

DETERMINANTS OF A TALENT LIFE CYCLE FOR ACADEMIC STAFF IN A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Most talent management programmes tend to neglect a fully integrated approach that addresses all segments of the talent life cycle. This can have negative consequences for business success and sustainability over the long term. The subject of a talent life cycle has not been investigated much, but is prevalent and pervasive in the thinking of recruiters. The main objective of this study was to explore the determinants of a talent life cycle for academic staff in a higher education institution.

A qualitative research approach was adopted, using semi-structured interviews to collect data from management (N=12) of a merged South African higher education institution. The findings revealed five components that should form part of the talent life cycle framework for academic staff: talent mind-set, talent preparation and acquisition, talent development, talent performance and recognition, and talent retention, which assist with the effective talent management of academic staff members throughout their careers. The HEI management are encouraged to follow an integrated and strategic approach to academic talent management by incorporating the dimensions of the TLC.

Keywords: Academic staff, Higher education, Talent life cycle, Talent management.

Introduction

The 21st century higher education landscape has become known for a ‘war’ for academic talent. According to Samuel and Chipunza (2013) the rivalry for superior academic talent in HEIs has emerged as a prominent factor in attrition of academics from one institution to another. Other factors fuelling the need for academic talent management include globalisation and increasing competitiveness across markets, the aging workforce, a decline in younger workers entering academia, a lack of adequate funding, uncompetitive remuneration packages and research incentives, and employment equity initiatives (Callaghan, 2015; Schulze, 2015; Singh, 2015). Higher education institutions are therefore encouraged to adopt a talent culture and implement career orientated strategic plans to retain competent academics (Mohan, Muthaly and Annakis, 2015).

According to Leisy and Pyron (2009), most talent management programmes focus almost exclusively on filling vacant positions with qualified individuals, while neglecting a fully integrated approach that addresses all segments of the talent life cycle (TLC). The latter approach is more likely to contribute to an organisation’s success. In order to harness the value of the TLC in higher education, it is important to first comprehend the concept of talent management. Talent management “refers to the concept of bringing together — in a unified technology platform — the functions of recruitment, selection, assessment, learning and development, performance management, workforce planning, compensation, and other human resource functions” (Oakes, 2006, p. 21). Talent management, in

essence, follows the process of the human resource life cycle of acquiring, developing, and retaining appropriate talent for an organisation's unique strategy (Schiemann, 2009). Kurganova (2014) described a TLC as an organisation's relationship with its employees according to six phases, namely planning, attracting, identifying, selecting, deploying, and managing.

According to Deb (2006), the management of the talent life cycle is dependent on both the employer and the employee, with a complete life cycle of gains and services from the onset of employment until exit or termination. Bondarouk, Ruel, Guiderdoni-Jourdain, and Oiry (2009) further stated that poor management of the TLC will have an adverse effect on all talent management activities in the organisation in terms of the quality and consistency of its data and daily operations. The ClearCompany (2015) stated that each organisation defines and plots its TLC in its own way. Stages differ, procedures are diverse, and each phase is distinct. This is because each organisation has its own unique character, regardless of whether they operate with other organisations in the same market or sector.

Against this background the researchers therefore deemed it necessary to investigate the specific TLC that would best suit the merged South African higher education institution (HEI) under study, in order to achieve the most feasible approach to talent management for the institution. For the purpose of this study, the factors that have been identified as those that influence the TLC in HEIs are talent mind-set, preparation for talent, talent branding, talent mapping and acquisition, talent development, talent performance and recognition, and talent retention. Furthermore, the present study sought to make these seven components uniquely applicable and beneficial to the merged South African HEI under study. These are discussed in the ensuing section.

Literature Review

Factors Affecting the Talent Life Cycle in HEIs

Talent mind-set: Best and Paterson (2010) stated that most organisations are weak at managing talent, and need to adopt a talent mind-set. Managers in possession of a talent mind-set know that talent is a vital source of competitive advantage (Tan, 2012). According to Elegbe (2010), the manner in which managers establish performance goals mirrors their talent mind-set. Michaels, Handfield-Jones, and Axelrod (2001) further maintained that being devoted to talent management with a strategic inclination nurtures a talent mind-set. Snyders (2015) evidently concurs with these authors by defining the talent mind-set as fully comprehending and being able to recruit, retain, and identify talent in people that can be successfully deployed and perpetually developed in the direction of a particular purpose that inclines the strongpoints and enthusiasms of the person towards the short and long-term objectives of the organisation. Viljoen (2014) argued that there is an immense challenge within higher education to retain academic staff, and the successful application of a comprehensive talent management tool in HEIs would require these organisations to first possess a talent mind-set. Kopp and Farr (2011) expressed the view that, with a talent mind-set, education systems would actively recruit talented individuals.

Preparation for talent: According to Maxwell (2010) preparation for talent is fundamental to the success of a talent management strategy. Kurganova (2014) argue that labour-force- and succession planning assist in assessing the precise pool of candidates that an organisation is attempting to attract, where these candidates can be accessed, and orchestrates the establishment of the organisation's TVP. Turner and Minnone (2011) stated that a crucial stakeholder group in universities is academic staff members. They are a principal resource responsible for producing and expanding knowledge, thereby enhancing the institution's competitive advantage. Turner and Minnone (2011) stated that academia is the custodian of the unearthing and proliferation of knowledge. This requires high-quality academic staff. It is also vital that HEIs determine the specific outcomes and contributions they wish to achieve, in order to appropriately prepare for the recruitment of the necessary talent.

Talent branding: Stringer and Rueff (2006) explained that talent branding could appeal to an organisation's target applicants while deterring those who may be incongruent with its needs. Baker and Balmer (1997) indicated that communication is essential for talent branding in HEIs. Silzer and Dowell (2010) further pointed out that the appropriate management of a talent brand can greatly enhance the attraction of superior academic talent to HEIs. According to Smither (2003), the progression of an employee through the introductory stage and beyond is, to a large extent, dependent on occurrences in the recruitment and hiring stage. If new employees are impressed with their initial experience, chances are that they will facilitate external communication of the talent brand. HEIs that comply with the above are likely to portray an attractive talent brand to current and prospective employees.

Talent mapping and acquisition: Greer (2013) described talent mapping as the connecting of the available talent with the talent that is foreseen to be required to sustain growth in a way that determines existing lack or discrepancies. Silzer and Dowell (2010) refer to talent acquisition as discovering the appropriate talent when it is required, and ensuring a consistent applicant experience throughout the process of attraction, recruitment, appointment, and on-boarding. The outcome of talent mapping, which is a talent pool, provides the capital to construct a maintainable talent pipeline for intermediate and long-term talent acquisition throughout tiers, operations, and geographic locations. Kumaarr (2014) stated that talent acquisition implies an outlook of not merely filling positions, but additionally making full use of the candidates to occupy comparable job posts in the future as well. From the above, it is clear that there is a close relationship between talent mapping and talent acquisition, which justifies grouping the two concepts as one in the TLC framework of the present study.

Evans and Chun (2012) contended that talent acquisition by means of perpetual tracking, recruitment, and outreach practices is crucial to institutional sustainability and organisational rejuvenation in a HEI. Even so, in spite of the requirement for speed in obtaining talent, the methods that HEIs employ in pursuit of candidates are characterised by inflexible stages, tedious interview schedules, and deficiency lack of technologically advanced employment practices (Evans and Chun, 2012).

Talent development: Garavan, Carbery, and Rock (2011) defined talent development as a process of preparation, selection, and enactment of development approaches for the whole talent pool, in order to guarantee that the organisation has at its disposal both an existing and a forthcoming source of talent to achieve its strategic aims. Talent development practices are generally carried out by organisations for the purpose of ensuring sufficient talent, enabling premeditated and calculated succession, as opposed to impulsive replacement (Gandz, 2006). The main purpose of talent development is to ready individuals for future positions. Development, in this instance, is an ongoing process that assists individuals to become agents for group- or organisational transformation and learning (Rothwell and Kazanas, 2003).

According to Messick (2008), a HEI's superiority depends on its ability to develop its academic staff. HEIs play a pivotal role in the ongoing development of their academic talent by means of institutional centres intended to augment the abilities of staff to the benefit of the institution (Bitzer, 2009). Sabbaticals provide opportunities for professional development and research through compensated leave or partly funded leave for a period of six months to a year (Evans and Chun, 2012). Huang, Finkelstein, and Rostan (2014) furthermore indicates that HEIs are becoming increasingly concerned with the need to forge international collaboration and networks during research training. This implies that HEIs realise the importance of keeping in contact with academics worldwide to remain relevant and competitive. This statement is supported by the findings of the present study.

Talent performance and recognition: Schoemaker (2005) defined talent as the superior ability to perform a particular undertaking. This definition accentuates the exceptional nature of talent and the specific influence it has on performance (Van der Sluis and Bunt-Kokhuis, 2009). Job performance can be described as the overall anticipated value to the organisation of the distinct behaviours of a person over a period (Motowidlo, 2003). Dunkel and Kleemann (2013) stated that appreciation and acknowledgement imply the value that is placed on performance. MacLean and Redman (2006), through investigations using applied behavioural psychology, established that recognition and compensation should be aligned

with the distinctive requirements of different people or groups if these are to succeed at encouraging exceptional performance in the long run.

Marshall (2016) opined that superior staff performance necessitates the HEI to intensely support its staff. It is imperative that there should be full, well-timed, and perceptible acknowledgement of the inputs to a HEI's mission by staff members who exhibit outstanding excellence, insight, and commitment (Rauhvargers and Rusakova, 2009). Khurana and Singhal (2010) stated that gauging, cultivating, and recompensing the academic staff of a HEI are essential in fostering an inspiring, high-achievement atmosphere. Halvorsen, Ibsen, and M'kumbuzi (2015) stated that monetary incentives tend to be particularly important to employees, due to the great importance and desirability that society has placed on it. These authors further indicated that many universities in South Africa, China, Europe, and the United States of America offer financial rewards to academics for every research paper they publish.

According to Huisman, de Boer, Dill, and Souto-Otero (2015), HEI managers must embrace performance anticipation, employ appropriate incentive schemes, and provide opportunities for development and reward, and celebrate the success of individuals and teams. However, directors of HEIs cite a lack of time for such activities, citing having to constantly adhere to frivolous procedures and attend to *ad hoc* demands and gatherings that minimally pertain to the desired organisational results (Fullan and Scott, 2009).

Talent retention: Retention is the organisation's success rate in keeping talented workers (Van Tiem, Moseley, and Dessinger, 2012). The majority of organisations acknowledge the cost effect of losing talented individuals. In spite of this, several organisations are still not exerting adequate effort to comprehend what causes workers to exit (Smither, 2003). One of the reasons why organisations are not as proactive as they ought to be is that the expense of losing a talented employee is underestimated (Smither, 2003).

Epie (2014) stated that most of the research available on talent retention occurred in Western populations, and further studies are required in emerging countries, because skills are becoming increasingly rare in these countries. Reitman (2013) suggested that the beliefs of managers that they possess the most superior available talent is pivotal to successful retention habits. An employer that recognises and acknowledges that it has high-quality talent will go to great lengths to keep that talent content and engaged in their work for the benefit of the organisation (Reitman, 2013).

Selesho and Naile (2014) stated that keeping staff members in HEIs is a critical challenge, because high attrition detrimentally affects the performance and reputation of academic entities. A study conducted in South Africa by Theron, Barkhuizen, and du Plessis (2014) showed that 34% of the academics in their sample contemplated leaving their current HEI, and discontentment with remuneration surfaced as the most prevalent motive. These authors recommended that the national government increase the budget for academic remuneration, and that HEIs craft appropriate incentives and benefits for academic staff. The authors also postulated that the career-path development and mentorship of HEI scholars should be more vigorous.

It can be concluded that making the most of talent in the complete TLC is an intricate procedure that determines the level of success of investment in talent. Careers meander through a relatively foreseeable set of phases, that is, from introduction and development, to maturity and, ultimately, retirement. Management in HEIs should acknowledge the significance of the TLC and how important it is to implement the correct processes.

Research Methodology

Research Design

A research approach is the strategy and the processes for a study, and includes suppositions, data gathering, analysis, and interpretation. The choice of a research approach is further determined by the

nature of the research problem under investigation, the world view of the researcher, and the subjects of study (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative research approach was adopted in the present study. This was motivated by the small population of individuals in managerial positions within the HEI under study, which means that a quantitative approach would have been inappropriate. A case study strategy was used in the present research, as it allows a researcher to explore a phenomenon in real life (Lichtman, 2014). In the present study, the qualitative case study approach fell within the interpretive/constructivist paradigm (Yin, 2012).

Research Setting

The research setting was a merged South African HEI. The participants were 12 managerial staff members who were situated at three campuses of the institution. The participants were interviewed in person at their offices, and, in cases where the researcher could not travel to meet with the participants, interviews were conducted via telephone or Skype.

Study Population and Sampling Strategy

The participants consisted of the management three campuses of the merged South African HEI. Interviews were conducted until data saturation had been achieved. This study made use of purposive convenience sampling, meaning participants were selected based on their willingness and availability to take part in the data-collection process and the potential relevance of their contribution. Table 1, below, shows the demographics of the 12 participants in this study.

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Participants	Gender	Race	Qualification	Job Level
1	Male	Black African	Doctoral degree	Executive management
2	Male	Black African	Doctoral degree	Senior management
3	Male	Black African	Doctoral degree	Executive management
4	Female	White	Doctoral degree	Senior management
5	Male	Black African	Doctoral degree	Executive management
6	Female	Black African	Doctoral degree	Senior management
7	Female	White	Doctoral degree	Senior management
8	Male	White	Doctoral degree	Executive management
9	Female	White	Doctoral degree	Middle management
10	Male	Black African	Doctoral degree	Middle management
11	Female	Black/African	Doctoral degree	Executive management
12	Male	White	Doctoral degree	Senior management

As can be seen from the table above, the majority of the participants were male, making up 58.33% (seven participants) of the sample, while the female participants constituted 41.67% (five participants) of the selected sample. Seven participants (58.33%) were black Africans, and 41.67% (five participants) were white. All 12 participants in the sample had doctoral degrees. The distribution in terms of managerial level showed that 41.67% (five participants) were in the executive tier, 41.67% (five participants) were in the senior management tier, 16.67% (two participants) were in the middle-management tier. Only one of the five participants in executive management was a woman (8.33% of

total sample). At senior management level, three of the five participants were women, (25% of the total sample), as opposed to 16.67% men. Middle-management participants consisted of one man and one woman.

Data-Collection Method

Qualitative data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to explore more profound meanings by allowing new information and concepts to emerge, which quantitative data would not have revealed. The interviews were aimed at determining the perceptions of management regarding the TLC within the merged South African HEI. The participants were requested to express their experiences regarding the TLC. The aim was to determine what TLC could be applied to the academic staff members of the merged South African HEI.

Data Analyses

According to Maschi (2016), qualitative content analysis can involve a combination of inductive and deductive analysis approaches. In the present study, the researcher first used the inductive approach to analyse the qualitative data and uncover deeper relationships between the new concepts, for the purpose of making credible recommendations. Deductive analysis was used to address the research objective. The researcher was also able to make sure that the specific research question was relevantly and appropriately answered.

Ethical Consideration

Permission to carry out this research was obtained from the relevant authorities of the institution by means of a letter of request, prior to collection of the data. Upon obtaining permission, the researcher approached interview candidates personally, requesting an interview, and interviewees were required to give consent before answering any of the researcher's questions. Anonymity was upheld, and all information provided remained confidential, in accordance with research ethics.

Results

Table 2 provides the themes and sub-themes, together with their frequencies, that emerged from the data analysis. *Talent development*, *Talent retention*, and *Talent performance and recognition* were the highest-recurring sub-themes.

Table 2. Frequency of Themes

	Theme and Sub-themes	Frequency
Theme	Talent Life Cycle	
	Talent mind-set	8
	Talent preparation and acquisition	11
	Talent development	71
	Talent performance and recognition	37
	Talent retention	38

Theme: Talent Life Cycle

From the main theme Talent life cycle, the sub-themes that emerged, in descending order of occurrence frequency, are: Talent development, Talent retention, Talent performance and recognition, Talent preparation and acquisition, and Talent mind-set.

Sub-Theme: Talent Mind-Set

Although the sub-theme *Talent mind-set* did not occur as frequently as the other sub-themes, the participants noted it to be a crucial element in ensuring that academic staff members are kept content by taking good care of them, recognising them as key role players in the institution, and offering a worthwhile employment experience. This was indicated by the following response:

As far as value goes, this institution is extremely committed to offering superior value to all our stakeholders, especially to our academic staff members. We are motivated by the core business, or the persons involved in core business. If they are not in a position to be top performers, then the institution is at risk, so it's important to ensure the well-being of the institution by ensuring that the persons involved in core business are happy, and that they have all the resources to remain effective and to perform (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).

Another participant stated:

The most important thing is to take care of our staff. If I really don't take care of the campus Rector, and she's not happy, there's no way she can take care of the campus, you know, and the same goes for our academic staff. Unfortunately, that's how it is, you know (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black African).

Another participant also acknowledged the significance of academic staff in HEIs:

At a university, there are two things — staff and students, and both need equal attention. You can't have the one without the other, so, I think that it's very important for the sake of managing your talent (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

Sub-Theme: Talent Preparation and Acquisition

The participants outlined how important it is to provide a conducive working atmosphere for academic staff members, to enhance the attractiveness of the institution, as seen in the following response:

We assume that, as the employer, you should be able to assure your staff that everything will be provided for them, because, if you don't assure them, they won't come here. So, the management recognises that, and that is why they make an attempt to review their salaries every year and make an attempt to accommodate them when they first assume their duties (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black African).

Participant described how management identifies and grooms the students they perceive to have a strong potential to thrive in the academic arena:

We also have what we call G.O.O.T programme — Growing Our Own Timber. We recruit these young ones, and we look at the scarce programmes, and that's how we're trying to attract you guys and give you employment, at the same time mentoring you to become a well-rounded academic (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black African).

Participants also mentioned the factors that make the institution attractive to academic staff:

I think, what attracts talent at this university, especially this campus, is because it has got a history of real scholarship, and what we have also managed to do over the years is to draw scholars from different countries and so on (Participant 6, female, senior management, doctoral degree, black African).

Another participant stated:

You know, the areas that distinguish us from most universities in South Africa is the fact that we have three campuses, each with a unique profile, and it's not a deficit, it's an asset, because it enables us, not only to attract a much broader spectrum of students, but it also enables us to attract a much broader spectrum of staff (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black African).

Coming to this institution, as I said, due to the fact that I can say to academics, 'We're working towards becoming the business hub of this institution', that is a practice for them, and, also, our entrepreneurial culture is also very attractive to them (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

Other participants mentioned the measures that are taken to orientate and assimilate newly acquired academic staff in the institution:

New staff is subjected to training for one year, so that they can get to know the university, and, also, they provide training in teaching, for instance teaching large classes that are hard to control. So, that kind of support that the university has made available (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black African).

Sub-Theme: Talent Development

Talent development was the sub-theme that occurred most frequently in this study. This indicates that the participants deemed it to be the most crucial component of a TLC. All the participants agreed that opportunities for development in the institution were plenteous, for example:

There are lots of opportunities for development (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

Participants considered the institution to be an ideal climate, in comparison with other South African HEIs, for developing and establishing themselves within their academic discipline:

It's difficult if one is to go to UCT today, or to Wits. I think, if I can look at it from my own position, the growth that I went through, you know, if you go to a well-established environment already or somewhere where the pace has already been set, you'll simply need to go and fit into it, but here I feel people get a chance to be involved in the programmes, in the developmental processes. So, you feel ownership of what is going on, and you become part of the system, so, in that case, you take responsibility and care of what is happening (Participant 10, male, lower management, doctoral degree, black African).

Another participant stated:

You know, at my level, I always tell staff members to say, 'We give you bursaries, we give you sabbatical leave to encourage you to study' (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black African).

Another element that was mentioned as a driving factor in development was personal development plans, which was mentioned several times by participants, for example:

I think it is how you develop that person's potential, and I think something like a performance development plan to show you that this is where you are, but we can help you to get at this level (Participant 9, female, middle management, doctoral degree, white).

Staff will tell you their personal development plans, and, at the beginning of every year, they are supposed to submit them so that we know in what areas you need assistance to grow as an academic, and not only for academic staff, but even for support staff (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black African).

Participants also outlined the opportunities available for academics to develop themselves and gain relevance and recognition on a national and global scale, as expressed in the following statement:

I would submit conference articles, and I would get invited to conferences and make that presentation. In an academic world, it is very important for networking and also for you to learn from others and others to learn from you, so as to make your impact or your mark in your field of study. Both nationally and internationally it is important (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black African).

Sub-Theme: Talent Performance and Recognition

The participants in this study mostly agreed that one of the most important considerations is being acknowledged for work well done. This is supported by the following statements:

High-performing academic staff members want to be recognised, they want recognition, and if you don't recognise them, they feel worried. They want to be recompensed for their performance, and if they are not properly recompensed for their performance, they look for other places where they'd be appreciated (Participant 5, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black African).

At the top of the list is personal acknowledgement, personal recognition. That is, informing personally the people that are doing excellent work, instead of a mere announcement at a staff meeting or an email, so more of a personal recognition (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, White).

Another trend that was identified from the findings was that the participants were of the opinion that, although academic staff members do appreciate monetary compensation and benefits, they rate recognition for excellent performance higher than monetary reward. This was confirmed by the following responses:

You know, what I think would work with people would be to give them recognition. Recognition for things other than monetary. Monetary can work, but recognition, as in being recognised and valued, and, maybe, if it's made known to the other staff members that you've achieved this, okay. So, I think recognition is important, as I've picked up with people, and then, also, if they know why they have to do certain things (Participant 9, female, middle management, doctoral degree, white).

I think high performing academics staff members want to be able to grow. I think that's important to them, but, also, we do have performance incentives as well, so people can also say, 'Okay, if I do well, I will qualify for something tangible', although money is not the only incentive, but, I mean, if people get a top performer's bonus, or if they even just get recognition, not always money, just recognition, appreciation (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

Another finding was that academics were provided with continuity in terms of opportunities to excel once they have been identified and recognised as high-performers, as implied by the following response:

There are rewards that are given. Most of the time, they might be monetary in value, but what I've realised, the most important thing is, there's a key element in that, even if there's a monetary element, but one element which is there is the continued facilitation of excellence. What we normally do is that, if you have a talent in research, we still give you some funds to facilitate your continued performance first, after they have recognised you and told you that you are a high performer in that category (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black African).

Participants further stated that there is also recognition of high performance through promotion systems that allow academics to take up greater responsibility once they have proved themselves in their current position, which was identified from the following statement:

Academic staff is also rewarded in terms of promotion, because, if you have worked yourself towards a senior position, your performance is what leads to a promotion (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black African).

Sub-Theme: Talent Retention

Talent retention was the second-most frequently occurring sub-theme in this study. The results demonstrated that participants believed that, as management, they were doing the best they could to manage turnover. However, certain factors were noted as being out of their control, evidenced by the following:

We do get resignations, but, usually, if we do the exit interviews, it's because of things, like, 'All my friends, or my wife isn't getting a job in Mafikeng, so I'm going to another university because it's in a bigger city, but I'm actually crying because I don't want to leave, because I'm enjoying my work' (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

I am speaking now from what has emerged in exit interviews, whereby a person will say, 'I have extended family factors, my siblings, my other family members are less fortunate, and now I have the opportunity with this bigger salary to be able to support them' (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).

Another trend that emerged from the findings was that remuneration has a significant influence on retention:

We want to remain compatible with the industry, so that we don't lose academics for reasons that we could have anticipated. So, on that part of it, we've got to do a good market analysis of our packages (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black African).

Many of the participants also expressed that, although they felt retention was satisfactory, there was much room for improvement:

I think, so far, if I have to rate to say retention here is effective because it's a relative thing, I still feel for the talented people. What is happening is okay, but I still feel something more can be done to make sure that we retain people (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black African).

I don't think we as management are doing a lot to retain staff. Perhaps we are trying, but not much (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black African).

Discussion

The objective of this research was to determine a talent life cycle framework for academic staff in a merged South African HEI. The subject of a **talent life cycle** has not been investigated much, but is prevalent and pervasive in the thinking of recruiters. The findings of this study indicate that five sub-themes namely *Talent mind-set*, *Talent preparation and acquisition*, *Talent development*, *Talent performance and recognition*, and *Talent retention*, under the main theme of *Talent life cycle*, are pivotal in ensuring that the academic talent of the institution is managed in the most effective manner possible. All the participants in the study elaborated on various imperatives pertaining to the TLC of the academic staff of the merged South African HEI.

Although the sub-theme ***Talent mind-set*** was the least discussed among participants in this study, substantial information emerged from the interviews that implied that the management of the institution is fully cognisant of the importance of academic staff to the effectiveness and success of HEIs, both in South Africa and internationally. Bitzer (2009, p. 257) described the academic staff of a HEI as “its most expensive and precious commodity.” Tan (2015) stated that workers are one of the fundamental resources of any organisation, and that highly driven workers enhance the performance of the organisation. This literature is therefore in agreement with the findings of the present study in this regard.

The findings in the study suggest that processes pertaining to the ***Preparation and acquisition of talent*** are considered to be important within the HEI that was investigated in this research. Fifty per cent (50%) of the participants discussed and were in agreement pertaining to the importance of having effective recruitment strategies in place for academic staff members. Information from the literature proved to be in support of this finding. Chun and Evans (2009) delineate that preparing for talent involves determining where the highest calibre employees can be located internally and creating external sourcing mechanisms to draw a variety of candidates to the organisation. These authors also explain that the mechanisms that increase variety in the talent acquired comprise wider job needs to acknowledge diverse backgrounds, the establishment of diverse acquisition teams, as well as highlighting the benefits of joining an organisation, such as development opportunities, incentives and an accommodative working atmosphere.

Talent development was one of the two most discussed among the participants in this study with all 12 participants (100%) admitting to the absolute importance of providing academics with the opportunity to grow and advance within the arena of academia. Bitzer (2009) states that, higher education institutions continue to have a pivotal bearing on the perpetual development of their academic talent by means of institutional divisions or centres intended to augment aptitudes and abilities of staff for the benefit of the Institution. This is in accordance with the findings obtained from this study.

Talent performance and recognition was the second most discussed by the participants in this study. Fifty-eight per cent (58%) of the participants that were interviewed unearthed matters pertaining to the recognition of particularly top achieving academic staff members and all agreed that acknowledgement for work well executed is pertinent to achieving an effective TLC. McCaffery (2004) pointed out that in the UK, for instance, the government placed more resources at the disposal of HEIs to allow them to incentivise and offer growth to staff, and this assistance was given provided that HEIs designing a distinguishable talent strategy and these strategies were to also allow for constant evaluations of all staff, by means of attainable and unbiased standards, with incentives linked to the effort of employees and where applicable, their involvement in team work, thus depicting congruence between the findings and the literature.

Talent Retention was the second of the two most frequently discussed sub-themes among the participants in this study with all 12 participants mentioning issues pertaining to the retaining of academic talent. Selesho and Naile (2014) delineate that keeping staff members in HEIs is a critical challenge because of the accentuated exit rate of academic employees which creates much difficulty for these institutions. High exit numbers of workers detrimentally affects the quality, dependability, and steadiness of academic entities. Samuel and Chipunza (2013) argue that employees will more probably stay with an organisation if they feel as though the organisation cares and caters for them, if they know are fully aware

of what they are supposed to do, if their job is best suited with their strengths, and if they get consistent optimistic feedback and acknowledgement.

Implications for Practice

The present research makes important theoretical and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this study adds to the limited empirical knowledge on the TLC of academic staff in HEIs. From a practical point of view, this research identified the key process elements of a TLC that will aid the effective talent management of the careers of academic staff members from beginning to end. HEI management are encouraged to follow an integrated and strategic approach to academic talent management by incorporating the dimensions of the TLC. Human resource practitioners and management should also focus on creating career development opportunities to ensure the relevance of the skill sets of academic staff members in an ever-changing higher education environment. HEIs can further benefit from developing performance management systems that are integrated with talent- and business scorecards.

Limitations and Recommendations

A limitation of this study was that minimal knowledge currently exists with regard to the TLC in an academic setting; therefore, the researcher had to rely on literature related to non-academic organisations. Another limitation was the demanding nature of the jobs of the participants. Several prospective participants could not commit to being interviewed, due to time constraints, which caused delays in data gathering, and some participants withdrew from the study after initially agreeing to participate. The researcher also experienced a certain degree of reluctance from some managers in the HEI to participate, due to apprehension emanating from the recent nationwide fees-related protests. This uneasiness to participate was evoked by the aberrant circumstances characterising most higher education institutions at the particular time, therefore rendering many of the orthodox opinions inapplicable due to the disrupted academic environment. For instance, what the managers would normally have been able to describe as a safe, work and development conducive environment for retaining academics was now characterised as a volatile environment possibly contributing towards the attrition of talented academics.

The researcher recommends that a further inquiry of a quantitative nature be conducted in the merged South African HEI to obtain the opinions of academic staff. The institution should also consider applying the TLC to non-academic staff members. The TLC should also be implemented in line with the institution's current talent management strategy. More research on the TLC also needs to be done in other South African HEIs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research highlighted the importance of following an integrated approach to talent management of academic staff, underpinned by the TLC. It is therefore imperative that HEI leaders manage the process through which talent progresses in the workplace, in order to ensure an employment experience that benefits not only the employee, but the HEI as well.

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