

THE TALENT MANAGEMENT APPROACH TO HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: ATTRACTING AND RETAINING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

*H.G. van Dijk
University of Pretoria*

ABSTRACT

What provides a public organisation with its competitive edge? What makes it evolve into a more productive, better managed and efficiently organised entity? The argument can be made that the organisation's product is its reason for existing, but without the appropriate human resource capacity, the product would not get delivered. This might be too simple an explanation, but authors agree that an organisation's most important resource is its human resource.

Talent is the product of ability (competence, education, training and experience), coupled with motivation (engagement, satisfaction, challenge and wellness) and opportunity. Talent management can be defined as the strategic integrated approach to managing a career from attracting, retaining, developing to transitioning the organisations' human resources. In this paper attention will be given to identifying what attracts talent to the South African Public Service. Developing countries should seek new ways to lay their hands on an ever diverse, but always limited pool of talent. Research has shown that truly talented people tend to gravitate towards the best organisations and in this paper the case will be made for those aspects that characterise best organisations, namely those that instil the talent management mindset at all levels, those who integrate talent management in their recruitment strategies and those who grow their leaders.

INTRODUCTION

During 1997, the Department of Public Service and Administration published the *White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service*, detailing a paradigm shift from personnel administration to human resource management.

Personnel administration dealt with the acquisition of employees, while human resource management deals with the effective utilisation of employees with the main aim of effectively achieving the goals and strategies of an organisation. The observation is made that human resource management is the encompassing management function comprising all the different human resource functions, including talent management, talent recruitment and management development. The vision of *the White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service, 1997* is that human resource management will result in competent and well-managed employees, capable of, and committed to delivering high quality services to the people of South Africa. The human resource management mission entails that (*White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service, 1997*):

Human resource management in the Public Service should become a model of excellence, in which service to society stems from individual commitment instead of compulsion. The management of people should be regarded as a significant task for those who have been charged with the responsibility and should be conducted in a professional manner.

The importance of ensuring an appropriate human resource management direction for the Public Service is undeniable. Only when an organisation puts into practice the words describing a competent, professional and committed human resource system, will employees be able to master their own competence while acting as development resources to the benefit of their colleagues.

Since 2001 the *South African Management Development Institute (SAMDI)*, now called the *Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA)* drafted its Senior, Middle and Feeder Management Competency Frameworks describing those competencies required from public servants to advance into the Senior Management Service. The competency frameworks were drafted in an effort to ensure the creation of a talented pool of managers for the Public Service. The creation of this talented pool of managers is done through the recruitment and development of public servants. Thus, even though talent management was not officially introduced in the Public Service, the competency frameworks functioned as guideline for identifying and developing talented public servants.

Margerison (1991:2-3) suggests a continuum for management development that is meant to improve productivity and performance. It is a learning process applied to all aspects of work from recruitment and selection through to the delivery of a service. The emphasis of this definition is placed on development from within – identifying the appropriate talent and providing opportunity for the talent to excel to the benefit of both the individual and the organisation.

Authors, such as Long (2004), Ready, Vicere & White (1994), Horwitz (1996) and Rousillon and Bournois (1997) define management development as the planned and continuous process of learning to develop knowledge and skills to function effectively in realising organisational goals and objectives. The South African management development context prescribes a focus towards career management and retention of knowledgeable and experienced public servants. Ready *et al.*, (1994:65) maintain that it has become a

management tool for revitalising organisations and building learning-oriented competitiveness. The *Public Service Review Report*, 1999-2000 (2000:64) affirms that the key challenge facing the Public Service is the need to attract, develop and sustain capable managers.

Neither recruitment, nor management development can happen in a vacuum, nor can it be planned for in one. The question remains: Can talent management be used as a framework to ensure appropriate recruitment and management development? Acquiring talent rather than growing it can be seen as a quick fix to competence challenges, but it may not lead to long term pay-off in practice. Academics and practitioners alike are becoming more aware of the fact that acquiring talent rather than growing it should be an integral part of the human resource debate facing evolving public organisations.

In this paper attention will be given to identifying what attracts talent within the South African management development environment. When one considers growing talent from within one need to ask what keeps people in organisations? Developing countries should seek new ways to lay their hands on an ever diverse, but always limited pool of talent. Research has shown that truly talented people tend to gravitate towards the best organisations. In this paper the case will be made for those aspects that characterise best organisations, namely those that instil the talent management mindset at all levels, those who integrate talent management in their recruitment strategies, those who grow their leaders and those who offer diversity in working conditions.

CONTEXTUALISING TALENT MANAGEMENT

A talent is a measure of weight or value, according to Ancient civilisations. Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary terms it as to describe skill, abilities, wealth, riches, abundance, aptitude, attitude and disposition. Talent has been used broadly to describe an individual's skill, aptitude and achievement. Joubert (2007) states that talent is a person's ability to repeatedly inspire and arouse emotion in others. We perceive talent emotionally and react to it emotionally. We see, feel and hear talent in our every day lives and talent seem to be an important ingredient for greatness. The four elements of individual talent are potency (person's power, influence and capability to achieve results), truest interest (passion), skill intelligences (mental and physical learning and performance abilities to compete, conquer and survive), and virtue intelligence (moral excellence and integrity).

Glen (2007) states that talent is the product of ability (competence, education, training and experience), coupled with motivation (engagement, satisfaction, challenge and wellness) and opportunity. Talent management can be defined as the strategic integrated approach to managing a career from attracting, retaining, and developing to transitioning the organisations' human resources (TalentAlign 2007). Joubert (2007) defined talent through the identification of eight elements that characterise truly talented people. These eight elements are:

- a passion for learning;
- responsiveness to inspirational role models and influences;
- hunger for excitement of achievement;

- ambition and the drive for supremacy;
- nonconformism and contrariness;
- self-sufficiency and a preference for solitude;
- physical vulnerability; and
- personal branding.

This concept of personal branding is echoed in the Department of Public Service and Administration's *Guide to Retention* (2006) which states that employee development should place emphasis on life-long learning, personal development and capacity building. Although talent management is not directly mentioned, it is surely implied in the notion of self development and capacity building.

According to Cunningham (2007) talent management can be contextualised by taking into account two main strategic choices, namely aligning people with roles and aligning roles with people. Aligning people with roles implies a preference towards recruiting talent, learning and development while aligning roles with people focuses on utilising talent through an enabling work environment. It should be borne in mind that these two strategic choices cannot be implemented in isolation but should be seen as the two sides of the same coin. The identification of opportunity becomes a key element in the use of talent management to ensure appropriate management development. This is the reason why McCauley and Wakefield (2006) state that talent management should become more strategic, connected and broad-based.

In order to ensure proper alignment between the role and the person, learning and development should be part of assessing available talent and placing the right people in their best roles (recruiting talent). Creating an enabling work environment is part and parcel of effective retention, according to the Department of Public Service and Administration's *Guide to Retention* (2006). Vermeulen (2007) states that however talent management is contextualised, the main emphasis is on retention, development and motivation of talent to optimise organisational performance, especially with regard to senior management performance. High-performing organisations will have the following practices in place for managing talent, namely:

- creating talent by planning the future talent supply, being employer of choice, sourcing young talent, tutor coaching, exposing young professionals, hiring for behavioural skills, referral recruitment and sharing best practices;
- calibrating talent by measuring it according to specifications, building equity through forced ranking, deploying the best talent to critical positions and proposing creative assignments;
- cultivating talent through mentor development, holding management accountable, firing poor managers, enforcing high standards and rewarding achievement, forced ranking and career planning;
- leveraging talent through motivation, employee involvement, breakout achievement and sharing the credit;
- caring for talent through personal wellness, employee engagement, inspiration, building vital inner circles and talent retention; and

- talent coaching through personal mastery, sharing the philosophy of life as a journey and creating circuits of personal success.

RECRUITING TALENT

In the midst of increasing unemployment the war for talent rages. What then is the talent challenge? Athey and Burnside (2007) state that the challenge is the rising demand for capable performers as compared to the dwindling supply of such persons. The universal truth is that not enough talent is developed to fill the gap left by the soon-to-be-retired baby boomers (those persons born between 1946-1964). Not enough graduates are delivered and the current education system seems not to be able to address this gap effectively.

Another challenge is the growing discontent among employees, as evident from high absenteeism and turnover rates. Coupled with the increasing complexity of today's work environment (Athey and Burnside 2007) and one is left with the realisation that a mere mention of talent management will not address the problem. Public organisations should embark on a concerted effort to integrate talent management into all their human resource management functions. In fact, talent management should become the umbrella for redefining the human resource management and development environment.

The basic assumptions upon which talent management as a recruitment tool is to be implemented are:

- people work for more than just money and employees offer their best when they feel that they are making a meaningful contribution towards a vision that is backed by a clear strategy;
- traditional recruitment and retention strategies are not sufficient – organisations should focus on what matters to their talented employees, namely their own development, learning and growth; and
- learning is an integral part of every-day work and should be woven into the workplace through both internal and external interventions.

Davidson (2004) describes a set of competencies that define truly talented managers. These competencies are in great need and not enough truly talented managers exist, which adds an additional burden to the recruitment of talented managers. These competencies include well developed leadership skills, the ability to shift attitude and behaviours, the capacity to exert influence and work through others, the talent for successful partnership working and the potential to adapt to internal and external changes and to get the change owned and embedded in the rest of the organisation. Davidson (2004) suggests the following principles to guide the recruitment of talented managers, namely:

- be open-minded and source talent from diverse fields;
- be honest in your *sell*, acknowledge the cynicism and challenge inherent in the position;
- avoid the common pitfalls, such as:
 - racing into recruitment;

- delegating recruitment;
- failing to look for talent abroad;
- failing to provide proper job or personal specification;
- putting together an inadequate briefing or information pack;
- bring insufficiently inventive in drawing up the advertisement; and
- treating people like a commodity.
- recruit people with the ability to build capacity in others;
- value style, bravado and even outrageousness;
- do not be seduced by own confidence, but engage staff in process; and
- dare to be brave and bold in selecting really good people – hire those who are brighter and more talented than yourself.

In recruiting talent people, one should realise that the drive to move around is much more evident. The position is the challenge and the position should allow the individual to showcase his or her talent. Once their talent is no longer evident in the positions, or it is not being developed to adapt to changes in the position, the individual talent will leave the organisation. The recruitment strategy should be guided by identifying what would make talent people interested in the position and determining how they will then want to be treated in that position.

MEASURING TALENT

How does an organisation measure, develop and retain talent? Joubert (2007) states that the measuring of talent is based on the following potency factors, namely confidence, skills expression, virtue expression, physical wellness, mental wellness, relationship wellness, spiritual wellness and personal leverage. Potency is the measure of personal branding (as mentioned earlier in this paper) and is developed through opportunity and comparable to the phenomenon of *alphaness* in the animal world. Being the alpha means being the best, taking the lead and being dominant. Although human talent might take some of its potency factors from its *alphaness*, there are also environmental and work factors that have to be conducive for the alpha to reach its potential.

What does the work environment look like that would support personal branding/potency? High-performance organisations are characterised as living their vision, implementing strategic and business plans, writing and evaluating scorecards, setting benchmarks and enforce ranking. A culture of achievement emanates from strong values and beliefs. A culture of achievement supports instruments of motivation and measurement of individual, group and organisational performance. Joubert (2007) maintains that motivation will drive performance towards the key performance areas of talent management, namely creation, calibration, cultivation, leverage, caring and coaching. Motivation will control the quality of talent management.

The *Draft Public Administration Management Bill, 2008*, makes provision for the use of development to maximise human potential to the benefit of the organisation. Furthermore the head of the organisation (Director-General) should provide for the education and

training of all employees to develop their skills in an efficient, quality, collaborative and accountable manner.

DEVELOPING TALENT

Management development starts with the identification of the most suitable individual and his or her individual development needs, leading to the development of the person's contribution to team and organisational development. Nel, Van Dyk, Haasbroek, Schultz, Sono and Werner (2004:427) refer to management development as an organisational development intervention aimed at strategically focusing the individual towards future organisational demands.

Management development is a key management function, since the continuous improvement of all organisational systems and products is a strategic reality for all organisations. Concerning the factors necessitating management development, Long (2004:701) states that a balance should be created between developing individual talent and adding value to the organisation.

Management development is highlighted as a vital component of the strategic development of the organisation, specifically when coupled with the organisation's emphasis on continuous learning and improvement. Ready *et al.*, (1994:65) state that an important prerequisite of management development is the realisation of the commitment needed from all parties, employees and managers. The commitment towards management development is further emphasised in the writings of Horwitz (1996:14), and based on the management development research of authors such as Human (1991) and Kiggundu (1991) who propose that line management ownership and accountability facilitate learning transfer.

If the management of talent is about cultivating a passion for learning, then a talent management approach to management development seems appropriate. McCauley and Wakefield (2006) mention that organisations that excel at talent management all exhibit the following eight best practices, namely:

- defining talent management broadly;
- integrating the various elements of talent management into a comprehensive system;
- focusing talent management on their most highly-valued talent;
- getting senior management committed to talent management work;
- building competency models to create a shared understanding of the skills and behaviours needed and valued by the organisation;
- monitoring talent system-wide to identify potential talent gaps;
- excelling at recruiting identifying and developing talent as well as performance management and retention; and
- evaluating the results of their talent management system.

Furthermore, when talent management is built on a strong management development programme, a solid platform is created from which to proceed. McCauley & Wakefield (2006) propose the creating of a *talent mindset*, which will enable the high-performing

organisation to achieve its goals. The bottom-line of talent management is that traditional human resource management structures which operate in silos (a branch for recruitment, a development and performance management branch, an industrial relations branch and an employee benefit branch) should be abolished. True talent management calls for an integrated approach to human resource management, since talent is found in all human resource management activities. When talent is successfully recruited, whether from inside or outside, the human resource management function should be implemented in such a manner as to retain this talent, develop it and utilise it to the benefit of both the individual and the organisation.

MENTORING TALENT

Research conducted by Groves (2007) suggests that employees with mentors experience a range of positive organisational outcomes, including enhanced job performance, greater job satisfaction and organisational commitment, personal learning and reduced turnover intentions. Conger and Fulmer (2003) state that balancing leadership development with succession planning (through mentorship) increases the optimal development and placement of leadership talent. Charan *et al.*, (2001) argue that development practices should support the entire pipeline of talent across the organisation, which implies that each manager is a mentor for a subordinate in the careful succession planning of talent in the organisation.

Successful mentoring relationships aid in the transfer of psychosocial benefits, such as acceptance, encouragement and coaching, as well as career facilitation benefits. Both formal and informal mentoring relationships should be encouraged between managers and talented, high potential employees. The ultimate aim, according to Groves (2007) is the creation of a mentor network. This implies the creation of multi-talented mentor pool from which high-potential employees can draw encouragement and advice. The benefit from successful mentoring includes ensuring flexibility in key senior management succession.

Bhatnagar (2008) states that mentoring is a popular activity for pipeline talent development. This implies that mentoring is not just a tool of transferring essential job-related skills, attitude and behaviours, but high-potential talented individuals are placed in a mentoring relationship in an effort to development the management pipeline and thereby creating a sustainable pool of talented managers from which the Public Service might be able to recruit. The *Public Service Mentorship Programme Guide* (2006) specifies that mentoring is a process of developing the careers of those assigned to the mentors – their *protégés*. Furthermore, mentoring should be used to equip the *protégé* with the necessary abilities to cope with new demands and allow them opportunity to demonstrate their newly acquired skills. Mentoring is seen as a non-formal training vehicle for enhancing potential and attracting scarce skills to the Public Service. Mentoring is used to improve the quality of human resource development and should thus, be seen as an important ingredient in the planning and implementation of talent management as an approach for effective and efficient utilisation of human capital.

AN INTEGRATED HUMAN RESOURCE TALENT MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The key to an integrated approach of talent human resources is found in the definition stated by Halloran (1978:5). He defined the study of human relations as the study of how people can work effectively in groups in order to satisfy both organisational goals and personal needs. Personal needs such as job satisfaction, recognition and career advancement are influenced by organisational conditions in the work environment. Employees are not isolated from the production process, and no matter how sophisticated the technological advances become, complex human beings' normal human interactions would affect the total production output (Halloran 1978:10-11). Humans are also not just another factor in the production process, but the emphasis on talent management implies that human resources are the main ingredient to the success of the organisation.

When an employee's talent and ambitions match the demands of a specific position, the employee will be productive and experience personal satisfaction. However, within the current human resource management system in South Africa, this is not always the case. The government's emphasis on human resource development is an attempt to address the gap between human resource organisational needs and human resource supply. Human resources are not in limitless supply, and the Public Service needs to analyse and explore ways to utilise its current human resources as effectively and efficiently as possible. The approach to human resource talent management is based on the integration of all human resource functions in order to ensure a coherent system that will address human resource issues responsibly.

The integrated approach to human resource talent management is based on the argument that organisations do not, only, have to be clear on their purpose, but more specifically on the strategy that would operationalise the purpose. Thus, the structure and system of the organisation need to be integrated and the focus placed on the development of employees as talent resources. An integrated approach to human resource talent management will also enable the employees to identify a clear career path, as well as determining the development initiatives that would have to be undertaken to reach a determined position within the structure of the organisation.

The question remains whether the South African Public Service is geared towards such an integrated approach to talent management? There can be no denying that the appropriate regulatory policies are in place to promote these pillars of talent management. However, it can also not be denied that the human resource management function is implemented in silos and that the regulations for recruitment state that potential should be taken into account, although the Public Service is rife with nepotism and corruption. The Employee Performance Management and Development System makes provision for individual development but it is rarely linked to workplace skills plans, nor appropriately budgeted for. Learning is facilitated through the Human Resource Development Strategy but is more related to organisational performance and targets and not so much as to aligning the individual to the job, not the job to the individual.

CONCLUSION

Since the competition for critical talent will not subside in the near future, the competitive, cutting-edge and evolving public organisation needs to rethink the actions and functions it uses to attract and retain talent. An integrated talent management approach will ensure the balance alignment between talented people and their roles.

However, talent management should not be seen as a quick fix to recruitment or management development challenges. Rather, if implemented correctly, talent management will become the umbrella (future model) for the integration of the human resource management function, which will include talent recruitment, management development and talent mentoring.

Recruiting talent means taking the realities of the position into account and tailoring the recruitment strategy towards the attraction and retention of talent. The position is the challenge and should one want to attract the most talented people, the position has to be advertised in such a manner as to ensure an appropriate response. Attracting talent is only the first step in an integrated human resource talent management approach. Retaining talent through development and mentoring is an integral part of successful implementation. The fact does remain – people are attracted by more than money and their talent should be utilised and developed using an integrated approach to the human resource management function.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Athey, R. and Burnside, R. 2007. Engaging and developing is key to the challenge. *In Focus/Talent Management*, 27(4).
- Bhatnagar, J. 2008. Managing capabilities for relent engagement and pipeline development. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 40(1).
- Charan, R. Drotter, S. and Noel, J. 2001. *The Leadership Pipeline*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Conger, J. and Fulmer, R. 2003. Developing your leadership pipeline. *Harvard Business Review*, 81(12).
- Cunningham, I. 2007. Talent management: making it real. *Development and Learning in Organizations* 21(2).
- Davidson, H. 2004. Recruiting for success: challenges and solutions. *Human Resource Management*, 12(7).
- Department of Public Service and Administration. 1997. *White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service*. Available at: <http://www.dpsa.gov.za>.
- Department of Public Service and Administration. 2000. *Public Service Review Report 1999/2000*. Available at: <http://www.dpsa.gov.za/docs/reports.psreview/psr00-00-3.htm>.
- Department of Public Service and Administration. 2006. *The Information Guide on Staff Retention for government departments*. Available at: http://www.dpsa.gov.za/documents/ep/2006/retention_guide.pdf.

- Department of Public Service and Administration. 2006. The Public Service Mentorship Programme: A Step-by-Step Guide. Available at: <http://www.dpsa.gov.za/documents>.
- Glen, C. 2007. Fostering talent opportunity: getting past first-base. *Strategic Direction*, Volume 23(10), 3-5.
- Groves, K.S. 2007. Integrating leadership development and succession planning best practices. *Journal of Management Development*, 26(3).
- Halloran, J. 1978. *Applied Human Relations: An Organizational Approach*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Horwitz, F.M. 1996. Executive development: facing the new realities. *Journal of European Industrial Training* 20(4).
- Human, L. 1991. Black advancement, affirmative action and managing diversity. *IPM Journal*, 3(2).
- Joubert, D. 2007. *Talent Management: Deliberate practice for success*. Randburg: Knowres Publishing.
- Kiggundi, M.N. 1991. The challenges of management development in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Management Development*, 10(6).
- Long, S.F. 2004. Really... why do executives attend executive education programs? *Journal of Management Development* 23(8).
- Margerison, C. 1991. *Making Management Development Work: Achieving Success in the Nineties*. London: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- McCauley, C. and Wakefield, M. 2006. Talent Management in the 21st Century. *The Journal for Quality and Participation*, 29(4).
- Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary. 2008. Talent. Available at: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/talent>.
- Nel, P.S., Van Dyk, P.S., Haasbroek, G.D., Schultz, H.B., Sono, T. and Werner, A. 2004. *Human Resources Management*. Sixth Edition. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Ready, D.A., Vicere, A.A. and White, A.F. 1994. Towards a Systems Approach to Executive Development. *Journal of Management Development* 13(5).
- Rousillon, S. and Bournois, F. 1997. Identification and development of potential for management and executive positions in France. *Career Development International* 2(7).
- South Africa (Republic). 2008. Draft Public Administration Management Bill. *Government Gazette* 514. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- TalentAlign. 2007. Talent management processes in organisations. Available at: http://www.talentalign.com/talent_management_processes_in_organization.htm.
- Vermeulen, L. 2007. Talent Management as strategic tool in retaining human capital. *Journal of Public Administration*, 42(5).