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Talent Management: Hiring and Developing Engaged Employees

Chuck O'Bryan and Anne Marie Casey

Abstract

Talent management, which includes intentional work design, leadership development, and employee engagement, is a growing trend in the world of commerce, both domestically and globally. This article provides a review of the literature on talent management and explores ways in which this human resource management concept might be applicable to higher education and libraries.

Introduction

The top trends in the field of human resources (HR) in the United States (US) as forecasted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)¹ have remained relatively constant since 2003. US human resource management (HRM) specialists tend to emphasize domestic issues related to healthcare and legal challenges.² This emphasis differs from trends found in the international arena, where HRM professionals identified the following as their key priorities for 2013 and beyond:³

1. Managing talent
2. Improving leadership development
3. Enhancing employee engagement

Granting that there are a multitude of challenging issues under the umbrella of HRM, managing talent and enhancing employee engagement have been among the top four key priorities for HR leaders in the US since 2008 with improving leadership development (LD) coming to the forefront beginning in 2010.⁴ These three international trends have domestic

implications as the global competition for jobs and talent accelerates, economic growth expands in emerging markets and as students and workers gain cross-cultural savvy. Even with their importance as identified through HRM surveys since 2008, managing talent, improving LD, and enhancing employee engagement have not been considered together as a continuum within the context of higher education or libraries.

Friedman writes that we live in a time when the world has become flat.⁵ He makes the case that as commerce becomes more globally connected, the world becomes flat and interconnected; issues on one side of the globe may directly impact those on the other. Friedman focused primarily on business in his writings, however as all aspects of life are becoming increasingly globalized. With expanding technologies, constant human migration and changing demographics in the United States, the impact on libraries is becoming more common. According to a workforce study conducted by the American Library Association, approximately 30 per cent of credentialed librarians would be over 60 by 2015, implying substantial retirements on the horizon.⁶ Although the same report projects a similar infusion of new librarians into the profession, the potential loss of a veteran knowledge base could cause disruption without some talent management. In addition, “knowledge workers [including library employees] are incredibly mobile today, and if they are not feeling fulfilled or see opportunities for growth in their current work, they will go elsewhere.”⁷

Literature Review

Talent Management

Talent Management may be viewed as the overarching trend, encompassing both LD and employee engagement. Schiemann defines talent as “the collective knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences, values, habits and behaviors of all labor that is brought to bear on the

organization's mission."⁸ The scholarly literature identifies at least three distinct interpretations of talent management (TM). First, it is simply a new term for describing traditional HR practices.⁹ Traditional HR practices, similar to Schiemann's definition of talent, include identification of institutional need and the recruitment of employees, but fail to differentiate between "strategic roles within organizations over non-strategic ones."¹⁰

Secondly, TM can also refer to succession-planning practices. As Maltais writes, "One of the reasons companies invest in talent-management solutions is to make informed, data-driven workforce decisions and align talent with business objectives,"¹¹ which includes planning for the future as employees retire. TM practices need to be aligned with the institution's mission and vision at the forefront of all decisions being made and help to create a competitive advantage.¹² Because of the strategic nature of TM, these procedures need to "focus on hiring, developing, retaining, and engaging faculty, staff, and administrators who help the institution attain its goals."¹³ At present, talent management terminology and strategies are scarce within library literature, yet the library field is not alone. "Industry surveys show that more than half of all organizations do not have an integrated talent-management strategy."¹⁴

Last, TM should include the identification and management of talented employees currently in an organization's employ. Although early identification and engagement with employees is critical, this alone is not enough. The 2012 ASHE Higher Education Report article by Evans and Chun, lays out a "framework for strategic talent management in higher education with four focal areas of the employment experience for faculty and staff: (1) recruitment, outreach, and hiring; (2) affirmative action and diversity; (3) total rewards; and (4) employee engagement."¹⁵ It is no longer enough to just fill positions, staff classes and keep the lights on. "Talent acquisition through continuous sourcing, recruitment, and outreach processes is vital to institutional sustainability and organizational renewal in the public research university."¹⁶ Schachter echoes this in her advice to library managers to practice good hiring methods and

effective performance management as well as budgeting annually for staff development programs, discovering what motivates staff, and engaging in retention and succession planning strategies.¹⁷

Schiemann builds on the work of Evans and Chun with what he calls the *talent lifecycle*. “This ranges from building a talent brand that attracts the right talent to acquiring, onboarding, developing, managing, retaining and even recovering talent.”¹⁸

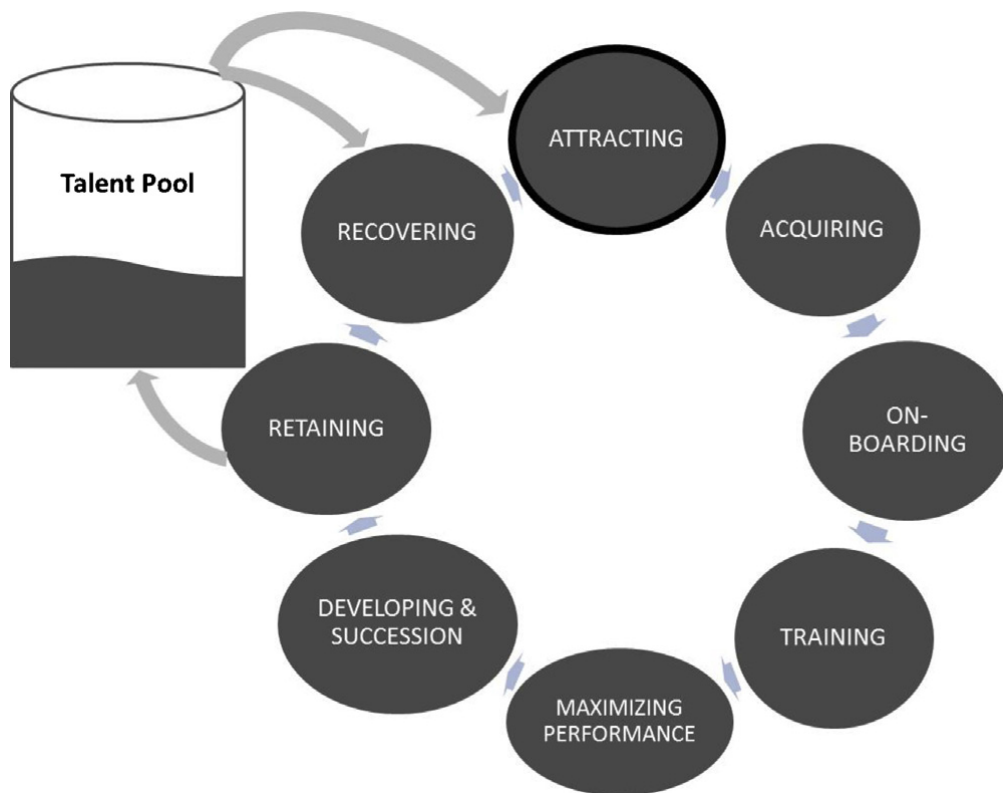


Figure 1. Talent lifecycle

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“The talent lifecycle is the path upon which most people interact with the organization. Talent management is the way in which the talent lifecycle is managed.”¹⁹ Thus, in the broadest

sense, the lifecycle begins prior to hiring, continues throughout one's career and incorporates both LD strategies and employee engagement themes throughout. The unique element found in Schiemann's talent lifecycle is the recovering stage. Through a variety of social media such as LinkedIn and alumni groups from an organization, outreach and "recovery" can sometimes be made of those inopportune employee departures.

Schachter urges libraries to adopt the components of TM to plan for the anticipated talent shortage as larger numbers of aging librarians and staff retire.²⁰ Hawthorne touches on TM, describing it as the broad category in which the subject of her article, succession planning & management (SPM) fits. She defines succession planning as a formal activity in which an organization plans to have the right people in place for the right job at the right time, while succession management is the implementation of the plan. Successfully paired, SPM initiatives anticipate organizational needs and develop a pipeline of talent before the need arises.²¹ In addition, references to TM appear in articles focused on the importance of succession planning and LD in libraries.²²

Leadership Development

A key element of talent management within Schiemann's talent lifecycle involves developing.²³ Leadership development through skills acquisition is no longer sufficient for today's challenges. The paradigm of skills acquisition in LD is shifting "from approaches that are predominantly concerned with building skills to that of emotional intelligence and mindset development."²⁴ Goleman found that the attributes traditionally associated with leadership—"intelligence, toughness, determination, and vision, are insufficient. Truly effective leaders are also distinguished by a high degree of emotional intelligence, which includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill."²⁵

Mendenhall asserts that due to the "extreme complexity" of globalization, leaders need

to delineate “this global complexity into four mutually influential dimensions: ambiguity, interdependence, diversity, and fast flux.” Ambiguity refers to the difficulty of making sense of mountains of data; interdependence means everything is connected; diversity has grown exponentially due to the international workforce; fast flux refers to the instability created by a rapidly changing environment.²⁶ Kennedy, Carroll and Francoeur comment, “This calls for leadership development that understands leadership as responsive to emerging situations, calling for more dynamic, contextualized approaches.”²⁷ Indeed, custom individualized training, focusing on strengths and recruiting the best to begin with while growing talent at all levels of management were successful practices found in highly developed, corporate LD programs in India by Vohra, et al.²⁸

Leadership development has been a theme in library literature for some time. Formal leadership development programs (LDPs) are numerous and range from state association programs to national workshops.²⁹ Herold compiled an assessment of 18 of these programs, which reveals a variety of approaches and learning models.³⁰ In the library literature, LD is often coupled with succession planning.³¹ It is also viewed as a method to enable substantive cultural change³² and a renewed commitment to the organization.³³

Organizations are increasingly looking for those small things that invigorate their staff while contributing to their overall competitive advantage. Enhancing leadership opportunities for key staffers may add to that competitive edge while helping employees realize their leadership potential.³⁴ It may also enable significant planned-for organizational change.³⁵ Cohen argues, “Whether it is anecdotal stories or fact-based research of how great leaders built up their organizations or sustained strong business results, there aren’t many arguments against the value and impact of solid leadership.”³⁶

As such, there are a number of LDPs noted in the literature. Miller and Desmarais present a five-part, best practices framework for LD that may be used when setting up an institutional LD program: aligning LD with strategic initiatives, getting the support of key stakeholders, assessing the impact of culture, linking LD to other HR processes, and sustaining development through the support of others.³⁷ In addition to these best practices, Dentico advises using an integral leadership perspective when viewing the leadership landscape: “1) the leader—an embodied individual who performs a role in a system, 2) leading—the activities that leaders use in their role, and 3) leadership—the actual practice of leadership within a specific real context that includes culture, systems, processes and technologies with a stated goal of bringing about significant or transforming change”.³⁸ Industry has realized that once the employee, in particular the ‘talented’ employee is in place, the individual needs opportunities to grow and serve a larger role in directly impacting the organization and its success. Leadership development is strongly proposed as a source of sustained competitive advantage that leads to increased firm performance.³⁹

The significance of another framework, developing leadership talent (DLT) DLT comes through its strategic planning approach to LD. The first step involves a strategic assessment of key challenges ahead for the organization. Next, in order to meet and mitigate these challenges, the organization needs to specify the type of competencies that are needed or can be developed with existing staffing.

Step three builds on step two by moving to the individual level and identifying specific leadership skills needing to be refined and developed. Global corporations oftentimes offer opportunities for key staff members through “the use of global mobility as a means of global leadership development.”⁴⁰ Global mobility refers to the movement of individuals in leadership roles from their home or institutional base to corporate businesses in other countries. The challenges around an individual’s relocation to another branch, country, culture and social

network can be daunting. In moving these potential leaders into challenging new roles worldwide, the hope is that their potential, skill sets and abilities will improve thus contributing to the greater good of the institution.

Step four crosses over into the area of talent management. Specifically, who is capable of moving to the next levels of leadership? This assessment seeks to identify the individual with high potential. "They are generally identified as those who are smarter, more strategic thinkers, with a certain constellation of personality factors which include strong interpersonal skills, and perhaps above average interpersonal sensitivity and sociability."⁴¹

Step five deals with "organizational capacity and individual competency."⁴² Collings reflects further upon the nature of individual contributions and organizational performance using the lens of human capital theory. This theory places an individual's skills, competencies or characteristics that contribute to their productivity within the context of capital. Collings defines human capital as "the value-generating potential of employee knowledge, skills and abilities."⁴³ Hunter, Schmidt and Judiesch reason, "The potential value of human capital increases with job complexity, with higher performance in complex jobs associated with greater differences in human capital."⁴⁴

Step six involves implementation and sustainability of programs while step seven brings in the evaluation component. It is clear to see that employee attrition can be disruptive to internal social networks; it is also possible that similar disruption can occur through ill-conceived LDPs, without the employee departing the organization.

Libraries are beginning to view the concept of human capital as important in a field undergoing tremendous change due to the aging of the profession, ongoing technological innovation, and changing clientele, often from other countries or cultures. White explores ways in which industries assess human capital and encourages libraries to consider similar strategies

since staff costs constitute the largest part of most library budgets.⁴⁵

Town proposes a framework for assessing human capital in academic and research libraries based on four dimensions considered necessary and sufficient to measure the value employees add to the enterprise.⁴⁶ The first dimension is capacity, or the volume of human capital, which provides a surrogate for the work that they can produce. The next one is capability, which is the ability of the library to perform or achieve based on the collective ability of the employees. The third element is the climate of affect, which relates to how people feel about the work itself and the work environment. And the final dimension is the culture of momentum. Town explains that a key shared value of libraries today is “responsiveness to change, and this implies the need for a fundamental cultural assumption that change is both positive and essential, and needs to be achieved at a competitive pace.”⁴⁷

Also investigating the concept of human capital in libraries, Corral describes ongoing research that is examining the use of strategy maps to articulate the competencies of subject liaison librarians. Her study explores the feasibility and utility of employing the concept of intellectual capital to articulate the assets required of liaison librarians.⁴⁸ She concludes that the framework “should enable information professionals to articulate existing and required competencies in different ways that highlight taken-for-granted assets that are fundamental to the liaison role,”⁴⁹ thus enabling libraries to measure what skills they need in new liaison hires.

Employee Engagement

Talent management begins prior to hiring and continues through the talent lifecycle, then LD opportunities and programs engage while further developing the employee, with all of these elements contributing to employee engagement. Vance identifies ten common themes correlated to engagement from company-wide attitude or opinion surveys: “pride in employer, satisfaction with employer, job satisfactions, opportunity to perform well at challenging work,

recognition and positive feedback for one's contributions, personal support from one's supervisor, effort above and beyond the minimum, understanding the link between one's job and the organization's mission, prospects for future growth with one's employer, and intention to stay with one's employer."⁵⁰ Additionally, goals of engaging employees may also include "lower absenteeism, lower turnover, fewer safety incidents, fewer quality incidents, higher customer metrics, higher productivity and higher profitability."⁵¹ Alonso and Wang argue that that evidence of employee engagement can be seen through "higher levels of performance, commitment, and loyalty."⁵² They report that 69% of Canadian HR professionals "indicated that employee engagement is a problem within their organizations."⁵³ Alonso and Wang point out "it appears that the disengaged do not leave their organizations; instead they stay and damage both productivity and relationships."⁵⁴

Konrad breaks employee engagement into three components: "cognitive, an emotional, and a behavioral aspect."⁵⁵ The cognitive element relates to how an employee perceives the organization and his or her direct report, as well as the overall working conditions. From these three perceptions, an employee's emotional base is established in light of whether there are positive or negative attitudes toward the above. The behavioral component has to do with how much effort employees expend above and beyond their requisite job duties. Biswas and Bhatnagar found that if employees "perceive positive levels of organizational collaboration, they are intrinsically encouraged towards exerting considerably higher levels of effort."⁵⁶ They also found that the more closely employees' personal values were aligned with that of the organization, the more meaningful relationships are, leading to "higher levels of employee engagement."⁵⁷

Abraham, however, suggests that job satisfaction serves as an "antecedent to employee engagement."⁵⁸ According to a survey conducted by SHRM in 2012, a number of key factors were identified that contribute to job satisfaction as well as employee engagement: "job security,

opportunities to use skills and abilities, relationship with immediate supervisor, and relationship with co-workers.”⁵⁹ The engaged employee would also be aligned emotionally and intellectually with their organization.⁶⁰ This “engaged employee is enthusiastic, fully involved in his or her work, and works for the organization’s interests.”⁶¹

The topic of employee engagement is not very evident in library literature. One of the few is a case study of the University of Saskatchewan Libraries in-house leadership development training. Conceived as a method to shift the organizational culture to achieve a revitalized vision, the training has proven successful. Beginning in 2010, cohorts of librarians have experienced formal training, mentoring, peer-to-peer learning, and ongoing discussion over an eight to ten month period. “Survey results and employee testimonials indicate that there is greater engagement with, understanding of, and buy-in with the library’s strategic directions.”⁶² In addition, the employee engagement score of the library, as measured by the Gallup Q12 survey, rose from 54% of employees considered to be engaged in 2006 to 72% in 2011 following the inception of the leadership development program and was maintaining at the higher score.⁶³

Summary and Conclusions

Although the domestic HRM trends such as spiraling insurance costs, implementation of health care legislation, and large numbers of Baby Boomer retirements loom large in the United States, the importance of key international HRM trends cannot be overstated. The overarching trend of talent management includes employee engagement and begins at the hire, follows induction and socialization, empowerment and recognition, intentional work design, through leader engagement, and creating an environment of trust and respect. By focusing on managing talent, improving leadership development and enhancing employee engagement,

managerial leaders will be able to create more focused hiring practices, develop leadership capabilities in-house, while putting in place mechanisms for improving and enhancing employee engagement.

The benefits of strategic talent management in libraries are many. In an era of constant change due to evolving technologies, dwindling financial support, and different user expectations, libraries face questions about their relevance and demands for innovation. By ensuring that the librarians and staff hired are the right fit and by developing them into engaged employees from the beginning, libraries can build the workforce needed to meet the needs of our communities now and into the future.

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