



A Qualitative Research to Explore Processes that are Utilized for Managing Talent: A Case Study in a Queensland Regional University

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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 managers who work at the University of Southern Queensland. A brainstorming session was transcribed and thematically analyzed using NVivo 11. Four key themes and eleven subthemes of 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 have 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 and 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 et al., 2015; Mohammed et al., 2017; Osigwelem, 2017; Urbancová and Vnoučková, 2015). This is because of the pragmatic advantages for universities that are focused on improving talents (Kasemsap, 2017; Wu et al., 2016). Moreover, educational institutions are conscious that talent is an essential key to institutional growth and success (Hazelkorn, 2017; Rudhumbu and Maphosa, 2015). Competitive advantage can be maintained by talent management processes (TMPs) in key workplaces within an institution (Kasemsap, 2017; Kibui, 2015).

However, TM studies in the universities sector are limited (Paisey and 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 and Thunnissen, 2016; Mohammed et al., 2017. p. 1133; Thunnissen, 2016; Tomany, 2012). Therefore, this study will provide a combined vision of TM 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. Third, 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 organization (Ingram, 2016; Kimathi, 2015; Morley et al., 2017). In the literature, there are four common perspectives on TM, which are (1) developmental; (2) cultural; (3) competitive; and (4) human resources planning perspectives (Al-Awamleh, 2009; Baublyte, 2010; Li and Devos, 2008; Mohammed et al., 2017). According to the developmental perspective, TM is a strategic priority for business organizations and is perceived as a crucial driver in developing organizational performance (Davies and Davies, 2010; Ingram, 2016). Similarly, Cannon and McGee (2011); Moczyłowska (2012); Silzer and Dowell (2010) explain TM as a set of procedures, programs, and activities applied to highly qualified individuals who are characterized by high performance in their development to achieve an organization's goals now and in the future. The reason for this is that, if an organization fails to provide talented development and training, it may lose available talent (Torrington et al., 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 et al., 2014; Ross, 2013; Scaringella and Malaeb, 2014). Supporters of this perspective propose that individuals are successful only when they have sufficient talent and believe that the success of organizational work will be followed by their own success (Blass, 2009; Storm, 2015).

According to the competitive perspective, as perceived by Beamond et al. (2016); Meyers and Van Woerkom (2014); Tomany (2012), TM is an engine of sustainable competitive advantage, that is difficult to imitate, is rare and valuable, and cannot be replaced by competitors. From the same perspective, Al Haidari (2015); Gelens et al. (2013); Waheed et al. (2013); Yap (2016) define it as activities, processes, and the development of skills which require individuals to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and institutional success by providing competent and highly qualified individuals more capable than competitors in other institutions.

In regards of the human resources planning perspective, Beardwell and Thompson (2014); Cappelli (2008a); Cui et al. (2016); Nissler (2010); Visuri (2014) introduce TM as a tool of human resource planning to develop a plan to meet institutional resources needs, to attract individuals with the appropriate skills in the appropriate area of work. It involves a number of procedures designed to attract, develop, and retain extremely talented staffs to meet institutional needs. In other words, TM anticipates the necessity for human resources and then builds a strategy to meet it. Thus, TM is a key for organizational success through making it possible for organizational systems to achieve higher aims (Andersson, 2014; Calo, 2008; Daneshfard et al., 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 et al., 2014; HÄgg and Musse, 2016; Helquist et al., 2017; Keeney, 2012; Litcanu et al., 2015; McMahon et al., 2016; Rowley and Phibbs, 2012; Shirani et al., 2012). Alex Osborn, an advertising executive, developed this technique in the discipline of marketing in the 1940s (Boddy, 2012; Hender et al., 2001; Shih et al., 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 and D'Lauro, 2017; Korde and Paulus, 2017; Kornish and Hutchison-Krupat, 2017; Levine et al., 2016; Wilson, 2013). The results of additional experiments

have supported the original brainstorming method process (HÄgg and Musse, 2016; Korde and 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 and Latif, 2013; Gururajan et al., 2014; Shih et al., 2011; Torres and Carte, 2014). Once all generated ideas are highlighted, the group goes through the ideas discussing their helpfulness, and combining as well as improving similar ideas or solutions (Boddy, 2012; Grĭbek, 2011; Keeney, 2012; Korde and Paulus, 2017; Rietzschel et al., 2006; Rowley and 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 and Wiley, 2011; Haddou et al., 2014; HÄgg and Musse, 2016; Korde, 2014; Kornish and Hutchison-Krupat, 2017; Levine et al., 2016; Rietzschel et al., 2006; Sekhar and 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 et al., 2006; Helquist et al., 2017). In addition, Boddy (2012); Galatescu and Greceanu (2002); Grĭbek (2011); Potter and Losee (1996) have given other benefits of the individual brainstorming technique as follows: (2) It equalizes 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 organized generation of many ideas (Litcanu et al., 2015; Sekhar and Lidiya, 2012). Finally, (4) brainstorming provides useful input to the focus group session (Fitzgerald, 2015; Gallo and Gonos, 2014; Keeney, 2012; Lee et al., 2015; O'campo et al., 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. First, the brainstorming process takes time to learn and requires distinct skills (McMahon et al., 2016; Potter and Losee, 1996; Sutton and Hargadon, 1996; Wilson, 2013). Second, even though the brainstorming methodology is popular, it can be misleading because fewer ideas might be produced through its procedural mechanisms (Goldenberg and Wiley, 2011; Kavadias and 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 and 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 maximized 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 and 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 and 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 and Latif, 2013; Gururajan et al., 2014; Shih et al., 2011; Torres and Carte, 2014). Overall, Using the strategies discussed above, the brainstorming session can be a useful resource to inform the focus group session (Fitzgerald, 2015; Gallo and 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 et al., 2013). 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 and 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, the large group has more than eight participants (Korde and Paulus, 2017; Paulus et al., 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 et al., 2014; Lefika and Mearns, 2015; Mrtensson and Hensing, 2012; Peek and Fothergill, 2009; Todd et al., 2012). A small group has eight participants or less (Korde and Paulus, 2017; Michinov et al., 2015; Paulus et al., 2013). Researchers Shirani et al. (2012) have provided middle solutions; they recommended that the perfect group size is between 5 and 10 participants (Shirani et al., 2012) or 6-9 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 and Mearns, 2015; Mrtensson and Hensing, 2012; Peek and 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 uniformly relying on the site and availability of staff on the day of the brainstorming session (Gururajan et al., 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 e-mail or phone (Sutton and 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; Tshela, 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 recognized, 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 and 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 organized, in which the participants themselves suggest themes (Balasubramanian et al., 2008; Lu and Yuan, 2011; 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 before 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 through 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.

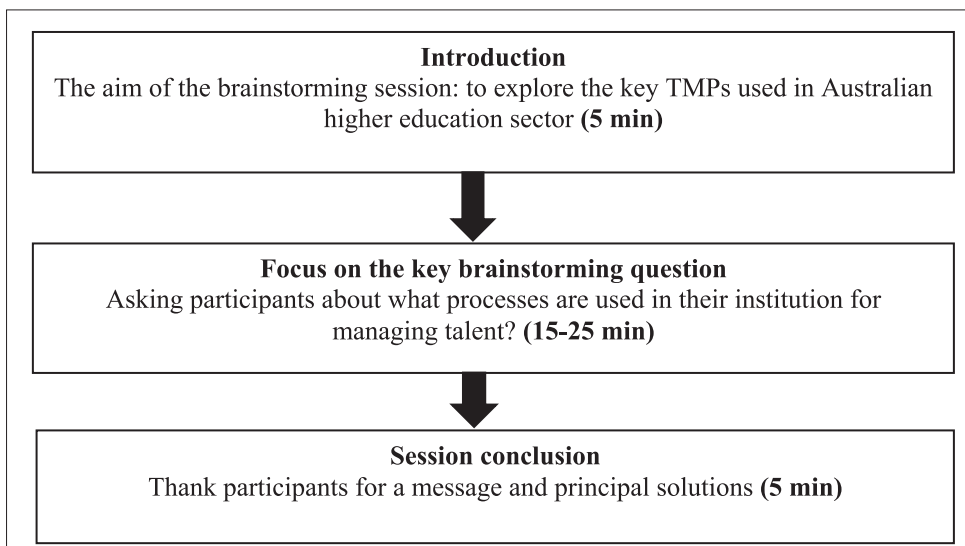
The brainstorming session began with a short introduction where the moderator and the facilitator welcomed participants, and then introduced themselves and the research topic. A quick summary explanation of the session's purpose was supplied to the six participating managers (four males and two females) who then were tasked with introducing themselves to the group before beginning the formal discussion. This took 5-10 min. 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 utilized 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 5 min for each participant to answer (BÖrekÇİ, 2015). BÖrekÇİ (2015, p. 5) explains this as, "When his/her turn came, the speaking participant had 3 min to think out loud and share his/her ideas on the problem area, after which, for 2 min 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 40-50 min 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 5-10 min. 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 utilized both manual methods and NVivo 11 software to code, recode, and generate themes (Ngulube, 2015; Paulus and Bennett, 2017). Data analysis discovered that participants provided valuable ideas of the TMPs for managing 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.

Figure 1: The schedule of the brainstorming session



The brainstorming session investigated four themes of TM. The first key theme explored in this research is talent retention. All respondents agreed that University of Southern Queensland (USQ) has a desire to retain the talented staff. This is because it is a key role in achieving institutional growth. These results confirm 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: (1) Competitive compensation, (2) employee motivation, and (3) 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 organization, 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 organizations through assessing the current strategies of talent retention from the best performing organizations. 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 et al. (2013); Refozar et al. (2017); Salau (2017); Walker (2017) who emphasize that employee motivation in educational institutions plays a key role in retaining valued staff. Employee empowerment is the final and third subtheme mentioned by the 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 et al., 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:

Table 1 : TMPs used in Australian higher education

Themes and categories of themes	Participants mentioned in the brainstorming session						Σ (%)
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Retaining talent							6 (100)
Competitive compensation	✓						
Employee motivation	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Employee empowerment		✓		✓		✓	
Developing talent							5 (83.3)
Coaching talent	✓			✓			
Training needs		✓	✓				
Appropriate development strategies						✓	
Skills gap analysis			✓				
Succession planning	✓					✓	
Attracting talent							4 (66.6)
Work conditions	✓	✓	✓				
Career advancement	✓	✓		✓			
Talent acquisition							2 (33.3)
Building talents	✓		✓				

TMPs: Talent management processes

(1) Coaching talent, (2) training needs, (3) appropriate development strategies, (4) skills gap analysis, and (5) 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. First, 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 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 et al. (2014); Vnoučková et al. (2016) emphasize that the 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 emphasize 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 emphasized 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 through two subthemes: (1) Work conditions and (2) career advancement. The result of work conditions is in line with Chandra (2012); Lyria (2014); Ogbogu (2017); Schlechter et al. (2014); Thompson (2013) who emphasize that having an institution characterized 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 et al. (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 operationalize USQ's strategic plans. These outcomes are in line with Randhawa (2017); Silzer 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 USQ 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 emphasized by USQ and other Australian universities in general to increase their ranking and profits.

However, small sample size is one of the key limitations of this study. Only one Queensland regional university is included. A single case study is adopted by a small group of information communication technology (ICT) managers who are working in one university. In addition, lack generalization 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.

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