

Integration of Talent Management into Human Resource Practices in Public Universities in Ghana: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract: This explored the value of integrating talent management into the overall human resource activities in public universities in Ghana. Competition for expertise has led to war of talent among universities making some of them to 'poach' experts or knowledge workers while some academics are enticed by the 'greener pasture syndrome'. To reduce frequent academic staff turnover universities need to manage talent. The study used qualitative methods of interviews to explore the value of integrating talent management into human resource practices in public universities. The study found that talent management has the potential to reduce high academic staff turnover by retaining expertise. Due to logistics and time the study focused on 3 of the 10 public universities in Ghana where only 220 information rich people were selected to participate in the study. The few universities and participants involved in the study could make it difficult to generalize the findings to other universities because of unique conditions in such institutions. The study will assist the universities' management to enforce talent management into human resource policies and programmes to reduce the loss of human capital and funds.

Key Words: Talent management, Human Resource Management, Human Resource Practices, War of Talent, Expertise.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Africa the role of the universities in national development is seriously hampered by a lot of challenges such as lack of adequate funding, proper management, good remuneration, heavy teaching loads and adequate infrastructure. The lack of adequate funding can adversely affect the universities because without adequate funding they cannot retain the best faculty members. Utulu (2000) affirms that the prevailing funding crises coupled with increases in the student population are making it increasingly difficult for the universities in Ghana to promote academic excellence. The inability of many Ghanaian universities to maintain academic excellence implies that most of them are unable to retain quality academic staff. Utulu (2000) intimates that apart from the overall quantitative shortage of academic staff there is a usual remarkable deficit in quality of lecturers. The acute shortage of academic staff is an indication that the universities are unable to attract and retain experienced and qualified academic staff that often leave in their droves for greener pastures (Utulu 2000).

In the globalised competitive labour market *talent or knowledge workers* are so much sought after which is why universities need to be more strategic in improving and renewing themselves to retain talent. The goal of a university as an organization is to keep and develop knowledge of its employees because human resources and their development are crucial elements in any effort to upgrade organisations and the economy at large (Gururajan & Fink, 2010; Ahsan, Fie, Foong & Alam, 2013)

In the workplace talent refers to the personal qualities of those individuals who can make a difference to organisational performance either through their immediate contribution or, in the longer-term, by demonstrating the highest levels of potential (Dhanabhakym & Kokilambal, 2014). Talent is associated with general and contextually relevant competence as a foundation for successful employee performance and organizational competitiveness (Brown & Tannock, 2009). The concept talent is also described as the flow of skilled knowledge workers in the labour market (Martin & Verdier 2012; Guerci & Solari 2012, Linhartova 2012). Talent management is the process of identifying, developing, recruiting, retaining and deploying talented people (Armstrong, 2011). It is a modern and effective way of implanting the personnel policy to enable the organization to achieve its strategic goals through the proper using of the potential inherent in human resource. The management of talent, in practice, is the planning of future organisational employee or staffing needs, career advancement, and internal workforce matters (Sawyer, 2004).

In this paper, Talent Management is defined as an organisation's ability to attract, select, develop, and retain key employees (see Stahl et al. 2007). By doing so, Talent Management is clearly differentiated from general human resource management (HRM) practices, which are defined as all policies, practices, and systems that influence employees' behavior, attitudes, and performance (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright 2010). Thus, Talent Management and Human Resource Management differ significantly with respect to the scope of practices involved and target groups (talents vs. human resources). In actual fact Talent Management only involves a set of selected Human Resource Management practices (Lewis & Heckman 2006) for a smaller group of particularly talented individuals (as defined by the company), compared to Human Resource Management, which includes all policies and practices (e.g. labour relations, compensation and benefits, workplace safety) and involves various stakeholders such as the whole workforce, labour unions, customers, suppliers, and investors (Tarique & Schuler 2010). Mayers et al (2013) argue that talent management is part of Human Resource Management but covers a specific niche thereof.

Human Resource Management (HRM) on the other hand is a process that brings people and organisations together in order that the goals of each are met. This is part of the management process which focuses on the management of human resources in an organisation and strives to produce the best out of its people by soliciting and winning their commitment and cooperation. Human Resource Management can be viewed as the art of reincarnation, developing and maintaining competent workforce to achieve the goals of an organisation an effective and efficient manner. Talent management is an aspect of the general human resource functions which needs to be emphasized and integrated fully into human resource activities for sustainability of organisations.

An organisation is nothing without skilled workers because it is the workforces that engage in productivity for the realisation of the goals of the organisation. The challenges today of Human Resource managers is in the recognition of talent and nurturing it with care to achieve significant gains in productivity over a period of time. In order to continuously create value for the organization and maintain competitive advantage, organizations must constantly manage their human capital. This can be done by identifying, selecting, developing and retaining capable employees who demonstrate skills and realize more productivity and higher incomes (Cania, 2014) for the organisation. Such employees are the organisation's asset (human capital) and they need to be recognised, protected and retained for the organisation's continuous success and sustainability.

The management of talent is an important aspect of the overall human resources practices. The competition for expertise has led to a war of talent among universities hence any university that wants to be ahead of its peers should manage the talent of its academic staff. In the contemporary higher education environment the status of a university is determined by the number of experts in its employ. Every year universities are ranked globally and the status of a university does not only increase public recognition but also acts as a marketing tool to attract best academics, funding and students. Quality teaching and research outputs from experts make a university stand out among its peers. To be able to compete with their peers some universities therefore often try to ‘poach’ expertise. As a strategy to retain its best academics human resource should broaden its activities to cover *talent management*. Human resource sections of a university should identify academics with specific talent, nurture and further develop them for retention. Without managing talent public universities in Ghana may always lose their best academics. The researcher has been a human resource practitioner for over ten (10) years and has observed the lack of talent management in Ghanaian public universities. This observation motivated her to do this investigation. She used the qualitative methods of interviews to explore the value of integrating talent management into the general human resource practices in public universities in Ghana.

2. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to explore the value of integrating talent management into the overall human resource activities in public universities in Ghana.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to provide adequate answers to the following research questions.

- What could be the value of integrating talent management into the overall human resource activities in the public universities in Ghana?
- How is talent managed in public universities in Ghana?
- Why should talent be managed in Ghanaian public universities?

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study will assist the universities’ management to enforce talent management into human resource policies and programmes to reduce the loss of human capital and funds. The study will also assist the public universities to know the cost and effect of staff attrition and turnover on the university’s operations and public standing as an institution that has a social mandate to educate the citizens of Ghana.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper investigates the value of integration of talent management into the overall human resource management. It is therefore grounded in the resource-based theory which originated from Penrose (1959). Drawing on the Chicago revisionist school of industrial organisation and early work of Penrose (1959), Stigler (1968) proposed the resource-based theory of the firm. Olavarrieta & Ellinger (1997) report that the writings of Rumelt (1984; 1987) and other scholars also contributed to popularizing the development of the resource-based theory of the firm. In the recent years the theory has been amplified by Wernerfelt (1984), Prahalad & Hamel (1990), Grant (1991), Peteraf (1993) and Amit & Schoemaker (1993). The theory emphasises that internal aspects (e.g. human and material resources) are very important for the success and profitability of an organisation. Lado & Wilson (1994) argue that a firm is viewed as a nexus of resources and capabilities that are not freely bought and sold in the spot market. An organisation can make use of its resources to renew and

sustain itself. Prahalad & Hamel (1990) agree that business should exploit and leverage its core competences. It is true that organisations must have capabilities in order to compete with their peers. Olavarrieta & Ellinger (1997) attest that organisation's capabilities are a complete set of individual skills, assets and accumulated knowledge exercised through organisational processes that enable firms to co-ordinate activities and make use of their resources. The extent to which these firm-specific resources and capabilities yield economic benefits that cannot be perfectly duplicated through competitor's actions may be potent of sustained competitive advantage (Lado & Wilson, 1994).

Every organisation or firm has resources (human and material) although these may differ in quality and quantity from organisation to organisation. Burr et al (2016) point out that the resource-based theory is widely acknowledged as the most prominent theory in the field of strategic management. An organisation's success or failure depends on how much resources it has and how well they are managed. A university's resource such as academic staff can put it at a competitive advantage if concerted effort is made to identify, nurture and develop the talent of the staff. The intangible human resource attributes like knowledge, expertise, and know-how constitute the talent base of an organisation. It is employees who make things happen and as such any organisation that wants to move ahead or create a sustainable competitive advantage over others should focus on development of its human resources. Employees create a competitive advantage in every firm or organisation. Studies by Porter (1982, 1985) and others on strategic management affirm that the success of a firm or organisation is mostly determined by its industrial sector features (Olalla, 1999)

A firm's success and profitability is not determined only by external factors but most importantly by its internal factors such as the expertise, skills, competencies and commitment of its employees. The theory postulates that firms are bundles of resource and superior performance (Olavarrieta & Ellinger, 1997). The resource-based theory is therefore a new perspective of human resource management that focuses on the management of an organisation's human resource and capability. In terms of human resource the responsibility of the organisation is to nurture, develop and manage its human resources for optimum production, retention of staff and sustainability of the organisation. In the words of Wernerfeld (1984) by resource is meant anything which could be thought of as strength or a weakness of a given firm. A firm's resources at a given time could be defined as those tangible and intangible assets (Hall, 1992) which are tied semi permanently to the firm. Examples of such resources are brand names, in-house knowledge of technology, employment of skilled personnel, trade contracts, machinery, efficient procedures, and capital. The resources of a firm include inputs that allow the firm to work and implement its strategies (Olavarrieta, 1996).

The resource based theory has implications for talent management. The theory is based on the view that an organisation should use its valuable human resources to build its own human capital base for its success. Thus the valuable resources should be used to achieve competitive advantage over its peers. Human resource is an important resource which can be used to achieve success. The theory postulates that competitive advantage is dependent on the valuable, rare and hard to copy resources that reside in the organization and human resource is one of those scarce resources. It is argued that the resource based theory views rival firms compete on the basis of the heterogeneity and immobility of their resources and capabilities (Peteraf & Bergen, 2003). Resources can be physical, human and organizational in nature, and they can be used to implement value-creating strategies. As suggested by Barney (1991), resources which are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable, have the potentials to provide firms with a sustainable competitive advantage.

A set of resources that seem to match the above criteria are talent assets of an organisation. Both Grant (1991) and Amit & Schoemaker (1993) agree that organisations's resources are the "inputs into the production process" or "all input factors"---both tangible and intangibles, human and non-human --- that are owned and controlled by the firm and that enter into the production of goods and services to satisfy human wants.

The theory postulates that talent is the only resource of firms or organisations which may provide basis for workable reasonable advantage, hence organisations should focus on talent developing and the competences derived from it. Talent is the only resource which helps in gaining and maintaining the competitive advantage, which is why organisations must focus on attracting and maintaining the talented work force (Rabbi, et al, 2015). As talent resides in the head of individual employees firms only integrate and provide system and operational arrangements for coordination and co-operation between the talented workers (Rabbi, Ahad, Kousar & Ali, 2015). It is argued that organisation's image and performance can be enhanced, if the capabilities of individuals are utilised accurately and successfully. In the contemporary knowledge economy, the main concern of organisations is to find, attract, develop and retain talented people for their (organisations') survival. For this reason organisation's these days try to gain and maintain the competent people as their employees (Rabbi et al, 2015) and human capital base for increased production.

The competences of organisations like universities are based on the specialised resources, or assets such as academics. The unique competency of any organisation is linked to its resources such as assets and skills possessed by its staff or employees. The optimum utilisation of the above resources help organisations to build competitive advantage which is universities need to attract, nurture and develop the talent of academics. The talent based view of the firm, gives importance to developing and enhancing the competency of the employees of the firm through a systematic process of talent acquisition and talent transfer and sharing to gain competitive advantage. In today's world of competition there have been a shift in most organisations to focus on internal (e.g. staff) resources because such internal resources have a crucial role to play in the performance of the organization (Wright et al., 2009).

6. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This was a qualitative study which took the form of a phenomenological research. Phenomenological research method assists researchers to describe the phenomenon as it is and thus enable them to understand the meanings participants might construct and give about their experiences (Johnson & Christenson, 2000).

6.1. Research design

From the interpretivist stand point truth or reality is negotiated through dialogue. In line with this fact the researcher employed the interpretivist paradigm which has some relationship with the resource-based theory. The resource-based theory is aligned to the interpretivist paradigm where reality is constructed through meanings and understanding developed through interaction with people; in this case academic employees in organisations, --the universities in Ghana. The researcher utilized qualitative research method in this study because it tries to discover the inner feelings of participants involves and in a dialogue between the researcher and the participants. Qualitative research involves how individuals make meaning and understanding of issues from their perspective hence Wiersma & Jurs, (2005) intimate that qualitative design requires flexibility and tolerance for adjustment as the research progresses. The perception of those being studied is important; therefore, "these perceptions are to be captured in order to obtain an accurate 'measure' of reality. The

'Meaning' of experiences by those being studied; cannot be imposed (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

Thus through dialogue (interviews and observation) data could be gathered on pertinent issues such as employee training needs, job satisfaction, causes of labour turnover, attrition and retention of 'knowledge' workers. The interaction with participants in this study assisted the researcher to understand the subjective (Cohen et al, 2000) and objective interpretation of their experiences. The researcher therefore employed the qualitative methods of interviews backed by observations to explore the value of integrating talent management into human resources practices in the public universities of Ghana as a strategy to retain talent.

The qualitative approach was deemed suitable for the study because it addresses objectives of a study through techniques that allow researchers to provide elaborate interpretation of the experiences of the participants without depending on numerical measurement. Its focus is on discovering true inner meaning and new insight provided by participants rather than quantifying results (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013). The researcher therefore adopted this design to enable her investigate the value of integrating talent management into the general human resources practices in the public universities in Ghana.

6.2. Population and sample

The entire population for the study comprised all the academic staff members of the 10 public universities in Ghana. Due to logistics and time constraint the researcher used the simple random sampling techniques to select 3 of the public universities for this study. The total number of the academic staff of the 3 selected public universities was 660. Out of this number the random sampling technique was again used to select 220 academic staff members (a third of the population) to participate in the study. The eligibility criterion used was that participants in the study should be an academic staff member of the 3 selected public universities who have worked for 10 years in their respective universities.

6.3. Data collection

In this qualitative study a semi-structured three (3) item interview schedule was administered on the selected participants. The 220 participants were interviewed in their offices during lunch time (between 1-2pm) in the three (3) universities. The one on one interview approach was used in collecting primary data because it allowed the researcher to ask follow up questions for clarification where necessary. Tustin, Lightelm, Martins & Van Wyk (2005) affirm that primary data is the original data collected specifically for solving the problem at hand. The interview covered pertinent human resources issues such as: the value of integrating talent management into human resource activities in public universities in Ghana, how talent is managed in Ghanaian public universities and why talent should be managed in Ghanaian public universities.

6.4. Data analysis

The researcher employed the interpretive approach in analyzing the data. she pruned and arranged the interview texts under various categories to make the information understandable and easy to analyse. She also read through all the interview transcripts received and wrote down issues that emerged from the information before analyzing them manually. The researcher followed this approach to ensure that all responses from the participants were captured. Citing Mouton (2004) Quan-Baffour (2014) reports that this approach to data analysis makes the various constitutive elements in the data clear through an

inspection of relationships between concepts, constructs and variables and to see whether there are any patterns or trends.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was set up to explore the value of integrating talent management into human resources practices in public universities in Ghana. In order to acquire the candid opinions of the academic staff two hundred and twenty (220) of them selected from three (3) public universities were selected for interview. Three (3) main questions were asked to each of the participants for their views on the issue being explored. The responses of the participants were arranged, analysed and interpreted under the following themes:

Theme 1: The possible value of integrating talent management into human resource practices in the public universities in Ghana

The participants expressed their views on the possible value of integrating talent management into human resource practices in the public universities in Ghana. All the participants (100%) agreed that if talent management were to be integrating into human resource practices it would have positive impact on performance of lecturers, production and the retention of human capital in the public universities in Ghana. The views of the participants agree with the fact that talent management integrates the business strategy, the human resource strategy processes and the organisational culture (Silzer & Dower, 2010). The two issues that emerged from the responses of all the 220 participants were that:

- The integration of talent management into the overall human resources can improve the lecturers' expertise in teaching and research and thereby put the public universities ahead of their peers (115 responses)
- Talent management can contribute to succession planning, organisational renewal and sustainability. (105 responses)

The interview revealed that human resource practices in Ghanaian public universities do not focus on talent management. The participants corroborated in their responses that its integration into human resource practices could have positive impact on the academic staff status in the universities. The following extracts from one hundred and fifty (150) respondents sum up the views of most of the participants;

“talent management will enable public universities to attract, nurture and develop expertise for retention and sustainability.”

Indeed when an organisation identifies talent, nurtures, manages and retains it such an organisation can be assured of quality production, sustainability and better image among its peers. As one senior academic put it (reproduced verbatim);

“Without managing talent you will not get the best out of your employees. You may make do with mediocrity or even loose the few better ones you have”.

Thus as the various responses from the participants indicate, without talent management universities as organisations cannot stand the test of national and global competition for academic staff, students and better image. In the absence of quality academic staff universities' core business – teaching and research – can be in jeopardy. It is through talent management that progressive universities can renew themselves and retain the best of their lecturers. It can be summed up from the responses that talent management provides a framework for recruitment motivates processes for career development and introduce a coherent strategy with regard to particular group of employees called knowledge workers who could be identified and retained (Morawski, 2009).

Theme 2: Management of Talents in Public Universities in Ghana

The second item requested information on how talent is managed in the public universities in Ghana. Again the responses made it clear to the researcher that the term talent management is not popular in the public universities in Ghana. Apparently there is no specific policy to manage talent and the absence of such a coherent policy the issue of talent management might be on adhoc basis if at all it is practised. In this competitive global labour market it is prudent for public universities to build human capital. They need to integrate talent management practices into general human resource activities. This can be done by attracting, selecting, developing and retaining capable academic employees who demonstrate skills for higher productivity (Cania, 2014). The seemingly ignorance of the concept, *talent management*, resonates in the responses of all the participants. More than 170 of the 220 participants responded by saying;

“our human resource practitioners do not do talent management in managing human resources. The management of talent it not something popular in our work places”.

The foregoing response indicates the lack of understanding of the concept *talent management*. However, upon probing the respondents further all the participants agreed that the universities selectively pick few academics from disciplines where there is a serious shortage of lecturers to be sponsored for further studies. In fact 152 of the participants emphasized it in the following words;

“it is not free for all. Selection is strictly on need basis. If ten (10) academics apply for sponsorship the selecting committee can settle for one or two and leave the rest to their fate”.

When asked what happens to the rest of the applicants sixty five (65) of the participants agreed that faculty members who could not be selected to be sponsored for further studies with pay have the option to engage in part-time studies on their own or take leave without pay. They added that such people however, must apply for permission six months prior to the self-sponsorship. Thus there is lack of equal treatment or opportunity in human resource management in the public universities. The responses imply that there is no concerted effort to identify and nurture talent among academic employees. The public universities in Ghana do not show commitment to manage talent for retention, a situation which can be recipe for staff turnover. Every employee in the organisation can maximize its potential, production and efficiency (Cania, 2014) hence concerted efforts should be made to identify talent, nurture and develop it for organisational renewal and sustainability. One participant who engaged in part-time studies to gain his PhD expressed his disappointment in the following words;

“After struggling to pay my fees for five (5) years I applied for a refund when I graduated but for nearly two years now no one has attended to my request.”

The lack of encouragement for academics to improve their knowledge and skills (qualifications) can be a recipe for academic staff attrition. Once academics pay for their own fees they have no loyalty or obligation to the employer and may leave at any time opportunities arrive. This can create vacuum and instability in the faculties, and may that may have dire consequences for teaching and research. The apparent lack of encouragement and equal opportunities for academics to improve their knowledge and skills is a weakness that can affect the universities' image among their local and international peers. Without talent management Ghanaian universities would be operating with less qualified and less experienced academic staff and this can affect enrolment of students and the image of the

universities. Besides, on the international front universities are considered better institutions when the profiles of their academic staff indicate higher qualifications with good lecturing and research expertise. The role of the universities in national development in Ghana is thus hampered by poor management and the inability to mentor young academics (Sawyer, 2004; Utulu 2010).

Theme 3: *Reasons why talent should be managed in Ghanaian public universities*

Universities have human resources practitioner who handle the day to day issues of employees. The researcher therefore asked participants why they think talent should be managed. The participants unanimous agree that talent management which is an important aspect of human resources management is good for organisational renewal, growth and sustainability. Fifty (50) of the participants added that the universities as organisations are expanding in today's world to cater for the diverse needs of society. At the same time they are faced with competition for better academic staff. To be able to compete fairly with their peers universities should recruit, attract, identify talent and develop it for retention of knowledge workers. This is an acknowledgement of the fact that effective knowledge management depends on talent management, especially the practical components such as recruitment of talent, training, knowledge sharing, coaching, mentoring, succession planning and development of global leadership competencies (Vance & Vaiman, 2008).

The fifth (50) participants added that human resource is a specialist area in any organisation and as such practitioners should seek expertise and retain it to enable institutions to compete with their peers. As one of the respondents, intimated;

“there is always a war or competition for best brains in the academia. Any institution that wants to be ahead of others must take talent management seriously or else it could suffer from brain drain – losing the cream of its academic employees”

The above view is very relevant in the wake of war of talent. Universities that provide better conditions including management of talent could stand the chance of attracting and retaining the best academic employees. The fifty (50) agreed with the earlier responses by saying that growth and sustainability is important to the existence of academic institutions. This growth, they agreed, can only be based on attracting, developing and retaining expertise otherwise public universities can suffer from the ‘greener pasture’ syndrome.

The above responses are pertinent to the essence of talent management in the public universities in Ghana. The views of the participants indicate that human resource sections of public universities should create a cohort of experts and retain it for their sustainability. As a specialist group of employers they have the responsibility to attract, recruit, develop nature, manage and retain the best academics as human capital not only to enhance the image of the universities but also to improve production through teaching and research. The success or failure of organisations' actions depends on owned talents and their development, management and retention (Tamer & Kemal, 2014).

8. CONCLUSION

The paper explored the value of integrating talent management into the overall human resource practices in the public universities in Ghana. Interviews were conducted with two hundred and twenty (220) participants and the study found out that managing talent could create a cohort of expertise for the public universities. In the light of findings the paper concludes that in order to retain expertise public universities in Ghana should attract, recruit, nurture and develop the human capital as a strategy to retain academic staff for their sustainability.

9. RECOMMENDATION

The study recommended that:

- in order to become the best among their peers public universities should make talent management a priority in human resource practices.
- to ensure retention of the best academics public universities should revise their conditions of services for academics
- the universities should put in place policies on study leave to ensure that all academics are treated equally when they apply for study leave.

10. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This study focused on integrating talent management into the general human resource practices in the public universities in Ghana. Due to logistics and time constraint the researcher selected 220 participants from a total population of 660 from three (3) of the ten (10) public universities to participate in the study. The number chosen from only three of the public universities might make it difficult to generalise the findings to cover all the ten (10) public universities in the country. Moreover the conditions in the three selected public universities which participated in the study might differ from the others which were not included in the study. The above could be major limitations to the study.

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