

Developing Talent Potential for a Dynamic Business Environment: A Case of Three Zambian Public Institution Employees

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ABSTRACT

As institutions plan for survival in an ever-changing business environment, they need to have employees that can not only perform exceptionally but also develop into future leaders called talent potentials. Therefore, the institution needs to assess the required talent potential according to its current and future strategic needs. The results of the assessment should guide the search, recruitment, and selection for the required talent potential. Once the institution has acquired this talent, the institution should retain it and develop it at all the different levels. This paper explores the talent management cycle from assessment to management of the talent with the institution with the hope of managing talent potential through the assessment of three specific individuals from three different business environments in the Zambian public sector. It also draws to the attention of how nature and future needs of the specific institution affects the specific strategic talent potential that the institution would require in order to adapt in an ever-changing business environment.

Keywords: Talent Potential, Dynamic Business Environment, Strategic Objectives, Recruitment Process, Talent Retention, Talent Pool and Leadership

ASSESSMENT OF TALENT POTENTIAL

The definition of Talent Potential is the ability of an employee to successfully take-up a role that is above the current position. This position can even be at the same level as the current position of the employee but the move could be because of the institution's focus on archiving a strategic objective (Parrack, 2017).

The assessment of employees is usually through the use of performance appraisals whose main goal is to determine whether an employee is performing according to the expectations. Most of the managers conduct these performance appraisals consistently according to the expectations (MCCARTHY, 2018). The only problem is the performance appraisals is they only accurately measure the performance skills but do not accurately assess personality traits that are necessary for determining talent potential (Ahmad, Ather, & Hussain, 2014).

The following three personalities moved up to new positions as the institutions were taking different strategic direction.

John Mbewe (Manager IT Projects)

Established by the National Pension Scheme Act No. 40 of 1996 of Parliament in February 2000, the National Pension Scheme Authority (NAPSA) was formed against the inevitable risk arising from retirement and death with the aim of providing income security for those in formal employment in Zambia. The Scheme has over time evolved to include those that are in the informal sector as long as they are registered with NAPSA. As the number of subscribers and beneficiaries of the scheme increase, the National Pensions Scheme Authority (NAPSA) has been implementing strategies to optimise its operation. Information Systems are therefore at

the centre of its strategic direction. NAPSA, had in past been using a number of Information systems in different departments with very little communication or exchange of information between them. If NAPSA was to manage the growth of its clients coming from diverse industries, there was need for the institution to implement an integrated information system that could easily adapt identifies but also the unidentified future needs the authority might require (NAPSA, 2017).

John Mbewe at the time was a Senior Business Analyst in the IT Department and was already actively assisting on working a helping adapt the current system to the need requirement of the business. Therefore, he was appoint a substantive position as Project Manager for the project that ran from 2015 to 2017. During the project, he was able to work with the different consultants engaged at different stages of the project. He was able to coordinate the gathering and verification of the requirements of the system (using his experience as Business Analyst) from the fellow employees within the organisation. Finally, he was able to interact and report to Senior Management on the proceeding related to the project. He faced a number of challenges on the project but found ways to overcome them and learn from them. At the end of the project, NAPSA management focused on the strategic direction for developing more IT solutions the institution would require in the future and given the diverse nature of its operations, created the position of Manager IT Projects (Parrack, 2017). The institution appointed John Mbewe in that position as he demonstrated the abilities during his substantive appointment as Project Manager.

Patricia Mwansa Chileshe (Senior Lecturer)

Patricia was a trained mathematics teacher are Kitwe Girls Secondary School, in Kitwe, Zambia. She decide to pursue a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science at the Copperbelt University. After completing a degree studies she continued to teach at the secondary school since the Ministry of Education did not have possible placements for her qualification. However, she applied to lecture on computing course at the Copperbelt University on a part time basis.

In 2015, the Ministry of Education declared that computer lesson should taught at all levels in schools starting with secondary school (MWAMBASI, 2015). Therefore, there was need for skilled teachers to take these computer lessons. The ministry quickly realised that it needed to beef up on lecturers that can deliver the computer training in the existing teachers training colleges. Therefore, it decided to check for teachers that were already in the system that could promote to these positions, possessed Bachelor's Degree qualification in the areas of Computer Science or Information Technology and had the experience in teaching or lecturing of course boarder on personality traits. Therefore, The Ministry of Education promoted Patricia to position of Lecturer, placed her at the new Mukuba University for Teachers, and later elevated to the position of Senior Lecturer.

Serah Beza Mbewe (Senior Distance Education Coordinator)

Serah is a Computer Scientist by profession and her original engagement by ZCAS was as an ICT Consultant under the Research and Consultancy Department. Since the consultancy job were not continuous, the institution expected her to take up lecturing roles assisting the ICT department especially on programming courses.

ZCAS was initially established by the ZCAS Act No. 1 of 1989 of Parliament to train accountants in Zambia. Its original setup was sustainable for a number of years but noticed the drop in the market for professional training and more need for academic programmes. In 2013, with the focus on increasing the enrolment numbers, ZCAS introduced academic business programmes

to its profile. The expectation in Zambia is that academic programmes run on three modes (Full Time, Part time and Distance Education (DE)) (infoapo, 2018). Therefore, in August 2014, ZCAS introduce the academic programmes on DE under the Directorate of Research, Consultancy and Distance Education (DRCDE).

The introduction of DE at ZCAS required a person who could not only coordinate the DE affairs at that moment at its introduction but also handle the expected changes and challenges as the institution introduced more programmes on DE and the number of students increase. The person needed to be a team player because the programmes that would run on DE were coming from different department under other department heads. The mode of study would also require the use of on ELearning platform, so the person needed to have sufficient IT skills to configure and manage the courses and students on the platform. The person also needed to have people skills to interact appropriately with the students on this mode of study.

Therefore, ZCAS promoted Serah to the position of Senior ICT Consultant with extra responsibility on DE and ELearning Coordinator. In 2016, ZCAS observed that there was a clear growth in the number of students on the academic programmes as compared to the consultancy job. Therefore, viewing DE as the institution's strategic growth area, ZCAS placed Serah in the position of Senior DE Coordinator with more emphasis on DE activities and only help on consultancy job when required. Furthermore, in 2019, the entire DE department was detached from the DRCDE and led to the establishment of the School of Open, Distance and eLearning (ODEL) and Serah's position was changed to Assistant Dean ODeL.

TALENT POTENTIAL AND THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Chambers et.al in 1998 produced an article, the "War for Talent" that highlighted the shortage of impending shortage of talent on the labour market. The labour market has enough candidates with the needed competences for most of the jobs that are required in an institution. However, the institution requires a few individuals have the talent possess the required competence but can also adapt easily in a dynamic business environment, make decisions as required in the face of uncertainty and navigate through situations that are ever changing (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin, & III, 1998).

Therefore, the challenge that institutions have is to be able to locate, assess, recruit and retain those important individual that it required on its bid for survival in the face a still competitive market that is also constantly hunting for the same talent (IGI_Global, 2018).

Attracting and Searching for Talent

With survival in main institutions are to have a brand that talented individuals should be attracted to and want to be a part of as we are now operating in a candidate led hiring market. With the view of institutions, surviving the dynamic and competitive there is need for talent, which are usually in short supply. The problems or successes of every institution can either attract or cause the talent potential not want to work for that institution (TalkingTalent, 2018).

The institutions mainly require individual that can immediate provide the required skill for the need at hand and the correct knowledge that would yield immediate results. For instance when NAPSA needed someone to manage the Integrated Information Systems, had to identify internal talent potential so yield immediate results using an IT professional who already had institutional knowledge that was required for the successful implementation of the project, hence the appointment of John Mbewe. However, every institution should be able to attract new talent. Therefore, the ability for an institution to attract talent is an indication the

institution is competitive on the market. The inability to recruit talent successfully can be a distraction and usually puts most operations on halt (AHRI, 2018).

In addition, the institution will require a great understand of its strategic goals that will in turn guide the institution of the needed talent. The institution will then use both the strategic needs and the required talent to develop job description that will form part of the job adverts (Lever, 2018). In some case, the developed guide can simply help the institution identity the needed talent among the current pool of employees within the institution as in the case of the John, Patricia and Serah discussed earlier (Entrepreneur_Media_Inc, 2018).

However, if the institution does not have the required talent within, it will need to find the talent on the job market. The avenues for searching for talent are headhunting, employee referrals, using the industry contacts that we have gathered through sharing business cards, having a careers page on the institutional website, using online recruitment websites, maintained contacts of previously interested candidates and publicity on the job market (Entrepreneur_Media_Inc, 2018) (Lever, 2018).

Recruitment and Selection of Talent

The recruitment of talent is assessing the current applicants for fitness the job at hand and selecting the best candidate that will help the institution achieve its strategic objectives (AHRI, 2018).



Figure 1: Depicting the Talent among the others (hrm-storitve, 2018)

The recruitment process will usually require the all-important screening of the applicant's resumes, phone screens and finally conducting interviews with well-structured and unstructured questions that are in line with the needed talent that will achieve the institution's strategic needs. Though it may seem like a lot of effort, this ensures that all the needed competences that and that you are can include certain processes, like using the most popular and recognised recruitment agencies that will cause a certain kind of candidate that the institution would like to attract (HEATHFIELD, 2018).

The institution uses the recruitment process to identify the appreciate candidate, usually the first stage, that will effectively execute the roles and responsibilities as require but there is to assess the required personality traits (second stage) that will enable the candidate to adapt the expected changes in the job and according to the market demands (hrm-storitve, 2018). Therefore, the earlier activities will require addition activities that will help assess the candidate's personality (Ahmad, Ather, & Hussain, 2014). These activities include, following up on references to verify the information that the candidate provides in the resume and application. Furthermore, there is need to carry out psychometric tests to identify the personality traits that the candidate possesses. The institution can also use the candidate's personality profile on social media network websites to verify the personality traits. After gathering all this information, a follow-up interview to verify all the other information that

would have come up during the initial interview, psychometrics tests and follow ups with the listed references (AHRI, 2018).

Then finally the selected candidate will be informed and an offer delivered. If the person accepts the offer, the successful candidate will then be the clients and the final decision communicated to the institution and all the stakeholders (hrm-storitve, 2018). The recruitment process requires detailed refinement as it is a long a tedious and costly process. The institution should not be find itself in a position of going back through the same process because the wrong candidate was employee for the job (HEATHFIELD, 2018).

STRATEGIES FOR RETAINING TALENT POTENTIAL

A lot costs and hustle go into the attracting, locating, recruiting and selecting the required talent potential for an institution that will enable it to achieve its strategic objective. Therefore, if an institution manages to identify or employ the right talent potential, there will be need for the institution to retain it. If the talent potential feels that other competitor institution can offer better conditions of service, it is very like that the potential can leave for greener pasture (Lattimer, 2016). Furthermore, the high employee turnover sends a negative signal on the market indicating that there are deeper internal problems with the institution (Lattimer, 2016).

A lot of research as gone into developing standard tools and frameworks that institutions can use to retain their talent potential the one shown in Figure 2 below (Frey & Steckstor, 2006);

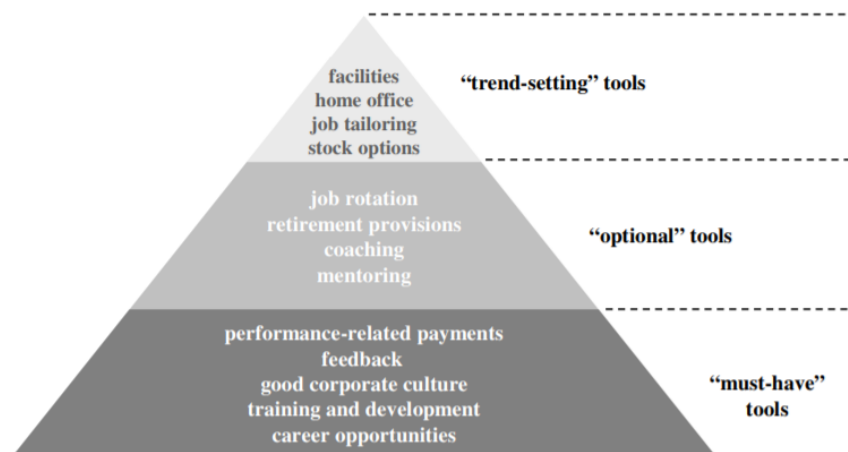


Figure 2: The three groups of retention tools (Frey & Steckstor, 2006)

However, it is difficult to apply these tools and frameworks in different institutions because each institution is unique in its nature and operation leading to different strategic needs as noted in the three public institutions discussed earlier (NAPSA, Ministry of Education and ZCAS). The institution therefore, will need to provide a guide that it will use to ensure that it has the right and sufficient talents at all times (Keller & Meaney, 2017). These strategies could be influenced by the following factors;

1. The employees should be engaged to harness the methods for providing and obtaining feedback. Hence, having communication that in both directions (Lattimer, 2016).
2. The institution should make every effort to make the employees feel a part of it by having mission and vision that they can easily relate to and motivate them contribute to adding more value. The institution should couple this with an environment that employees can enjoy and be comfortable (Lattimer, 2016).

3. The culture of loyalty that will encourage and ensure the talent that if one works hard, he/she would be elevated to high-level positions as noted with the three employees from different public institutions. This will encourage the employees to be more innovative and even become even better talent potentials (Lattimer, 2016).
4. The institution should have a clear policy for the employees to rise through the rise based on performance and talent potential so that the high flyers have something to look forward (Lattimer, 2016). This is opposed to what was noted in the three cases where the promotion was necessitated by the changes in the strategic direction of each institution.
5. The establishment of contracts that have extra benefits. The idea is to encourage the employees to invest more time and effort in creating value that will attract extra benefits (Lattimer, 2016). These benefits should be in form of bonuses and recognition like Labour Day awards that emphasise how much value the institution attaches to great achievement (Thomas, 2018).
6. Provide for employees with mentors that will prepare the employee and in some case help harness the talent potential that the employee possesses. The institution can use these mentoring programmes to help employee start focusing those personality traits that help align his/her work with the institution's culture and values. (The_Recruiting_Training_Corner, 2018).
7. The institution should invest in training and development that focuses not only on competences (though equally important) but those that help harness the talent potential. These should be not only be done locally but also exposing the employees to other cultures and environments that to help highlight the possible dynamics of a business environment. This will boost employee motivation and provide a hint in the belief that the institution has in him/her given investment in his/her development (The_Recruiting_Training_Corner, 2018).
8. Do not lose focus on the importance of the emotional intelligence of the employees. When they start feeling as if the institution is not does not care about their feelings (Entrepreneur_Media_Inc, 2018).

The factors should help the institution develop the motivation of the employees that eventually leads to employees remaining a particular job. According the McClelland, employees are motivated through three main needs namely achievement, affiliation and power. Though every employee can possess all these needs, the needs will exist in varying degrees and not all the three needs can fully define all the employees. Talent potential is not immune to the needs for motivation and so they expect it (Moriarty, 2014). However, the main challenge for the institution is to assess the motivation needs of its employees and include some of the factors that apply to providing for the motivation need and in the right context.

However, the institution cannot eliminate the possibility for an employee to leave the institution regardless of the attraction or retention strategies that are place. The institution should simply ensure that it provides the best conditions that make it the best employer of choice. If an employee still leaves despite this, the institution and the employee will part away without any hard feelings (Lattimer, 2016).

TALENT POTENTIAL AT DIFFERENT LEVELS IN AN ORGANISATION

As institutions strive to survive the current competition, their main challenge is to ensure that they have the right competences and the right talent potential at each level of the organisation. Therefore, institutions need to have a precise process that identifying and evaluating high potentials that have just the right potentials required at the right level needed in the institution. This is because the institution needs every level to effectively complete all its tasks

for it to contribute to the overall goal of the institution (AonHewitt, 2013). The pool of talent potential tends to reduce because the needs move beyond the skills of an individual as we move to the top as demonstrated in the in Figure 3 below;

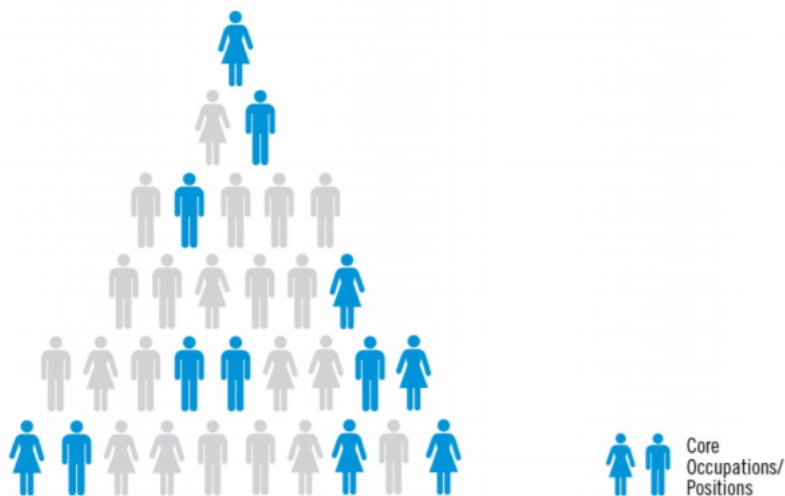


Figure 3: The Pool of Talent through the different Levels in an Institution (AonHewitt, 2013).

This is also because there also more employee at lower levels in the institution as compared to the top executives. Therefore, institutions have the duty to invest in the creation of in high potential according to the needs of each level and ensure that the institution can adapt quickly in this ever-changing business environment. The institution should provide for enough forerunners for a strong pipeline of potential in preparation for the future. There is need for the institution to talent reviews that will enable it identify and select the correct potential for at specific levels in the institution (AonHewitt, 2013).

The definition for the talent potential requires a variety of inputs and the extent to which the institution needs them help to align the employee potential at each level appropriately. These inputs board on the combination and measurement of performance and personality traits needed for each leader in the particular level as shown in Figure 4 below (Hudson_Global, 2018).



Figure 4: Leadership needs at different levels of the Institution (Hudson_Global, 2018)

Each type of leader at each level within the institution as demonstrated in Figure 4, with require a different degree of skill and personality traits that will allow the employee to fulfil the roles and responsibilities for that particular job. According to Timothy A Judge, in a

research conducted in 2002, the certain personality traits that are required at different levels and leadership positions in the institution. This research was particularly with reference to the “Big Five” personality traits, which are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Lebowitz, 2016). With reference to Figure 4 the required combination of skills and personality traits are as follows:

1. **Leading Self:** The focus of the employee at this level is the technical ability to accomplish the assigned tasks. The assessment of the employee focuses on performance and following instructions. Such employees are neurotic and are not usually likely to become leaders in the institution (Lebowitz, 2016) (Hudson_Global, 2018).
2. **Leading Others and Leading Managers:** These levels require both technical ability and some personality traits. These employees are great team players and every effective in organising and coordination activities with the institution. Therefore, the personality traits they should possess are conscientiousness and agreeableness (Lebowitz, 2016) (Hudson_Global, 2018).
3. **Leading Divisions and Leading the Organisation:** These levels have greater emphasis on personality traits than technical competences. Furthermore, the dominating personality traits that the employee should be both an extrovert and open to experiences, which closely linked in assessing the strength of a leader. According to Justin Sullivan “In business settings, openness to experience is an important predictor of leadership” (Lebowitz, 2016).

The institution therefore, requires a specific exercise that will categorise all the employees in using a similar model that aligns each employee using the required competences and the personality traits according to the potential it needs to achieve its current strategies and those that are coming in future. The main objective is the institution being able to predict the potential demands each level in the near future and having the right potential readily available when need arises. These potentials are not only for placing employee in higher positions, but also potential that can work across different functions with the same level. Therefore, the identification of these potentials should be the work of all decision makers within the institution and not only the Human Resource Department (Parr, 2018).

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