

Conceptual Framework of Talent Management Affecting Employee Performance of State Government Employees in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Government of Malaysia is emphasizing on development of talent in the public sector, as it is the most significant resource for the federal and state services. Even though, the government has invested in various programs and initiatives to develop and produce key talented human capital, Malaysia is still short of talented people and struggling to develop talent, and talented skilful people are leaving. This paper fills the gap by analysing the comprehensive literature in order to bring understanding on talent management issues within Malaysian state government context. The aim of this paper is to identify talent management practices affecting state government employees and to develop a conceptual framework explaining their relationships. The literature reveals that there is positive relationship between talent acquisition, talent development, talent retention and employee performance. Although the relationships among the four constructs have been extensively studied in the extant literature, this paper is one of the few, if any, in investigating the constructs in state government agencies or local authorities in Malaysia. If empirically supported, the proposed framework may provide an effective alternative in assisting state government agencies at attracting and nurturing talented workers. The study also discloses that there is a need for further research to discover new insights on talent management and retain talent among the state government employees in Malaysia

Keywords

talent management, state government, human capital, retain talent

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Introduction

The total of Malaysian civil servants was 1.6 million in 2017 (Ministry of Finance Malaysia (2016) and increased to 1.7 million in 2019 (Cuepacs, 2019). In 2021 budget, the government has prioritized the civil service sector in improving the civil service delivery system and welfare of civil servants (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2020). The effectiveness of service delivery among federal and state government agencies has been the priority of the government as it is parallel with the aspiration towards sustainable economic growth as targeted in the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (WKB2030). Malaysia aims to become top civilizations worldwide and be listed among the top 20 most advanced countries in the world by 2050 (JPM, 2015). Hence, Malaysia should nurture and retain talented workforce as valuable assets in the public sector for the growing economy to meet the status of a developed nation. Improving the performance of public and state government employees has been an ongoing effort for this country. But the challenge to make civil service even better is especially crucial now, given a more sophisticated and demanding society who expects ever better public service delivery. In its endeavour to become a high-income advanced economy, Malaysia has implemented the National Transformation Programme (NTP). NTP is the centrepiece of the government's efforts to drive Malaysia towards high-income nation status. One of the aims is to modernize government operations in the public sector. Under the NTP, the Government Transformation Program (GTP) was targeted at improving public service delivery and strengthening public institutions (Performance Magazine, 2020).

Nevertheless, further improvements are needed to improve the Malaysian public sector and increase its effectiveness. While the Malaysian public sector had performed well in the region, its progress was at risk of slowing down. (The Star, 2019b). Since 2014, the performance of Malaysia's civil servants has been declining. While Malaysia was doing better than others in South-East Asia, there was a big gap in the civil servant performance with Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. World Bank lead specialist claimed the indicator for government effectiveness exhibited the performance has stagnated in 2018. Indeed, it is below that of between 1991 and 2014 (The Star, 01 Jul 2019a).

Malaysia is losing the skilled talent that is needed to drive the country into a developed country and for further growth (Ananthan et al., 2019). This situation is critical since talented employees are the key contributor of service excellence. Therefore, this study proposes that state government empowers its human capital to be competitive and subsequently turn out to be world-class civil servants. The performance of talents can make a measurable difference to current and future organizations. Both management and employees are responsible in achieving high performance (Cohen & Prusak, 2002). That is the reason in talent management practice, an employee is evaluated before commencement of employment (Quarstein, McAfee, & Glassman, 1992) i.e. talent acquisition. Moreover, most of recent empirical studies are based attracting creative and innovative talents for the growth and survival of businesses and organizations (McDonnell, et al., 2017).

Despite the increasing interests in academic spheres at the global level (McDonnell, et al., 2017), less attention has been paid to talent management issue in the public sector (Hosseini, 2010), particularly in Malaysian state government agencies. Indeed, Malaysia is struggling to retain talent (Alias, Noor & Hassan, 2014). The discussion of this study is expected to bring the understanding on talent acquisition, talent development and talent retention among employees in Malaysian state government agencies to cultivate and transform skilful resources to meet with the status of a developed nation. As such, this study shall establish the influence of talent management practices and performance of state government employees. The study contributes to the body of talent management literature with the main focus on the perspective of Malaysian state government servants from a developing country's viewpoint. The aim of this paper is to identify talent management practices affecting employee performance and to develop a conceptual framework explaining their relationships.

This paper is presented as follows. First, a theoretical foundation for an alternative explanation of the primary mechanism is presented: talent management practices influencing employee performance. Then, a conceptual framework based on two underpinning theories is discussed. Next, the research examines the literature pertaining to talent management and its relationship to employee performance. Finally, the paper ends with implications for future research.

Theoretical Development

Talent-based Theory

Talent-based theory claims that talent is the only resource that provides sustainable competitive advantage; hence, the organization's decision making should centre on talent and talent's competitive capabilities (Cheese, Thomas & Craig, 2007). The internal resources have a significant role in the performance of the organization (Wright & McMahan, 2011). Organizations must put an effort on attracting, developing and maintaining the talented workforce. In

talent-based view, organizations should develop and enhance the competency of the employees through a systematic talent management process. Therefore, this theory is relevant to the study since it constitutes the management style that constantly focus on improvement of working conditions and management in order to enhance the employee performance.

Resource-based View Theory

Resource-based view theory reveals the purpose of talent management practices; in a way that its strategic and tactical disposition facilitates the appropriate process of talent management. According to the theory, competitive advantage is dependent on the organization valuable, rare and unimitated resources; and talent is one of those scarce resources. Sustainable competitive advantage is attainable when organizations have human resource pool which cannot be copied by rivals (Barney, 1991). Talent is the only resource of organizations which provides basis for sustainable competitive advantage (Karanja, Namusonge, & Kireru, 2018). Hence, to ensure value-added advantage, organizations should always appraise their employees to ensure that they have the skills and competencies. In order to gain the competitive advantage, organizations should focus on the development of employees' competency through a systematic process of talent acquisition, talent development and talent retention. As depicted in the conceptual model, managing talent unique is prerequisite for unlocking employees' potential to deliver superior returns to the organization.

The Proposed Conceptual framework

This study has constructed a conceptual framework based on two underpinning theories: talent-based theory and resource-based theory. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework of talent management (Meyers et. al, 2020; Khoreva, Vaiman, & Van Zalk, 2017) and links them to employee performance (Saffar & Obeidat, 2020; Chen et. al, 2020).

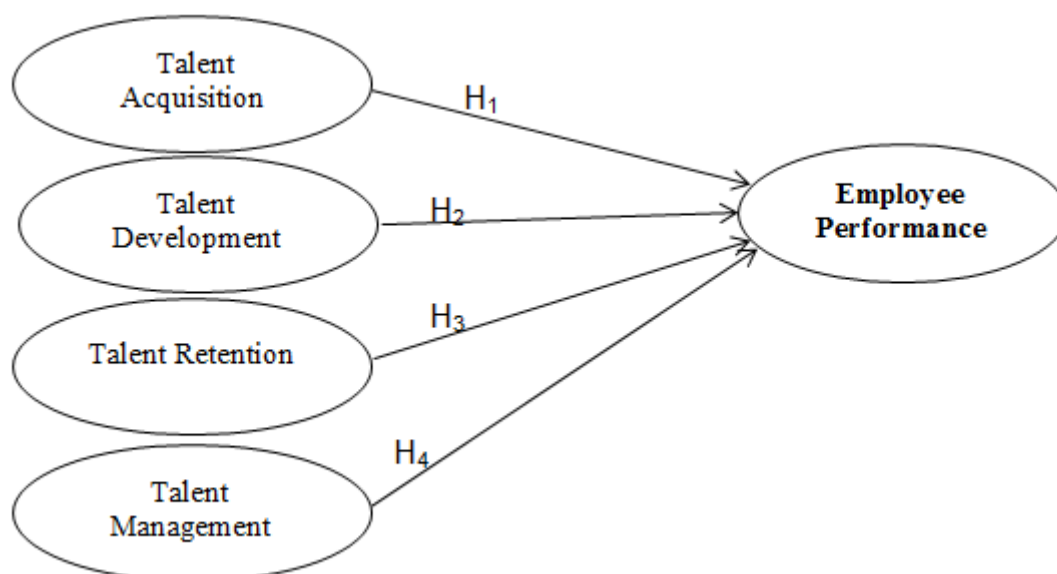


Figure 1.0: Conceptualization of the relationships between talent management and employee performance

The following hypotheses are made:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between talent acquisition and employee performance.

H₂: There is a positive relationship between talent development and employee performance.

H₃: There is a positive relationship between talent retention and employee performance.

H₄: There is a positive relationship between talent management and employee performance.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Employee Performance

The term "employee performance" indicates the achievement of an individual's employment after undertaking the necessary efforts for employment related to earning meaningful jobs, profiles involved, and caring friends or employers (Hellriegel et al., 1999; Karakas, 2010). Such achievement requires better employee performance management which is considered essential to improve organisational performance (Pradhan, 2017). There are types of employee performance; task and contextual performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Task performance has to do with behaviours that contribute to the core transformation and maintenance activities in an organisation (Van Scotter et al., 2000). Whereas contextual performance involves behaviours that go beyond the formally prescribed work goals, such as taking on an extra task, showing initiative or coaching newcomers on the job (Koopmans et al., 2011). In a study by Pousa et al. (2017), they considered that all employees (regardless of their career level) can benefit from the positive effects of coaching on employee performance. The authors proved the positive effect of managerial coaching on frontline employee behavioural and sales performance. Talent management can affect employee performance; in which the better the company's talent management, the better the employee performance (Krishnan et al., 2020; Wadhwa & Tripathi, 2018). Although numerous researchers have taken an interest in exploring employee talent management and have identified a significant relationship between talent management and employee performance (Sopiah et al., 2020; Damarasri & Ahman, 2020; Kaleem, 2019), studies on employee performance among state government employees are limited.

Talent Management

Even though talent management is closely aligned to the business and corporate strategies (Farndale et al., 2010; Kim and Scullion, 2011), its context remains complex, challenging, and continually evolving for many organisations (Vaiman et al., 2017). It has recently been argued that talent management needs to be studied more in different contexts and environments and that focus should be extended to a broader multi-stakeholder perspective (Collings, 2014). Identified as a collection of typical human resource department practices, functions, activities specialist areas such as recruiting, selection, development, and career and succession management (Byham, 2001; Mercer, 2005;

Olsen, 2000), Noe & Kodwani (2018) highlighted that talent management is becoming increasingly important as changes in demand for specific jobs and occupations, skills needs, retirement expectations of the baby boomer generation, and the need to develop the talent and management skills of the next generation of organizational leaders.

Talent Acquisition

The tight labour market benefits highly competent workers as they have many options in employment (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2008) especially in professional organisations, information, knowledge, technical and service organizations (Ewing et al., 2002). Moreover, prospective employees prioritise choosing the right organisation such as choosing the right job (Rynes & Cable, 2003). Therefore, organisations are increasingly striving to evaluate and increase their attractiveness to prospective applicants (Highhouse et al., 1999). This has critical consequences for recruitment organisations (Rynes, Bretz & Gerhart, 1991) as it leads to the most pressing talent acquisition problem - attracting people with the right set of skills and competencies that also fit the needs and culture of the organisation (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2008). The expected result of a shortage of competent manpower mentioned above is the need for a strong recruitment strategy after knowing what differentiates an organisation from competitors and then marketing unique job proposals it can offer (Ewing et al., 2002; Keefe, 2007). In addition, Kaleem (2019) believes that the talent management acquisition process will have a direct impact on employee performance in their job role if the right person is matched with the right job. However, Axelrod et al. (2001) revealed that around 90% of the nearly 7,000 managers have identified acquiring and retaining talent becoming more difficult than other talent management activities. Thus, this study assumes that:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between talent acquisition and employee performance.

Talent Development

Based on the definition by Garavan et al. (2012) talent development focuses on the planning, selection and implementation of development strategies for the entire talent pool to ensure the organization has current and future talent to meet strategic objectives and that development activities are coordinated with the organizational talent management process. Consequently, this leads to a significant debate point in the literature on whether the talent development process should focus on the development of technical or generic competencies or both. Top leaders in today's turbulent global environment must constantly adapt and develop their organisation to achieve and maintain competitive advantage using (those unique organisational strengths which are inimitable) (Mayfield, Mayfield & Wheeler, 2016). This change needs top leaders to find out if their resources - especially their employees - can afford it innovation. Consistent with Garavan et al. (2012), acquiring talent from external sources is not a successful long-term strategy; instead, organisations should pursue strategies to develop talent from within, to ensure that employees have the essential skills and competence to apply business

strategies. Moreover, modelling the talent that flows in the job ladder is the preparation of the organisation to identify the factors that influence how quickly employees move through the job (Bidwell, 2017). Furthermore, a worker's ability to move from one job to the next job on that career ladder is likely to depend on the availability of job openings, or vacancies in that next job. Upward movement into a vacancy can also create an opening in the job that he or she left, allowing advancement by someone at a yet lower level. External HR supply in today's organisation also occurs and is strongly supported by new institutions, particularly labour market intermediaries (Cappelli & Keller, 2014). However, Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li (2016) urged that it is very important to realise that having enough specific skills to do one's job and at the same time knowing that today's position is not as stable as it used to be is much more important and therefore requires flexible employees who can learn and develop new skills and expertise. Based on the aforementioned insights, this study assumes that:

H₂: There is a positive relationship between talent development and employee performance.

Talent Retention

Talent retention is one of talent management practices that influences employee performance. Instead of focusing on acquiring talent that will not solve organisational problems, retention management or retention of talent should be a priority (Iles, Chuai et al., 2010; Lynn, 2003). More importantly, it will ensure stimulation and have a positive impact on retaining talented employees such as work-life balance, flexible working hours and work arrangements, career management and promotion opportunities (Cappelli, 2009; Mahapatro, 2010). As per Bhattacharyya (2015), retaining talent will avoid the loss of talented employees while being recognised as the most likely motive and determinant of employee satisfaction and well-being (Qureshi, 2019). They agree that talent retention can be enhanced as organizations implement specific proactive talent management practices, including employee engagement, empowerment, career development opportunities, compensation and competitive benefits, among others. The prospect of retention is also enhanced as employers maintain a positive brand or reputation in the labour market. These strategies will help organisations to maintain and grow, avoiding excessive spending triggered by talent loss. Having such planning in talent retention, this leads to a long-term positive impact on company performance (Qureshi et.al, 2019). Accordingly, organisations must provide a variety of practices to promote and retain key talents (Collings & Mellahi, 2009) because talented employees have the luxury of selecting and selecting employers that offer accurate currency design, such as work life balance; effective work diversity policy; or contexts where talented people have a strong voice in the organisation (Berger, 2004). Therefore, the following is hypothesised:

H₃: There is a positive relationship between talent retention and employee performance.

Relationship between Talent Management and Employee Performance

According to Ashton & Morton (2005), talent management is a strategic and holistic approach to both human resource and business planning or a new path to organizational effectiveness. This enhances the performance talents who can make a measurable difference to current and future organizations. Consequently, this aspires to result in improved performance among all levels in the workforce, thus enabling everyone to reach their potential. Although this interpretation of talent is inclusive, it can achieve a strategic balance between performance and potential. Historically, performance, with measurement and management focus, concerns the past and the present, while potential represents the future. Not surprisingly, many empirical studies have evaluated the influence of talent management practices on employee performance. For example, Ndolo et al. (2017) found positive effects of talent management practices including talent development, career development and work-life balance on employee performance while the study of Dixit & Amit-Arrawatia (2018) also showed positive effects of talent management practices on employee performance and job satisfaction. Furthermore, previous scholars (Yapp, 2009; Mensah, Bawole & Wedchayanon, 2016; Bibi, 2019) agreed to conclude that talent management leads to employee performance and at same time it helps organisations deal with challenges, enter new markets and move forward competition. Managing talented employees will also reduce expenses and labour costs in order to manage organisational competitiveness, efficiency and problems, which ultimately helps organisation to maximise return on investment. The following hypothesis is derived:

H₄: There is a positive relationship between talent management and employee performance.

Implications for Future Research

This study can provide additional information for the management on the influence of talent management toward employee performance. The result of the study could also be a determinant towards making more reliable decisions on the planning process in talent management and implementation of associating succession programs to increase employee performance and involvement. It should be noted that the outcomes of talent management not only depend on the overall organizational philosophy, but also on the individual philosophies of the people who are responsible for talent management practices, particularly HR managers.

As this study happens to be the first focusing on talent management and employee performance in Malaysia, thus, a major contribution of this is the generating of talent management practices among the state government employees. In consequence, the research outcome may be taken as input for future research, to serve as guide to raise hypotheses to be tested on. Consequently, this study reveals that there is a need for further research to discover new insights on talent management and enhance employee performance in Malaysian state government agencies.

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