EFFECTIVENESS OF TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AT THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

TEBOHO MKHUMA [1] and WILFRED ISIOMA UKPERE [2]

[1,2] Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management, College of Business & Economics, University of Johannesburg, Auckland Park Kingsway Campus, Corner Kingsway & University Road, PO Box 524, Auckland Park, 2006, South Africa. Email: [1]tebohomkhuma81@gmail.com, [2]wiukpere@uj.ac.za

Abstract

The COVID-19 epidemic has brought attention to the vital role of effective talent management in organisational sustainability. Talent management strategies enable organisations to optimize talent retention, cultivate organisational capabilities, and maintain a competitive edge. However, most South African public institutions face talent management challenges. A review of current literature reveals a scarcity of research on talent management practices within the South African public health sector. Hence, to close the gap, this study explored the effectiveness of talent management strategies within the Free State provincial department of health. This qualitative study utilized purposive sampling to recruit fourteen employees from Tokollo and Mafube hospitals, representing various organisational levels. Additionally, the study used semi-structured interviews (n=13 face-to-face, n=1 virtual) to gather in-depth data on the effectiveness of talent management strategies. The findings reveal a mixed landscape of effectiveness. Notably, employee benefits and rewards, and training and development emerged as effective strategies. On the other hand, participants exhibited polarized views on performance management's effectiveness (n=6 positive, n=6 negative). Conversely, the study found workforce planning and staffing, succession planning, staff recognition policy, and the retention policy as ineffective talent management strategies. These results offer insightful information for healthcare organisations seeking to optimize talent management practices. Hence, the findings will contribute to the creation of evidence-based talent management strategies for improved organisational performance and sustainability.

Keywords: Talent Management, Organisational Sustainability, Public Health Sector, Free State Department of Health.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the world witnessed the emergence of an unprecedented health crisis with the outbreak of COVID-19, a novel coronavirus strain. This epidemic had a profound effect on the global economy, precipitating widespread disruption to economic activities and necessitating extensive measures to mitigate its effects. Consequently, numerous organisations were compelled to suspend operations, while others navigated the process of closure or restructuring. The remaining organisations are thriving owing to effective talent management as part of their strategic objectives. Talent management, according to Mathimaran and Kumar (2017), refers to measures that employers take to build a positive work environment through which the implementation of effective talent management strategies enables employees to remain committed.

Effective talent management strategies are essential for organisations to optimise talent retention, cultivate organisational capabilities, and continue to have market advantage (Armstrong, 2011). Talent management involves strategies for organisations to retain their best talent, as it is crucial for their survival and success. In addition, Younas and Bari (2020)

emphasise the issue of the battle for talent, and edge organisations to actively recruit and retain brilliant individuals to enhance their performance. Additionally, Kakar et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of using and recognising effective talent management strategies to prevent employee turnover.

While talent management seems to be a general challenge in most organisations in South Africa, this research explored the effectiveness of talent management strategies within the Free State department of health. Various scholars have undertaken research on the administration and retention of talent in various economic sectors. However, there seems to be little research conducted on these practices within the provincial department of health in the Free State, which motivated this study.

Problem Statement

Many organisations are losing experienced and skilled employees owing to the poor implementation of talent retention strategies, which has hampered effective management and operations in most organisations. Effective talent management strategies are a prerequisite for organisational sustainability because of the knowledge and skills retained within the organisation The problem statement prompted the formulation of the susequent research question.

Research Question

- How effective are talent management strategies at the department of health in the Free State?

Research Objective

- To explore the effectiveness of talent management strategies at the department of health in the Free State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effectiveness of Talent Management

Talent management is effective when an organisation can fully utilise its employees' skills to respond to challenges brought about by the competitive global markets (Mensah, 2015). Organisational success depends on effective talent management strategies, which support talent retention and attraction (Isfahani & Boustani, 2014), whilst impacting employee performance positively. Employee performance refers to an employee's capacity to perform a specific duty in a disciplined and timely way (Anwar, 2021).

Dimensions of employee performance, according to Mensah (2015), include task, contextual, adaptive, and counter-productive performance. However, the said author asserts that effective talent management impacts the task, contextual, and adaptive dimensions positively, but have a negative impact on counter-productive performance dimension. Measurements of effectiveness of talent management strategies include:

Increased Employee Productivity And Business Performance, and Reduced Costs Of Recruitment: As a result of employee engagement, motivation, and satisfaction, effective talent management strategies in an organisation serve to improve employee retention and organisational performance (Agarwal, 2018), thereby decreasing costs associated with recruitment processes.

Reduction in Training Costs: Talented individuals possess the necessary values, traits, and skills for the business. As a result, when a firm attracts brilliant individuals, it signifies that it has chosen individuals who fit its standards, and the company will not have to spend a lot of money on employee training (Nguyen *et al*., 2021).

Benefits of Effective Talent Management

Effective talent management strategies are beneficial to employees and organisations (Garg & Rani, 2014). In this regard, Mtshali et al. (2018) mention that these benefits include the development of a succession-management pool, the accomplishment of transformative goals, increased company performance, and the retention of critical talents for organisations, while for employees, the benefits associated with effective talent management strategies, as outlined by Garg and Rani (2014), include high levels of desire and dedication, professional advancement, greater understanding of and contribution to organisational goals, and long-term job satisfaction.

Agarwal (2018) states that there were strong correlations between management and retention of talent in various Indian IT companies. Additionally, Mensah et al. (2016) discovered that talent management had positively impacts the performance of talented employees and negatively affects counterproductive behaviours. While employing examples from South Africa's industrial fields such as financial services and the mining sectors, Seopa et al. (2015) found that employees who were part of an organisation's talent pool indicated greater levels of psychological contract in employment relationships and related transactions, commitment within the organisation, Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB), trust, and willingness to stay with the company. Additionally, Valk and Yousif (2021) found that in Dubai's hospitality sector, motivated and satisfied employees work harder and longer to achieve team and organisational success. Moreover, according to Prabu et al. (2022), benefits of effective talent management include improved recruiting, retention of top talent, a deeper knowledge of workers, and improved decisions of employees for professional advancement. Most organisations today fail to execute proper talent management initiatives successfully that possess a positive influence on the process of finding, nurturing, and keeping the best personnel to maintain an organisation's competitive edge (Mary et al., 2015). Every organisation needs to have effective talent management strategies to retain top talents (Prabu et al., 2022). Furthermore, if talent management is used effectively, it is possible to develop harmonious employment relationships, as discussed in the next section.

Effective Talent Management and Harmonious Employment Relations

The goal of employment relations is to strike a fair and equitable balance between the employment relations parties' convergent and divergent interest (Nel et al., 2016). According

to Bendix (2019), the study of relationships, work situations, and working people, as well as the difficulties and issues of new industrial and post-industrial society, as well as procedures, structures, institutions, and regulations unique to this relationship, is known as employment relations. Harmonious employment relations is critical for organisational success, prosperity and long-term viability, and also result in highly devoted, motivated and loyal employees in organisations (Samwel, 2018). Effective talent management in the organisation has enabled employees to boost their work ability to create quality and quantity in accordance with organisational objectives (Anwar, 2021). Furthermore, according to Samwel (2018), if there is a strained connection between employees and their employers, organisations cannot function better or accomplish their goals; hence, it is vital for managers to maintain harmonious employment relations with their workers. Top management's poor talent management skills could sabotage effective talent management implementation and result in negative outcomes at organisational and employee levels (Jyoti & Rani, 2014). Additionally, King and Vaiman (2019) identified three major talent management impediments, namely an organisational-level approach, an HR-centric approach, and a primarily intra-organisational focus, which limit cross-level strategic integration and hamper the significance of talent management as a basic corporate strategy.

Research Method and Design

In this study, the researcher adopted a qualitative research method, anchored on the interpretivist approach, namely the exploratory research design. The qualitative approach was chosen owing to its ability to provide new insight on the effectiveness of talent management strategies at the provincial department of health in the Free State. A qualitative study is a series of activities designed to maximise research integrity, whilst it employs non-numerical data, and its goal is to explore meaning and expose various realities (Saunders et al., 2007; Polit & Beck, 2010; Polit & Beck, 2014). Conversely, according to Saunders et al. (2007), exploratory research aims to seek new insight into a given phenomenon.

Population and Sample Size

The study's population included both managers, union representatives and employees at the Free State Department of Health who work at Tokollo and Mafube Hospitals, and who perform operational and administrative duties. Since this is a qualitative study, a purposive sample method was used. Fifteen participants from the population were sampled, using a non-probability sampling approach and their participation was voluntary. However, one participant declined.

Data Collection

Data collection refers to interrelated actions to gather comprehensive information to answer research questions (Burns & Grove, 2013). According to Polit and Beck (2014), qualitative researchers often enter the field with the most knowledge of probable data sources without ruling out alternative options as data collection develops, while in-depth interviews are commonly used to gather qualitative data. To make sense of and understand effectiveness of talent management strategies within the Free State provincial department of health, semi-

structured interviews were used. Semi-structured interviews aid in understanding research topics by allowing interviewers to conduct face-to-face interviews, using preset questions based on the investigated phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2007; Creswell, 2015).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a method that is used to identify patterns, behaviours, objects, stages, or ideas in a dataset (Neuman, 2014). The process entails the compilation and organisation of data, which is then coded into themes and displayed as tables, figures, or debates (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, the processes of data analysis in a qualitative study are intertwined, constituting a spiral of actions that relate to analysis and reporting (Creswell, 2014). Content and thematic analysis were used for the current study. The goal of content and thematic analysis, according to Jordaan (2014), is to compress data and provide new insight into phenomena. Content and thematic analysis involves extracting ideas from a transcript, exploring evident and hidden themes, sub-themes, and patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Coding and transcription are crucial in data analysis, dividing data sets into analytical units and converting spoken language into written form for analysis (Stuckey, 2015). To analyse data satisfactorily, the researcher used the following process: transcribed the participants' responses; organised the data by categorising it into codes and identified themes; and read exit interviews to analyse established talent management strategies at the case organisation to gain an understanding and to develop empirical knowledge. Additionally, the researcher used the ATLAS.ti computer software package for data analysis.

FINDINGS

Synopsis of Research Participants

Most of the participants were Black African, while one was White. Additionally, all the participants spoke diverse languages, making the Free State provincial department of health a diverse and inclusive organisation. A total of 57% of the participants were ≤40 years of age, while 43% were older than 40 years. Of the participants, 93% of them had post-matric qualifications and 7% had a Grade 12 with incomplete tertiary qualifications. The participants included two union officials, four members of the clinical team, and five non-clinical officials. Nine of the participants were based at Tokollo Hospital, while five participants were stationed at Mafube Hospital. Table 1 below shows gender representation of research participants.

Table 1: Gender Representation of Research Participants

Category	Male	Female	Total
Management	01	02	03
Clinical workers	01	03	04
Nonclinical workers	02	03	05
Union representatives	02	00	02
Total	06	08	14

Source: Author's fieldwork (2023).

Discussion of the findings

After the interviews were concluded and transcribed, the interview materials and research questions were contrasted. To make sure that the research questions were addressed accurately and without excessive prejudice, some of the participants' comments were narrated in the current author's voice, while others were quoted verbatim. Seven themes emerged from the data analysis and their illustration is depicted in the figure below:

Figure 1: Illustration of the emerging themes

Source: Author's fieldwork (2023).

As aforementioned, the article explored the effectiveness of talent management strategies at the Free State Department of Health, and the findings of the study revealed a mixed picture. Below is the discussion of these findings.

Effectiveness of Employee Benefits and rewards as a Talent Management Strategy

Effectiveness of employee benefits and rewards as a talent management strategy emerged as a theme when participants responded to questions around the effectiveness of talent management strategies at the department. Most of the participants agreed that the department's employee benefits and rewards were practical and effective. The participants mentioned that the department uses accommodation and subsidised incentives to manage talent effectively. Some participants stated that the free accommodation that was offered to doctors and other clinical staff have been able to reduce staff attrition.

In this regard, **NCLIN5** said:

> *"...The department is providing free accommodation and paying rural allowance...these are some of the incentives and benefits that the department is giving to retain their talent...we have a doctor who has been with us for over 10 years, we also have about five professional nurses from Bloemfontein who have been here for over 6 years... and, yes, these strategies have been effective...".*

In addition, **CLIN2** observed:

> *"... what I found to be interesting is government giving out subsidies. Our medical aid subsidies, housing subsidies, contributions towards pension funds...moreover, there are many incentives and rewards that are available to employees, things like, if I may name a few: the 13th cheque, performance bonuses, rewards for long service, rewards awarded as a result of academic achievement etc...and, yes, some of these benefits contributed to staff retention...".*

The study's results align with previous research. In their study, Mathimaran and Kumar (2017) found that rewards and competitive wage packages impacted the retention of top performers substantially. Furthermore, Fatah and Suhandini (2019) discovered that providing incentives and awards impacted employee performance significantly. In addition, Bolatito and Mohamoud's (2024) study's findings reported higher levels of job satisfaction when employees believed that their organisation's incentive management system was fair and effective. Furthermore, Bolatito and Mohamoud (2024) underlined that ineffective incentive programmes may result in higher employee turnover, lower productivity, and employee demotivation.

Effectiveness of training and development as a talent management strategy

As participants responded to questions around the effectiveness of talent management strategies at the Free State Department of Health, training and development as a talent management strategy also emerged as a theme. Participants noted that the department was doing everything possible to train and develop employees through various internal and external training programmes, whilst providing possibilities for them to continue their education with health-related courses. **NCLIN5** said:

> *"...the department has policies for training and development. In our facilities managers also conduct in-service trainings on a quarterly basis... we also have Skills Development Committee, which aims to develop employees for better performance. These trainings have been effective in keeping our staff...majority of employees were absorbed to higher positions due to the skills they have gained...".*

Additionally, **MAN2** stated:

> *"...The department make use of both on-the-job and off-the-job trainings. A large number of these off-the-job trainings are for staff members in supply chains, HR, and admissions, etc. The department's performance has improved as a result of these trainings. However, a staffing deficit impedes the department's excellent activities...additionally, the department provides clinical staff with on-the-job training, whereby a senior employee*

will demonstrate specific tasks to other clinicians…as a result, patient care has significantly improved.…".

The findings are consistent with previous research. Lockwood (2006) states that efficient talent management systems and procedures that prioritize human capital leads to more engaged employees and lesser attrition rates. Furthermore, Kucherov and Monokhina (2017) propose that training and acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes are aided by training to improve individual and organisational effectiveness. Furthermore, Dhanpat et al. (2018) found that training and growth have a favourable psychological effect and can lead to an employee's loyalty towards the organisation. In addition, Profiroiu and Simion (2021) posit that adopting and maintaining professionalisation in the public sector for both executives and support workers is crucial to ensure the development of expert skills and abilities, which are required to do their duties adequately. Björkman et al. (2022) suggest that corporate sector development practices should follow the 70-20-10 philosophy, with 70% based on on-the-job experiences, 20% on learning, and 10% on formal interventions.

Effectiveness of Performance Management as a Talent Management Strategy

The theme performance management emerged as a significant talent management strategy. However, participants expressed mixed views regarding its effectiveness, with three sub-themes emerging. Effective performance management (6 participants), moderately effective performance management (2 participants), and ineffective performance management (6 participants). Participants who viewed performance management as ineffective cited lack of adherence to performance management processes, insufficient feedback, limited accountability, disparities in assessments, focus on adjusting compensation rather than improvement, and non-payment of performance assessment incentives. Whereas those who viewed performance management as moderately effective noted partial adherence to procedures, annual reviews instead of continuous assessment, and limited monitoring. Conversely, nevertheless, participants who viewed performance management as effective highlighted efficient performance management system, annual evaluations, identification of areas for improvement, alignment with training and development, tracking of employee progress, and merit-based promotions. Hence, **MAN2** remarked:

"…I do not think we have an effective performance management system at institutional level…in terms of the guidelines, we should be having at least five meetings with our subordinates… However, these processes are not adhered to…".

Similarly, **NCLIN3** stated:

"…PMDS on paper is great. I can understand how it works. It links performance to a job description, to a potential reward for performing, but it has become so contrived. Comply now and complain later. Tick all the boxes because the paperwork should be done…the annual performance assessment and notch increments are contrived and lack accountability, making talent management less effective than intended. Employees often receive no feedback on improvement or skills development...it is so frustrating…".

The above findings align with the findings of Aguinis and Burgi-Tian (2021), who found that many organisations lack advanced performance management systems and rely on annual appraisals, lacking continuous feedback and alignment with strategic goals.

However, the other six participants felt that the performance management system at the Free State Department of Health was effective.

Hence, **MAN1** maintained:

"...we have an efficient performance management system in place…employees indicate their personal development plans and the department take these into account when developing training initiatives and identifying the skills gaps…without this talent management strategy, we would not be having effective training and development…".

Likewise, **MAN3** indicated:

"...performance management is effective because it feeds into training and development. It helps employees to perform better in their roles and responsibilities. Moreover, it prepares them for future responsibilities and growth…".

The above findings are consistent with earlier research. According to Mathonsi et al. (2023) and Munzhedzi (2017), performance management systems (PMS) help to improve results for institutions by measuring and controlling performance of teams and individuals with specified framework of objectives, standards, and competency requirements.

Effectiveness of Workforce Planning and Staffing as a Talent Management Strategy

Another theme that emerged from the participants' responses on the effectiveness of talent management strategies at the Free State Department of Health, was workforce planning and staffing. As a result, most of the participants perceived that the department's workforce planning and staffing had been ineffective. Most of the employees mentioned the impact of staff shortages.

The current study's findings revealed severe staff shortages at both Tokollo and Mafube hospitals. Participants stated that a personnel shortage hurts their performance and health, while they go beyond their normal working hours to fill the gaps.

The findings are consistent with previous literature. For instance, in their study, Govender et al. (2018) noted that increased patient waiting times were owing to a scarcity of clinical personnel such as doctors and nurses.

Moreover, Fana and Goudge (2021) state that austerity measures in South Africa result in decreased staffing numbers, reduced benefits, equipment shortages, and delayed procurement and recruitment processes.

Furthermore, in his study, Letsie (2021) observed that staff shortages in public hospitals harm the typical healthcare service delivery of nurses, resulting in violations of both staff and patients' rights.

Hence, **NCLIN3** stated:

> *"... we had one speech therapist for the whole Parys area but because we did not have speech therapist in Welkom, she was doing Sasolburg, Parys, Boitumelong, Kroonstad and Welkom, and we lost her in the end due to burnout...".*

In a similar vein, **MAN1** lamented:

> *"...for the past two to three years we have not appointed any non-clinical officials...We have officials who went on retirement, others died, others even resigned, and we have not filled those posts... you can just understand the gap within the facilities... It is bad...".*

Effectiveness of Succession Planning as a Talent Management Strategy

Another theme that emerged when participants were responding to the question around the effectiveness of talent management strategies at the Free State Department of Health is the effectiveness of succession planning. Participants reported a lack of succession planning, prolonged acting capacity in some positions, and insufficient early identification of potential candidates owing to employee departures. These factors, according to participants, are because of their institutions' management inability to finalise the succession planning strategy. From this perspective, **NCLIN3** submitted:

> *"...if I leave there is no occupational therapy (OT) services for Tokollo or the district hospital. I am the only permanent OT for the complex. We have no replacement plan... you are losing talent, and you are not replacing it with equivalent...".*

Similarly, **UNI2** stated:

> *"...succession plan is not well effective. Currently, we have ageing professionals who are upon retirement, but there is no plan for succession or who will take over...".*

The results of this study align with previous literatures. For instance, Jindal and Shaikh (2020) observed that talent retention and successful succession planning are the results of proper talent identification and development methods. Moreover, according to Rani (2014), to retain and develop talented employees, organisations should consider factors such as salary, benefits, organisational commitment, age, succession planning, satisfaction, job security, work environment, and flexibility. In the same context, Milky (2013) found that talent management and succession planning are essential to enhance organisational effectiveness and talent retention.

Effectiveness of Staff Recognition Policy as a Talent Management Strategy

A theme that emerged when participants were responding to questions around the effectiveness of talent management strategies was the effectiveness of staff recognition policy as a talent management strategy. The current study found that within the Free State Department of Health, particularly at the Tokollo and Mafube hospitals, there was a lack of recognition, motivation, and support. The participants stated that some categories of staff and departments were not recognised and supported in terms of opportunities and resources.

In line with this, **NCLIN3** stated:

> *"...I know if I talk to my staff that have left, it is just a general lack of promotional opportunities...I think we often have people in reasonably high posts that are not necessarily skilled enough...we should be aiming to develop a pocket of excellence...or recognise high performers...".*

In addition, **MAN3** claimed:

> *"...with the lack of staff recognition, a lot of our employees are no longer motivated to put extra effort into their roles and responsibilities. This is also affecting the performance of the department and our institutions..."*

These findings are congruent with extant literature. Oburu and Atambo (2016) found that one of the most effective ways to motivate employees is through recognition, which increases talent attraction and retention. Likewise, Sheehan et al. (2018) posit that senior management's commitments to the development of a talent mindset or culture, at all levels within the organisation, are necessary for the efficient implementation of talent management strategies. In addition, Kundu and Lata (2017), in their study, found that recognition positively impacts talent retention. Moreover, Monyei et al. (2023), in their study: *"Workplace conflict and the productivity of employees in the healthcare sector: A case study"*, concluded that employee loyalty and a favourable work attitude should be appropriately recognised and rewarded to boost organisational development and growth effectively.

Effectiveness of Retention Policy as a Talent Management Strategy

Retention policy also emerged as another theme when participants were responding to the questions around the effectiveness of talent management strategies at the Free State Department of Health. The findings of the current study revealed that most of the participants perceived that the department's retention policy was ineffective. Participants were concerned with the poor implementation of the policy and the rural nature of the Free State Department of Health. Many of them stated that the department has made a little effort to retain its employees over the years. In this regard, **CLIN3** observed:

> *"...There is not much that they have been doing to retain people...myself included, should I get the opportunity, I think I will even move from the Free State...majority of the people are even moving from government to private institutions...".*

Similarly, **NCLIN3** noted:

> *"...I do not think that the Free State Department of Health over the last 17 years has been able to retain their top talent or encouraged them to stay...I am emigrating...there you have it...".*

The present findings align with those of Oleribe et al. (2019), who found that inadequate human resources and a lack of funding or budgetary allocations are the main factors that affect healthcare systems in most African countries. In addition, Fahmi and Mohamed's (2020) found that talent management strategies and intention to depart from the organisation are interrelated.

Plessis (2010) also observed a considerable link between employees' perceptions of talent management procedures and their propensity to resign from their organisations.
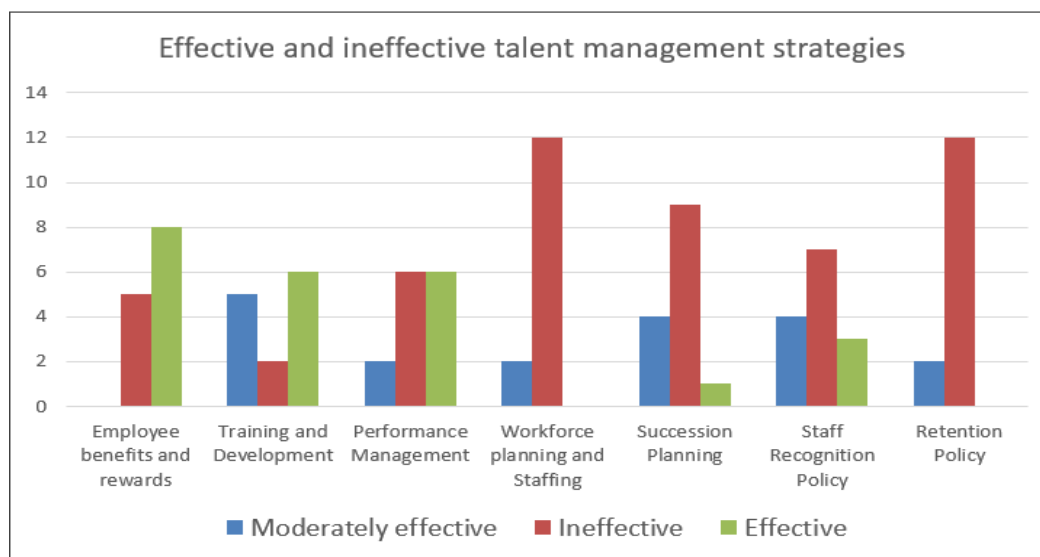

Figure 2: Summary of the effectiveness of talent management strategies at the Free State department of health

Source: Author's fieldwork (2023).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Every study has its own limitations; and the current study is no different. One of its limitations is that the study only examined two hospitals in the Free State Province to explore the effectiveness of talent management strategies. Another shortcoming of the current study was the usage of only a qualitative research approach and semi-structured interviews, which have their own limitations. A mixed method approach may have yielded more robust outcomes. Another limitation was the sample size. The current researcher purposively selected a sample of fifteen participants as he intended to select participants who were familiar with the phenomenon under study, and who had first-hand experience of the topic. Even though one participant declined to participate in the study, this number of valid participants did not cover the complete staff complement of these two hospitals and the whole the Free State Department of Health. Consequently, it may not be possible to generalise this study's findings to the entire Free State Department of Health. A bigger sample could have yield more robust and reliable outcomes. Hence, research of this nature could have been extended to more hospitals in the province, using a larger sample and for more robust data collection. Another limitation is that one of the participants requested a virtual interview and asked to have visual interaction hidden. Due to the inability to see her non-verbal cues and expressions, the quality of the collected data could have been affected. Another limitation was that some participants requested to use their native language, which added strain to the process of data transcription.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study has charted some, though not exhaustive, recommendations to improve talent management at the provincial department of health in the Free State. These recommendations are proposed to provide a roadmap for policymakers, managers, and HR practitioners to navigate the complex terrain of talent management.

Effective Workforce Planning and Staffing is urgently Needed

The current results underscore the critical need for effective workforce planning and staffing. Therefore, the Free State Department of Health should take a strategic approach to workforce planning and staffing to ensure a strong and agile workforce. To guarantee effective workforce planning and staffing, the department should analyse its workforce thoroughly to determine strengths, weaknesses, and future needs. Constant examination of an internal talent pipeline, industry trends, and departmental goals should all be part of this. Furthermore, use of forecasting and data analytics techniques to anticipate personnel needs and skill gaps should be employed to create a flexible staffing plan that supports their goals. This should include using contingent labour and diversifying the sources of talent.

Moreover, there is a need to foster an environment where learning and development are ongoing so that staff members can reskill and upskill in response to changing organisational needs. Additionally, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs should be made a significant priority to pull in and hold on to top talent from diverse backgrounds. In addition, a dynamic talent pipeline management system should be installed to reduce talent shortages, whilst optimizing workforce numbers. This includes programs for internal mobility and initiative-taking hiring. In addition, regular assessment and adjustment of talent management strategies should be done to ensure that they remain relevant for changing business needs and market conditions. Furthermore, recent technologies and data analytic tools could improve workforce planning and staffing decisions. Through the introduction of AI-powered technologies, predictive analytics, and the Persal system, the department can expedite talent acquisition, management, and development processes. By doing this, the department can guarantee a future-fit workforce that can enhance the department's competitiveness and sustainability.

An Enhanced Employee Retention Policy is Necessary

The Free State Department of Health should reassess and enhance its employee retention policy to address the challenges of retaining critical personnel, particularly in rural areas. In this case, the department should continue to offer competitive incentives such as free accommodation, bursaries, and a rural allowance to pull in and hold on to top talent. Additionally, the department should focus on improving working conditions, offering opportunities for advancement and growth, and fostering a favourable work environment to encourage employees to stay. Furthermore, to enhance the effectiveness of the retention policy, the department should conduct regular needs assessments and exit interviews to understand the reasons for employee turnover. This will assist in pinpointing areas in need of improvement and provide guidance for the development of targeted retention strategies.

A Need for more Effective Succession Planning is Important

There is a pressing need for the provincial department of health in the Free State to prioritise the development and implementation of a comprehensive succession planning strategy to ensure continuity and to minimize disruptions in healthcare service delivery. This plan should identify critical positions, determine potential talent, and provide training and development opportunities to prepare employees for future leadership roles. For this, the department should establish a clear policy on succession planning, communicate it to all employees, and ensure its effective implementation. To enhance the effectiveness of succession planning, the department should conduct regular talent assessments, identify knowledge gaps, and develop strategies to retain critical skills and expertise. This could include job-enrichment, on-the-job training, and job-rotation initiatives to guarantee that employees are ready to take on more duties and responsibilities.

Additionally, the department should review and address the issue of frozen posts, which has been cited as a major obstacle to effective succession planning. Additionally, the department should also create a tracking and assessment system to track the effectiveness of its succession planning strategy at the department. Lastly, it is important to conduct routine evaluations and assessments to pinpoint problem areas and guarantee that the succession planning strategy is aligned with the department's overall talent management objectives.

An Improved Recognition Policy is urgently needed

There is a severe need for the Free State Department of Health to improve its recognition policy to ensure that all employees, regardless of their profession or position, are recognised and rewarded for their contributions. This can be achieved by establishing a fair and transparent recognition system that acknowledges employees' hard work, skills, and expertise. Hence, the department should offer various forms of recognition such as cash bonuses, promotions, and certifications to motivate employees and boost their morale. To enhance the effectiveness of the recognition policy, the department should ensure that the criteria for recognition are well-defined and measurable. Moreover, the department should recognise employees' achievements publicly such as through awards ceremonies or public announcements to reinforce the value of their contributions. Additionally, the department should address the issue of unequal recognition and ensure that recognition is based on merit and performance rather than personal relationships or biases.

A Need for Stronger Performance Management System is Imperative

There is a critical need for the Free State Department of Health to strengthen its performance management system to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability. This can be achieved by adhering to established procedures, providing regular employee feedback, and ensuring that performance evaluations are based on actual performance. Accordingly, the department should address disparities in performance management while ensuring that poor performers' challenges are addressed, while good performers are well recognised and rewarded. Furthermore, the department should prioritise employee development and ensure that performance management feeds into training and development initiatives. This could support

building employee skills, knowledge, and confidence. To strengthen the effectiveness of performance management, the department should further ensure that regular training is provided to managers regarding the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS)., which will help to reduce arbitrariness and biases and ensure that performance management does not merely concentrate on incentives, but also helps to recognise talented and potential employees. By strengthening the performance management system, the department could promote a culture of excellence, accountability, and transparency.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the current results highlighted the vital role that effective talent management can play in the long-term sustainability of organisations. The widespread failure of organisations, including the Free State Department of Health, to implement robust talent management strategies, has resulted in the loss of experienced and skilled employees, thereby hindering effective management and operations. This study demonstrated how important it is for organisations to prioritise talent management, not only to maintain knowledge and skills, but also to attain sustainability and provide high-quality services. By addressing the gaps and challenges highlighted in this research, the department can develop and implement effective talent management strategies that foster a culture of excellence, growth, and retention, which ultimately results in improved organisational performance and sustainability.

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