A qualitative research to explore processes that are utilised for managing talent: A case study in a Queensland Regional University

Atheer Abdullah Mohammed[1], Abdul Hafeez-Baig[2], Raj Gururajan[2]

[1]School of Management & Enterprise University of Southern Queensland/Australia, The Industrial Administration Department/College of Administration and Economics/ University of Baghdad-Iraq, [2]School of Management & Enterprise University of Southern Queensland/ Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate generated themes associated with Talent Management Processes (TMPs) in Australian higher education. This is because of the practical advantages for educational institutions which are focused on TMPs within their activities. For example, talent is the main source of competitive advantage for educational institutions. Furthermore, talented individuals contribute to increased rankings and profits for higher education institutions. For data collection, this paper completely depends on the brainstorming method. The sample comprised six Information Communication Technology (ICT) managers who work at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ). A brainstorming session was transcribed and thematically analysed using NVivo 11. Four key themes and eleven subthemes of Talent Management (TM) were explored. The key themes were talent retention, talent development, talent attraction, and talent acquisition. Each one of themes and subthemes is examined. A small size sample is a key limitation of this study.

Keywords: Brainstorming Session; Talent management; Higher Education

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing number of publications focusing on how can institutions achieve the excellence in performance. Talent is considered one of the key tools to achieve the institutional excellence (Hazelkorn, 2017; Kasemsap, 2017; Lynch, 2015; Shabane, 2017; Urbancová & Vnoučková, 2015). It provides educational institutions with the excellence in dealing with opportunities, risks and challenges of the current and future environment (Hazelkorn, 2017; Lynch, 2015). TM can be used to assist institutions to meet these demands by investing in their human capital to generate talented abilities (Gallardo-Gallardo, Nijs, Dries, & Gallo, 2015; Mohammed, Gururajan, & Hafeez-Baig, 2017; Osigwelem, 2017; Urbancová & Vnoučková, 2015). This is because of the pragmatic advantages for universities that are focused on improving talents (Kasemsap, 2017; Wu, Nurhadi, & Zahro, 2016). Moreover, educational institutions are conscious that talent is an essential key to institutional growth and success (Hazelkorn, 2017; Rudhumbu & Maphosa, 2015). Competitive advantage can be maintained by TMPs in key workplaces within an institution (Kasemsap, 2017; Waithiegeni Kibui, 2015).

However, TM studies in the universities sector are limited (Paisey & Paisey, 2016). Furthermore, a majority of TM 'research focuses on theoretical frameworks, and they give little focus to empirical research' (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016; Mohammed et al., 2017, p. 1133; Thunnissen, 2016; Tomany, 2012). Therefore, this study will provide a combined vision of TM in order to add value for practitioners, researchers, and authors in the field of human capital and strategic human resources.

This research will first provide the introductory information for the study. Next, it will review the relevant literature to provide a theoretical basis for the research. Thirdly, for achieving the purpose of this research, it will describe the methodology that would collect the empirical data. The results and discussion will occur in section four. Finally, section five highlights the research conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, TM has received growing attention among various institutions (Ingram, 2016; Kimathi, 2015; Morley, Valverde, & Farndale, 2017). TM can be understood in terms of developmental and cultural (Al-Awamleh, 2009; Baublyte, 2010; Li &

Devos, 2008). According to the developmental perspective, TM is a strategic priority for business institutions and is perceived as a crucial driver in developing institutional performance (Davies & Davies, 2010; Ingram, 2016). Similarly, Cannon and McGee (2011); Moczydłowska (2012); R. F. Silzer and B. E. Dowell (2010) explain TM as a set of procedures, programs, and activities applied to highly qualified individuals who are characterised by high performance in their development in order to achieve an institution's goals now and in the future. The reason for this is that, if an institution fails to provide talented development and training, it may lose available talent (Torrington, Hall, Taylor, & Atkinson, 2014).

In terms of the cultural perspective, TM focuses on social and cultural contexts of available human resources within a range of qualities (Storm, 2015). These qualities include an innate ability, intelligence, and creative skills (Butter, 2015; Dries, Cotton, Bagdadli, & de Oliveira, 2014; Ross, 2013; Scaringella, 2014). Supporters of this perspective propose that individuals are successful only when they have sufficient talent, and believe that the success of institutional work will be followed by their own success (Blass, 2009; Storm, 2015). Thus, TM is a key for institutional success through making it possible for institutional systems to achieve higher aims (Andersson, 2014; Calo, 2008; Daneshfard, Rajae, Bilondi, & Banihashem, 2016; Sweem, 2009).

3. METHOD

3.1. Approach

Brainstorming is a group-based method that is one of the most useful tools to generate multiple creative ideas as well as creative solutions for issues (Haddou, Camilleri, & Zaraté, 2014; HÄgg & Musse, 2016; Helquist, Kruse, & Diller, 2017; Keeney, 2012; Litcanu, Prostean, Oros, & Mnerie, 2015; McMahon, Ruggeri, Kämmer, & Katsikopoulos, 2016; Rowley & Phibbs, 2012; Shirani, Shahin, & Ghasemi, 2012). Alex Osborn, an advertising executive developed this technique in the discipline of marketing in the 1940s (Boddy, 2012; Hender, Rodgers, Dean, & Nunamaker, 2001; Shih, Venolia, & Olson, 2011; Shirani et al., 2012). Osborn (1953) suggested that for a brainstorming process to be most effective, it should contain both group and individual ideation (Johnson & D'Lauro, 2017; Korde & Paulus, 2017; Kornish & Hutchison & Krupat, 2017; Levine, Alexander, Wright, & Higgins, 2016; Wilson, 2013). The results of additional experiments have supported the original brainstorming method process (HÄgg & Musse, 2016; Korde & Paulus, 2017; McMahon et al., 2016). The objective of this methodology is to generate ideas in which group members are given time to brainstorm (Dilshad & Latif, 2013; Gururajan, Hafeez-Baig, Clark, Moller, & Sankaran, 2014; Shih et al., 2011; Torres & Carte, 2014). Once all generated ideas are highlighted, the group goes through the ideas discussing their helpfulness without criticism, and combining as well as improving similar ideas or solutions (Boddy, 2012; Gřibek, 2011; Keeney, 2012; Korde & Paulus, 2017; Rietzschel, Nijstad, & Stroebe, 2006; Rowley & Phibbs, 2012; Shih et al., 2011; Shirani et al., 2012).

The brainstorming method has been employed in this research for the following reasons: (1) the majority of academic empirical research have recommended that brainstorming is an optimal method for generating ideas in terms of both quantity and quality (Boddy, 2012; Goldenberg & Wiley, 2011; Haddou et al., 2014; HÄgg & Musse, 2016; Korde, 2014; Kornish & Hutchison☐Krupat, 2017; Levine et al., 2016; Rietzschel et al., 2006; Sekhar & Lidiya, 2012; Wilson, 2013). To explain further, brainstorming provides a great number of creative ideas that are novel, practicable, specific and relevant (Brewer, 2017; Dean, Hender, Rodgers, & Santanen, 2006; Helquist et al., 2017). In addition, Boddy (2012); Galatescu and Greceanu (2002); Gřibek (2011); Potter and Losee (1996) have given other benefits of the individual brainstorming technique as follows: (2) it equalises the involvement of group members; by providing each participant with equal time to think and speak (Litcanu et al., 2015); (3) it also encourages creative, fast and organised generation of many ideas (Litcanu et al., 2015; Sekhar & Lidiya, 2012). Finally, (4) brainstorming provides useful input to the focus group session (Fitzgerald, 2015; Gallo & Gonos, 2014; Keeney, 2012; Lee et al., 2015; O'campo, Smylie, Minh, Omand, & Cyriac, 2015). This allows the researcher to identify talented individuals for participation in the focus group where ideas that may have arisen from the brainstorming session can be discussed further.

However, the brainstorming method has some issues. Firstly, the brainstorming process takes time to learn and requires distinct skills (McMahon et al., 2016; Potter & Losee, 1996; Sutton & Hargadon, 1996; Wilson, 2013). Secondly, even though the brainstorming methodology is popular, it can be misleading because fewer ideas might be produced through its procedural mechanisms (Goldenberg & Wiley, 2011; Kavadias & Sommer, 2009). Finally, in terms of efficient and effective teams, the logistics of session facilitation in the brainstorming technique is difficult. For example, to get a brainstorming team of professionals to work together at the same time and in the same place can be problematic (Goldenberg & Wiley, 2011; Hender et al., 2001).

Nonetheless, to overcome the possible difficulties of the brainstorming method, there were a number of strategies adopted. For example, in terms of learning the brainstorming method, the facilitator has joined an academic research group to increase knowledge and experience of group management before conducting pilot brainstorming, focus group, and individual interviews. In terms of increasing knowledge and experience of group management, membership in the research group allowed the researcher to learn skills and strategies for managing group dynamics, interaction and discussion; focusing on active contribution and how roles can be distributed among group members; and identifying 'group think' or participants dominating group opinion (Ayar, 2012; Pabari, 2016; Rosenlund, 2017; Toiviainen, 2003).

In the case of less ideas being produced, the study maximised the production of ideas through applying a number of procedures such as: making a session less complex and as straightforward as possible (Helquist et al., 2017); avoiding blocking the production of ideas and evaluation or criticism of group members (Fillion, 2015; Goldenberg & Wiley, 2011); using an expert moderator to manage the brainstorming group; and supplementing brainstorming with focus group discussion which results in concentration of effort (Goldenberg & Wiley, 2011). In the case of the logistics of session facilitation, the researchers limited the number of groups and sessions. There were only one brainstorming group and one session. This was enough to refine the research question, and explore themes (Dilshad & Latif, 2013; Gururajan et al., 2014; Shih et al., 2011; Torres & Carte, 2014). Overall by using the strategies discussed above, the brainstorming session can be a useful resource to inform the focus group session (Fitzgerald, 2015; Gallo & Gonos, 2014; Keeney, 2012; Lee et al., 2015; O'campo et al., 2015).

3.2. Sampling Procedure

Optimal group size is a critical factor in any group's success (Liamputtong, 2011; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). In order to determine the ideal number of participants for the brainstorming session, a number of factors need to be considered. Scholars and researchers have differed in determining an optimal size for a brainstorming group. Some of them advocate a large number for the group. Even though a group with bigger numbers of participants is difficult to manage and control (Lefika & Mearns, 2015; Liamputtong, 2011), a larger group is more likely to exchange expertise among them and create a greater number of diverse solutions (Boddy, 2012; Hender et al., 2001; Panchal, 2015). In this case, a large group is more than eight participants (Korde & Paulus, 2017; P. B. Paulus, Kohn, Arditti, & Korde, 2013).

In contrast, a small number of participants is useful for a better opportunity to express their opinions and perceptions in-depth, related to the significant issues under investigation (Hopf, Bond, Francis, Haughney, & Helms, 2014; Lefika & Mearns, 2015; Mrtensson et al., 2012; Peek & Fothergill, 2009; Todd, Jones, & Lobban, 2012). A small group is eight participants or less (Korde & Paulus, 2017; Michinov, Jamet, Métayer, & Le Hénaff, 2015; P. B. Paulus et al., 2013). Researchers Shirani et al. (2012) have provided middle solutions; they recommended that the perfect group size is between five to ten participants (Shirani et al., 2012), or six to nine participants (Srivastava et al., 2017).

Overall, as mentioned in the literature above, no particular recommendations address the ideal group size (Atanga, 2007; BÖrekÇİ, 2015). In this research, a smaller group is recommended, 6-8 participants. This was sufficient to allow a successful session (Hopf et al., 2014; Lefika & Mearns, 2015; Mrtensson et al., 2012; Peek & Fothergill, 2009; Todd et al., 2012). Regardless of the final sample sizes of the brainstorming session, "it is important to invite more participants than necessary, so as to fill gaps left by those who fail to turn up" (Baig, 2010, p. 98). Besides, the research supposes that the sample size may not be uniform relying on the site and availability of staff on the day of the brainstorming session (Gururajan, Hafeez Baig, Sturgess, Clark, & Gururajan, 2015). To overcome this issue the investigators invited 8-10 individuals to participate in the brainstorming session.

3.3. Deriving Data Collection

The brainstorming process involves the following steps. Invitations are sent to participants by email or phone (Sutton & Hargadon, 1996). The goals and principles of brainstorming will be explained to them with a protocol so that, team members come to the brainstorming understanding the articulated goals of the session, prepared to initiate contributions to the discussion (Boddy, 2012). Group members in a brainstorming session may be resistant to exchanging ideas for fear of derision (Gřibek, 2011; Tshehla, 2014). Each team member anonymously addresses possible ideas in a set time period, and then the facilitator records the ideas (Gřibek, 2011; Saberiyan, 2015). As has been recognised, while ideas are commonly addressed as current concerns in brainstorming (Silver, 2014), a brainstorming procedure is also designed to involve team members in a discussion about future aims (Galatescu & Greceanu, 2002; Saunders, 2013). Optimally, at the session's end, some key solution areas should be identified (BÖrekÇİ, 2015). Therefore, the brainstorming session is planned and

organised, in which the participants themselves suggest themes (Balasubramanian, Kevrekidis, Sonnemans, & Newby, 2008; Lu & Yuan, 2011; Torres Kompen, 2016).

3.4. Actual Data Collection

A high-level brainstorming session was conducted in the first instance to derive themes from TMPs. The facilitator arrived an hour prior to the beginning time for preparation of all required materials such as, checking the room is correct, writing materials, and recording devices. In terms of participants' invitations, the researchers approached possible participants with an information sheet of the project including the research objectives was sent via the researchers to the prospective respondents. This ensured that participants were fully informed about the nature of the research before being involved in the brainstorming session. Once they agreed to participate, further details were provided as well as the consent form. The participants needed to read the consent form and sign it. The participants were advised that they could withdraw at any time without consequence.

The brainstorming session began with a short introduction where the moderator and the facilitator welcomed participants, and then introduced themselves and the research topic. A quick summary explanation of the session's purpose was supplied to the six participating managers (four males and two females) who then were tasked with introducing themselves to the group before beginning the formal discussion. This took five to ten minutes. One key question was designed to collect generated ideas and presented to all participants (Figure 1). The brainstorming question was significant in generating valuable ideas which assisted in achieving the main research objective.

The brainstorming session was conducted to assist in generating themes associated with TMPs to be utilised in modifying the study model. This question assessed thoughts by determining worthwhile processes of TM in the Australian higher education sector to be included in the research model. Each round optimally requires five minutes for each participant to answer (BÖrekÇİ, 2015). BÖrekÇİ (2015, p. 5) explains this as, '*When his/her turn came, the speaking participant had three minutes to think out loud and share his/her ideas on the problem area, after which, for two minutes the listening participants were allowed to speak and ask questions while continuing with their note-taking*'. This research is similar to BÖrekÇİ s' study in that it followed the same method. The six participants shared their ideas, thoughts and information about TM which in total took forty to fifty minutes in their institution. Before the brainstorming session ended, the researchers asked participants for any final opinions or additional comments. Finally, the moderator and facilitator acknowledged and thanked participants for their time and effort. This took five to ten minutes. After the session, the researchers evaluated the details and formulated a synopsis of events to complete the procedures of audio recording and transcribing. The brainstorming session was audio-recorded in MP3 format, then transcribed without eliminating the speeches' spontaneity. The following diagram shows the main processes with estimated times of each process.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers utilised both manual methods and NVivo 11 software to code, recode and generate themes (Ngulube, 2015; T. M. Paulus & Bennett, 2017). Data analysis discovered that participants provided valuable ideas of the TMPs for managing
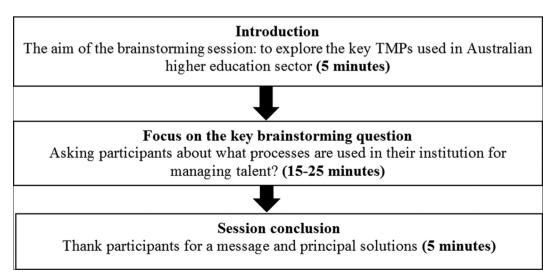

Figure 1: The schedule of the brainstorming session

talent in their university. The brainstorming session has identified eleven subthemes of TM. These were assembled into four key themes: talent retention, talent development, talent attraction, and talent acquisition. Table 1 shows a summary of the research results.

The brainstorming session investigated four themes of TM. The first key theme explored in this research is talent retention. All respondents agreed that USQ has a desire to retain the talented staff. This is because it is a key role in achieving institutional growth. These results conform to the view of participants as stated by Alnaqbi (2011); Koranteng (2014) who recommend that an institution should retain talented individuals to build a unique source of competitive advantage which can lead to institutional growth. The views of participants can be divided into three subthemes: *(i) competitive compensation; (ii) employee motivation; and (iii) employee empowerment.* Competitive compensation is the first subtheme of talent retention. One out of six participants stated that even though competitive compensation is an essential element of the success for retaining highly qualified individuals within an organisation, USQ may not be as concerned with competitive compensation as an essential element of talent retention due to the regional position of the university. This outcome does not support Dunkerly and Wonh (2017); Horseman (2018) who point out that competitive benchmarking is a beneficial way for retaining talented staff within higher education organisations through assessing the current strategies of talent retention from the best performing organisations. The second subtheme of talent retention is *employee motivation*. This demonstrated that motivation through remuneration should be used by USQ to reduce the turnover of talented individuals. These findings are consistent with Gakure, Kamau, and Waititu (2013); Refozar, Buenviaje, Perez, Manongsong, and Laguador (2017); Salau (2017); Walker (2017) who emphasise that employee motivation in educational institutions plays a key role in retaining valued staff. *Employee empowerment* is the final and third subtheme mentioned by participants. Participants expressed how the ability of USQ to provide empowerment to staff members allowed it to retain talented staff. In addition, the results show that employee empowerment is a key practice in assisting USQ to retain talented individuals through increasing work productivity, encouraging innovation, supporting staff, and improving skills. These results align with Chitorelidze (2017); Tsai (2012) who state that employee empowerment in the academic work environment helps in retaining talented individuals, both professional and academic. It also increases employee satisfaction by granting them self-efficacy in their work (Saleem, Nisar, & Imran, 2017; Twyman-Abrams, 2017).

The second key theme explored in this research was talent development. The majority of the respondents stated that USQ is motivated to develop its talents. The participants identified five subthemes: *(i) coaching talent; (ii) training needs; (iii) appropriate development strategies; (iv) skills gap analysis; and (v) succession planning.* Matching results are outlined in Lyria's research, (Lyria, 2014). She highlighted all themes which are the same as those found in this study. Firstly, the pragmatic outcomes in the case study explain that coaching of talent is a common practice of talent development at USQ. These results are in line with Kimathi (2015); Lyria (2014); Meyers and Van Woerkom (2014) who point out that the best way to learn

No.	Themes and categories of themes	Participants mentioned in the brainstorming session%						∑	%
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
1	Retaining talent:							6	100
	Competitive compensation	✓							
	Employee motivation	✓	✓	✓		✓			
	Employee emwwpowerment		✓		✓		✓		
2	Developing talent:							5	83.3
	Coaching talent	✓			✓				
	training needs		✓	✓					
	Appropriate development strategies						✓		
	Skills gap analysis			✓					
	Succession planning	✓					✓		
3	Attracting talent:							4	66.6
	Work conditions	✓	✓	✓					
	Career advancement	✓	✓		✓				
4	Talent acquisition:							2	33.3
	Building talents	✓		✓					

Table 1: TMPs used in Australian higher education

skills and develop talents is coaching. *The second subtheme* of talent development is training needs. The results show that USQ should meet the needs of its talented staff with development requirements. Al Ariss, Cascio, and Paauwe (2014); Vnoučková, Urbancová, and Smolová (2016) emphasise that training need identifications are essential for talent development. Participants' brainstorming highlighted that appropriate development strategies *(the third subtheme)* are critical for developing talent. These outcomes are consistent with Horváthová and Durdová (2011); Nyaribo (2016); Wu et al. (2016) who advise that institutions should encourage their experienced staff to develop their best traits. These literature emphasise that staff should develop their overall performance containing identifiable skills, increasing their motivation and advancing their career development. Skills gap analysis is the *fourth element* of talent development. This demonstrated that USQ outlines learning content systems and career description dependent on the training needs of its talented individuals. These priorities confirm research by Bersin (2013) who states that an institution should create a set of basic self-assessments which note the key skills and experience to perform in each functional position in the institution. The *final and fifth element* of talent development is succession planning. USQ faces some issues regarding how it can identify the right candidates for a position. These findings are consistent with Kimathi (2015); Lyria (2014); Xue (2014) who observe that the importance of the existence of succession planning contributed positively in developing talented individuals' skills.

Talent attraction is the third key theme in this research. In general, four out of six participants emphasised that this process is used in their university. The results confirmed that USQ is interested in attracting the rare talent to work, because those talents have a great effect in terms of achieving goals, success, and institutional growth in a dynamic industry environment. According to the results, talent attraction operates via two sub-themes: *(i) work conditions; and (iii) career advancement*. The result of work conditions is in line with Chandra (2012); Lyria (2014); Ogbogu (2017); Schlechter, Hung, and Bussin (2014); Thompson (2013) who emphasise that having an institution characterised by ideal working conditions such as improved health, stress reduction, autonomy, job security, and satisfaction are considered a motivating factor for an institution's employees. The outcome of career advancement is similar to the study of Carter, Cook, and Dorsey (2011); Kimathi (2015); Schlechter et al. (2014); Thompson (2013) who state that an institution should create opportunities for talented individuals so they are likely to develop their future careers.

Talent acquisition is the last and fourth key theme investigated in this study. Two participants indicated that acquiring skilled highly qualified individuals are necessary to operationalise USQ's strategic plans. These outcomes are in line with Randhawa (2017); R. Silzer and B. Dowell (2010) who advise that an institution should build its highly qualified individuals skills to meet institutional needs.

5. CONCLUSION

The brainstorming session has outlined four key themes and eleven subthemes of TMPs in Australian HE. The key themes were talent retention, talent development, talent attraction, and talent acquisition. The University of Southern Queensland has a great desire to attract, develop and retain talented individuals including professional and academic staff. Consequently, participants consider those practices as strategic keys to institutional success. Therefore, the identified themes should be specifically emphasised by USQ and other Australian universities in general to increase their ranking and profits.

However, a small sample size is one of keys limitations of this study. Furthermore, there is only one Queensland regional university. A single case study is adopted by a small group of ICT managers who are working in one university. In addition, lack generalisation, and hence cannot be extended to other institutional settings as the brainstorming session consisted of only six participants. Future research would be useful to cover the examination to a broader sample of institutions within different sectors.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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