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The effectiveness of The HR function in driving Talent Management Practices at an Electricity Company

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Abstract. Over the years HR departments have been accused of prioritising transactional functions over the strategic functions that drive business results. In addition, the changing nature of the business environment together with the pressure from business executives for HR to contribute value to business, HR departments find themselves compelled to demonstrate their efficiency and effectiveness in supporting the strategic imperatives of business. The aim of the study therefore was to investigate the effectiveness of the HR function in driving talent management at an electricity company. The study adopted a positivist descriptive approach. A sample of n=28 participants were selected from management employees using purposive sampling strategy. Data was collected via questionnaires and analysed with SPSS package. The researcher focused on management staff as they are responsible for implementing HR policies and work very closely with HR departments. The overall findings of the study indicated that the HR functions is not adequately managing talent management. Participants felt that there is no talent mind-set in the company and, there was great uncertainty about the link between the business strategy and talent strategy. Although respondents were content with development plans, they were not so satisfied with the implementation and meeting of development needs of employees. Other areas for improvement included employee retention and succession management.

Keywords. HR Function, Talent Management

Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2009) alludes that the concept of talent management has evolved into an important management practice in such a way that what was once completely related to recruitment now incorporates a multitude of functional areas focusing on organisational capability, individual development, succession management and performance improvement. The fight for talent among companies reflects a turning point in business where technological innovation, for example, can significantly change the way everyone approaches business. Good talent management has a huge impact on business performance. It helps organizations achieve longevity and sustainability. Empirical research shows that human capital has become a critical driver of organizational performance, and an organizations ability to source, nature and retain talent is a major competitive advantage that extends far in the future (Gove, 1999, in Silzer & Dowell, 2010). Talent Management has and

will always be a critical process for the HR function in organizations. In fact, business leaders today demand that talent be managed optimally and that it becomes part of business priorities to help organizations in achieving business goals. Consequently, TM aims to promote a culture of high performance and ensure a sustainable organization that meets its operational and strategic goals and objectives.

O’Leonard (2010) noted that despite the increasing significance of TM organizations still find it difficult to define TM. Talent, according to the Society for Human Resources Management (2006), is seen as a scarce resource and only a handful of organizations have an adequate supply of talent. Talent Management is defined by The Society for Human Resources Management (2006) as the implementation of interconnected systems developed to improve the basic Human Resource functions such as recruiting, developing and retaining those employees who possess the abilities, competence and knowledge to help the organization achieve its short and long-term goals. Similarly Massie (2015) conceptualized the term as a combination of integrated human resource processes which are structured in such a way that they enhance the identification, motivation, engagement and retention of employee in an organization. The CIPD (2015) defined talent management as planned system for identifying, attracting, developing and retaining and deploying valuable employees because of their “high potential” or because they are fulfilling critical business roles.

There is no single definition for the concept of Talent Management. The above definitions of however not only highlight the importance of the basic HR functions, but also underscore the criticality of adding value by focusing Human Resource efforts on accomplishing organizational goals. Many authors come up with assumptions of what talent management entails and, as a result there is a lot of confusion regarding the precise definition of the concept (Distiller, 2015). Gallardo-Gallardo, Nijs, Dries, and Gallo (2015), Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier (2013) and Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion (2017) note that regardless of the vast literature on the concept there are still questions on the practical implications of talent management. The authors contend that when it comes to the conception, implementation and expected outcomes of talent management, there is limited knowledge for management. In addition, although scholars and organizations adopt different approaches regarding the implications of talent management outcomes, research on talent management hardly considers the effect of the internal context such as the organizational structure in achieving TM goals.

Talent management framework

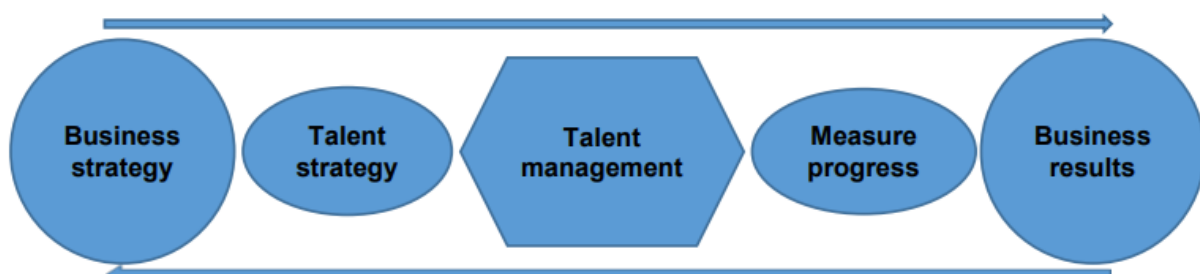


Figure 1. Talent management framework Adapted from Silzer, & Dowell, (2010).

The talent management framework (Figure 1) as conceptualized by Silzer and Dowell (2010), implies that talent management begins with an understanding of the organization’s

business strategy. The talent strategy and actual implementation of talent management programs and practices thus focus on driving and supporting the business strategy. An organization's business strategy entails the manner in which an organization plans to compete for success against other organizations. It ensures effective competitive actions in the market. An organization's talent strategy therefore aims at assisting the organization to achieve its business goals through optimal utilization of human capital. Vatne (2016) states that aligning a talent management strategy begins with thorough analysis of the organization's operational and strategic goals and objectives. The author also contends that developing a talent strategy requires organizations to learn from best practices and understand the environment within which they operate, and adapt their strategy to the environmental circumstances and needs. Bersin, Harris, Lamoureux, Laurano and Mallon (2010) add that the first step in talent management is defining a talent strategy within the context of the business strategy. In a similar vein, Distiller (2015) asserts that organizational talent management begins with an awareness of the type of talent the organization will need to reach its goals. Consequently, in strategic planning both organizational and strategic HR perspectives are essential in ensuring that the talent management strategy is in accordance with the long-term business strategy. As alluded in previous sections, the ultimate goal of talent management is to help the organization achieve its strategic goals. From a HR perspective, achievement of business results is dependent on the alignment of the talent strategy with the business strategy.

Integration of talent management processes

The integration of TM processes and its implications for business results are the overarching themes in executive business conversations. Gar (2012) note that the need for connectivity of HR processes has been heightened by globalization of the business landscape. Similar to other strategic business solutions, talent management data should be housed in a single system (Sumtotal Systems Inc, 2009). Improvements in technology has enabled HR to streamline most of its activities and provide reliable and accurate means of access to information. Sumtotal Systems Inc (2009) put forward that in migrating to a fully integrated approach, the organization needs to create aligned processes, standardized competency models, job profiles, and complementary training programs so that all stakeholders are ready to use the integrated system. A complete coordinated talent management and development system that incorporates all elements involved in acquiring, assessing and developing talent enables organizations to take better control over their investment on talent. Garr (2012) state that integrated talent management provides organizations with a clear understanding of their talent, enabling them to make adjustments to its current approach and giving them the necessary information to plan for the future.

A strong correlation was reported by Bersin & Associates (2011) between organizational performance and organizations with fully integrated TM systems. Companies with integrated talent management components tend to outperform their counterparts with unintegrated systems (Coy, 2012). A survey of HR leaders by Softscape, (2010) found the following results between organization with integrated systems and those with les integrated systems. Those with integrated systems performed better by 41% across different of HR business metrics. Organizations with integrated systems as Garr (2012) notes, tend to be adept at sourcing talented employees, developing employees and managing career planning. Integration not only helps companies streamline their functions but to also optimize the skills of employees and their financial investment (Ngozwana and Rugimbana, 2011). Softscape (2010) identifies the following benefits of integration: • Improved internal talent mobility •

Lessened voluntary turnover • Improved alignment of workforce to the overall business strategy • Increased workforce productivity • Faster on-boarding. To implement and execute a fully integrated TM system, organizations need to first integrated analytics and metrics in all facets of TM and provide mechanisms that support partnership, teamwork, accountability and placement strategies and provide employees with better development and advancement opportunities (Bwowe, 2015).

The significance of Talent Management

What constitutes a positive impact or effectiveness of talent Management may differ from one organization to the other. Business outcomes may be a combination of: (a) Human Resources processes, such as Motivation, engagement or job satisfaction, (b) Financial results, such as market share/value or profits, (c) Organizational results such as productivity or customer satisfaction. Three major aspects become critical to business success: 1) A strong and practical strategy, 2) Having the right technology and systems to implement the strategy 3) Having the talent to drive the strategy (HR.com-Whitepaper, 2012). A strong business strategy is critical in providing the direction for business operations. This also provides talent specialists with an understanding of the talent required to drive the company strategy. A talent strategy that is linked to the business strategy enables business leaders to forecast future challenges and opportunities for the organization and its employees. Organizations who want to create a successful and sustainable competitive advantage have to design a strong talent strategy and ensure that it is aligned to the business strategy. In their (2011) report entitled “Take aim: be clear about your talent management goals”, the Hay group also mention that the only way organizations can realize their investment in talent management is by linking talent strategy to the business strategy.

Chapman and Sandrin (2015) state that TM capitalizes on the potential and competencies of employees to reach organizational goals. In a similar vein Bersin & Associates (2011) maintain that an organizations talent drives business results and with proper systems of management can create value for the organization. Accordingly the Hay Group (2011) reported that committed and empowered employees perform 50% above expectations which increases business results by 30%. Having the right talent in critical positions in an organization has always been the primary role for the HR function, however, approached differently, TM has the potential to create sustainable organizational success (Ashton & Morton, 2005). Research by Ernst & Young (2016) also concluded that the adoption of smart targeted talent investments by the HR function places organizations in a suitable position to achieve a lasting competitive edge.

A growing amount of literature shows agreement among business leaders and researchers on the centrality of talent management in achieving business objectives and gaining a sustainable competitive advantage (Lawyer, 2005, Farley, 2005, Rose & Kumar, 2006, Ordonez de Pablos, 2004 & Kurgat 2016, all in Shrimali and Gidwani, 2012). Accordingly, Shrimali and Gidwani (2012) state that strategically managing human resource practices and integrating them in the strategy of the business, as suggested by talent management literature, helps to create a competitive advantage. In today’s knowledge economy, leaders understand that competitive advantage is driven by human capital as employees are the only asset that innovates, and innovation is the major factor in sustaining a competitive advantage (PWC, 2011).

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative, descriptive research design. A sample of n=28 comprising of participants was drawn from management staff in the organization. Management staff were deemed appropriate for the study as they deal with the day-day management of talent and implementation of company strategy and HR policies. Simple random sampling was used to select participants ensuring that all got an equal chance of being part of the study. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires. Descriptive statistical tools were used for data analysis.

Results and Discussions.

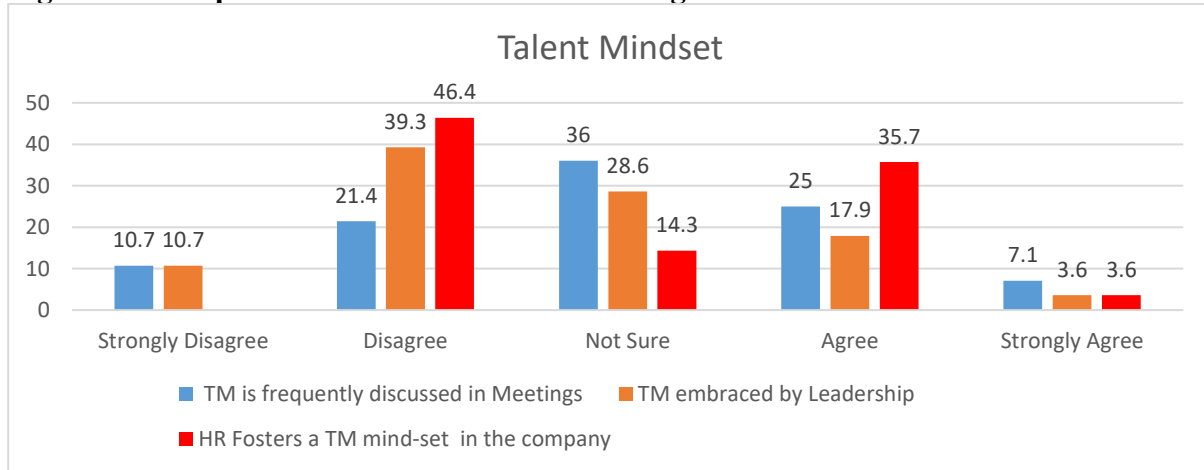
Table 1. HR Performance Functional Areas

| Statement Category | Mean | Poor | | Unsatisfactory | | Fair | | Good | | Excellent | |
|---|------|------|------|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|-----------|-----|
| | | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Managing costs | 3.07 | 1 | 3.6 | 6 | 21.4 | 13 | 46.4 | 6 | 21.4 | 2 | 7.1 |
| Retaining key talent | 2.21 | 7 | 25.0 | 11 | 39.3 | 7 | 25.0 | 3 | 10.7 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Collaborating with management on Human Capital Management | 2.67 | 3 | 10.7 | 9 | 32.1 | 11 | 39.3 | 2 | 7.1 | 2 | 7.1 |
| Implementing Coaching and Mentoring programs | 2.43 | 4 | 14.3 | 13 | 46.4 | 6 | 21.4 | 5 | 17.9 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Achieving operational excellence | 3.04 | 1 | 3.6 | 5 | 17.9 | 16 | 57.1 | 4 | 14.3 | 2 | 7.1 |
| Sourcing key talent | 3.21 | 1 | 3.6 | 4 | 14.3 | 13 | 46.4 | 8 | 28.6 | 2 | 7.1 |
| Providing workforce analytics for strategic decisions | 2.61 | 3 | 10.7 | 10 | 35.7 | 10 | 35.7 | 5 | 17.9 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Supporting and enabling strategic decisions | 2.96 | 1 | 3.6 | 6 | 21.4 | 15 | 53.6 | 5 | 17.9 | 1 | 3.6 |

The results in table 1 show that the HR function is doing well in sourcing key talent, managing cost and achieving organization with a mean score of 3.21, 3.07 and 3.04 respectively. The basic responsibility for the HR function is to ensure that the organization is adequately staffed and supported to achieve its strategic objectives. Retaining talent has proven to be a challenge for many organizations. The results show that the organization is struggling to retain its talent with a low mean score of 2.21 out of a total of 5. Mentoring and coaching play a critical role in retaining employees. The results showing that the organization is doing enough to implement coaching and mentoring programs which could be a contributing factor to their struggle to retain talent.

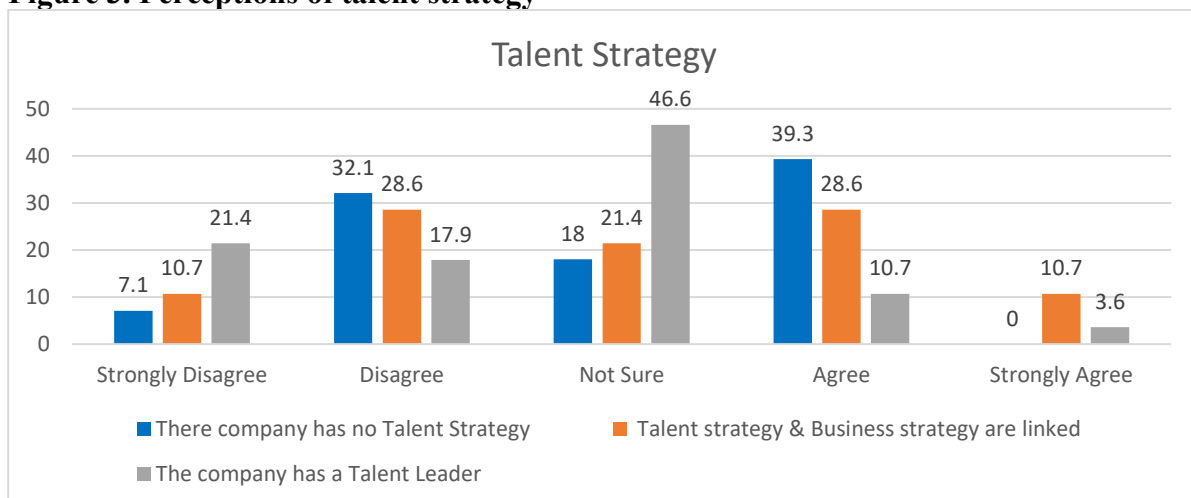
Talent Management practices

Figure 2. Perceptions of talent mind-set in the organization



The findings of the study indicated that a talent mind-set does not prevail in the company and that TM is not embraced by the leadership in the company. For any process to be a success in an organization there must be management buy-in. Talent management has become a strategic imperative and a crucial topic in strategic conversations (Silzer and Dowel, 2010, Lubitsh and Smith, 2007). Organizations who embrace a talent mind-set are bound to outperform those who neglect the benefits of such programs. Lubitsh and Smith (2007) state that talent management is not a once-off, quick fix intervention but rather a system-wide approach demanding deep conversations and long-term investment that require reinvention, reviewing and refining. In addition, if organizations are too develop and embed a talent culture, TM issues should be central in executive meetings. Michaels, Handfield-Jones, and Axelrod (2001) argue that better talent management comes not from having HR processes but from having managers and leaders who embrace a talent mind-set. They further mention that leaders who embrace a talent mind-set make talent management a priority and also devote a great amount of their time to strengthening their talent pools and help others strengthen theirs.

Figure 3. Perceptions of talent strategy



Regarding talent strategy, the findings indicate high uncertainty on whether the company has a talent strategy and whether the strategy is linked to the business strategy. The

first step in implementing an effective TM strategy is understanding what constitutes a pragmatic strategy and how to execute it (Naik, 2012). Research by Deloitte (2010, cited in Engorova, 2013) reported that only 20% of executives and HR specialists agreed to have carefully worked out a talent management program. Moreover, the reported highlighted that the talent strategy had to be reworked because of changing economic conditions. As indicated in the previous section, TM systems require review and reinvention, this ensures that it is still aligned with the business strategy and to ascertain that there are contingency plans to ensure enough capability to meet the demands of the business environment.

A talent strategy is important for providing a framework for the implementation of HR practices by line managers and the HR function. Talent management on its own is a business strategy that must be fully synchronised with all human resource-related functions in an organization. As a result, to ensure that talent management efforts are directed towards achievement of the strategic goals of the organization, the talent strategy must be fully aligned with the business strategy. To fully align a talent management strategy, business leaders should first do an in-dept analysis of the organizations strategic and operational goal (Vatne, 2016). The author add that understanding of the environment within which the organization operates ad adapting their strategy to the environmental needs is very crucial. Organizations need to learn from best practices.

Figure 4. Perceptions of Management & staff development



Staff Development

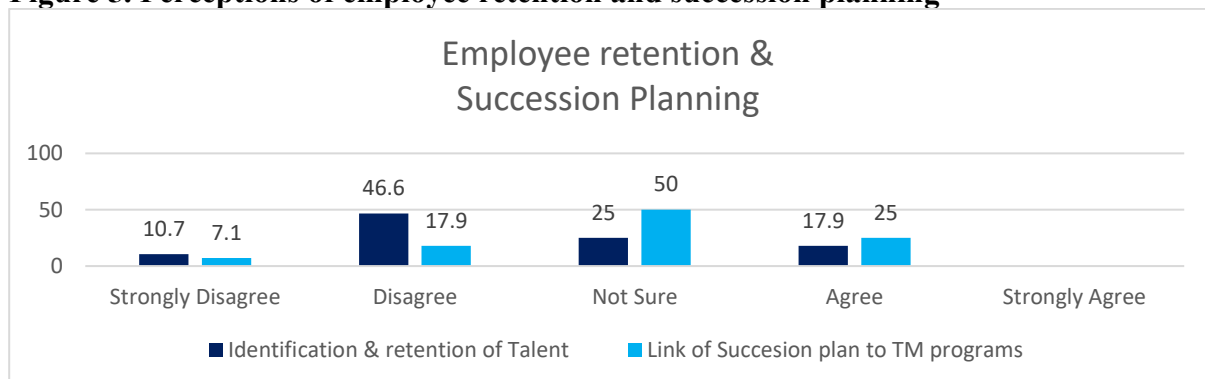
Developing employees and managers has always had positive outcomes for motivation, commitment, performance and retention. The findings indicate that the company has management development plans and career management policy in place. According to Carbery and Garavan (2012), at management level, organizational capability is considered crucial for enhancing competitiveness and ensuring future growth. Mullins (2002) state that the success of any organization relies heavily on the quality of management. As a result

organization should prioritize continued management development of employees to ensure the supply of both present and future managers. Carbery and Garavan (2012) state that organizations that assume a proactive and systematic approach towards management and leadership development normally have more leadership talent and are recognised by the ability and strength of their management and leadership development interventions.

Management and employee development plans should focus on both the needs of the organizations and the career aspirations of the workforce. Employees are responsible for managing their careers. However, organizations have crucial role to play in ensuring that employees career aspirations are met. Having career management policies in place is the first step in ensuring that employee careers are taken seriously. Khan, Rajasekar and Al Asfour (2015) argue that organizations need to design career development programs based on their needs and on the competencies and aspirations of their employees. Organizations with career planning and development policies understand the significant role it plays in crafting their human capital element.

According to a study by CIPD (2017), identifying and addressing development needs of the workforce should be an ongoing process which involves assessment of staff capabilities alongside an understanding of current and anticipated gaps in skills and knowledge. In the present study, respondents felt that employee development needs are not addressed in a timely manner, and that there is no competency-based development of the workforce. Employee development includes various development interventions to address talent skills gaps, including performance management and current development. In another study by CIPD (2006), 94% of participants confirmed that well-structured TM development practices have positive effects on the organization's bottom line. Moreover, respondents said that developing high-potential individuals and growing future senior leaders are the main objective for talent management (CIPD, 2006). Rothwell (2011) states that knowledge of competences and competency modelling is increasingly important for the staff learning professionals who are responsible for training and development. Consequently, if developing talent is essential for organizational success, the understanding and use of competencies to create a more talented pool of employees is key to maintaining a competitive advantage. Competency-based development is very important as it lays out the performance expectations and also provides means to discuss career paths for employees and articulate specific ways to develop them and leverage their strengths.

Figure 5. Perceptions of employee retention and succession planning

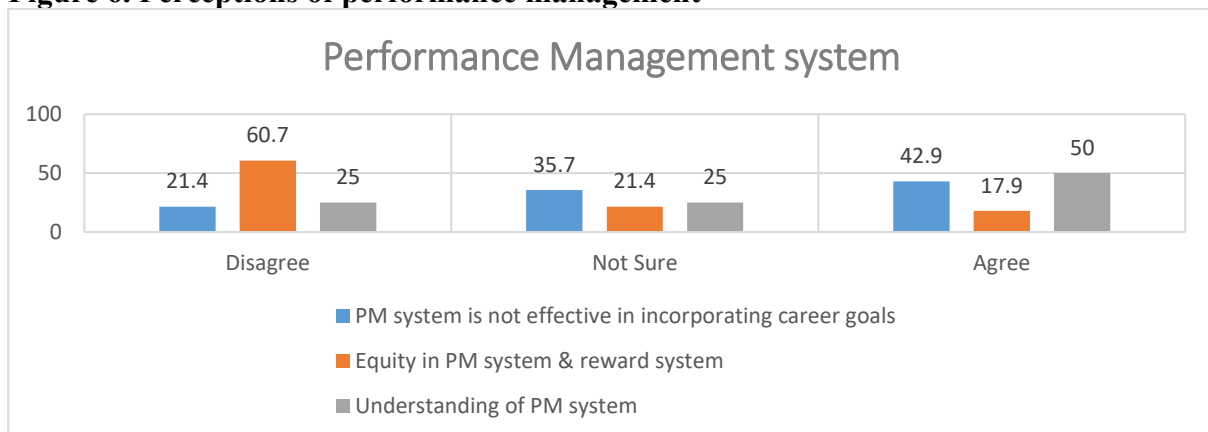


The changing nature of the labour market coupled with high levels of employee turnover are posing serious challenges business and organizations are struggling to maintain a stable workforce. The findings revealed that potential talent is not identified and there are no

programs to retain talent. There is also uncertainty regarding the link between succession planning and talent programs. Similar results were found by Pandey & Sharma (2014) who studied the succession planning practices and challenges of Indian companies. Their findings indicated that most of the process of succession planning in companies are not linked to other talent management activities. The authors stressed that succession planning is dependent on integration with other processes to give efficient results. They further mentioned that succession planning is not one exclusive process, and for the process to be wholesome and efficient, it needs to be linked with other processes such as personal development plans and career aspiration plans.

Retention and succession management are critical processes in any organization. Considering the changing talent market and shifting demographics (e.g. retirement of baby boomers), organization must act swiftly in identifying and retaining potential successors. Research by Taylor and McGraw (2004) found that 80% of HR managers surveyed believed that succession planning was critical; however, less than half of the companies surveyed had a succession plan in place. The Talent Institute points out that although organizations realise the importance of growing leaders from within for organizational competitiveness, they struggle in deciding who to entrust with their investment efforts. Similarly, research by Korn Ferry (2014) on succession management found that two thirds of respondents said less than 10% of potential leadership were identified for key positions within their organizations. The above statistics indicate that organizations are either battling to run successful succession planning programs or are reluctant to even put the plans in place despite understanding the benefits of the process.

Figure 6. Perceptions of performance management



Employees use performance management feedback to make critical career decisions. The feedback received from performance reviews helps them to identify their strength and weaknesses and provide information on the areas to improve to enhance their current and future performance. The findings indicated that employee career aspirations are not incorporated in the performance management system. Anguinis, Gottfredson, & Joo, (2012) stressed that the focus of a performance management system should be on maintaining individualized development plans and providing clear advancement opportunities and a contingent reward system. Research by Bouachie-Mensah and Seidu (2012) reported that 44% of participants saw performance management as important to their career goals and development, and 18% said the process was highly important for their career goals and aspirations. Participants believed that the information they received from the process enables them to identify their strengths and weaknesses and establish direction in their job performance.

When designed to meet the specific needs of the organization and its reward system, performance management systems can enhance employee performance, motivation and retention. According to Gungor (2011) employee performance and retention can be enhanced by providing fair rewards to employees. The findings of this paper further indicated that participants felt that the rewards they received are not equitable to the level of performance they exert. With reference to the equity theory, if employees do not perceive fairness in performance and rewards, it will impact their level of satisfaction. An effective performance management system is most effective when it creates a true pay-for-performance principle, which in turn develops talent engagement and retention. In addition, such systems should enable effective use of rewards and performance.

Often times managers and employees tend to be confused and frustrated with the process of performance management because of the complexity of the various strategies and techniques used to evaluate employees' performance. The results indicate that respondents understand the performance management system used in the company. Evaluators, as reported by Boachie-Mensah and Seidu (2012), mention that their biggest challenge is that they are not given sufficient guidelines to assess employees. To ensure the success of the performance management process, evaluators need to fully explain the process to employees and, there must be agreement by all parties involved. In addition, to get the appropriate knowledge and skills to engage employees in the evaluation process, extensive on-going training should be provided to evaluators on the importance of the process and its implementation. Managers should ensure that the process is simple, comprehensive and easy to implement. Complex and sophisticated systems tend to be costly and deliver little value, and can have a negative impact on employee engagement.

Recommendations

Respondents reported uncertainty on the link between talent strategy and business strategy, and about discussions on talent strategy in management meetings. A talent management strategy should focus on the whole employee work-life cycle and the human capital requirements of the organization, as such, all aspects of the process should be treated as critical for both employee and organization growth. Such strategy should also address issues and practices pertaining to the management of talent in the organization. The findings revealed deficiencies in various TM activities such as performance management, training and development, succession planning and retention practices. The findings also indicated that a talent-mind set does not permeate the company. It is the responsibility of HR and management to instill a talent mind-set in the company. If a talent mind-set does not permeate the company, and managers feel the company's leadership does not embrace talent management, they will not buy-in to a talent strategy that is imposed on them. Moreover, the lack of a talent mind-set may be another contributing factor to the lack of awareness on talent strategies. The lack of stakeholder engagement in the conception of TM strategies and activities leads to lowered commitment to the process and thus dissatisfaction of the workforce towards TM practices. The organization should ensure that TM/ HR processes are integrated. Integration of the process eliminates silo operations and ensures the accuracy, reliability and readiness of all TM related data. This is not only important for the HR function but also serves as a point of reference for many strategic decisions in an organization.

Conclusions

The aim of the paper was to determine the effectiveness of the HR function in driving talent management practices. The HR function, including the roll out of talent management practices will forever play a vital role in the success of organizations. The findings revealed that though talent management is regarded as important, there are still many aspects to be improved for it to be fully beneficial to the organization. Embracing a talent mind-set is very critical to the success of any talent management efforts by the organization. A talent culture which runs throughout the organization is a catalyst in the successful implementation of TM practices. In addition, it is crucial for the credibility of HR function to ensure that they add value to the organization by focusing on the critical aspects which have significant impact on the organizations bottom line.

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