

A Critical Analysis of Current Talent Management Strategies and Outcomes at the Free State Department of Health

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Abstract

Talent management is essential for organizations to recruit and retain talented individuals, with rapid talent placement, great work environment, and effective HR strategies being key strategies. Talented employees are difficult to replace, and their retention is essential for adapting to changing environments. This qualitative study investigates the establishment and application of current talent management strategies at the Free State Department of Health, examining their effectiveness in enhancing employee performance and organizational effectiveness. The study reveals key challenges and opportunities for improvement, contributing to the understanding of talent management in South African public healthcare.

Keywords: Talent Management, Employee Performance, Organizational Effectiveness, Public Healthcare

1. INTRODUCTION

Talent management (TM) has become an effectively significant organizational issue about recruitment and retention of talent in the larger context (Collins & Mellahi, 2009). Manyika et al. (2017) highlight rapid talent placement, great work environment, and effective human resource (HR) as three key strategies for effective talent management to support organizational sustainability. Certainly, talented employees are difficult to find and replace because of their high level of competence and direct impact on the organization's success. Therefore, to adapt adequately and creatively to constantly changing external environments, retention of these employees is crucial for most organizations. According to Gopee and Phang (2017), the development, release, sharing, and utilization of knowledge across all members of the organization for ongoing creativity and renewal constitute talent management, which impacts excellence and innovation. Since human capital is the public sector institution's greatest asset, it is, therefore, crucial to

develop and coordinate talent management strategies for the public good, as well as to maintain maximum institutional effectiveness (Vermeulen, 2007). The function of talent management, according to Härtel and Fujimoto (2015:360), is "the mindset and concomitant practices of attracting and retaining the core human talent the organization needs."

Despite the importance of talent management, South African public health sector still face challenges, including: insufficient funding and poor infrastructure, loss of skilled professionals to private sector, and management of the impact of retiring employees on workforce. Given the challenges associated with skills shortages and high employee turnover within the Free State Department of Health, it was important to critically analyses the department's current talent management strategies. More specifically, the article aimed to address the following research questions.

Research Questions

- Which current talent management strategies have been established within the department?
- How is talent management strategies applied within the department?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Talent Management

The term "talent management" was originally used in the phrase "war for talent" by Michaels et al. (2001) of McKinsey and has since become a topical issue in recent years. A system for managing talent is a combination of internal procedures, initiatives, and cultural norms implemented within an organization with the goal to pull in, nurture, utilize, and hold onto individuals to fulfil long-term business requirements and strategic objectives (Gomathy et al., 2022). According to Ashton and Morton (2005), talent management is a new path to organizational performance or a strategic and comprehensive perspective for both business and HR planning. According to Michaels et al. (2001) of the McKinsey Group, executives should focus on the following important actions when it comes to talent management:

- Participate in people's decisions;
- Create in-depth talent evaluations;
- Develop a culture of talent-focus inside the organization;
- Spend money on talent; and
- Be responsible for managing talent.

Therefore, organizations and HR practitioners must use

effective talent management strategies for efficient talent retention and organizational sustainability. An outline of these effective talent management strategies is given in the sections that follow.

Workforce Planning and Staffing

According to Ulrich and Lake (2015), planning for the workforce is an act of making sure that the appropriate number of individuals with the appropriate abilities is employed at the appropriate time through a variety of activities such as flexible working, succession planning, and job design. Today, it is crucial for every organization to plan how to build the future structure of their organization so that the appropriate people with the necessary talents are identified and appointed within the organization, and this talent management goal is the cornerstone for long-term organizational success (Tamunomiebi & Okwakpam, 2019). Any strategic talent management system begins by identifying and developing the most suitable talent to ensure effective hiring and matching of roles and responsibilities (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; DiRomualdo et al., 2009).

Succession Planning

Planning for succession is a systematic process to identify and prepare potential successors for essential roles within an organization (Conger & Fulmer, 2003; Berke, 2004). The idea of succession planning comes from human resource planning (HRP), a strategy used by organizations to guarantee that they have the necessary talent to provide a certain level of production or service (Gómez-Mejia et al., 2010). Through a structured review process, succession planning seeks to identify and nurture candidates to take over important responsibilities within an organization (Van Hoek, 2017). DiRomualdo et al. (2009) contend that once the important positions have been identified, the next stage is to conduct a skills inventory to ascertain whether the skills are available for the vital tasks and to suggest potential solutions in case they are not. This mostly relates to talent recruitment tactics, which involve a change from vacancy-led recruitment to an initiative-taking approach of hiring, which should be connected to the position's requirements (Kumari & Bahuguna, 2012).

Training and Development

Ohunakin et al. (2020) describe training and development as a tactic, which organisations use for employees to enhance organisational activities. Talent development is key for the development of human capital needed for organizational sustainability (Al Mannai et al., 2018). Organizations that can provide opportunities for training and growth for their employees tend to successfully attract, motivate, and retain their best talents. Nguyen (2020) re-emphasizes this view,

stating that it is every employee's desire to improve and develop them. The author further asserts that organizations that offer training and development opportunities can retain their best talents simply because employees feel recognized and are able to gain knowledge, skills and abilities, which can improve organizational sustainability. However, Noranee et al. (2021) found in their study that training and development insignificantly impacts employee retention and maintained that their study is strongly supported by Chris-madu's (2020) study, which revealed that without good compensation, investing in training and development may not be effective to attain high retention rates amongst employees. Similarly, Omoikhudu (2017) discovered that training and development impacted talent retention insignificantly.

Compensation

The phrase "compensation" refers to an employee's total pay, which includes monetary awards and bonuses that may motivate workers to implement the organizational strategy (Schuler & MacMillan, 1984; Verma & Sharma, 2019). Erasmus et al. (2019: 466) define compensation as "financial and non-financial rewards provided by an employer for the time, skills and effort made available by the employee in fulfilling job requirements aimed at achieving organizational objectives." Dhanpat et al. (2018) posit that compensation assists with employee commitment and retention. Terera and Ngirande (2014) support this view, claiming that compensation is an important element within human resource management systems, which determine employee commitment and retention levels, and the best way to retain best talents is through competitive packages

Performance Management

Performance management is a comprehensive work system that outlines goal setting, coaching, feedback, and evaluation procedures to raise employee performance and ultimately improve organizational performance (DeNisi & Pritchard, 2006; London, 2015). Moreover, Aguinis and Burgi-Tian (2021) contend that many organizations lack advanced performance management systems, focusing on annual evaluations and reviews. This lack of continuous feedback and alignment with strategic goals hinders talent management. Additionally, performance management, when implemented with evidence-based recommendations, can provide crucial support for administration, strategy, communication, development, and documentation (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2021)

Additionally, performance management, according to Aguinis (2014), is a continuing process that mandates managers to make sure that workers' actions and outputs are in line with the organization's objectives, whilst assisting

to gain a competitive advantage. For example, Muda et al. (2014) postulate that the elements that surround an employee's degree of productivity, regarding the aims and objectives of the organization, may be used to evaluate the performance of the employee. In addition, Erasmus et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of performance management in talent management to enhance employee productivity, career growth, and talent retention through systematic planning, goal setting, development, improvement, and performance monitoring. Research, according to Groen et al. (2017), suggests the importance of employee participation to determine the fairness of the measures for performance.

Talent Retention

Talent is defined as a “high potential employee who displays ability, engagement, and aspiration to succeed in more senior and pivotal positions” (Naim & Lenka, 2017: 183). Nijs et al. (2014: 182) define private sector talent as “systematically developed innate abilities of individuals that are deployed in activities they like, find important, and in which they want to invest energy. It enables individuals to perform excellently in one or more domains of human functioning, operationalised as performing better than other individuals of the same age or experience, or as performing consistently at their personal best” and Kravariti and Johnston (2020: 7) characterize public sector talent as “the implementation of key procedures to ensure public sector employees possess the competencies, knowledge, and core values in order to address complex contemporary challenges and fulfil public sector strategic objectives for the common good.” Wikstrom and Martin (2012) classify talent as the superior mastery of systematically developed skills and knowledge in the realm of human endeavour. Additionally, Tansley (2011) labels talent as an exceptional ability or aptitude, with people who possess it having the ability to prove exceptional achievements in both physical and mental realms. Moreover, Armstrong and Taylor (2020) assert that individuals should possess talent to excel in their jobs.

Talent retention has been a major difficulty for organizations currently, especially in light of globalization and scientific progress as companies strive to retain their most talented employees. Hence, the concept has been extensively discussed in talent management literature and has become increasingly important for organizations owing to the fact that knowledge is becoming a more important business asset (Horn & Griffeth, 1995; Bairi et al., 2011; Tamunomiebi & Okwakpam, 2019). The retention of talent requires a multifaceted approach rather than a single strategy (Haider et al., 2015). According to Matongolo et al. (2018), organizations that provide meaningful and

responsive talent management strategies progressively retain their best talents. As stated earlier, South Africa faces difficulty regarding skilled workers. The Public Service Commission report of 2009 highlights that the ability of the South African government to tackle developmental challenges lies in its ability to pull in and hold on to top talents. It further states that effective recruitment and selection enhances performance and ensures that government departments achieve their organizational objectives (Public Service Commission, 2009). Ansari and Bijalwan (2017) posit that talent retention, which they refer as the process of motivating and encouraging best talent to remain with the organization for longer periods, is in fact valuable for both the employee and the organization.

Human Capital Theory

According to Vodenko and Lyausheva (2020), human capital may be characterized as the whole of an employee's skills and knowledge acquired via training and development, and experience. The early 1960s saw the development and articulation of the modern theory of human capital, which is notably linked to the work of Schultz and Becker and has been applied in numerous studies to examine the correlation between human resource management and employment results (Dzimbiri & Molefakgotla, 2021; Tight, 2018). According to Tight (2018), in essence, human capital contends that investing in training and development promotes improved productive capacity, which is beneficial to both the individual and the organization. Furthermore, Tarique and Schuler (2010) argue that from the standpoint of human capital, organizations that appreciate their employees will invest in them and, as a result, those employees will stay with the company for extended periods. According to Guo and Chen (2021), human capital may be thought of as the financial worth that people or their talents bring to businesses.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this article, the researcher adopted a qualitative research method, anchored on the interpretivist approach, namely the exploratory research design. The qualitative approach was chosen owing to its ability to provide new insight on the effectiveness of talent management strategies within the provincial department of health in the Free State. A qualitative study is a series of activities designed to maximise research integrity, whilst it employs non-numerical data, and its goal is to explore meaning and expose various realities (Saunders et al., 2007; Polit & Beck, 2010; Polit & Beck, 2014). Conversely, according to Saunders et al. (2007), exploratory research aims to seek new insight into a given phenomenon.

Research Findings

Table 1: Sample profile

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MAN1	Black South African	Tswana	46 years	Female	Manager	18 years	Higher Certificate; currently studying towards a degree
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Source: Author's fieldwork (2023).

Discussion of the Findings

After the interviews were concluded and transcribed, the interview materials and research questions were contrasted. To make sure that the research questions were addressed accurately and without excessive prejudice, some of the participants' comments were narrated in the current author's voice, while others were quoted verbatim.

Theme 1: Status of current talent management strategies at the Free State Department of Health

This theme considers the status of current talent management strategies at the Free State provincial department of health. The findings revealed that the Free State Department had not been able to establish effective talent management strategies. However, there were other views which suggested that the department had been able to establish effective talent management strategies. There is a prevalent belief that although certain talent management strategies have been established, their proper implementation has not been achieved. UNI2 submitted:

"...the strategies are there, but majority of them are not well implemented. As a result, I cannot say they are effective or not..."

Similarly, **MAN1** stated:

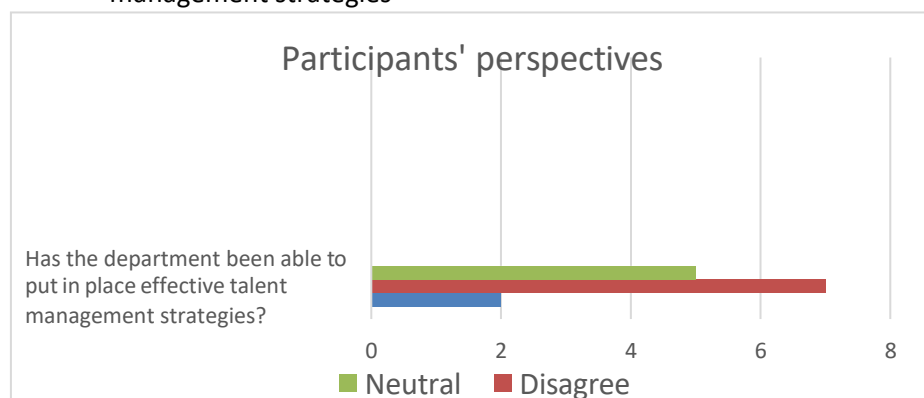
"...some of our current talent management strategies, as put

by the department, are effective, but others are not...there is still room for improvement...”.

The current study’s findings are congruent with the findings of Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2020), who found that little is known about how to conceive, develop, and implement effective talent management strategies within an organizational context. Nevertheless, Anlesinya et al. (2019) aver that an effective talent management strategy may help the organization to achieve macro-level outputs and improve employees’ positive attitudes and behaviour. The revelation must, however, be backed by a strong strategic talent management framework that can overcome or minimize the different obstacles that often stand in the way of achieving positive outcomes.

Figure 1 below mirrors participants’ perspectives regarding the Free State Department of Health’s capacity to establish effective talent management strategies.

Figure 1: Participants’ perspectives regarding the department’s capacity to establish effective talent management strategies



Source: Author’s fieldwork (2023)

Figure 1 above indicates that two participants agreed that the department had established effective talent management strategies, while five participants chose to remain neutral in their responses. However, seven participants indicated that the department had not established effective talent management strategies.

Theme 2: Application of current talent management strategies at the Free State Department of Health

The results of this study demonstrated that half of the participants perceived that the Free State Department of Health has consistently applied some talent management strategies, while the other half perceived that some talent management strategies were applied inconsistently. The

study's findings revealed consistent application of training and development and the performance management system, while some aspects of training and development, the recruitment and selection strategy, and succession planning, were applied inconsistently. In this regard, CLIN1 stated:

"...I honestly believe they do have few things in place... but I do not think it covers everyone...it is very selective... there are fields where employees are not taken for trainings...there are some fields where they have special programs in place..."

NCLIN4 observed:

"...The implementation of recruitment and selection strategy is not consistently applied.... there are instances where bias selection takes center stage...we have witnessed appointments of unqualified personnel here on a number of occasions..."

The current study's findings align with the findings of Culié et al. (2014) and Kravariti et al. (2022), which found that effective talent management is often underdeveloped, poorly administered, ad hoc, fragmented, and reactive, underlining the essential role and obstacles that supervisors face when implementing talent management strategies. Funhiro et al. (2022) submit that compliance with the variety of concurrently adopted professional guidelines is a barrier to the application of effective talent management strategies and the healthcare system.

Theme 3: Barriers to current talent management strategies

The results of this study revealed that there are some internal and external barriers confronting current talent management strategies at the department. Sub-themes such as poor implementation, freezing of posts, rural setting, lack of advancement and growth, and budget constraints emerged under the theme barriers to current talent management strategies. The text goes into additional detail about each of these sub-themes and provides firsthand statements from participants to bolster the depiction.

Sub-theme 1: Poor implementation

The results of this study revealed that current talent management strategies at the case organization have been poorly implemented. This finding is in line with extant literature. For instance, Barkhuizen (2014) found that South African local government institutions implement talent management poorly and without strategic focus. Similarly, Anlesinya et al. (2014) noted that at an organizational level, talent management faces challenges relating to a shortage of competent talent specialists for the design and successful

application of talent management initiatives. In this regard,

NCLIN3 observed:

“... we have good strategies, but I think they just become contrived and poorly communicated... does not help if we are not implementing or we just implement to be compliant...”

Likewise, **NCLIN2** posited

“... policies are there but they are selectively and poorly implemented... let us take a look at this one of leave...when employees apply for annual leave six weeks before, management would reject but allow their preferred employees to sign leave forms on the exact day of leave, or on the day of their return, or even when they are already on leave at home...”.

Sub-theme 2: Freezing of posts

The current findings revealed that, currently, Tokollo and Mafube hospitals are unable to appoint staff owing to the freezing of posts and austerity measures imposed by the national treasury. The participants stated that within their institutions they are unable to recruit administrative personnel. However, the Free State Department of Health prioritises appointments of clinical personnel over non-clinicians. This finding aligns with the finding of Funhiro et al. (2022), who observed that a fundamental obstacle to fulfilling the responsibility of effective governance in public hospitals is staff freeze. According to them, hospitals must first obtain treasury's approval before filling positions, which often results in delays to acquire the necessary employees. Furthermore, Public service commission (2021) discovered that a majority of the Free State Department of Health's institutions had a staffing challenge with professional personnel. In line with the above, **NCLIN5** submitted:

“... currently, yes, as we speak there is... there is a moratorium. Institutions cannot appoint... number two, the same shortage of staff we are referring to, it is a huge challenge, which puts even the lives of staff and patients at risk. I think also insufficient budget...”.

In a similar vein, **MAN1** declared:

“... in the Free State Department of Health, every time we are supposed to appoint non-clinical officials, there is a moratorium...but when it comes to clinical, everything just runs smoothly... for the past two to three years we have not appointed any non-clinical officials...”.

Sub-theme 3: Rural setting

The current findings revealed that the application of talent management strategies at the Free State provincial department of health faces barriers owing to the location of certain hospitals within the province. This finding shows that quite a significant number of personnel are leaving these hospitals because of the rural setting within which the hospitals are situated. In this regard, CLIN4 averred:

“...people resign and go to better towns. I do not know if it is related to maybe the setting at the Free State where more of your... no let me say, it is more of your... your rural health. It is rural, and then in terms of access to the opportunities, maybe they are fewer... like, let us say I am working in this setting and want to further my studies. I would want to be in a town where there is access...”.

This finding aligns with extant literature. Prior research found that culture, environment, and complexity might function as barriers to the effective application of talent management strategies (Sheehan et al., 2018; Sparrow et al., 2013). Recently, Oppong and Gold (2016) found that local settings and cultural elements may hinder the development of talent management systems.

Sub-theme 4: Lack of advancement and growth

The current study's findings revealed that despite the department providing opportunities for further studies, insufficient career opportunities have led many employees to seek better opportunities elsewhere. In line with this, **NCLIN3** stated:

“...with the lack of finances...there are no opportunities for growth...”.

In concordance, **NCLIN4** also observed:

“...it is almost a given that the department overlooks its best workers. We have noticed that talented and experienced employees do not receive promotions while some unskilled, under qualified, and poor performers are promoted...these types of decisions result in disputes, grievances, and poor performance...”.

The current study's findings align with the study of Koketso and Rust (2012), who found that the retention of qualified personnel, a lack of employee appreciation, succession planning, and slow career management plans are among the talent management challenges that plague South Africa's public sector. Moreover, Manjenje and Muhanga (2021) note that lack of career advancement opportunities affects motivation and success negatively, and further state that employees feel empowered and admired when they

have opportunities to enhance their skills, technology, and capabilities. Similarly, Oburu and Atambo (2016) found that employee productivity will rise if there are equivalent opportunities for promotion, a fair wage structure, and training.

Sub-theme 5: Budget constraints

Lastly, the results of this study revealed that budget constraints are a barrier to effective application of talent management strategies at the department. In this regard, **NCLIN5** said:

“...the same shortage of staff we are referring to, it is... it is a huge challenge, which puts even the lives of staff and patients at risk. I think it is due to insufficient budget...”.

Likewise, **NCLIN4** remarked:

“... I do not think the department is able to deal with the effects of shortages of staff. When we are supposed to advertise, we are told of the budget... we are told that we are overspending...”.

This finding is congruent with the study of Musango et al. (2013), which found that a lack of funding for healthcare is a widespread issue in most African countries, even the wealthiest nations are finding it challenging to maintain current level of development, particularly considering the continuing economic crisis and its constraints. Similarly, Oleribe et al. (2019) found that insufficient funding of healthcare is the biggest problem in Africa. The next section focuses on the application of current talent management strategies at the Free State Department of Health.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study has charted some, though not exhaustive, recommendations to improve talent management at the provincial department of health in the Free State. These recommendations are proposed to provide a roadmap for policymakers, managers, and HR practitioners to navigate the complex terrain of talent management

Commitment towards consistent application of talent management strategies is imperative

There is a need for consistent application of talent management strategies at the provincial department of health in the Free State. This can be achieved by establishing clear policies and procedures, providing comprehensive training and development opportunities, and ensuring equal access to resources and support. Consistent application of talent management strategies is key to building trust and ensuring that each worker feels empowered and appreciated

to contribute to the organization's success, while inconsistent application of talent management strategies can lead to perceptions of favoritism, unfairness, and discrimination. By consistently applying talent management strategies, the department of health in the Free State can promote a culture of fairness, transparency, and meritocracy. This can result in higher employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention, eventually leading to better outcomes for patients and the organization.

A need for more effective succession planning is important

There is a pressing need for the provincial department of health in the Free State to prioritise the creation and application of a comprehensive succession planning strategy to ensure continuity and to minimize disruptions in healthcare service delivery. This plan should identify critical positions, determine potential talent, and provide training and development opportunities to nurture employees for future leadership responsibilities. For this, the department should establish a clear policy on succession planning, communicate it to all employees, and ensure its effective implementation. To enhance the effectiveness of succession planning, the department should conduct regular talent assessments, identify knowledge gaps, and develop strategies to retain critical skills and expertise. This could include job-enrichment, on-the-job training, and job-rotation initiatives to guarantee that workers are prepared to take on additional tasks and responsibilities.

Additionally, the department should review and address the issue of frozen posts, which has been cited as a major obstacle to effective succession planning. Additionally, the department should also establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to track the effectiveness of its succession planning strategy at the department. Lastly, it is important to conduct routine evaluations and assessments to pinpoint problem areas and guarantee that the succession planning strategy is aligned with the department's overall talent management objectives.

An enhanced training and development strategy is necessary

As a matter of urgency, the Free State provincial department of health should enhance its training and development strategies. Without effective strategies regarding skills development, the department will continuously experience skills shortages, which could compromise service delivery. Ongoing and regular training and development will improve organisational performance and efficiency, leading to increased employee productivity. Therefore, the department should continue to offer employees opportunities to grow through training and development, mentorship, and career

advancement opportunities. Opportunities for professional development and advancement can raise employee satisfaction, engagement and, ultimately, retention. Employees have a higher chance of becoming disengaged if they believe that they are not growing or developing in their positions, feel demotivated, and seek opportunities elsewhere. Through enhanced training and development, the department can encourage traditions that value learning and innovation.

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