Talent Management Strategies and Customer Delight : A Conceptual Study

** Annette Sonia Maben*
*** Rashmi Uchil*

Abstract

Managing talents of individuals has always been a challenge for business leaders. Delighting and engaging customers is also a key challenge faced by organizations in order to be competitive and sustain in the global market. This paper tried to analyze the concepts of talent and talent management for organizations. This paper developed a conceptual framework and aimed to review the various strategies for effective talent management and understanding its implications. It is an interdisciplinary approach in which strategic talent management is linked with organizational outcomes of customer delight. It tries to bring in an overall approach in terms of means and ends, the ends being customer delight. This paper tried to provide insights on concepts, strategies, and implications of talent management practices required for further empirical research.

Keywords : **talent, talent management, talent management strategies, customer delight**

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To gain competitive advantage in the present business scenario, an important element is the talent of individuals in the organizations. The traditional sources of gaining competitiveness are losing importance; whereas, human talent, a renewable resource, is a resource which cannot be easily copied or stolen by competitors (Dries, 2013 ; Iles, 1997) and results in a firm's competitive advantage. Talent means the sum total of all the experience, knowledge, skills, and behaviours that a person has and brings to work (Cheese, Thomas, & Craig, 2008). It refers to a set of competencies that, being developed and applied, allow the person to perform a certain role in an excellent way (Gallardo - Gallardo, Dries, & Gonzalez - Cruz, 2013). There is a growing need to strategize the management of talents in order to overcome the challenge of global competition and meet needs of changing demands of the customers; hence, talent management comes into aid.

Talent management has become more decisive because an organization's talent is an important factor which leads a downturn into long term sustainability and success (McDonnell, 2011). The term talent management gained momentum when a group of McKinsey consultants coined the phrase 'the war of talent' in 1997 (Axelrod, Handfield - Jones, & Michaels, 2002 ; Michaels, Handfield - Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). Since then, talent management has emerged as one of the key strategic issues facing managers in the twenty first century (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). In academics and in practice, there is vast scope for research in the area of talent management. This paper tries to analyze the different strategies which would assist in managing talented individuals, who in turn would be profitable to business firms by delighting customers.

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* *Research Scholar,* School of Management, National Institute of Technology Karnataka (NITK), Srinivasanagar Post, Surathkal, Mangalore -575 025, Karnataka. E-mail : annettechetan@gmail.com
** *Assistant Professor,* School of Management, National Institute of Technology Karnataka (NITK), Srinivasanagar Post, Surathkal, Mangalore -575 025, Karnataka. E-mail : rashmi.suchil@gmail.com
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Talent management has been defined as the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention, and deployment of those individuals with high potential who are of particular value to an organization (Davies & Davies, 2010; Thunnissen, 2016). Talent management needs to focus on leadership, workforce, and critical tasks (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). They also stated that talent management needs to fit the organizational culture, individual's perspective, organizational perspective, management capability, and HR policies. McDonnell (2011) asserted that strategies are the driving force for talent management. Strategic talent management is to assure that a supply of talent is available to align the right people with the right jobs at the right place and time based on strategic business objectives (Dries, 2013). Collings and Mellahi (2009) defined strategic talent management as a set of activities involved in the systematic identification of key positions, which contribute to an organization's competitive advantage, development of high performing talent pools to fill these roles, and to ensure their commitment to the organization. Ashton and Morton (2005) stated that talent management is a strategic system which enhances performance at all levels of the workforce and also helps individuals to reach their potential. The talent management life cycle consists of the following elements: talent acquisition, talent development, talent management, and talent assessment (Orlova, Afonin, & Voronin, 2015). The talent management strategies required to effectively manage starts from workforce planning and attracting the potential employees through talent acquisition strategies.

Talent acquisition refers to attracting potential talents, sourcing, and hiring the talented workforce required for attaining the predetermined business objectives. Cappelli (2008) stated that organizations need to shift from vacancy led recruitment to recruiting ahead of the curve and to strategically think about 'make and buy talent' in order to fulfill the shortfall of talent.

Deloitte (2017) stated that 81% of the global leaders agreed that talent acquisition is the most important challenge faced by them. One of the modern strategies for talent acquisition is the use of social media. According to statistics, as in 2018, there were 2.23 billion active users and the Linkedin report 2018 stated that there were 562 million users. Out of 2 billion millennials globally, 87 million are already on Linkedin (Statista, 2018). Millennials are always very keen towards their access to cutting - edge technology (Wetsch, 2012). This growing trend of users can be a vital tool for acquiring talented workforce through social media. The social media is regarded as highly individualized and engaging media for talent acquisition (Dutta, 2014). Social media is also a well - known tool for marketing. Brand image of a firm has a significant and direct impact on customer satisfaction and also on loyalty (Jana & Chandra, 2016). Though branding is a marketing concept, but it is also used widely as a talent acquisition strategy. Branding principles, when applied to management of human resources, are called employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The term employer branding from the perspective of managing talents is described as to how firms market their offerings to potential and present employees, communicate with them, and build loyalty both within and outside the firm, and also a clear picture as to what makes an organization different and desirable as an employer (Sokro, 2012). At present, organizations are ready to invest more in employee branding programs as it creates a positive image among the public at large. Employer branding creates a value proposition for employees which, in turn, contributes towards retention and engagement levels. Employer branding also provides for better employee referrals. Employee referral is advantageous for the potential employees during the job interviews and also for the organizations as the candidates have been pre-screened and prepared by the employees (Breaugh, 2008). Employee referral, though a traditional policy, is still very popular for acquiring a talented workforce (Linkedin Talent Solutions, 2016). Employee referral also creates word of mouth publicity in the society about the organization. According to Ignatova and Reilly (2018), the current trend is acquiring diversified talent in order to improve culture and organizational performance, which will motivate employees. Another recent trend is use of artificial intelligence in order to hire and source best talent by minimizing human bias (Ignatova & Reilly, 2018). Gamification in recruitment and selection is a recent strategy used, which enables the potential employees to be engaged. Once the talented workforce has been acquired effectively, the next challenge for HR professionals is developing the same based on organizational requirements.

To cope with the changing needs of technological advancements and the global environment, talent development becomes the key player in the organization. Kessels (2004) promoted that education, a traditional means of imparting information and providing skills, has become secondary and educational programmes in organizations shall emphasize learning as a means of improving knowledge productivity in organizations. The present development programmes should move from the process oriented and administration approach towards a strategic approach with the help of leadership roles (McDonnell, 2011). The leaders of the organization should motivate and encourage the learning culture among the employees by being mentors and coaches. Development of individuals should be made in a collaborative manner and also aim at building strong teams of performance. Talent development should be technologically oriented and strategically aligned to the organizational, team, and individual requirements. The development programmes should also be aligned with the career of individuals. The career planning of employees should be well designed in accordance to the organizational mission and vision. Recently, gamification has been the new trend in training and development. The meaning of gamification is that, it is a strategy which uses the mechanics and techniques of games in order to drive user behaviour by increasing self-contribution (Markopoulos, Fragkou, Kasidiaris, & Davim, 2015). It has been adopted by many practitioners and consultants as a motivational tool which drives engagement of employees and customers (Potnuru & Sahoo, 2016). Another motivational tool for employees is performance evaluation of their work.

Talent assessment focuses on understanding the skills of individuals, their behaviour, their working styles, and their hidden potentials in order evaluate them against set standards in accordance to the organizational objectives. Talent assessment is a known tool for providing inputs for identifying training and development needs and also for succession planning. Talent assessment is done in order to gain insights of individuals' skills, their behaviors, and their working style, which is evaluated based on set parameters that are important to the organization (Lombardi & Saba, 2010). The pressure for business leaders for talent assessment is due to the fact that aligning skills, behaviors, and styles with what the business needs is a critical piece of driving performance. The present employees' potential needs to be identified, determining the future talent requirements, and matching the skills of current staff, which provides for succession planning. Succession plans should be always updated on a yearly basis for accuracy as there are changes in the workforce due to turnover (Cappelli, 2008). The managers should be keen observers of employees in order to identify the hidden potentials of employees and recognize and appreciate highly talented individuals. For assessing the talents of individual members in an organization, the initial step is aligning the clearly set targets of every individual to the departmental targets and the departmental goals with the organizational goals. The skills of individuals should be mapped in accordance to the organizational goals, and the individual employee should be clearly informed about his/her job, and the targets expected. The managers have to observe the individuals in their teams and then assessment of employees should be done objectively. Talent assessment helps to identify the high performers and also talent gaps for each job role. The assessment of individuals should be directed towards providing the members of the organization rewards and incentives and salary increments. The talent assessment should be objective oriented, which helps the individual employee in climbing the career steps and also help him/her in his/her career development. There should be a clear analysis of the individual's critical thinking, problem - solving approach, leadership skills, interpersonal skills, alongside with the quality and quantity of job performance.

Lombardi and Saba (2010) suggested the following enablers for talent assessment of employees : behavioural based or personality type assessments, critical thinking or cognitive ability assessments, skill based assessments, 360-degree assessments, competency model, competency gap analysis, and assessment or test building software tools. The talented employees who are assessed as high performers have to be retained for higher productivity, better customer service, and for the growth of the firm.

Retention of talented employees has always been a challenge in the organization's functioning in the economy. Retention is a major priority for the organizations due to stiff competition and also lack of highly talented employees (Bhatnagar, 2007). Retention of talented employees leads to competitive advantage, and it is the human resource which brings about creativity and innovation in the firms. Premalatha (2016) advocated that retention of workers leads to cost-effectiveness and sustained profits. Culture such as respect for individuals, team work, and security fosters individual loyalty and long term commitment (Sheridan, 1992). The organization culture should promote learning and development and respect diversity among employees. It should promote innovation among employees and have open communication systems. The culture should promote employees to be agile and adapt to technological changes and other environmental changes required for the growth of the firm. Horwitz, Heng, and Quazi (2003) advocated that important factors which motivate and retain workers are challenging work, work culture permitting relative autonomy, celebrating achievements, sense of purpose and direction, willingness to share gains, people concern, effective communications, and acquisition of new skills for development. A clear career path will lead to retention of talented employees (Bagga, 2013). The career planning of employees has to focus on technical progressions and how work assignments link with the progression (Lee & Maurer, 1997). Cappelli (2000) stated that compensation shapes who leaves and stays in the organization. Compensation and benefits given to talented workforce should be attractive and in accordance to market standards. Employees are more loyal to a company when they believe in the management or those at the helm of affairs keep them informed about key issues. A free flow of communication from employees to management also encourages employees to provide feedback, opinions, and also contribute creative ideas. Communication is the base for building relations; hence, organizations should have a strong system of open communication. Cappelli (2008) suggested in maintaining relations with talented individuals, even after they leave the organization, as they might be potential employees for future if their interests change.

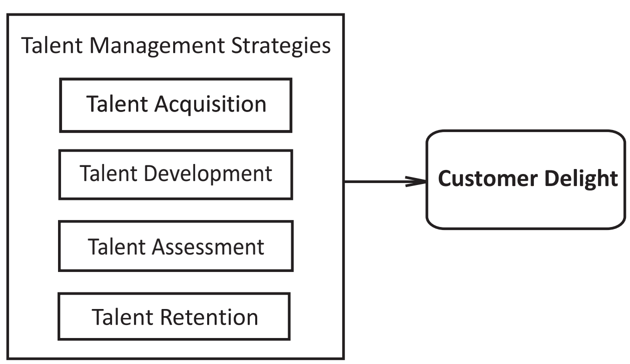
Work-life balance has gained a lot of attention during recent years. The levels of conflict between work and family will be impacted by the support level received by employees, workplace management, and industry norms (Deery, 2008). The organizations should ensure that policies are in place that restrain from invading the personal space and time of employees. Work and personal life balance maintenance is important in order to reduce stress levels and emotional exhaustion. Employees have to be treated with a humanistic approach. The role of a supervisor is a very important aspect in retention (Mehta, Kurbetti, & Dhankar, 2014). Leadership qualities have to be very effective in order to motivate and retain employees. The leaders have to be empathetic and understand the needs of employees. Needs of employees are multiple such as family, economic, cultural, social, political, career, individual, community, social status, religion, which are current and future (Ramlall, 2004). These needs have to be identified and streamlined with organizational objectives in order to motivate employees. The leaders also have to identify talents of employees in order to motivate them for future roles. The employees have to feel valued in order to be retained effectively. Cappelli (2000) remarked that job design and customization help in tailoring jobs to employee needs.

Employees who are actively engaged are dynamic and have increased loyalty in the organization (Mehta, Kurbetti, & Dhankar, 2014). The main elements of talent management have to be strategically aligned to the organizational objectives, which would help in gaining competitive advantage. Organizations have to strategically plan to introduce policies and activities in order to engage employees effectively. High level of engagement of employees leads to reduced turnover (Bhatnagar, 2007). Organizations need engaged employees as they contribute in creating value to the organizations by being cognitively, emotionally, and physically involved in their work leading to higher performance (Kahn, 1990; Lee, Kwon, Kim, & Cho, 2016; Shaheen, Zeba, & Mohanty, 2018). Engaged employees are more confident and positive at their workplace. Engaged, positive, and confident employees not only keep themselves but also their customers happy and positive through their optimistic outlook and efficacious work behavior (Shaheen et al., 2018). An employee who is friendly and provides service with a smile, who is fully dedicated has been pointed to be the key for success in service firms (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994).

It is stated that proximity and interaction between employees and customers contribute to customer delight (Barnes, Ponder, & Hopkins, 2015). According to Arnold, Reynolds, Ponder, and Lueg (2005), interpersonal factors are one of the most important factors leading to customer delight. Interpersonal factors relate to the interactions between employees and customers. The customers' positive experiences with the service levels are dependent on the services delivered by the organization. Engaged employees are highly motivated, immersed, and dedicated to their work and thus can be one of those vital sources in providing a high level of customer service (Barnes, Collier, & Robinson, 2014; Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005). An employee who is involved and engrossed in the workplace, in his/her case, it is expected that the number and quality of interactions with customers is more (Homburg & Stock, 2004) and he/she is also involved in the highest level of customer relations, which in turn would exceed the customer's expectations (Salanova et al., 2005) and delight them. Customer delight refers to the positive state of mind which is a result of exceeding customer expectations by the organization (Arnold et al., 2005 ; Oliver, Rust, & Varki, 1997 ; Shaheen et al., 2018). Customers are the most important stakeholder to any business (Dubey, Bajpai, & Guha, 2016), delighting them would lead to them being loyal to the firm. Organizations also focus on maintaining existing customer database and increase loyalty through customer relationship management (Naidu & Ponduri, 2015). Employee behaviors such as self-perception, team player, interpersonal skills, and patience have an impact on customers (Islam & Alam, 2009).

Talent management strategies result in creating a positive state of mind and also help in engaging employees of the firm to provide higher quality of customer services. If the leaders of the organizations would align talent management strategies to their overall objectives, then an organization can increase its productivity and motivate employees who, in turn, would delight and engage customers. The Figure 1 is the conceptual framework for the study which depicts the relationship between talent management strategies and customer delight.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Conclusion

At present, when there is huge demand for talented individuals, retaining and engaging the talented employees is the need of the hour for global managers. Global business leaders have realized the importance of talent in organizations. Acquiring talent is the start of the process, while maintaining and retaining the acquired talent is the greatest challenge faced by organizations today. The strategies discussed would enable them to manage talent effectively, leading to effective operations and also customer delight.

Limitations of the Study and the Way Forward

The scope of this study is limited only to a conceptual overview. This framework is more adaptable for larger organizations. There is much scope for empirical research in the area of talent management (Collings & Mellahi, 2009 ; Dries, 2013 ; Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier, 2013). The role of technology in talent management is immense and can be an interesting area for further research.

In culmination, talent management strategies aligned with organizational vision and mission will provide for effective management of talented workforce which, in turn, leads an organization towards sustainability and being competitive by delighting customers.

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About the Authors

Annette Sonia Maben is a Research Scholar at School of Management, National Institute of Technology Karnataka (NITK). She has an experience of 4+ years in the corporate sector as an HR professional and has an experience of a decade in academics. Currently, she is pursuing doctoral studies at National Institute of Technology Karnataka (NITK). Her areas of interest are talent acquisition, employee engagement, talent development, and organizational culture.

Dr. Rashmi Uchil is an Assistant Professor at School of Management, National Institute of Technology Karnataka (NITK). She has nearly 3.6 years of service in the corporate sector as well as 18 years of experience in academics. She is presently working as an Assistant Professor at National Institute of Technology Karnataka (NITK). Her areas of interest are acquisitions, international finance, and cross border acquisitions.