AN INVESTIGATION INTO TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on talent management, a Human Resource practice that plays a critical role in many organisations and encompasses a set of integrated processes that are used to attract and retain, develop, motivate and engage, talented employees to achieve a set of business strategies. The study assumes that human capital is key to organisational high performance and sustainability of competitive advantage. The main objectives were to identify, evaluate and determine the usage of talent management practices at a South African University. The research also determines whether talent management practices are aligned to organisational strategy. Face-to-face and telephonic interviews were used by the researcher to gather data for this research. As a result, ten Talent Management committee members were interviewed to determine the talent management practices at a South African University. The research findings indicate that talent management activities at the selected University are still at a maturing stage, therefore there are practices which are running and some that are still to be implemented within the organisation. The organisation used career conversation to identify talent pools and these will then be taken into different interventions as per their career aspirations. However, some problem areas were identified and these include the unavailability of a talent pipeline and succession planning. As a result, some recommendations were made, and these include the need for a critical gap skills analysis, mentorship, coaching and the design/implementation of a promotion policy. The study will add to the body of knowledge and assist the organisation under study to enhance or align talent management systems and practices.

Keywords: talent management; human resources; human capital
1. INTRODUCTION

Talent management, coined the “war for talent” in the late 1990s, has become an important managerial activity and organisations are placing greater scrutiny on talent management processes (Carcary, 2011: 677). The interest in talent management in the business context rose in the 1990s in order to emphasise the role employees play to the success of top performing companies (Khilji, Tarique and Schuker, 2015:237). Talent management creates value in the sense that value resides in the unique set of capabilities, skills, knowledge, competencies, commitment, contributions and abilities possessed by the organisation’s individual talent. Talented employees are seen as a strategic asset and add value to the organisational goals. High performing companies embrace individual talent and implement talent management processes, systems and practices that ensure company growth and the organisation’s competitive edge (Sparrow and Makram, 2015:23). Many organisations find it increasingly difficult to recruit top talent and run a constant risk of losing the ones they have to competitors. Talent management plays a critical role in developing, attracting, training and retaining highly skilled people. It is also the driving force of strategic human resource management, with talented employees being seen as an organisation’s strategic asset and contributing to value creation (Sparrow and Makram, 2015). In addition, talent management is viewed as the driving force of strategic human resource management in businesses. Hence, technological, economic and social changes encourage organisations to embrace the concept of talent management by nurturing future leaders and aligning the organisational strategy with talent management. Organisations that ensure global business success use human capital to create maximum performance and competitive advantages. A survey conducted in 2010 by King’s College London indicated that human capital should be taken seriously and thus was of the view that organisations’ human resources pay their future attention to talent management (Woollard, 2010). Talent management is linked to the core values to ensure selection, recruitment, retaining of the right talent for the whole organisation to function effectively. It is therefore, crucial to identify key positions within the organisation which have the potential to impact the company’s competitive advantage with high performers (Carcary, 2011:676).

1.1 Background to the Study

The rapid increase of competition in the higher education sectors and universities has compelled institutions in the sector to place growing emphasis on nurturing future leaders from within their ranks in order to gain competitive advantage over rival institutions. Universities have thus used talent management as a key driver of this human resource management strategy (Gichihi, Gakure and Waititu, 2014). Talent management offers universities’ Human Resource professionals and management a practical way of driving their competitive advantage. Talent Management emphasizes human capital as the most valuable asset in the organisation, for employees are the driving force behind organisational success. In addition, talent management encourages efficiency and the delivery of top quality services to students, staff and stakeholders (Gichihi et al., 2014). Institutions that put together talent management strategies that focuses mainly on creating a culture based on performance will drive efficiency, foster employee development, reduce turnover costs and ensure a high level of service delivery to students, staff and internal and external stakeholders. Therefore, universities cannot afford to lag behind in their talent management practices if they expect to recruit and retain workers who will drive their organisational success (Kagaari, 2011). The institution under study is one of the leading universities in the world and has branches in South Africa and abroad. It is also one of the largest universities in South Africa and has been in existence for more than one hundred years.
This university competes with other universities for talent and always tries to attract the best talent through the provision of competitive employee benefits and other incentives. The introduction of talent management at the university is at the emerging phase. However, this institution’s talent management is influenced by the rapid change in economy, technological changes and competition. Nonetheless, talent management is perceived as a strategic move aimed at addressing human resources issues as employees come first and ensure that the strategic goals and objectives of the university are achieved. The university under study is faced with a challenge of talent gap. Institutions compete for best talent and as such, the university was compelled to introduce innovative and robust talent management practices that will attract, retain and develop employees with the right skills and knowledge in order to enhance institutional sustainability and competitive advantage. As a result, the talent management initiatives at the institution under study aimed to address the following:

- Identifying future potential leaders
- Talent pipeline for the institution
- High professionals earmarked for transition
- Low performance at the institution with the aim of providing corrective measures
- What creates high performance
- Recruiting for success
- Identifying potential successors for key positions
- Employee interpersonal relationships

Therefore, the university introduced talent management to ensure that employees get the appropriate skills and talent to position the institution as a leading provider of higher education both nationally and internationally. In addition, the institution provides talent management practices which will ensure that employees are given an opportunity to develop themselves and acquire the necessary skills to ensure business continuity and success. The issue of identifying and developing internal talent pipeline remains a challenge for many organisations (Uren, 2011). Organisations should acquire strategic skills for the future in order to sustain competition and to expand into new markets. According to Uren (2011) organisations should identify and develop talented individuals from within who have the necessary skills to drive future values. As a result, the best practices in talent management focus on both leadership talent and other talents that will generate value and are in line with the organisation’s strategy, vision and mission (Uren, 2011). This university’s talent management policy was endorsed in 2014. The policy is intended at encouraging employee engagement, attracting talented people, retaining talented people, providing quality services to students through committed and capable employees, and creating a talent pipeline that will ensure continuity of services and sustain competition. The institution’s main purpose of providing teaching and learning to students demands that students benefit from high quality service through dedicated and competent professionals. The university also identified talent management strategies and practices that will foster growth and development to talented staff to enable them to excel in their specialised functional areas. The institution further ensures that there is an intervention plan for employees who do not perform according to the institution’s requirements. A management that implements best talent management processes is more prepared to compete in the global economy and capitalise quickly on new opportunities than their business rivals (Shalini, 2015). Talent management is not only about employing the best talent, but also motivating and retaining them. It involves identifying, knowledge transfer, developing, appraising and retaining high performing and high potential staff. Hence, global talent management is crucial for the strategic role within an organisation.
1.2 Problem Statement

Changes in technology and socio-economic factors encourage organisations to focus on future talent in order to ensure organisational sustainability and competitive edge. The institution under study has the challenge of a talent gap which has to be addressed in order to meet the current and future needs within the institution. The institution does not have a pipeline of talented individuals who will take key positions when they become vacant. Thus, talent management is important because it will assist the institution to put in place practices that will ensure that the talent is sustained within the institution. Furthermore, employee competencies, knowledge and skills should be recognized and maximised as a distinctive source of competitive advantage (Carcary, 2011:676).

1.3 Research Questions

The study intends to answer the following questions:

- How can talent management practices be identified, evaluated and employed at the selected South African university?
- How are the current talent management practices used at the selected South African university?
- How are the talent management practices aligned to the University’s strategic goals?
- What recommendations, based on the findings of the study, can be made and be applied at other higher educational Institutions?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study investigates, which talent management practices at a South African university, is important in that it determines how talent management practices are used to identify and retain the best employees for future development. Talent Management will assist the organisation to determine its business needs in order to meet institution’s current and future demand. The study is also important because it determines how talent management can make measurable differences to universities now and in the near future. The study will also benefit other private and public universities who want to enhance or adopt talent management strategies within their organisation. The findings of the research project could be used to address the challenges of talent management practices and processes of universities in other parts of the world. The study also contributes to the increasing awareness and development of talent management practices within higher education Institutions.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology refers to the way a topic is researched or investigated. There are different methodologies that can be used to investigate a research topic and these include quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. A quantitative procedure is used when a researcher is interested in measurements, while a qualitative method focuses on feelings, opinions and the behaviour of individuals. There is also the mixed method, which deals with both measurements and understanding people in accordance with the definition of their own world. A research design is a plan for the entire research project that encompasses various components such as the philosophical assumptions, research methods, approaches to data analysis and the writing up and publication of the findings. It is the road map of the whole research project (Myers, 2013). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) stresses further that the research design is a general plan.
which describes how the research questions will be answered and the way data will be collected and analysed, as well as a discussion on ethical issues and the constraints that will be encountered along the research journey (Saunders, et al. 2012). The study attempts at describing that which will be prevalent within a problem under study (Kumar, 2005). Fifth, an exploratory research is undertaken in order to explore an area where little is known or investigate the possibilities of undertaking a particular study. Exploratory research also aims to develop, refine and test measurement tools and procedure. The study attempts to understand the central phenomenon. The research under study here, is exploratory in nature. It investigates talent management practices and how are they evaluated and aligned with the organisational strategies.

2.1 Research Philosophy

The research took the form of a qualitative study. Qualitative research allows the researcher to develop an understanding of some phenomena in great detail and much depth (Zikmund, Babin, Carr and Griffin, 2010). In addition, qualitative researchers study behaviour holistically and naturalistically (Lichtman and Tech, 2014). Thus, a qualitative approach was utilised in an attempt to understand how talent management practices are implemented and used at a South African university. The study participants are responsible for talent management planning within the University, therefore their knowledge and experience enabled them to provide rich information concerning the topic under study. Finally, qualitative research is suitable for the study because the main aim was to understand the general views and individual perspectives with regard to talent management practices at a South African university. A case study method was deemed appropriate for the study, since the research is embedded in the interpretive paradigm. The cases studied under the case study method can be a process, an organisation, individuals or group of people. The study’s focus on a particular organisation and group of people within that organisation means that a case study is the most appropriate research approach as it allows the researcher to explore individuals and organisations. In this case, a South African university is identified as a case study, with individual members serving in Talent Management committees forming will form part of the study. The study therefore evaluated the selected Talent Management committee members’ experience and involvement with regard to Talent Management practices at a South African university and the way it is aligned to the organisational strategy.

2.2 Target Population

The target population is the total group of individuals from which the sample might be drawn. In this study the population is all talent management committee members within a South African institution representing different university structures. The Talent Management committee comprises of the College committee, Departmental committees and Regional office committee. The College committee comprises of Executive Deans, Directors and chairperson of departments. The departmental committee is the link between the department’s EXCO as well as all the directorates within the Department. The Regional office committee comprise of Regional Directors, one manager per regional hub, and one non-managerial representative. The Talent Management committee has about 28 members, from which the researcher selected one or two talent management representative for each region that is Limpopo, Midlands, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, and Gauteng. The study selected 10 participants for the research project, with one representative from each region requested to participate in the study in order to ensure inclusion in the group. Talent Management committee including representatives from the regions were selected to participate in the study.
2.3 Sampling

Franklin (2012:173) denotes that sampling involves the selection of a population from which a study will be conducted. The researcher selects the size of a group of respondents who will answer questions related to the aims and objectives of the study. The researcher employed purposive sampling after a careful consideration of the different types of sampling strategies. The researcher selected participants, purposively, who would be able to provide best information to achieve the objective of the study, and were thus information rich (Kumar, 2005; Braun and Clarke, 2013). The researcher employed purposive sampling because she is aware that the talent management committee members are responsible for the planning and implementation of talent management practices and activities within the university. The researcher was of the view that the committee has more knowledge and insight on how talent management practices are used, has the responsibility of ensuring employee career development and growth, and assumes that they are involved in the strategic planning of the organisation. The Talent Management committee has about 28 members, from which the researcher selected one talent management representative from different regions. 10 participants from different regions were selected to participate in the study. As a result, the study examined the selected Talent Management committee members’ experiences, involvement with Talent Management practices and how it is aligned to the organisational strategy at a South African university.

2.4 Pilot Study

A pilot test of a questionnaire or interview survey is carried out by a researcher in an attempt to test the instrument and find ways, if any, to amend the research instruments on the basis of the piloted individuals’ feedback/responses on the instrument. Davies and Hughes (2014) states that any drafted your research instrument must be piloted. The piloted participants write comments on the interview guide and the researcher uses these comments to modify his/her research instruments comments made. The piloted participants are, however, excluded from the final sample of the study (Creswell, 2012). Nonetheless, it should be underscored that the research should be piloted to subjects who are similar to those targeted in the study. This allows the researcher to fine tune a research instrument and ensure that the targeted participants will be able to answer the research questions. The pilot study was done by two participants to ensure that right questions were asked and that the interview will last for not more than 45 minutes as indicated in the study. The pre-test assisted the researcher to highlight problems in the Interview schedule and questions that are not clear.

2.5 Data Analysis

According to Bless (1995) data analysis affords the researcher an opportunity to check for inconsistencies, bias and errors which might influence the results. Sekaran and Bougie (2013) assert that data analysis seeks to make valid inferences from data in the form of words. Therefore, data analysis creates evidence about the context and builds or supports an argument. The use of face-to-face and telephone interviews for data collection demanded that the analysis be qualitative. Qualitative data analysis transforms data collected into something meaningful to the researcher and intended audience (Myers, 2013). The recorded data was transcribed into text in preparation for analysis. The data was then coded and linked to the participants’ responses to the concepts and categories of the study. Tags or labels were used to assign units of meaning to describe information compiled during the study. The data collected was sorted
out and organised excerpts of interview according to concepts and categories. Finally, the data was integrated to make sense of the sorted interview data and the findings analysed and discussed for similarities and differences according to the themes. Findings from the respondents should be recorded in full and not be selective. A summary of the collected data was sent to participants for review. Finally, a report outlining the interpretation of the findings against the background of the original research problem was written.

2.6 Trustworthiness

The following should be taken into consideration to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity in a qualitative study:

Credibility: The researcher should ensure adherence to issues of trustworthiness in order for a research to be reliable and valid. Credibility refers to “whether the participants’ ‘perception matches with the researchers’ portrayal of them’ (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012:112). This ensures that the information provided by participants is well articulated. As a result, the researcher sent summaries of the researcher’s conclusions to participants for review in order to ensure credibility and determine the accuracy of the findings. Only two participants provided clarity on some of the answers that were articulated, while the other participants agreed that the summaries are a true reflection of what transpired during the interview session.

Dependability: Dependability issues are addressed more directly within a study through the use of detailed reporting, which in turn enables future researchers to track the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret data (Bloomberg, Volpe: 2012). Thus, the researcher conducted an in-depth interview in order to investigate the talent management practices at a South African university. In addition, 10 talent management committee members from different regions within the institution were selected as participants in the study.

Conformability: Conformability ensures that the findings are free of bias, and reflect the experiences and ideas of the participants rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton: 2004). The researcher, on the one hand, constantly communicated with the participants to check if the information provided is what transpired during the interview in an effort to ensure conformability. On the other hand, the findings were communicated to the participants before they are published.

Transferability: Transferability implies that the findings of the study can be applied to other situations. The researcher should provide a detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation to allow other researchers/scholars to have a proper understanding and compare the phenomenon described with their current situation (Shenton: 2004). The researcher hopes that the findings will add to the world of knowledge and assist other institutions and businesses to learn or benchmark with each other with regard to talent management practices and strategies.

Authenticity: Authenticity focuses on the degree to which a researcher faithfully and fairly described participants’ experiences. Authenticity in research emphasises the reassurance that both the conduct and evaluation of research are credible and genuine, it is the recognition of appropriateness to both the context and participants (Denicolo and Becker: 2012). The collected interview data, which was audio-recorded, was transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the participants’ responses and views. Feedback to participants was provided to provide for their comments and to verify the accuracy of the collected data.
2.7 Limitations of the Study

The results may not be generalisable of the whole university employees since the study was performed only on employees dealing specifically with Talent Management issues at a selected South African university. The dissertation was restricted to talent management committee members and not all the employees of the University. College members who serve in the Talent Management committee did not form part of the study as the researcher could not get hold of them.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The researcher addressed ethical issues during the designing of the research methodology. The researcher was expected to act ethically and responsibly. In addition, the fact that the research involves human beings demanded that an ethical clearance be obtained from the institution under study. As a result, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from Mancosa for submission to the Institution under study. The institution under study has a research ethics policy which should be considered when one intends to and is conducting research. Hence, a request for permission to use the university staff and data for data collection was submitted to Research Ethics Review Committee (URERC) in order to ensure that the rights and interest of participants and the institution are protected. The researcher also considered that research reports that are compiled about company matters should not be disclosed to third parties. The researcher also addressed the ethical issues pertaining to the participants. An interview schedule was accompanied by a letter to request participation in the interview. The letter clearly stipulates that the participation is voluntary and personal information will not be revealed to any individual or third party. The letter assures participants of the confidentiality of the research and that their participation is not binding, for if and when they feel uncomfortable or unsure they may withdraw at any time. The researcher also provided sufficient information to participants explaining the purpose of research and their nature of involvement in order for them to make an informed decision. Finally, the researcher obtained an informed consent from the participants before the interviews took place.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Theme 1: Talent Management (TM) Planning

The first theme in the interview protocol was clustered into two sub-themes which emanate from the probing questions. The main question was whether there is Talent Management planning within the organisation. A majority of the respondents indicated that there is a Talent Management policy which guides the organisation on how talent management must be planned, managed and implemented. It was noted further that the employees should understand what talent management policy entails and there are guidelines that are to be followed which are the pillars of talent management. The TM strategy is based on recruitment, staff deployment, TM development and retention.

3.2 Sub-Theme 1. Identifying potential individuals for Talent Management programs

The question dealt with the procedures followed to identify potential individuals for talent management programmes within the organisation. What came out of the responses is that the potential individuals are identified during the organisation or departments’ career conversations in the beginning of the year. Employees and their line managers discuss
individual career aspirations to reflect on some of the things that they know and those that they do not know. The findings from the participants’ responses also indicated that the TM mapping process is crucial for identifying potential individuals. Participant 5 indicated that the first step in identifying potential individuals is to ascertain the critical skills needed in order to achieve organisational objectives, and that if the skill is not available within, then the talent should be obtained outside the organisation through recruitment processes.

3.3 Sub-theme 2: Talent management practices within the organisation

The question attempts at determining if there are talent management practices within the organisation under study. Career conversations or career circles came out from the eight participants and were indicated as one of the starting points. Participant 7 highlighted that there is a supporting template for the talent planning for each unit, Directorate, Department or Colleges. However, participant 9 stressed that the organisation uses talent mapping, a talent plan and the check point, but these have not been implemented systematically in the past. The participant also stated that this process will be implemented in July 2016, as line managers and the identified talent pools had already started with the engagements during the time of the research. Other participants also confirmed the existence and outlined processes related to talent management and planning in the institution.

3.4 Theme 2: Talent management and organisational strategy

The focus of the question was on how TM is aligned to the organisational strategy. The incorporation of talent management with an organisational strategy is very important in an attempt to achieve organisational goals and objectives. All the 10 participants believed that talent management planning is aligned to the organisational strategy in which the strategy focuses on 2016-2030. It is clear from the findings that TM is factored into the strategic planning of the institution. The TM policy guides the whole TM processes, especially, how it should be implemented and evaluated. Finally, participant 10 contends that TM is aligned to the organisational strategy in the sense that the TM policy revolves around the organisational strategy. Even the performance management system to check if employees are performing is another strategy of ensuring that employees are developed in the areas that they are still lacking and an attempt to reward high performers.

3.5 Theme 3: Training and Development

Training is of utmost importance to ensure employee development and improved performance. Training and development are implemented at the organisation under study through Personal Development Plans (PDPs). All participants stressed that employees sign a performance contract with the organisation at the beginning of each year, which focuses on their job descriptions (JD) and the organisational strategy. The performance agreement or contract also include PDPs. The personal development plans (PDPs) aim to identify areas in which individual employees need to develop so that they will be ready to take up related opportunities within the organisation when they arise. Once training needs are identified, the next phase would be the identification of actual courses. The organisation has a training policy which promotes a culture of continuous life-long learning and acquisition of skills and competencies for employees. Participant 9 contends that the training and development of talent pools focuses mainly on on-the-job training. The participant also quoted Charles Jennings’ model 70: 20: 10 framework where 70 percent of learning happens on the job, 20 percent through other people or through social learning, and 10 percent through course, training and formal education. The
model and the 70 percent received from on-the-job training leads to the creation of a talent enhancement strategy document that incorporates items such as coaching, job shadowing mentorship, rotational assignment, stretch assignments and communities of practice. Employees who indicated that they want to stretch beyond their job descriptions were alerted to a job compact support through the job description policy which indicates that employees can include 5 percent of stretch outside their JDs and can put that into their key performance areas (KPAs). The interview results indicated that there is a training and development policy which guides the organisation’s attempts at the training and development of staff.

3.6 Sub-Theme: Assessment of employee skills

The question focused on how employee skills were assessed within the organisation. Participant 6 suggests that employee skills were assessed through performance appraisal, with the assessment focusing on the performance areas that employees were contracted for. Though participants mentioned different terms such as performance management system, IPMS and performance, this indicates that there is a system in place to ensure employee skills are assessed. One respondent mentioned that there is a reporting template which is used for talent pools. Individuals in talent pools indicate their goals and these are assessed at the end of the year in relation to capabilities at the beginning of the year to determine if those goals would have been met or not. The next step involves a meeting between the individual employee and their line manager in which they re-rate those goals to check if there would be any capability move. Participant 4 indicated that the organisation was busy with a skills audit for ICT to determine the interventions that were needed in ICT related skills, while participant 7 disagreed with other participants by indicating that there is no structured way of or guidelines for assessing employee skills.

3.7 Sub-Theme: Employee Career Development

The issue of career conversation and PDPs emerges again in the question about the way the organisation is identifying employees for career development. All participants stressed that career conversations and PDPs are the starting point. The findings revealed that employee’s interest, abilities, career pathing and performance are considered in the draft development programmes. Participant 2 indicated that the organisation conducts work force analysis to identify individual employees’ career aspirations. All the participants, as noted in some of the samples below, concurred that there is a clear indication that the organisation has a career development tool that ensures employee aspirations and career path are met.

3.8 Theme: Talent Management System

The question relates to how the talent management system was implemented to monitor and evaluate employee performance. Employee performance can be measured through performance appraisals. The findings suggest that talent management is integrated with the performance management system in the sense that the assessments identify employees who are performing and may be put them in the talent management programmes for further development and to ensure organisational performance is achieved. Participant 3 affirms that the organisation is integrating TM with performance assessment even though there is no clear link between the two, while participant 2 indicated that TM is integrated into IPMS in the sense that employees who are performing very well would be put into the TM programmes.
3.9 Sub-Theme: Performance Reviews

The question is based on the way the organisation conducts its performance reviews with employees. Performance reviews assist organisations to clarify their individual roles and identify training and development needs. All participants share the same sentiments that there is a performance review system that is in place to evaluate employee performance. The findings, as shown in some of the cited responses below, suggest that the integrated performance Management System (IPMS) is integrated into the talent management framework which focuses mainly on developing, retaining and recruiting employees within the organisation.

3.10 Sub-Theme: Employee Reward System

Every organisation needs a strategic reward system in order to motivate and encourage employee high performance. Employees should be rewarded for exceptional performance. The answer that was provided with regard to the question on whether the organisation rewards employees for high performance was that there is a performance bonus which emanates from the mid-year and final review at the end of the year. Participant 8 contends that a rating score established after the completion of performance reviews at the end of the year, is used to determine the level of performance and monetary rewards. Participant 6 indicated that high performing employees can be rewarded in different ways such as requesting for a higher percentile with regard to salary or financial means. The findings indicate that score ratings are allocated by the individual employee and the line manager and both agree upon those scores. The scores are then used to determine the financial reward for higher performance. Hence, the respondents indicated that performance bonuses are used by the organisation to reward high performance. The performance bonus system uses a rating of 1-5, and so if an individual is below 3 it means that individual is below standard and cannot be rewarded, while employees who scores 3 and above get rewarded according to their scores.

3.11 Sub-Theme: Talented employee and the overall performance

Investing in talented people assists the organisation to achieve its goals. All the respondents shared the same sentiments with regard to the way talented employees contribute in the overall performance of the organisation. Participant 10 maintains that every organisation wants to perform at the highest level and for that needs talented and dedicated people. Participant 10 noted further that having more talented and dedicated employees leads to the boosting of the organisational performance and ensures the achievement of organisational goals and objectives. Participant 5 maintained that talented employees make a difference because they those are the employees who are able to read the document, read the strategy of an organisation, and to make sure that their activities fit into the strategic direction of the organisation, and in that way they contribute towards the overall performance of the organisation. The findings indicate that the investment made in talent has a definite positive impact on the output, which is directly linked to the organisations’ performance as a whole.

3.12 Theme: Succession Planning

The focal point of the question was based on the incorporation of succession planning within the organisation. Various and diverse responses pertaining to the succession planning within the organisation under study were given. The first view, as stated by participants 6 and 8, was that the organisation does not have succession planning. However, the second view from
participant 9 was that the organisation is trying to move away from succession planning since it creates a lot of expectations, hence, the organisation has developed a tool kit called building the leadership pipeline, which is mainly aimed at filling the organisation’s critical positions. The respondents’ findings indicate that the issue of succession planning within the organisation needs more attention in order to ensure that there is a succession planning, especially for key positions.

3.13 Sub-Theme: Talent pipeline

All the respondents’ views with regard to the sub-question on how the organisation’s pipeline will provide a supply of candidates for key positions, indicated that there is no succession planning. The respondents also highlighted that the organisation does not have a pipeline of candidates for key positions. This is reflected by participant 3 who stated that there is no talent pipeline within the institution, although the talent pool that has been created might probably be the pipeline. It was further pointed out by participant 4 that it is still early to determine as TM is still emerging within the institution. Both participants 3 and 4 concurred that talent pipeline does not exist in the institution, however mentorship, where senior people mentor their colleagues in lower levels is encouraged within the institution.

3.14 Sub-Theme: Attracting and retaining talented people

Another question focused on how the organisation attract and retain talented people. The answers from the ten respondents were diverse, with two respondents indicating that the organisation is attracting talent through job advertisements where talented employees within and outside the organisation can apply for that position. Participant 4 indicated that the institution has a good track record nationally and globally and as such it had a competitive urge when it comes employee attraction. Another participant indicated that talent management is used to attract and retain highly performing employees who will take over when someone resigns or retires. The identified employee will be groomed to ensure that they are ready to occupy key positions in the future. Another participant stressed that the organisation is attracting and retaining employees through its reward systems and other benefits such as organisational allowances and benefits. Participant 9 indicated that the organisation carried out a survey in which it was found out that the university does not have a retention problem but has a low staff turnover, which means that there are some employees who are disengaged. The organisation is in the process of procuring a competency framework in order to identify competency required for each role. Participant 3 is of the view that recruitment and selection processes are used to attract and retain people, with the job descriptions (JD) embodying the skills and qualities that are relevant for the position. Participant 6 also pointed out that he has not seen the process of attracting and retaining talented people within the organisation.

3.15 Theme: Evaluation of Talent Management practices/programmes

The participants’ views on how the organisation evaluates its talent management practices/programmes differ in many ways. Participants 3, 5 and 8 pointed out that TM programmes are evaluated using performance reviews which are done twice a year during the midyear and end of the year review. One participant indicated that the evaluation is done through the reporting template which focuses on the impact analysis of each talent pool candidate. Participant 9 indicated that there is a reporting template which will be used in November to assess the impact analysis of talent pool candidates.
3.16 Sub-Theme: Talent Management programmes successes

The next question dealt with the successes emanating from the talent management programmes or practices within the organisation. Three respondents indicated that the success of TM practices was through the implementation of talent management policy. Another respondents highlighted the programmes that have been running throughout the organisation such as the mentorship, flagship, building tomorrow’s leaders and young academics programmes. It was also indicated that a supervisory programme for lower level managers had been introduced. Another participant indicated that some employees were given an opportunity to act on higher positions, some now occupying higher positions within the organisation and others outside the organisation. Hence, acting provided individuals with the exposure to career opportunities. In addition, some participants stressed that it is still early to identify the successes as TM is still new within the organisation.

3.17 Sub-Theme: Challenges/Failures with regard to TM strategies/practices

The participants mentioned different challenges regarding the identification of challenges or failures when dealing with talent management strategies. These challenges included lack of resources to support talent plans, and employees who are not performing well but want to be on TM programmes or occupy higher positions. However, some indicated that when they first joined the committee they did not know what talent management was all about, for them TM is an eye opener and they have learnt a lot from the team. The findings also revealed that the institution is not sure how to effectively implement TM programmes. In addition, employees are not sure what TM is all about and what it is the institution is trying to achieve through TM.

3.18 Comments/Input

It was indicated that talent management is a good thing and a relevant organisational intervention. It was indicated that talent management is a good thing and a relevant organisational intervention. It was also considered as a good step in the right direction, although the institution is still experiencing serious challenges, especially with talent deployment and retention due to financial constraints. Another respondent added that there is need to offer specific and quality training before deploying someone. Finally, it was also pointed out that there is need to get involved in vigorous discussions, engage with staff and the powers that be with the financial muscle, and the business people of this world to finance and enhance TM at the selected university. It was also pointed out that the organisation does not have promotion policy. Another challenge that was raised concerns the visibility of the TM committee. Another respondent stressed that although the organisation may not reap the benefits of TM immediately, the practice is receiving is being implemented in a satisfactory way. As a result, the respondent was of the view that the organisation will begin to reap the benefits of TM programmes in the near future.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 To identify and evaluate talent management practices at a South African University

The empirical findings revealed that the organisation under study is still maturing in terms of talent management practices. Some of the departments have already started with the implementation of talent management practices, while some are trying to implement them. The organisation used career conversations to identify talent pools that will then be developed to
ensure that they contribute meaningfully to the success of the organisation. The talent management initiatives was guided by the talent management policy which is linked to other policies such as the Integrated Performance Management System (IPMS), Employment Equity, Remuneration policy and policy on Recruitment, Selection and Appointment. Different talent pools were identified and these include the leadership development, specialist and mentor pools. The fact that talent management is maturing at the Institution under study means that the evaluation of talent management practices, during every twelve month period, will be done once all the TM processes have been implemented.

4.2 To determine the usage of current talent management practices at a South African University

The findings revealed that the current talent management practices at the organisation include career conversations which take place at the beginning of the year when individual employees sign performance contracts. Talent planning plays a very pivotal role in identifying different talent pools. This is followed by the personal development plan (PDPs) which identifies areas of employee development and career aspirations. Some of the talent management activities the organisation has implemented include the flagship programmes, mentorship and coaching programmes, and community of practice.

4.3 To determine whether talent management practices are aligned to the University’s strategic goals

The study revealed that talent management practices of the University under study are aligned to the organisational strategy. The Institutional strategy which focuses on the 2016-2030 period has been approved by council. All talent management activities/practices should revolve around the organisational strategy. Talent management has key roles such as leadership which should be driven by management and skilled people to achieve the organisational strategy. The findings also suggest that employees should contribute to the strategic objectives of the institution through a committed involvement. It was highlighted that the organisation issues communication related to talent management to all staff members in order to interrogate the document and see how it affects them. Employees engaged with their line managers to determine how the talent management plan fits within their performance areas and link it to career conversations and PDPs.

4.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were suggested:

**Talent Management Awareness:** To address some of the challenges, such as uncertainty and knowledge of the system by employees, the organisation should implement talent management roadshows within the organisation to ensure a buy-in by all employees and that they understand talent management practices. Talent Management review meetings will also assist the organisation to review the effectiveness of talent management activities and identify the areas that still needs improvement. All employees should be made aware of talent management activities within the organisation.

**Employee Value Proposition:** It is recommended that the university perceive employees as a great asset towards the achievement of the organisation’s strategic objectives. The literature indicates that employee value proposition (EVP) plays a crucial role in the development,
attraction and retention of competent employees. Employee value proposition provides characteristics, benefits and ways of working in an organisation.

**Analysing what your employees expect and value in the employment relationship:** The analyses should identify which employees enjoy working at the organisation most and why, and also what drives their job satisfaction. Identifying employee turnover and absenteeism data is also crucial.

**Design an authentic and meaningful EVP with the help of your employees:** The next step would be to involve a diverse group of employees in the design of EVP. This will also ensure an employee buy-in and the effectiveness of the EVP. The EVP should be aligned to the vision, mission and values of the organisation, therefore it is important to link it to the organisation’s workforce planning strategy and it should be understood by the targeted audience (Mulcahy and Povey, 2015). The EVP draft should be tested during the recruitment phase with potential employees in order to determine the strength of the proposition in attracting suitably qualified people (Mulcahy and Povey, 2015).

**Communicate the EVP in a way that resonates with both existing and potential employees:** The communication of EVP within the organisation is key and all employees, especially the new recruits, should know about the EVP. Discussions on the EVP issues, such as its meaning to both the organisation and the individual employees and on whether there are any gaps and try to address them, should be held with the new recruits during induction (Mulcahy and Povey, 2015). EVP should be promoted through different platforms such as the organisation’s website, e-mails, posters, social media channels, intranet, roadshows and meetings.

**Integrate the EVP as a business as usual concept that’s regularly reflected upon by leaders and employees:** This is where the EVP is reinforced within the organisation by all levels and across all departments to ensure that it becomes part of the organisational DNA. EVP can also be discussed during performance reviews and coaching sessions to evaluate how it correlates with employees’ needs and identify any gaps as well as try to address them. Human Resource should develop a feedback channel wherein employees give comments that will assist HR to enhance EVP elements or processes (Mulcahy and Povey, 2015).

**Measure and improve the EVP as part of your ongoing strategic cycle:** The final step will be to measure if EVP programs are making any difference. This can be assessed through feedback from employees at regular intervals. Entry and Exit surveys allow the employer to obtain an honest feedback from new and departing employees through an independent and secured online portal. Employee surveys during entry and exit engagement can measure the effectiveness of the EVP systems. EVP should be reviewed every one to two years to ensure relevancy to the current organisational strategy. Alignment and engagement surveys serve as a baseline and are a very useful measurement to analyses of EVP (Mulcahy and Povey, 2015).

**Coaching and Mentoring:** It is recommended that the mentorship and coaching be taken seriously. Mentorship involves a process where an experienced person helps or supports a less experienced person to learn and develop. Mentoring and coaching is used to empower and enhance talent pools within an organisation. It is used to capacitate talented employees that need to develop and grow towards a new role or responsibility or a new position.
Succession planning pool: It is recommended that succession planning be viewed as key to ensuring that critical skills are available at all levels in an organisation. Succession planning can be used as a strategy for retaining talented employees. The organisation should have a succession planning policy, guidelines or programme that ensures that the required critical skills are sustained and ensure the companies’ continuity and are adjusted to the customer’s changing needs.

Promotion Policy: It is recommended that the organisation develop a promotion guideline or policy to ensure and effective and efficient transfer of appropriate calibre of staff to higher positions. The policy will afford employees a fair and equitable opportunity to move to higher positions and that there is a transparent and inclusive processes. Promotion opportunities within an organisation will serve as a motivation for staff performance and give them an opportunity to use their abilities to the fullest. Promotion from within the organisation can also save the organisation recruitment costs and on-the-job performance gaps.

Critical Gap skills analysis: It is also recommended that the organisation should identify the critical skills gap especially for employees who are retiring so that they can share their knowledge and skills with other potential employees. The framework for critical gap skills analysis will be used for recruitment, training and development, compensation and benefits for talented employees (Mensah, 2015). The organisation should engage a skills audit to identify employee knowledge and skills, qualifications and capabilities. Thus, the organisation can sustain a competitive edge and functions effectively by conducting critical gap skill analyses (Bergeron, 2004).

REFERENCES