

Implementation of Talent Management Strategies in Higher Education: Evidence from Botswana

NORMAN RUDHUMBU

Botho University, Gaborone, Botswana

Key words

Talent, Talent Management talent management strategies, success factors, private higher education.

This study examined talent management strategies of higher education institutions with specific reference to private higher education institutions (PHEIs) that offer professional and academic qualifications up to degree level in Botswana. Higher education in Botswana consists of both public and private higher education institutions. The scope of this study was on private higher education institutions. Literature shows that talent management in higher education institutions is a relatively new and untapped opportunity despite its importance in offering these institutions a proven and practical way for driving competitive advantage. The main objective of this study therefore was to investigate the different talent management strategies private higher education institutions in Botswana use to attract and retain talent. Results of this study showed that talent management strategies of private higher education institution in Botswana is still work in progress as in a number of cases the knowledge and ability to implement talent management strategies were seen as lacking in these institutions. For data collection, this study employed a structured questionnaire adapted from MOR (n.d.).

1. Introduction

Research has shown that higher education institutions lag behind industry in talent management practices (Lynch, 2007) and that for many of these institutions, talent management is a relatively new and untapped opportunity despite its importance in offering these institutions a proven and practical way for driving competitive advantage (Cobb, 2007). Despite the importance of talent management in institutional effectiveness (Bhatt & Behrstock-Sheratt, 2010; Conti, 2008) little is known about the range of talent management strategies that are deployed to support institutional operations in higher education institutions particularly in Botswana. The above issue therefore poses a huge challenge to higher education because the current speed of change and the complexity of activities in higher education now require that institutions have agile talent management practices and processes not only to succeed but to also attain competitive advantage. This thinking is confirmed by Lavania et al (2011) who posited that in periods of high competition for talent such as these, attracting, developing and retaining qualified talent is crucial for institutional success. Retaining key talent in institutions has now become a major challenge that is leading to a number of higher education institutions resorting to an unsustainable strategy of being poachers of talent instead of developers of talent (O'Callaghan, 2008; Conti, 2008). Literature also shows that for talent management to be effective, it should be carefully planned in line with specific anticipated changes in institutions rather than taken as a one-size-fits-all proposition (Success factors, 2013). The above is further confirmed by a number of authorities who attest to the fact that careful recruitment, retention

and development of talent is a critical aspect of motivated staff performance, quality student learning and institutional success (Leithwood et al, 2004; Rivkin et al, 2005; Imazeki & Goe, 2009; Conti, 2008).

2. Literature Review

a) Talent

Talent is defined as those individuals in organisations who can make a difference to organisational performance either through their immediate contribution or in the longer term by demonstrating the highest level of potential (McCartney & Worman, 2013; Bhatnagar, 2007). Talent is also defined as the people who are technologically literate, globally astute and operationally agile (Beechler & Woodward, 2009), as referring to the best and the brightest or as employees who fall in the top 10% to 20% of organisational members in terms of value, i.e., the "A players" (Bradford Smart, 2005). A more comprehensive definition of talent is one given by Michaelis et al (2001) who defined talent as those people in organisations that possess skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, good judgement, right attitude and character, as well as drive and who are always willing to learn and grow. Talent therefore, refers to those organisational members who have relevant knowledge and skills, are self-starters and demonstrate organisational commitment.

b) Talent management

Talent management has been identified as a key strategic issue in organisations (Clark, 2009). This is so because organisations that fail to redefine their employee value proposition always have problems in attracting, developing and retaining top talent (Ernst & Young, 2010). Talent management has been conceptualised in different ways. Among some of the definitions that help to clarify what talent management is are those given below. Talent management is a systematic attraction, development, engagement/retention and development of individuals with high value to the organisation (McCartney & Worman, 2013; Lawler, 2008; Smyley & Wenzel, 2006; Campbell & Smith, 2010; MOR, n.d.). Talent management is also defined as the process that deals with the identification and development of all talent especially high potential talent for future assignments, positions or projects (Clark, 2009; Cobb, 2007). When talent management includes workforce planning, talent acquisition, professional development, performance management, retention strategies and succession planning, it is now referred to as integrated talent management (Fitz-enz & Davison, 2002). The premise of talent management is that employees are every organisation's most valuable asset (Cobb, 2007) implying that employees should always be at the centre of all talent management functions of every success-focused organisation. Another more illuminating definition of talent management is that it is a dynamic, ongoing process of systematically identifying, assessing and developing talent for future critical roles to ensure continuity and optimal organisational performance (Heidke, 2006).

c) Rationale for talent management in higher education

Literature cites issues that necessitate the need for talent management in higher education as the following (McCartney & Worman, 2013): Increased competition among higher education institutions (both public and private); need to map the talents of the existing workforce; need to

address future leadership; recruitment and retention challenges institutions face; changes in demographics and external labour markets; skills shortage (7 out of 10 organisations currently report a rise in the number of unsuitable applicants); and under-utilisation of expertise of existing workforce. The need therefore for more effective and agile talent management strategies in higher education cannot be overemphasised. The importance of effective talent management practices to organisations can therefore be explained in the context of benefits that accrue (Heidke, 2006) which include: a) Reduction of recruitment costs as staff turnover is reduced; b) effective knowledge management and transfer; c) delivering of cutting edge services and products; d) creation of competitive advantage; e) reducing enterprise risk (one employee in hand is worth 200 in resumes); f) improved client retention (clients value relationships and talented people have been to value and maintain client relationships); and maintenance of adequate staff capacity.

d) Current trends in talent management in higher education

The following three talent management trends help to illuminate the reason why higher education institutions particularly private higher education institutions need to seriously engage in a paradigm shift regarding their talent management strategies if they are to succeed in their operations and achieve competitive advantage (Hewitt, 2012). The first trend is that literature shows that performance and reward programs in higher education are disconnected to be able to support effective and robust talent management due to the fact that only 48% of higher education institutions use systematic performance management processes to assess and improve staff performance. Also, of these 48%, around 20% consistently: (i) ensure that rewards and recognition link to the attainment of institutional, departmental and individual performance goals; (ii) differentiate pay significantly between high-potential and non-high-potential employees; and (iii) align rewards within the context of a total reward strategy that includes compensation, benefits and development opportunities for talent in the institutions.

The second trend is that focus on leadership development and succession planning in higher education while increasing, is still very slow as a result of the following reasons (Hewitt, 2012): (i) only 47% of human resources department personnel in higher education institutions work hand-in-hand with faculty and departmental managers to support key institutional talent management initiatives meaning that a silo approach to talent management is used in most higher education institutions; (ii) only 31% of higher education institutions report adequacy of staff with requisite skills and capabilities for the purpose of planning and to be able to lead leadership development and succession planning initiatives; (iii) only 23% of higher education institutions hold their management accountable for poor talent management in the institutions; (iv) only 10% of higher education institutions have succession plans that go 2 to 3 people deep for leadership roles and; (v) only 11% of higher education institutions use their succession plans to fill leadership positions with most preferring to offer the position to external recruits at the expense of the tried and tested in the institutions. The third and final trend is that commitment to monitor talent engagement in higher education institutions is still low as (i) only 36% of higher education institutions identify talent management engagement as within the top five strategic priorities of the institutions; (ii) slightly more than 37% of higher education institutions

gather and analyse institutional data to monitor talent management in terms of the fit between employee knowledge and skills and roles and responsibilities; and (iii) of the 37% above who gather and analyse institutional data, only 42% use the data consistently to improve talent planning and engagement.

e) Drivers of talent acquisition and retention in higher education

What drives talent to join a particular institution and to stay for longer periods is an issue shrouded in debate and controversy in higher education (McCartney & Worman, 2013; Shaffer, 2008). However, the following have been identified as key drivers of talent acquisition and retention in higher education, given in their order of priority as shown in table 1 (Towers Watson, 2011; Salt, 2007; Shaffer, 2008):

Driver	Priority ranking
Job security	1
Good pay	2
Career development opportunities	3
Promotion opportunities	4
Other benefits	5

Table 1: Drivers of talent acquisition and retention (*Adapted from Towers Watson, 2012*)

f) Effective talent management strategies in higher education

The following strategies have been viewed in research literature as critical in helping higher education institutions effectively manage talent (Success factors, 2013):

The first strategy is linking talent management to institutional growth. Deploying the right talent strategies has been seen to speed up progress and to help in the management of institutional growth. The following talent management tactics are critical in this frame, to ensuring effective management of institutional growth: i. *Maximising productivity*: regular communication and meaningful feedback from performance management sessions are practices that can improve task execution by employees leading to an increase in productivity needed for growth. Performance management sessions have been observed to provide opportunities to discuss, measure and improve employee performance which is key for institutional growth; ii. *Keeping people aligned*. By keeping all institutional members on the same level of understanding with regards to the goals and tasks of institutional growth through effective communication, as well as by assigning people into roles and positions their skills and knowledge best fit, institutions are able to motivate their employees and ensure productive performance for institutional growth (Lavania et al, 2011; Pitt-Catsouphes et al, 2009); iii. *Incentivising exceptional performance*. Giving employee a stake in the success of the institution has been viewed as a sure way to unlock employee potential and commitment.

To be able to achieve this, institutions need to have a clear and transparent compensation management strategy that makes it easier to monitor employee progress and reward top performers accordingly (Lavania et al, 2011); iv. *Replicating great talent through effective recruiting*. Higher education institutions should always seek to hire talent which replicates their top performers who are able to fit into the institution's unique culture (Lavania et al, 2011); v. *Ensuring adequacy of resources*. The primacy of resources when deploying employees to quickly

meet the growth demands of the institution, e.g., coming up with a new curriculum, can never be over-emphasised; *vi. Creating bench strength needed for institutional growth.* Roles and responsibilities need to be clearly streamlined and a clear succession plan developed to help the institution in effectively mapping internal talent against future needs; *vi. Scaling employee data management.* The Human Resources Department must always keep the employee data base updated to ensure employees' skills and competencies are known and can be quickly deployed where and when needed (Lavania et al, 2011).

The second strategy is linking talent management with new institutional or departmental project. New projects such as introducing a new curriculum means navigating through the unknown and requires an institution to have a plan of how employees will ensure success (Success factors, 2013). The following talent management tactics are critical to the success of new institutional or departmental projects: (i) *centralising the employee data base.* The human resources department should develop an updated centralised employee data base to ensure employees' profiles can easily be accessed; (ii) *developing a recruitment strategy.* As they grow, institutions need a recruitment strategy that clearly defines who to recruit, how and when; (iii) *aligning employees with goals.* To ensure all institutional members share institutional goals and work hard towards achieving them, communication should help existing employees to understand the vision and new recruits to understand where they fit in the skim of things; (iv) *keeping all members focused.* Since change as the institutions grow breeds uncertainty, the use of performance management with clear coaching and meaningful feedback helps to keep all employee focused and engaged; (v) *adjusting compensation based on market conditions.* Incentive-based compensation that rewards employees for concrete results is an important driver of effective talent management in higher education institutions; (vi) *retaining the best talent.* Career development plans that help employees to grow in their profession, help to show employees what is in it for them hence assuring the same employees that change is good for everybody; and (vii) *Developing people from within.* New ways of doing things require that employees also learn new skills hence in-house training complementing formal training is critical to successful execution of new tasks.

The third strategy is linking talent management with institutional efficiency. This refers to doing more with less (Success Factors, 2013). Tactics to achieve this alignment include the following: (i) *Quality hires.* Hiring the best talent in the beginning helps institutions to save on costs of replacing a mediocre employee and also affect productivity; (ii) *Ensuring information on demand.* Institutions should ensure that all members are able to access critical operational information at the click of a button and that information sharing becomes the culture of the institutions. A case of a privileged few in the access to key operational information is a recipe for demotivation and frustration among employee which has disastrous consequences on the retention of top talent.

The fourth strategy is linking talent management with institutional innovation. Growing an institution through innovation changes the nature of institutional activities and hence success depends on how employees will cope (Success Factors, 2013). Important talent management tactics to help employees cope with institutional changes include the following: (i) *Introducing*

ERP systems. This ensures that institutional data and processes are streamlined and efficient; (ii) *targeted hires*. Institutions should target hiring the right people with the potential to challenge and change the way things are done; (iii) *developing skills internally*. A culture of continuous learning that provides challenging problems motivate employees to think outside the box and is a good strategy for retaining talent; (iv) *rewarding innovation*. Compensating people who come up with innovative ideas improves employee engagement, motivates performance and fosters retention of top talent; and (v) *creating collaborative teams*. Breaking the silo mentality by helping people to work together and share knowledge is an important talent management tactic.

3. Methodology

Quantitative study

This exploratory study was an attempt at examining talent management strategies of private higher education institutions in Botswana, a branch of higher education institutions in Botswana. As a result, the study adopted a quantitative approach which emphasises objective measurements and numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires or surveys and focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people (Babbie, 2010). The overarching aim of a quantitative approach in this study was to classify features, count them, and use statistical tools in an attempt to explain what is observed (Babbie, 2010). A structured questionnaire adapted from MOR (n.d.) that uses a five-point Likert scale was used as the main source of data collection.

a) Pilot testing

The research instrument was pilot tested using three people, ie, one from each of the academic, administrative and support divisions.

b) Population and sampling

All 1350 staff members of the 5 PHEIs who are academic, administrative and support staff members were chosen as the population of the study. A sample of 300 participants was selected using the stratified random sampling technique. In this technique, the population was first divided into three strata of academic, administrative and support staff then simple random sampling was done in each stratum to select 175 academic staff, 92 administrative staff and 33 support staff as participants to the study.

c) Data collection

A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data.

d) Method of data analysis

Descriptive statistical tools were used to assist in the presentation and analysis of data.

4. Results

The main aim of this study was to examine talent management strategies of private higher education institutions in Botswana. A questionnaire that uses a 5-point Likert scale was used for data collection. Analysis of findings was done item by item. For ease of analysis, SDA + DA =

DA, SA + A = A. This analysis format enabled data to be discussed in three main groups of agreed, neutral and disagreed making it easy and more effective to detect the trend of data.

a) Talent management strategies

33% of respondents felt that talent management strategies of their institutions ensure that employees are engaged and committed to their institutions while 49% disagreed and 19% remained neutral. This situation shows that talent management strategies of higher education institutions are not effective in motivating employees to work hard. This problem could be caused by poor planning. Research points to the fact that for talent management to be effective, it should be carefully planned in line with specific anticipated changes in institutions rather than taken as a one-size-fits-all proposition (Success factors, 2013). The above is further confirmed by a number of authorities who attest to the fact that careful recruitment, retention and development of talent is a critical aspect of motivated staff performance, quality student learning and institutional success (Leithwood et al, 2004; Rivkin et al, 2005; Imazeki & Goe, 2009).

b) People hired at the institution

31% of respondents agreed that people hired by the institution work hard while 56% disagreed and 13% remained neutral. This situation again shows lack of staff do not work hard to perform to ensure institutional success. This confirms the assertion by Success Factors (2013) which posited one of the major reasons why institutional members may not work hard is poor or inadequate communication that fails to help existing employees to understand the organisational vision and new recruits to understand where they fit in the skim of things.

Another strategy which higher education institutions can use to ensure better performance by employees is by keeping all institutional members on the same level of understanding with regards to the goals and tasks of institutional growth through effective communication, as well as by assigning people into roles and positions their skills and knowledge best fit (Lavania et al, 2011; Pitt-Catsouphes et al, 2009). Another reason for failure by even the talented employees to perform to expectation in these institutions could be that institutions do not have clearly articulated career development plans that help employees to grow in their profession, help to show employees what is in it for them and also to assure employees that what is being done in their institution is good for everybody (Success Factors, 2013). Failure to develop skills internally through the development of a culture of continuous learning that provides challenging problems motivates employees to think outside the box and is a good strategy for not only ensuring employees work hard but also for retaining talent (Success Factors, 2013). Another major reason that may be contributing to demotivated performance by employees in higher education institutions could be that of poor monitoring of performance (Hewitt, 2012).

c) Best performers are known

47% of respondents indicated that best performers are known at their institutions while 38% disagreed and 17% remained neutral. This is confirmation to the trend in higher education talent management shown by Hewitt (2012) which showed that only 53% of human resources department personnel in higher education institutions do not work hand-in-hand with faculty

and departmental managers to identify and support key institutional talent. A silo approach to talent management is characteristic of most higher education institutions. According to Success Factors (2013), the human resources department should develop an updated centralised employee data base to ensure employees' profiles can easily be accessed. This is also supported by Lavania et al (2011) who argued that the Human Resources Department should always keep the employee data base updated to ensure employees' skills and competencies are known and can be quickly deployed where and when needed.

d) Getting up the learning curve quickly after being hired

34% of respondents agreed that after being hired, people get up the learning curve quickly while 43% disagreed and 23% remained neutral. This information may mean that employee induction, a process which formally introduces into and teaches new employees about the culture and processes of the institutions, is not adequately done, if it is even done at all. According to Success factors (2013), new recruits should always be shown how and where they fit in the institution's scheme of things for them to be able to get up the learning curve quickly.

e) Institutional leadership

27% of respondents agreed that institutional leadership in private higher education institutions has a deep conviction that talent is critical to institutional success while 52% did not agree and 21% remained neutral. The above results confirm research results by Hewitt (2012) which showed that only 36% of higher education institutions identify talent management and engagement as within the top five strategic priorities of the institutions.

f) Opportunities to further develop

62% of higher education institutions provide institutional members with opportunities to further develop their skills and knowledge through strong staff development programmes while 17% disagreed and 21% remained neutral. This situation demonstrates that there is a very strong desire in private higher education institutions to improve the ability of their members through skills and knowledge development. This is also supported by the Success Factors (2013) which assets that a culture of continuous learning by supporting employees through both internal and external learning programmes is an important talent management strategy critical to institutional success.

g) Institution able to attract best talent

42% of respondents agreed that their institutions are able to attract top talent while 38% disagreed and 20% remained neutral. This low level of agreement shows that higher education institutions have problems in attracting top talent and confirms results of research by McCartney & Worman (2013) that shows that 70% of organisations currently report a rise in the number of unsuitable applicants.

h) Competencies for key positions

29% of respondents agreed that competencies for key positions in their institutions have been clearly defined while 42% disagreed and 29% remained neutral. This information shows that institutions have problems in clearly articulating roles and responsibilities of employees

and confirms the research results by Hewitt (2012) that showed that slightly more than 37% of higher education institutions gather and analyse institutional data to monitor talent management in terms of the fit between the skills and positions that members are assigned to hold. Best practice however shows that by ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clearly streamlined, private higher education institutions can be in a position to effectively define competencies for key positions and also be able to successfully map internal talent against future needs (Lavania et al, 2011).

i) Best people made to perform important jobs

21% of the respondents believe that the best people perform the most important jobs while 58% believe that the best people are not made to perform the most important jobs in the institutions. 21% remained neutral. This information demonstrates a lack of fit between employee skills and knowledge and roles and responsibilities in private higher education institutions as also indicated above.

j) Retaining top talent

25% of respondents agreed that private higher education institutions retain top talent while 50% disagreed and 25% remained neutral. The above information shows that not only do private higher education institutions have problems in attracting top talent as shown by Hewitt (2012) but also have problems keeping the talent they have.

k) Employees given opportunities

12% of private higher education institutions give employees opportunities to be creative and innovative to do what they think is best. 63% disagreed and 25% remained neutral. This information shows that employees in private higher education institutions work in a highly regulated environment where almost everything the employees should seek approval for everything they do no matter how good for the institution, with little room left for the employees to use their own initiatives. Such a restrictive environment destroys employee innovation, demotivates employees and results in high staff turnover (Hewitt, 2012; Lavania et al, 2011).

l) Low staff turnover

35% of respondents agreed that there is low staff turnover in private higher education institutions. 49% felt that there is high staff turnover and 16% remained neutral. This information shows that there private higher education institutions have a big problem with staff turnover.

m) Institution is flexible in developing talent

42% of respondents agreed that private higher education institutions are flexible in developing talent. 37% of the respondents disagreed and 21% remained neutral. This statistics demonstrates that as part of talent management, private higher education institutions are making fair attempts in ensuring that their staff is able to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to be able to function more productively in their institutions.

n) Managers at all levels

34% of respondents agreed that managers at all levels in their institutions provide honest and thorough feedback to employees on an ongoing basis. 37% of the respondents disagreed and 29% remained neutral. This information shows that managers in private higher education institutions, as part of their talent management responsibilities, do not adequately provide helpful feedback to enable employees to be able to professionally grow and be able to effectively perform their responsibilities. This is confirmed in a research by Hewitt (2012) which showed that only 23% of higher education institutions hold their management accountable for poor talent management in the institutions.

o) Managers in the institution

29% of respondents agreed that managers in their institutions spend at least 20% of their time on talent-related issues. 29% of the respondents disagreed and 42% remained neutral. This shows that employees do not believe that their managers at different levels of the institutions are serious about managing and retaining talent. This, as already mentioned above, confirms Hewitt (2012)'s assertion that only 36% of higher education institutions identify talent management engagement as within the top five strategic priorities of the institutions.

p) Individual development plans

58% of the respondents agreed that individual development plans are in place for everyone in the private higher education institutions. 27% of the respondents disagreed and 15% remained neutral on the fact that there are individual development plans in place in private higher education institutions. This is also confirmed by the fact that respondents believe that private higher education institutions, as part of talent management, support skills and knowledge development of their employees.

q) Managers are held accountable

21% of the respondents agreed that managers in their institutions are held accountable for developing talent. 46% of the respondents disagreed that managers in their institutions are held accountable for talent development while 33% remained neutral. This low statistics on the number of respondents who agreed that their institution managers are held accountable for talent development again confirms results of research by Hewitt (2012) which showed that only 23% of higher education institutions hold their management accountable for poor talent management in the institutions.

r) A plan is in place in the institutions

20% of the respondents agreed that there are plans in their institutions to deal with future labour and skills needs. 45% of the respondents disagreed that there are any such plans in their institutions while 35% remained neutral. This information shows that private higher education institutions do not adequately plan for their future talent needs. This is also confirmed by Hewitt (2012) who showed that of the 37% who gather and analyse institutional data for the purpose of talent management, only 42% use the data consistently to improve talent planning and engagement.

s) There are set standards

28% of the respondents agreed that their institutions have set standards to monitor the impact of talent management strategies. 34% of the respondents disagreed that such standards exist and 38% remained neutral. These results help to confirm the findings of Hewitt (2012) which showed that as part of talent management strategies, commitment to monitoring talent management and engagement in higher education institutions is still low as only 36% of higher education institutions identify talent management and engagement as within the top five strategic priorities of the institutions and that slightly more than 37% of higher education institutions gather and analyse institutional data to monitor talent management in terms of the fit between employee skills and roles and responsibilities.

t) My institution has a scheme

37% of respondents agreed that their institutions have schemes for incentivising exceptional performance. 50% of the respondents disagreed that such schemes exist in their institutions and 13% remained neutral. These results confirm the results of a study on talent management by Hewitt (2012) which showed that performance and reward programs in higher education are disconnected to be able to support effective and robust talent management strategies. The same research showed that only 48% of higher education institutions use systematic performance management processes to assess staff performance (Hewitt, 2012) and of these 48%, around 20% (a) consistently ensure that rewards and recognition link to the attainment of institutional, departmental and individual performance goals; (b) differentiate pay significantly between high-potential and non-high-potential employees; and (c) align rewards within the context of a total reward strategy that includes compensation, benefits and development opportunities for talent in the institutions.

5. Conclusions

It can therefore be concluded from the above findings that talent management strategies currently being used in most of the private higher education institutions in Botswana are overall ineffective as they are unable to engage, motivate and ensure talent retention and improved performance at their institutions. Evidence of the ineffectiveness of talent management strategies in most of the private higher education institutions include the fact that: it takes too long for new recruits to be inducted to understand the culture and procedures of their institutions, there is a lack of prioritisation of talent management activities on the part of institutional leadership, there is high staff turnover in these institutions, institutional managers in these institutions spend very little of their time on talent-related matters because they are not held accountable for talent management, and also that there is a big disconnect between rewards and performance in these institutions.

6. Recommendations

In the light of the above conclusions, it can be recommended that:

- Leadership in private higher education institutions need to familiarise themselves more with talent management strategies especially with regards to how they can be successfully implemented to attract and retain talent.
- Talent management issues must be at the top of the agenda in all institutional meetings to ensure that all members understand and capture the importance of the strategies.
- Institutional managers in private higher education also need to be held accountable for all talent management problems so that they begin to respond by spending more of their time on talent-related matters.

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