organisational support and time are required for such collaborative cultures to develop.

Talent management (TM) plays a pivotal role in forming and sustaining effective CFTs in SMEs. It integrates talent attraction, development, and retention to align employee capabilities with strategic objectives (Collings et al., 2019). Talent attraction ensures that individuals' skills and values fit organisational goals, while retention promotes cohesion and minimises turnover (Foerstl et al., 2013). Strategic TM practices enable firms

to recruit and retain top performers and leverage their skills to enhance collaboration (Cascio & Boudreau, 2016). Approaches centred on integration and development strengthen organisational resilience and team cohesion, particularly in SMEs, where employee multifunctionality compensates for structural constraints (Vrontis et al., 2017). This multifunctionality—often less common in larger firms—facilitates smoother collaboration across functions.

Empirical research confirms that TM fosters coordination and knowledge sharing in CFTs (Gutiérrez-Broncano et al., 2025) and enhances functional integration and new product development by aligning team and organisational goals (Mehrabian et al., 2025). Robust TM practices thus promote innovation, collaborative decision-making, and overall performance, especially in dynamic markets (Samuel et al., 2024). Effective recruitment and development processes also help retain high-potential employees, enabling CFTs to achieve strategic goals (Allal-Chérif et al., 2022).

However, TM's influence on multidisciplinary teams is not always positive. Levenson (2012) cautions that weak transversal skill development and unclear integration processes can lead to friction and diminished performance. Similarly, Trent and Monczka (2003) observe that poorly aligned TM strategies can create interdepartmental conflict, while Ramsay and Croom (2008) argue that without a coherent strategic framework, the benefits of TM dissipate in interdependent work environments. Consequently, strong managerial commitment is essential to sustaining effective CFTs.

CFTs also strengthen entrepreneurial competences by integrating diverse perspectives to address complex challenges through innovation (Ancona & Caldwell, 1990). Team diversity enhances opportunity recognition, strategic planning, and resource management (Santa et al., 2023). Competences such as innovation, adaptability, and market responsiveness thrive in settings that encourage interdisciplinary collaboration (Kee & Ramayah, 2020). Companies that invest in developing transversal skills within CFTs gain sustainable competitive advantages (Camuffo et al., 2012). In SMEs, these teams promote agility, efficient resource utilisation, and resilience, thereby supporting long-term sustainability (Shams & Vrontis, 2019). CFTs thus serve as mediating mechanisms linking TM and entrepreneurial competences, transforming individual abilities into collective performance. As Häkkinen and Kansikas (2023) note, CFTs in SMEs harness employee capabilities through TM practices, enhancing adaptability and entrepreneurial outcomes in dynamic environments.

Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: *Cross-functional teams positively mediate the relationship between talent management and entrepreneurial competences in SMEs.*

2.3 Organisational commitment and employee professionalism

Although talent management (TM) encompasses the attraction, development, and retention of talent (Thunnissen et al., 2013), most research and practice have focused primarily on attraction, often overlooking development and retention, which have stronger effects on business performance (Oladapo, 2014). In today's competitive global environment, firms must manage and retain talent effectively to achieve sustained success (Dayeh & Farmanesh, 2021). Such practices enhance performance and support long-term strategic objectives (Luna-Arocas et al., 2020; Silzer & Dowell, 2009). However, scholars have noted persistent gaps in explaining how TM generates outcomes, emphasising the need to analyse mediating mechanisms (Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen, 2016).

TM has been shown to exert a strong influence on job satisfaction (Hafez et al., 2017) and organisational commitment (Malik & Singh, 2014). It also enhances motivation, retention, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011; Björkman et al., 2013; Gelens et al., 2015; Luna-Arocas & Morley, 2015; Mensah et al., 2024; Sariwulan et al., 2021).

TM further contributes to the development of entrepreneurial competences, which are essential for competitiveness (Montero Guerra et al., 2023; Vaiman et al., 2021). Two key mediating mechanisms in this relationship are organisational commitment—defined as employees' emotional attachment to the organisation, which enhances retention (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Hackett et al., 2001)—and employee professionalism, characterised by autonomy, expertise, and trust (Coulson-Thomas, 2021). Professionalism strengthens both efficiency and organisational trust (Atmaja et al., 2023; Noordegraaf, 2016) and reflects competence and loyalty (Tambunan et al., 2024). When organisational and employee goals are aligned, innovation and entrepreneurship are further enhanced (Björkman et al., 2013; Collings, 2014).

TM has been found to increase both commitment (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Dayeh & Farmanesh, 2021; Gelens et al., 2015) and professionalism (Baylie & Singh, 2019), fostering skilled and motivated workforces capable of sustaining entrepreneurial competences (Luna-Arocas et al., 2020; Thunnissen & Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019).

Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: *Organisational commitment and employee professionalism mediate the relationship between talent management and entrepreneurial competences in SMEs.*

2.4 Cross-functional teams and commitment-professionalism as sequential mediators

Within the framework of this study, cross-functional teams (CFTs) and the interplay between organisational commitment and employee professionalism are proposed as mediating mechanisms linking talent management (TM) to entrepreneurial competences (Becker, 1993; Meyer et al., 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Grounded in social identity, human capital, and organisational commitment theories, CFTs rely on cohesion and shared commitment to operate effectively. They have emerged as strategic responses to demographic and structural transformations affecting organisations, such as an aging workforce, increasing generational and cultural diversity, and the transition toward more flexible and less hierarchical structures (Hackman & Morris, 1975; Jackson et al., 1995). These transformations require the integration of specialised knowledge and diverse perspectives to strengthen adaptability and innovation in dynamic environments.

The effectiveness of CFTs depends on an organisation's ability to manage individual and functional differences while fostering collaboration, resilience, and creativity among team members (Bouachouch & Lamrabet, 2022). When employees prioritise collective goals, they overcome functional barriers and develop higher levels of cooperation and performance (Lembke & Wilson, 1998; Mathieu et al., 2008; Sethi & Nicholson, 2001; Webber, 2002). Commitment to shared objectives also reinforces trust and motivation (Hoegl & Parboteeah, 2006; Klein, 2013; Resick & Bloom, 1997). Together, commitment and professionalism establish a behavioural culture that drives innovation and continuous improvement (Daspit et al., 2013; Mentzer et al., 2001; Omachi & Ajewumi, 2024).

Within this dynamic, commitment and professionalism constitute the foundation enabling CFTs to function effectively. Committed and professionally responsible employees promote group cohesion, mitigate tensions arising from functional diversity, and enhance the integration of complementary knowledge, thereby improving team performance (Mathieu et al., 2008; Sethi & Nicholson, 2001). This behavioural process serves as a key mechanism through which TM practices are translated into collective outcomes such as innovation, learning, and organisational agility (Omachi & Ajewumi, 2024).

The interplay between commitment and professionalism thus represents the first stage in a sequential mediation process: TM practices strengthen employees' commitment and professionalism, which in turn foster collaborative and responsible attitudes that promote coordination and effective integration within multifunctional teams. These CFTs—characterised by interdepartmental cooperation and the continuous exchange of specialised knowledge—then transform individual capabilities developed through TM into tangible and sustainable entrepreneurial competences (Bouachouch & Lamrabet, 2022; Mentzer et al., 2001). Through this process, commitment and professionalism act as enablers of multifunctional teamwork, explaining how TM is ultimately converted into enhanced entrepreneurial outcomes.

Based on the above, we propose the following sequential mediation hypothesis:

H4: *Organisational commitment and employee professionalism are positively associated with the effectiveness of cross-functional teams, which sequentially mediate the positive relationship between talent management and entrepreneurial competences.*

2.5 The moderating role of environmental dynamism

Environmental dynamism (ED) refers to the degree of uncertainty in an organisation's external environment (Jansen et al., 2006; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005) and to the speed and unpredictability of changes in markets, technology, and regulation (Dess & Beard, 1984; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). ED significantly influences entrepreneurial strategy by shaping perceptions of uncertainty during strategic formulation and implementation (Alon et al., 2013; Miller & Friesen, 1983). It can either constrain or enhance the effectiveness of internal resources (Coombs & Bierly, 2006).

In dynamic environments, high uncertainty reduces predictability and impedes planning (Covin & Slevin, 1991; Teece et al., 1997). Excessive volatility may disrupt the development of entrepreneurial competences, even in firms characterised by strong commitment and professionalism (Lumpkin & Dess, 2001). Conversely, in more stable environments, these factors tend to reinforce entrepreneurial competences, as individuals are better able to refine and specialise their skills over time. From the perspective of the resource-based view (RBV), competitive advantage depends on aligning internal capabilities with external environmental conditions (Barney, 1991; Wales et al., 2021).

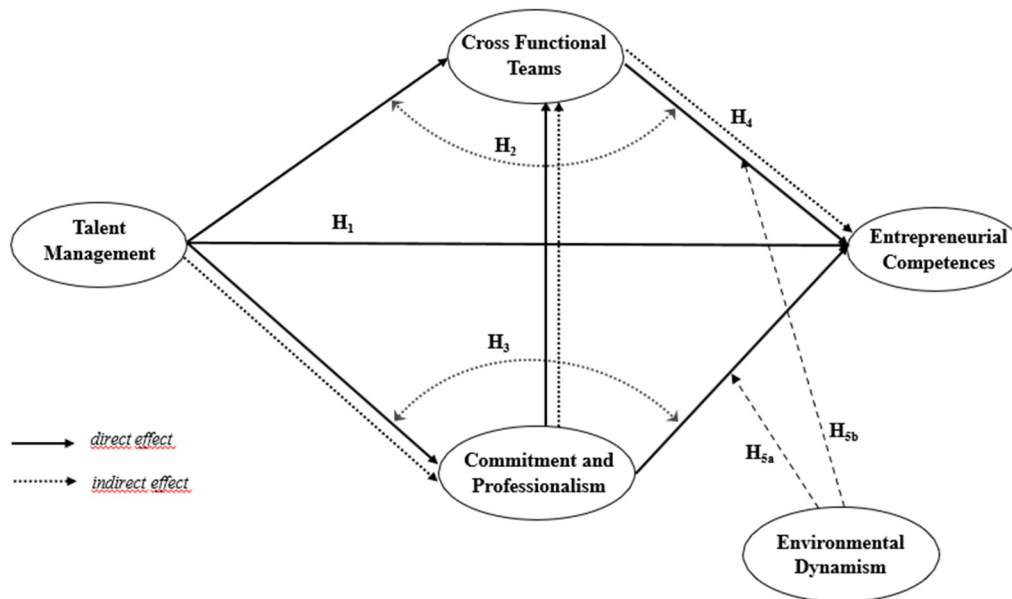
H5a: *Environmental dynamism moderates the relationship between organisational commitment and employee professionalism and entrepreneurial competences, such that commitment and professionalism have a stronger positive effect on SMEs' entrepreneurial competences when environmental dynamism is lower.*

Similarly, the performance of cross-functional teams (CFTs) is affected by environmental conditions. According to contingency theory, their effectiveness tends to increase in more stable environments with greater predictability (Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985; Siggelkow, 2002). In contrast, in highly dynamic contexts, rapid change complicates knowledge consolidation and hinders learning processes (Eisenhardt & Tabrizi, 1995; Zahra & Covin, 1995). Under conditions of lower ED, CFTs are better able to leverage their diverse expertise to foster learning and innovation (Covin & Slevin, 1989; Edmondson, 1999).

H5b: *Environmental dynamism moderates the relationship between cross-functional teams and entrepreneurial competences, such that CFTs have a stronger positive effect on SMEs' entrepreneurial competences when environmental dynamism is lower.*

Figure 1 presents the hypothesised model proposed in this study:

Figure 1. Hypothesised model



3. Research method

3.1 Sample and data collection

A random sample of SMEs operating in Spain was selected from the Spanish Central Business Directory (2024) and the SABI database, accessed via FAEDPYME. The sampling process followed a stratified random design based on population structure and the study's objectives. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was applied, and up to 2,000 questionnaires were distributed. After eliminating incomplete responses, 1,721 valid surveys were obtained, yielding a 28.32% response rate, a 3.1% sampling error, and a 95% confidence level under the least favourable assumption ($p = q = 0.5$).

Most participating firms operated in services (49.7%), followed by retail (19.2%), industry (17.8%), and construction (13.3%). By size, small firms (10–49 employees) represented 47.3%, micro-SMEs (6–9 employees) 45.2%, medium-sized SMEs (50–249 employees) 7.5%, and firms without employees 0.7%. Regarding ownership, 66.9% were family-owned, and 33.1% were non-family. Additionally, 44.2% of CEOs held higher education qualifications.

3.2 Measures

When measuring a latent construct, researchers may use either reflective or formative indicators (MacKenzie et al., 2005). Reflective indicators consist of highly correlated measures influenced by the latent construct, whereas formative indicators are variables that define the construct without necessarily being intercorrelated (Hair et al., 2017). Based on the four criteria outlined by MacKenzie et al. (2005) to differentiate between these two approaches, all variables included in our survey were reflective.

We used Mode A composites—linear combinations of reflective indicators—for all key variables (Hair et al., 2017). Respondents rated all items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Talent management: The talent management variable was measured through two items for the internal dimension, three items for the external dimension, and four items for the talent retention dimension (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). It was developed as a second-order construct composed of its three dimensions: internal, external, and retention.

Cross-functional teams: This variable was measured using three items validated in the studies of Enz and Lambert (2012) and Santa et al. (2010).

Entrepreneurial competences: Based on the works of Kyndt and Baert (2015) and Schelfhout et al. (2016), two indicators were used to assess the degree of importance of entrepreneurial competences in SMEs.

Commitment and professionalism: These variables were measured using two items validated by McCloskey and McCain (1987) and Nor et al. (2022).

Environmental dynamism: This construct reflects the difficulty of predicting industrial changes (Dess & Beard, 1984) and the ongoing movement of entry and exit within the industry. After reviewing several established scales, we adopted an adaptation of the measures proposed by Harrington and Kendall (2005) and Alon et al. (2013). Environmental dynamism was measured using a five-item scale.

Control variables: The study considered three control variables: company size, sector of activity, and family ownership. Separate analyses—including, partially including, and excluding these controls—produced consistent parameter estimates and unchanged significance levels. Therefore, following the methodological recommendations of Bernerth and Aguinis (2016), the authors decided to omit control variables from the final hypothesis testing and subsequent discussion.

3.3 Data analysis

We used SPSS v.24.0 to calculate descriptive statistics for the sample. To test the proposed hypotheses, we conducted a partial least squares (PLS) analysis using SmartPLS 4.0. A power analysis performed with G*Power 3.1 for regressions involving four independent variables confirmed the adequacy of the sample size. Post hoc calculations yielded a statistical power of 99.7%, demonstrating that the number of informants was sufficient to test the relationships (Cohen, 1988) while minimising the risk of a Type II error.

Following established guidelines (Hair et al., 2017, 2019), we conducted the PLS analysis with 10,000 subsamples to compute standard errors and bootstrap *t* statistics, using $n - 1$ degrees of freedom (where n represents the number of subsamples) to evaluate the statistical significance of the path coefficients.

3.4 Common method variance

Two post hoc tests confirmed that common method variance (CMV) was not a concern in this study. Harman's one-factor test showed that the first factor explained only 34% of the variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Using the marker variable technique (Lindell & Whitney, 2001) and further validation (Rönkkö & Ylitalo, 2011), all correlations remained below 0.05, confirming that CMV did not significantly influence the results.

4. Results

4.1 Measurement model

Following the recommendations of Conway and Lance (2010), we report the reliability and validity statistics for the reflective measures. Table 1 presents evidence of individual item reliability, composite reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity for all constructs. Table 2 provides the correlations among all study variables, including the control variables.

Table 1. Item loadings and weights, construct reliability, and convergent validity

Construct	Item/Second Order Construct	Loading	Construct Reliability			AVE
			Cronbach's Alpha	Dillon-Goldstein (ρ_c)	Dijkstra-Henseler (ρ_A)	
Talent Management (TM)			.91	.93	.92	.55
	TM1	.83				
	TM2	.81				
	TM3	.78				
Cross-Functional Teams (CFT)			.78	.87	.79	.69
	CFT1	.80				
	CFT2	.85				
	CFT3	.84				
Commitment and Professionalism (CP)			.80	.91	.81	.84
	CP1	.91				
	CP2	.92				
Entrepreneurial Competences (EC)			.71	.87	.71	.77
	EC1	.87				
	EC2	.88				
Environmental Dynamism (ED)			.81	.85	.83	.54
	ED1	.71				
	ED2	.72				
	ED3	.71				
	ED4	.80				
	ED5	.85				

Reliability and validity analyses confirmed the robustness of the measurement model. As shown in Table 1, all item loadings for talent management, cross-functional teams, commitment, professionalism, entrepreneurial competences, and environmental dynamism exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.707 (Hair et al., 2017). Both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (ρ_c) values were above 0.70 (Henseler et al., 2009), and these findings were further supported by Dijkstra and Henseler (2015) reliability coefficient (ρ_A), which also exceeded 0.70. Convergent validity was satisfactory, while Table 2 confirmed discriminant validity using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios below 0.85, consistent with Hair et al. (2017, 2019).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix (square root of AVE on the diagonal)

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Talent Management (TM)	4.07	.71	.74	.18 [.10, .26]	.17 [.08, .26]	.15 [.12, .18]	.05 [.02, .08]
Cross-Functional Teams (CFT)	3.89	.89	.15	.83	.38 [.24, .50]	.55 [.42, .67]	.09 [.10, .25]
Commitment and Professionalism (CP)	4.04	.89	.14	.45	.92	.56 [.47, .66]	.08 [.03, .13]
Entrepreneurial Competences (EC)	3.76	.92	.12	.60	.64	.88	.10 [.05, .16]
Environmental Dynamism (ED)	2.82	1.01	.06	.08	.05	.40	.73

Values in bold on the diagonal are the square roots of AVE (variance shared between constructs and their measures)

Off-diagonal elements below the diagonal are correlations among the constructs; correlations above .21 are significant at $p < .01$ (two-tailed test) and correlations between .11 and .21 are significant at $p < .05$ (two-tailed test)

Off-diagonal elements above the diagonal are the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios of correlations and their respective 95% confidence intervals. SD = standard deviation

4.2 Structural model analysis

Table 3 presents the results of the hypothesis tests. The total effect of talent management on entrepreneurial competences was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < .01$; Table 3), thereby supporting H1. However, when the mediating variables—cross-functional teams, commitment, and professionalism—were added, the direct effect of talent management decreased substantially and became nonsignificant ($\beta = 0.04$; Table 3). Therefore, the total effect, which combines the direct and indirect effects, was found to be indirect rather than direct.

Regarding the test of the mediation model (H2, H3, and H4), the findings confirm the proposed hypotheses. As shown in Table 3, in a model where commitment and professionalism are excluded and cross-functional teams serve as the sole mediator between talent management and entrepreneurial competences, the indirect effect is significant ($\beta = 0.04$, $p < .05$; lower bound = 0.02, upper bound = 0.07; Table 3), supporting H2. Similarly, in a model where commitment and professionalism act as the exclusive mediator between talent management and entrepreneurial competences, the indirect effect is also significant, as confirmed by bias-corrected bootstraps with a 95% confidence interval ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < .05$; lower bound = 0.03, upper bound = 0.11; Table 3), thus supporting H3. In both models, the increase in R^2 relative to the unmediated model is substantial, with the variance explained in entrepreneurial competences rising by 0.41 and 0.37 when the exclusive mediator is commitment and professionalism or cross-functional teams, respectively (Table 3).

Table 3. Servant leadership-team creativity mediated relationship: Mediated and unmediated models

Dependent Variable	Entrepreneurial Competences				Size of the Mediation Effect
	Unmediated Model	Mediated Model via CFT	Mediated Model via CP	Mediated Model in Serial	Unmediated Model
Talent Management	$\beta: .18^{**}$	$\beta: .09^*$	$\beta: .08^*$	$\beta: .04^{ns}$	 V
Cross Functional Teams (CFT)		$\beta: .60^{***}$		$\beta: .40^{***}$	
Commitment and Professionalism (CP)			$\beta: .63^{***}$	$\beta: .46^{***}$	Mediated Model in Serial
Indirect Effect (IE)		$\beta: .04^*$ [.02;.07]	$\beta: .07^*$ [.03;.11]	$\beta: .03^*$ [.02;.05]	
R ²	.08	.37	.41	.54	
Change In R ²	-	$\Delta R^2 = .29$	$\Delta R^2 = .33$	$\Delta R^2 = .46$	$f^2 = .34$

P-values: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; ns = not significant (one-tailed test)

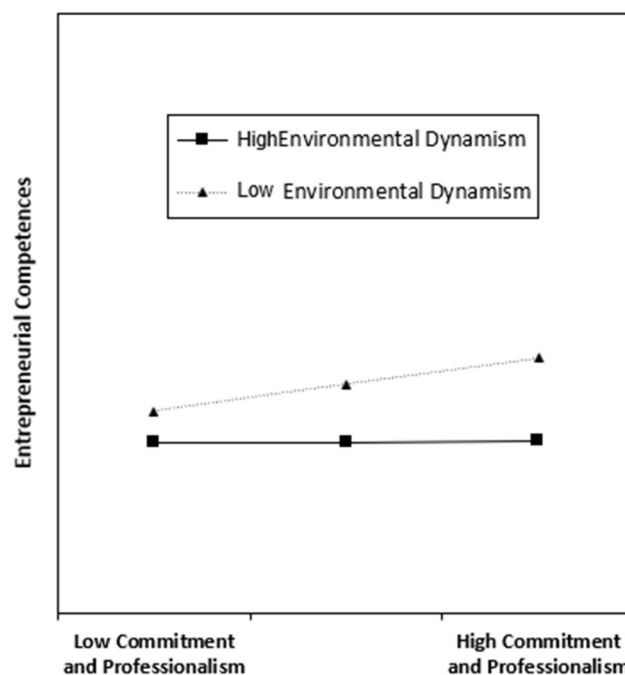
IE = indirect effect and corresponding 95% confidence intervals. $f^2 = (R^2(\text{included}) - R^2(\text{excluded})) / (1 - R^2(\text{included}))$

Effect sizes of f^2 between .15 and .35 are considered moderate (Cohen, 1988)

Finally, when both mediators are included in the model, the indirect effect between talent management and entrepreneurial competences appears to operate sequentially through commitment and professionalism and then through cross-functional teams. This indirect effect is significant ($\beta = 0.03$, $p < .05$; lower bound = 0.02, upper bound = 0.05; Table 3), providing support for H4.

The findings also support H5a and H5b concerning the moderating role of environmental dynamism in the relationships between commitment and professionalism and entrepreneurial competences, and between cross-functional teams and entrepreneurial competences. After mean-centring the independent variables and the moderator (Aiken & West, 1991), the resulting interaction terms were positive and significant in both cases: commitment and professionalism ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < .05$) and cross-functional teams ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < .05$). The plots of the regression lines for high versus low environmental dynamism (+1 SD and -1 SD; Aiken and West (1991)) show that, in the case of commitment and professionalism, the positive impact on entrepreneurial competences is stronger—reflected in a steeper slope—under low rather than high environmental dynamism conditions (Figure 2). Thus, H5a was confirmed.

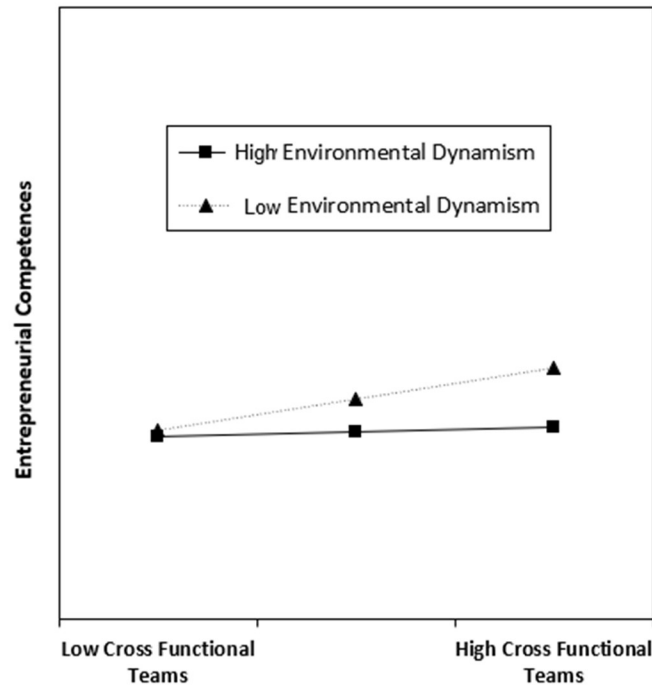
Figure 2. Interactive effect of commitment and professionalism and environmental dynamism on entrepreneurial competences



Similarly, in the case of cross-functional teams, the graph comparing the regression lines for low versus high environmental dynamism shows that the positive impact of CFTs on entrepreneurial competences is stronger

under low environmental dynamism conditions than under high environmental dynamism conditions (Figure 3). Thus, H5b was confirmed.

Figure 3. Interactive effect of cross-functional teams and environmental dynamism on entrepreneurial competences



5. Discussion

This study examined the direct relationship between talent management and entrepreneurial competences. The results indicate that SMEs implementing more effective talent management strategies develop higher levels of entrepreneurial competences (H1). This finding confirms the importance of promoting talent management through innovative approaches that foster new forms of entrepreneurial capability.

Cross-functional teams, composed of individuals with diverse disciplines and skill sets, have become essential tools for addressing the challenges of today's business environment. These teams are increasingly valued for their ability to integrate different perspectives and areas of expertise, thereby fostering a culture of adaptability and resilience (Yukl, 2012). Prior research suggests that the most successful interdisciplinary teams are those that establish effective internal processes, including clear communication, active collaboration, and appropriate coordination (Ancona & Caldwell, 1990; Pinto & Pinto, 1990).

Although previous research has recognised the importance of talent management in fostering entrepreneurial competences, several studies have emphasised the need to explore the mediating mechanisms that underpin this relationship (Luna-Arocas & Morley, 2015). In this regard, the present study analysed the mediating effects of organisational commitment and professionalism, as well as the role of cross-functional teams in this dynamic.

The results reveal that both factors play a crucial role in the relationship between talent management and entrepreneurial competences. When these mediating variables are included in the model, the direct effect of talent management on entrepreneurial competences becomes insignificant. This suggests that the influence of talent management on entrepreneurial competences operates primarily through cross-functional teams (H2) and through the mediating role of commitment and professionalism (H3).

Furthermore, we find empirical evidence supporting the sequential mediation relationship within the model. Specifically, talent management fosters higher levels of employee commitment and professionalism, which in turn strengthen cross-functional teams and ultimately enhance entrepreneurial competences (H4). This finding underscores the importance of cultivating organisational environments in which talent is strategically managed and high levels of commitment and professionalism are actively promoted. In such contexts, cross-functional teams can play a central role in driving innovation and improving organisational performance.

Finally, the relationship between employee commitment and professionalism, cross-functional teams, and

entrepreneurial behaviour appears to depend on the level of environmental dynamism in which SMEs operate (cf. Santa et al., 2023). Consistent with this expectation, our findings provide empirical evidence that SMEs operating in less dynamic environments achieve stronger entrepreneurial outcomes when both employee commitment and professionalism and cross-functional teams are present (H5a and H5b).

6. Conclusions

As a work management system, talent management plays a key role in strengthening the entrepreneurial competences that enable SMEs to grow and maintain a competitive advantage in dynamic markets. This strategic management approach recognises that human resources are not only an essential asset but also the primary source of a firm's competitive advantage (Mohan et al., 2024). Beyond traditional HR practices, an effective and integrated talent management strategy can significantly improve retention rates and employee engagement—both of which are associated with enhanced financial and operational performance (Adesina & Egbuta, 2025).

6.1 Theoretical implications

The theoretical contributions of this study are multiple and complementary. First, this research extends current knowledge on how entrepreneurial competences are developed in SMEs. To achieve this, it proposes a research model that has not previously been analysed in the literature and integrates several constructs—talent management, cross-functional teams, commitment and professionalism, entrepreneurial competences, and environmental dynamism. This approach contrasts with earlier studies that have examined the relationship between talent management and organisational performance in a fragmented manner (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Luna-Arocas & Morley, 2015), by offering a systemic perspective that explains how human resources generate entrepreneurial competences through intermediate organisational processes.

These findings are consistent with those of Vaiman et al., 2021 and Wang et al. (2020), who position talent management as a key catalyst for organisational learning and innovation. This study advances that perspective by introducing a sequential mediation model that clarifies how the behavioural dimensions of commitment and professionalism underpin the effective functioning of cross-functional teams. In turn, these teams constitute the organisational mechanism through which SMEs translate talent into innovation and sustain their competitive advantage.

Moreover, the results reinforce and extend prior contributions on teamwork in entrepreneurial contexts (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Daspit et al., 2013; Santa et al., 2023) by showing that transversal coordination and professional trust not only enhance performance but also foster the development of entrepreneurial competences. In contrast to studies focused exclusively on large corporations (Björkman et al., 2013), this research demonstrates that such processes are equally relevant within SMEs, where organisational flexibility and close manager-employee relationships enable a more dynamic and personalised form of talent management.

Third, the identification of the moderating effect of environmental dynamism provides a contingent perspective that refines the theoretical boundaries of the relationship between talent management and entrepreneurial competences. The findings partially support the arguments advanced by Lumpkin and Dess (2001), and Wales et al. (2021), as environmental dynamism appears to influence firms' ability to transform internal resources into sustainable competitive advantages. However, unlike these studies, the results indicate that the positive effects of cross-functional teams and commitment-professionalism on entrepreneurial competences are stronger in less dynamic environments. This suggests that SMEs are more likely to consolidate their entrepreneurial capabilities when operating in relatively stable contexts, leveraging accumulated learning routines and organisational cohesion.

In summary, this study advances the literature by integrating a systemic and context-sensitive perspective that explains how talent management—through its interaction with organisational and environmental factors—drives the sustained development of entrepreneurial competences in SMEs.

6.2 Practical implications

This study offers three major practical implications. The findings provide concrete and actionable guidance for SME owners and managers seeking to strengthen their entrepreneurial competences through a more strategic and integrated approach to talent management.

First, managers should design talent management policies that extend beyond recruitment or basic training to promote the continuous development of key competences linked to innovation and organisational learning. For example, implementing internal mentoring schemes that connect experienced employees with younger talent can foster professionalism and commitment, facilitating knowledge transfer and the generation of new ideas.

Likewise, establishing performance appraisal and recognition systems that reward cross-departmental collaboration and entrepreneurial initiative helps align individual behaviour with strategic organisational goals.

Second, because professionalism and commitment form the foundation of effective cross-functional teamwork, SME leaders should develop work structures that encourage cooperation and trust. Creating temporary project teams that unite staff from different areas—such as sales, production, and marketing—can stimulate collective creativity and enhance the firm's ability to solve complex problems. Cross-functional collaboration should focus on joint problem-solving and new product development rather than being limited to formal information exchanges. Such practices allow teams to share tacit knowledge and learn collectively, thereby strengthening the organisation's entrepreneurial capacity.

Third, the effectiveness of these practices depends on the level of environmental dynamism. In relatively stable contexts, SMEs should capitalise on this stability to consolidate learning routines and strengthen professionalisation within teams. This may involve developing continuous training plans that deepen technical and managerial skills or standardising processes to improve efficiency and quality. Conversely, in more turbulent environments, managers should prioritise organisational agility and flexibility. This can be achieved through self-managed teams, short-term staff rotations, or flatter organisational structures that enable the rapid reallocation of resources in response to emerging opportunities.

6.3 Limitations and future research directions

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it relies on cross-sectional data and perceptual responses from SME managers, which constrains the ability to establish causal relationships between the variables examined. Moreover, the analysis focuses exclusively on Spanish SMEs, meaning that specific cultural and institutional characteristics may have influenced the findings, thereby limiting their generalisability to other business contexts.

Although this study considered the role of employee commitment and professionalism, as well as cross-functional teams, as explanatory factors in the relationship between talent management and entrepreneurial competences, further work is needed to obtain a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics. For example, future research could incorporate the mediating role of knowledge-generation processes (i.e., accumulation, integration, utilisation, and reconfiguration), which would provide insight into how SMEs create the knowledge required to develop entrepreneurial competences.

In addition, comparative studies between developed and emerging economies could reveal whether institutional flexibility or resource scarcity strengthens or weakens the mediating mechanisms identified in this research. Such cross-country analyses would help clarify whether the relationships observed here are context dependent or generalisable across different institutional settings.

Future studies might also examine the impact of digitalisation on talent management and its influence on the development of entrepreneurial competences within organisations. In particular, researchers could explore how digital tools optimise talent identification and retention, as well as their role in promoting innovative business models and sustainable strategies in increasingly dynamic and competitive environments (Joaquim & Figueiredo, 2024).

Finally, future research could explore how leadership styles and organisational culture shape the effectiveness of talent management practices. Examining whether participative and trust-based leadership reinforces the link between professionalism, collaboration, and entrepreneurial outcomes could provide valuable insights into how SMEs transform human potential into sustained competitive advantage.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Funder Identifier: <https://doi.org/10.13039/501100002911>) Grant number: PR12/24-31559

This work was supported by the UCM-COFARES Chair on Health Promotion and Corporate Social Responsibility.

We express our sincere gratitude to the Colegio de Registradores de España and the Spanish Association of Accounting and Business Administration (AECA) for honouring us with the [4th International SME Juan Antonio Maroto Acín Prize](#), recognising our work as the best paper presented in this edition, and to the Small Business International Review for featuring our article as a highlighted publication.

Data Availability Statement

The research data for this study are not available for sharing

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