

GRADUATE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: TALENT IN THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

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Abstract *The economic downturn challenges organisations with the necessity of financial savings in the short term, and the need for innovation and efficiency in the longer (CIPD, 2009a). Getting the most from employees will require an intensified focus on skills and knowledge transfer, with learning and development activity becoming crucial. The forecast skills deficit has resulted in a review of approach using strategic succession management and effective talent management systems (Hewitt, 2009). This article provides case analysis in 2010 of a key UK public sector organisation, the Scottish Government. It considers the importance of these issues with particular emphasis on graduate talent skills and attributes. Line manager's roles and policy insights are also considered in the overall discussion enabled via questionnaire and interview analysis.*

Key recommendations include:

- Emphasis on communication about L and D activity and its currency for internal graduates with regards to talent throughout the employment lifecycle;*
- Line manager's responsibility and clarity over what constitutes organisational talent (including graduate talent), and how it should best be managed; and*
- Integrated systems to extract managing information data, particularly on skills and personal attributes to facilitate easy and fast access to target employee potential;*

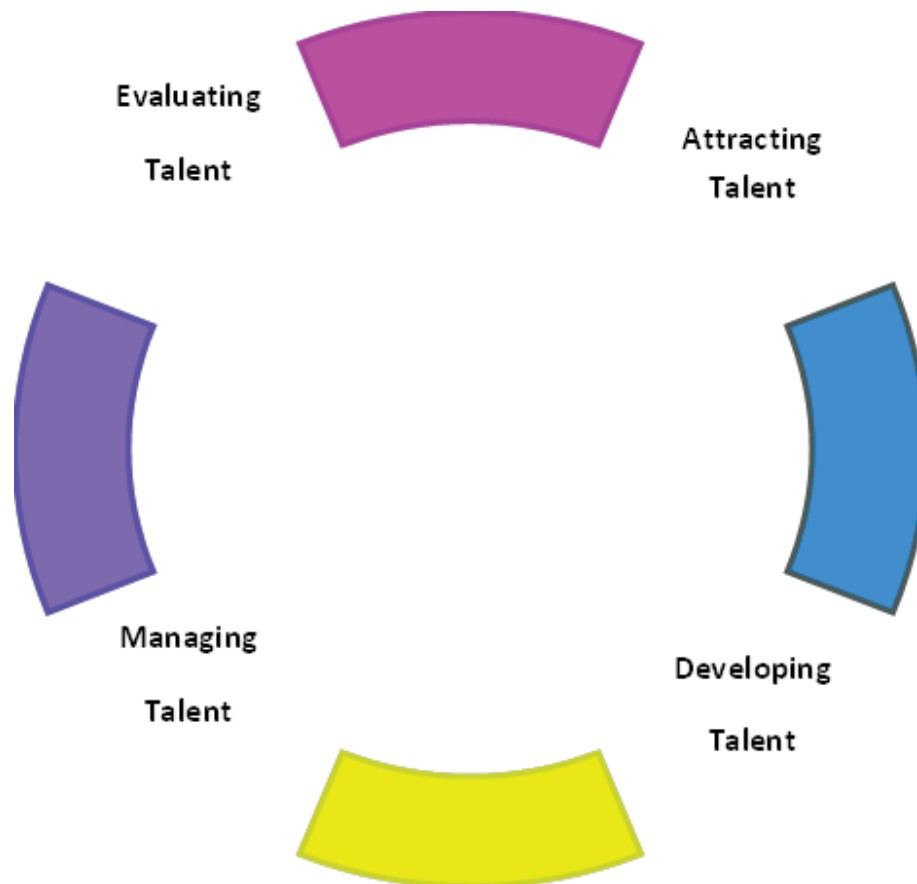
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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary workplace is undoubtedly more volatile than ever before (Hirsh 2007), in part due to changing demographic patterns with more people approaching retirement age than those entering the workforce (Blass, 2007). The resultant skills shortage has become a major agenda with ongoing debate on how to bridge the widening gap (Leitch Report, 2006). Organisations therefore need to think more about what they are doing to manage their talent within the workplace (Gandossy and Kao, 2004) and graduate skills and attributes have a substantial role to play in this. Graduates bring with them three categories of skills to employment (Lees, 2001), namely personal qualities, core skills, and process skills. The link between talent and graduate status attainment is undisputable, mainly because talent management is clearly connected with 'competency-based human resource management practices', (Barron, 2008)

The new millennium brought with it a growing interest in the field of talent management and succession planning (Armstrong 2006). More recently, there have been a range of factors that have fuelled interest in the field of talent management, (D'Annunzio-Green, 2008) and graduate talent management, per se (Scott and Revis, 2008). These have been linked to new technologies and rapidly changing business models, as well as globalisation of markets which has in turn pushed the demand for the so-called 'talented' person or employee. Interest in talent management has sharpened into a strategic imperative as many organisations have begun to experience the so-called 'war for talent' (Armstrong 2006). Human capital is seen as the competitive edge and organisations are finally beginning to think about how they use the skills and expertise of their staff to bring positive results. This has resulted in talent management moving up the priority chain. Recently, the Annual CIPD Survey (2009b) found talent management is increasingly being recognised as an essential organisational strategy. This is apparent across the, public, private and

Figure 1: The Talent Management Cycle



Source: Talent Management Loop, CIPD 2009c:3

the voluntary sectors. It reports that 51% of organisations undertake talent management activities, but only 20% have a formal definition of it (Devine and Powell, 2008). Talent management was defined by D'Annunzio-Green (2008) as 'a holistic approach to human resource planning aimed at strengthening organisational capability and driving business priorities using a range of HR interventions.' This provides links to performance appraisal, reward, recruitment, succession planning, and day-to-day HR management. The reported benefits of talent management are 'increased productivity, more innovative recruitment, greater human capital development, improved skills base, internal promotion, reduced labour turnover, enhanced commitment and improved employer image and brand' (Maxwell and MacLean 2008).

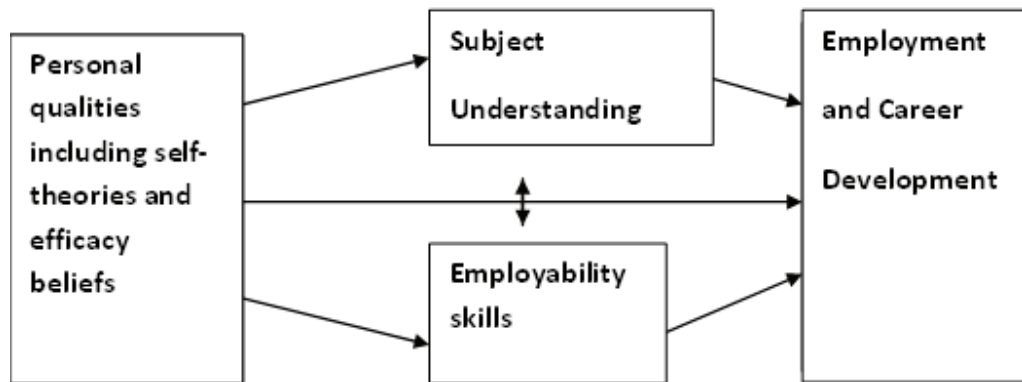
This article aims to critically analyse perceptions of talent management within the Scottish Government (SG) with particular emphasis on graduate skills and attributes. This will be achieved via analysis of findings across Scottish Government directorates, covering staff grades A to C. The SG has a very broad range of functions with offices situated throughout Scotland, with its largest workforce based in Edinburgh. The SG promotes the ideal that all of its staff are

considered to have "potential", which means that although some employees may have more talent than others, the process should not be solely restricted to the so called, 'high-flyer' (Armstrong 2006). Much of the existing literature tends to focus on the attraction of new talent, rather than how to pass on knowledge already within the organisation using effective succession planning. For this reason and because of the SG's inclusive approach, it was decided to take a broader view of the concept of talent and graduate skills for the purposes of this paper and not concentrate solely on the UK Civil Service Fast Stream scheme, which predominantly imports graduate talent from the outside. This research is concerned with talent management and perceptions of graduate skills across the main body of staff, many of whom are graduates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The recent economic turbulence has resulted in organisations looking closely at their learning and development (L and D) activities, with the central role of talent management being a key area of review (CIPD, 2009b). Skills help businesses achieve the productivity, innovation and profitability needed

Figure 2: Model of employability (adapted from Yorke, 2001)



to compete, with the UK Government stressing that, ‘a better skilled workforce is a more productive workforce’ (H M Treasury 2003). This focus on human capital has become an important issue, and organisations are increasingly aware of the need to treat people development as a strategic issue and ‘to systematically analyse, measure and evaluate how investment in people creates value’ CIPD (2006).

Talent Management Defined

According to April and Jappie (2008), ‘talent management has emerged as one of the biggest challenges for business and HR executives today’. It can be described as: ‘the use of an integrated set of activities to ensure that the organisation attracts, retains, motivates, and develops the talented people it needs now and in the future’ (Armstrong 2006).

The Talent Management Cycle (Figure 1) illustrates the importance of continuity in the process and it is argued that a strategic and systematic approach to the management of talent could aid businesses during recession (CIPD, 2007). The concept could be, ‘viewed as a tool to strengthen organisational capability through individual development, performance enhancement, career development and succession planning’, (Storey 2007). Therefore talent management does not sit in isolation within organisational process and practice. As a central theme, it can drive strategic resource management and should have a more explicit role in overall strategic planning, which dovetails with pressing contemporary organisational requirements for improved strategic alignment (Faragher, 2006). The importance, then, of attracting and retaining talent is a key corporate challenge and it is becoming a more powerful tool in today’s competitive environment (Rees and McBain, 2004). The complexity intensifies when it is considered that definitions of talent management vary between organisations, with a number of conflicting views and many operational practices (Blass, 2007). Some organisations apply the process to all

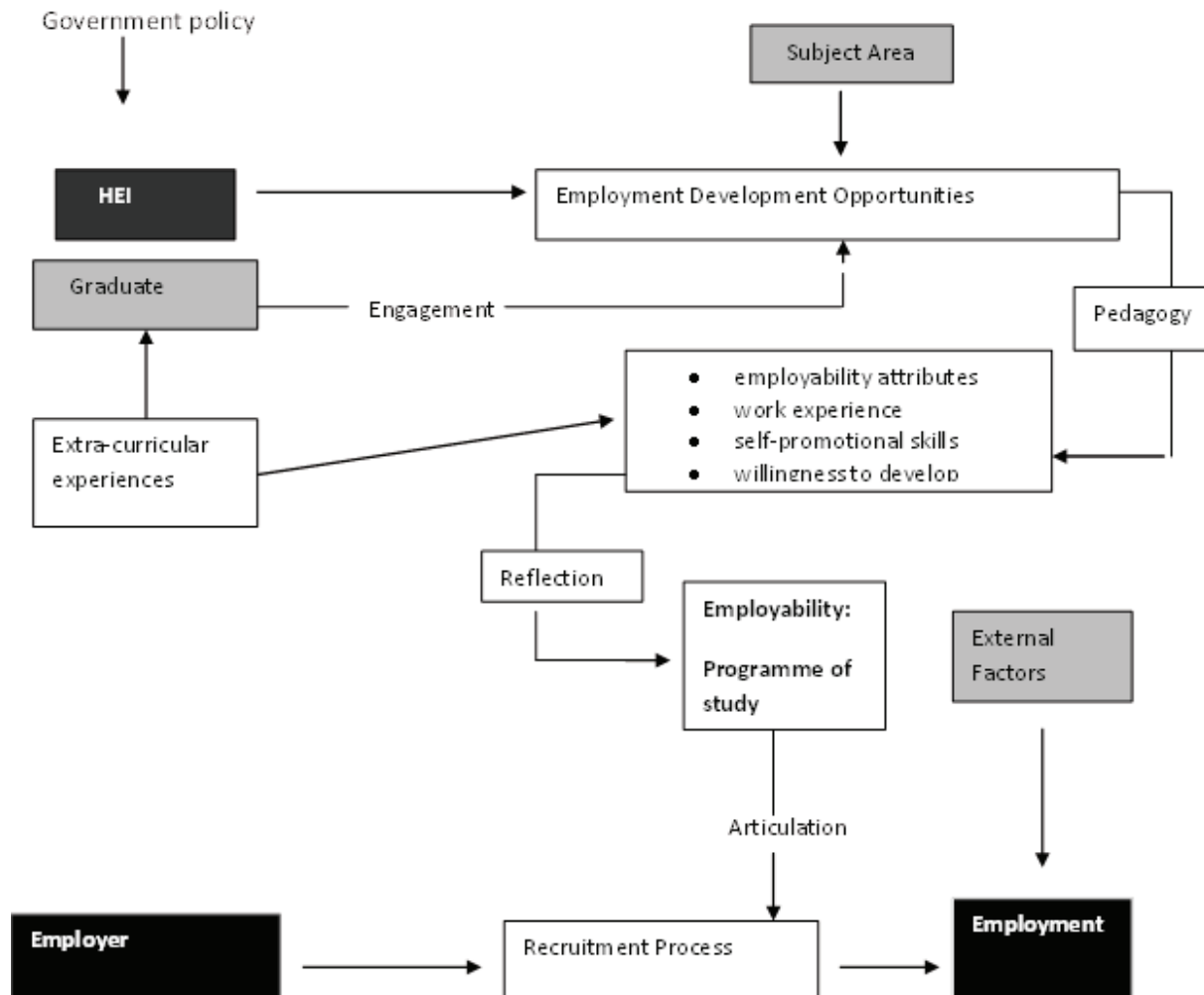
staff, whilst others confine it to an elite few. Additionally, Davis et al. (2007) have indicated that talent is not always restricted to particular grades or areas of responsibility. The CIPD (2009c) discovered that for the most part organisations choose to focus on a select group of employees, normally senior managers or skilled groups who would be more difficult to replace. This exclusive approach, however, does not deal with inclusion issues for employees who feel they are perceived as “non-talent”. It is vital that employees feel valued or they will not believe that their talents are recognised by the employer (Peacock, 2009). Therefore, it is necessary to encourage and foster the engagement and inclusion of all staff, to ensure employees are psychologically empowered to want to give to the organisation. Failure to address this can risk employees becoming marginalised, resentful, and disjointed from the organisation, which will inevitably result in a less productive workforce. Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC, (CIPD, 2007), stated, ‘Organisations will only succeed over the long term if they nurture the talent, knowledge, and experience of everyone in the workforce.’

The graduate is frequently identified as targeted talent priority in the recruitment and selection process and according to Scott and Revis (2008), “there can be little doubt that there exists a strong connection between notions of gradueness (level of preparedness for the working environment) and the requirements to be recognised as talent for industry”. The model of employability proposed by Yorke (2001) (See Figure 2) proposes the balance of the personal qualities which the graduate brings to a position with the aspiration of appropriate employment and career development, underpinned by subject knowledge and employability skills.

Many skills will have been honed in their programme of study which includes extra-curricular experiences and also work placement (Harvey et al., 2003). Typical baseline graduate attributes for both undergraduate and postgraduate level students can be seen in Figure 3. These are generally expected as universal for these levels of graduates by

Figure 3: Model of graduate employability development (adapted from Harvey et al., 2003)

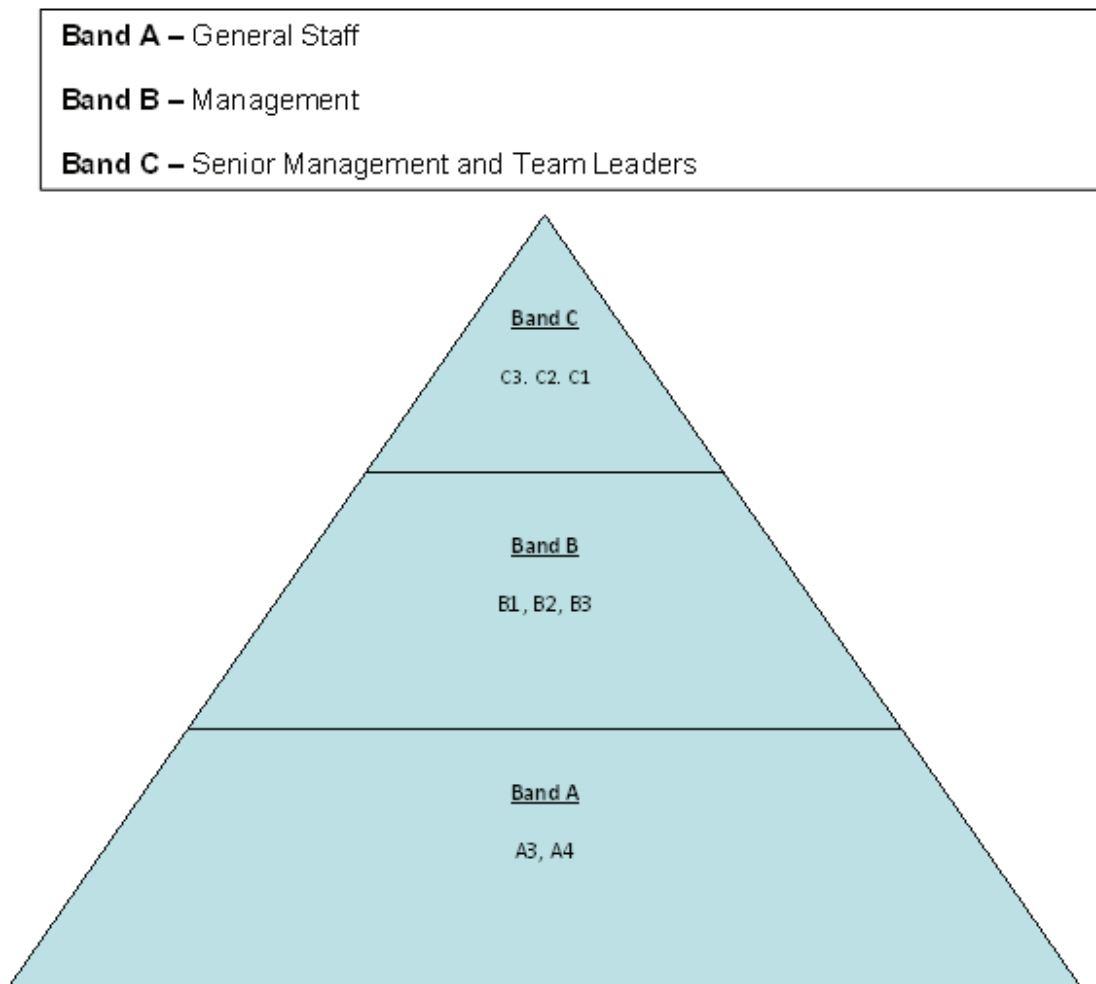
UK skills base and employer needs of graduates:



both the degree awarding institutions and also graduate employers. Graduates are usually recruited onto a fast-track development programme which underlines an organisation's streamlined approach to identify, nurture and maintain talent (CIPD, 2007). According to D'Annunzio-Green (2008) specified groups like these could be described as HiPos (high potential, high performers), which are set aside from other employees as 'key talent, defined as people with talent that the organisation values at all levels'. As a crucial talent pipeline resource, graduates play a major part in strategic succession planning in organisations. However, CIPD (2006) suggested that the factors of succession planning has shifted from identifying successors for posts, towards providing for the development of those successors by creating 'talent pools', such as graduate training cohorts. The talent pipeline and talent pool approaches are now evolving with Clutterbuck's (2012) 'pure energy,' Talent Wave approach to succession

which proposes that organisations must identify the right person at the right time to undertake the right role. This is because it is difficult in current changeable environments to accurately forecast organisational succession requirements (Armstrong 2006). Skills shortage has revived this need for succession planning, and the role of the line manager in L and D should be pivotal in supporting staff and forecasting for future skills gaps that are expected to arise (CIPD (2009d). Interestingly, the CIPD (2010a) indicated that in the period 2008 – 2010, leadership became increasingly important and filtered heavily into talent management initiatives, with 48% of line managers responsible for the flagging of talent within sampled organisations. The importance of the graduate talent pipeline and proactive succession management is reinforced by the onslaught of daunting demographical changes. As a result, organisations need to know where their critical talent is and where the replacements will come from in two, five

Figure 4: Scottish Government Grading Chart



and ten years from now. The emergence of Generation Y graduates (those born after 1980) means that employers are faced with a new generation of talent who are more demanding and interested in learning and developmental opportunities than that of the 'baby boomers', (Armstrong, 2006). Arguably, in the UK there is a dwindling supply of young workers and, more seriously for public sector organisations, this issue of an ageing workforce. This has resulted in recruitment difficulties and retention issues for organisations.

THE STUDY

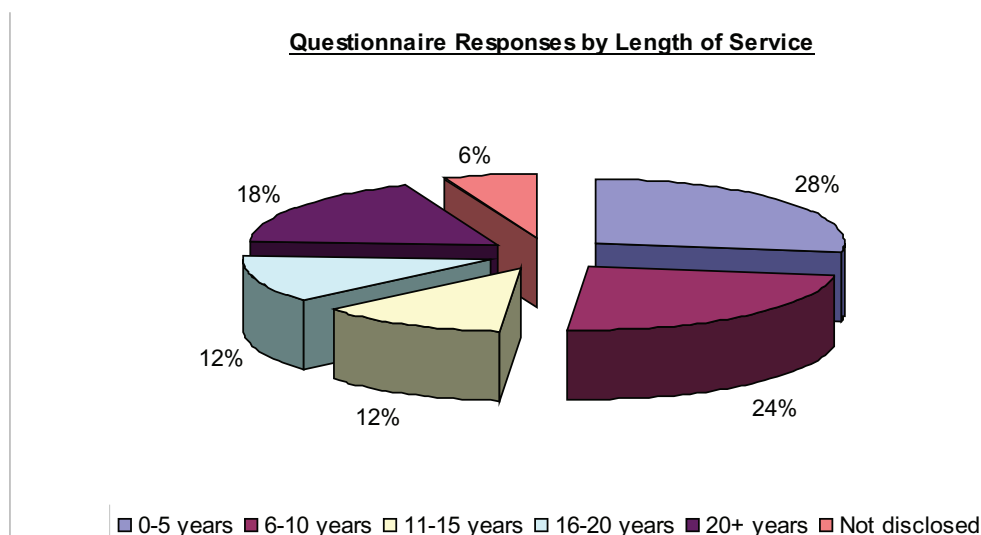
The empirical work combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches to achieve a more explorative perspective of this research and was set within a phenomenological paradigm, concerned with how things are and what currently happens in the chosen case. The methodological approach, combining both narrative and statistical data collected using questionnaires and semi-

structured interviews, facilitated the collection of a range of perspectives, with the aim of achieving a more balanced picture (Biggam, 2008). A case analysis was decided upon due to the research team's understanding of the business culture, grading structure and terminology associated with the Scottish Government (SG).

105 questionnaires were sent via internal email to employees within the core SG in 2009. This holistic target figure was achieved through the use of random sampling across the Scottish Government's directorate structure. In addition three elite interviews were held. This research used an inductive approach, concerned with views, opinions and feelings of people (Anderson, 2008) and, as such, gathered mainly qualitative data, to aid understanding of the critical issues in talent management gathered from individual perceptions, thus engendering an interpretive research stance.

For the purposes of this study and to gather relevant data on holistic talent management activity across the case domain, it was decided to focus on one particular group within the

Figure 5: Length of Service (n = 33)



SG. Overall, there are three grading structures within the SG; Bands A to C, Fast Stream, and Senior Civil Service (SCS) (See Figure 4). The Fast Stream programme is for people who have demonstrated potential to achieve rapid promotion to Band C and have the potential to progress to the SCS. The minimum requirement to compete for places on the Fast Stream is normally a Second Class Honours Degree (graduates). However, Fast Streamers can also be put forward via internal nomination which means they do not require any minimum entry requirements. This is a very competitive scheme and in 2008, there were 14,494 external applications of which 570 were recommended for post and 119 internal nominations were received, of which 54 were recommended for post (Cabinet office, 2009). This research will focus on the SG bands A- C which covers the bulk of the workforce. It contains many graduates who did not apply for the Fast Stream and could therefore identify real issues and perceptions of talent management in the SG. It was thought that to simply concentrate of the Fast Streamers would not produce a general picture of perceptions of graduate roles and attributes, in relation to talent management and potentially reduce objectivity.

Random sampling technique was used to select 105 staff members from across the directorates to gain their perceptions on talent management and the skills/attributes that graduates can bring to this within the case organisation. The selected subjects from across the organisation were approached via email with a covering letter and questionnaire. The distribution of questionnaires had targeted 49 male subjects and 56 females. A similar gender split was reflected in the questionnaires returned (15 males, 17 females and 1 non-disclosure). There were 33 replies received, a response rate of 31%.

In addition, three key stakeholder interviews were held with a senior member of HR for perspectives on succession planning and skills, a member the Talent Management team for policy aspects, and a Development Advisor for their view on graduate skills and talent management definitions. The interviewees were grades within Bands B and C.

RESULTS

The questionnaire and interview findings are detailed in turn:

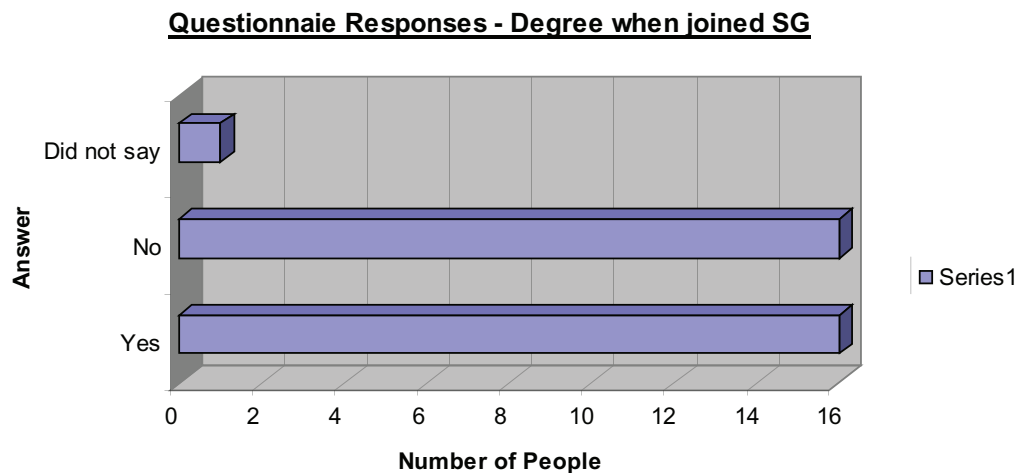
Questionnaires

The questionnaire was designed to enable data collection on the participants, as well as their perceptions of learning and development, graduate qualities, reflection on and management of talent within the context of the SG. Given the broad coverage across the 3 levels of banding in the organisation, this encompassed both managerial and non-managerial staff. 45% of respondents stated they had line-management responsibility, 49% said they did not and 6% failed to provide a response to this question. The following will initially present findings in a general sense and then conclude with specifics from the managerial sample.

The majority of all respondents (61%) were in the 41 years and above category, with 37% in the 51-60 group. A representative spread across business areas and grades (A-C) were represented in the results. The sample illustrated that almost a quarter of respondents had more than 20 years service (24%) and 28% were in the 0-5 year service category (see Figure 5).

Learning and Development

Figure 6: Those who joined the SG with a degree (n = 33)



The questionnaire focused on individual qualifications and whether staff had joined the SG with a degree or not. The results were evenly split at 48% as illustrated in Figure 6. In addition, the questionnaire enquired whether respondents had undertaken further study since joining the SG. Only 15% had taken to external study, however, as the SG promotes internal learning opportunities, 64% of respondents had taken part in training in the last 12 months. This activity covered topics such as customer service, health and safety etc. Those who opted to study externally, did so to ‘enhance their career opportunities’ and ‘credibility’. In these cases the SG offered support in the form of paid time to attend, payment of fees, the support from a mentor and reimbursement for resources such as textbooks.

Respondents, who did not study externally, reported they did not feel a formal qualification was necessary, whereas they indicated that learning on-the-job and having relevant experience was critical. They felt that they could benefit from the SG specifically formed courses, focusing on skills needed now, described as ‘knowledge of context and issues’. Employee reasons for opting to study further or not, was also found to be linked to the employee’s line manager and the type of support they received. Some respondents indicated that they did not know who to approach with ideas. 45% of respondents said they had instigated training activity on their own, in contrast to the 21% who said it had been suggested by a line manager. In terms of employability skills development, respondents indicated that L and D activity within the SG had a positive impact on their attainment and enhancement. Independent working, communication and, problem solving skills were cited most frequently by respondents as having been improved post training. Whilst time management, information retrieval, writing and strategic skills were next most popular.

Perceptions of Graduate Qualities

The SG does not ask for graduate qualifications at Band A entry level, although many people entering had such. The SG learning survey (2008) indicated approximately 50% of staff had a first degree, consistent with the graduate level of the research sample. Once within the SG, no formal qualifications are required to progress to band B or C. From the questionnaires, those with formal university qualifications felt it gave them confidence to apply for other posts. Graduate employees of the SG reported that their degrees enhanced their skill set and gave them more employability and creditability.

All respondents were asked to provide detail on their perceptions of graduate attributes, both in terms of skills and qualities, brought to the SG by both undergraduate and postgraduates:

Undergraduate Attributes in the SG

- Self motivation, good level of literacy, ability to manage own workload and check own work for accuracy, communicate and work with others, learn on their own;
- Critical thinking and analytical ability;
- Real life experience;
- Independent working, report writing, information retrieval, problem solving, and research skills;
- Decision making, leadership, numerical, personal learning and development, strategic working skills;
- Team working;
- presentational abilities and skills, appreciation of different communication media, written presentation

and other forms of communication; and

- Discipline in writing and producing work, ability to quickly absorb and present complex ideas, creativity.

Postgraduate Attributes in the SG

- Ability to identify relevant information sources, understand and synthesize complex information, articulate complex reports/documents, lead discussion groups and workgroups, manage relationships (as opposed to just “having” them – e.g. networking, coaching and supporting colleagues, identifying other people strengths and using them);
- Enhanced ability in independent working, information retrieval, problem solving;
- More specific – study related knowledge;
- Critical thinking and analytical ability and added ability to produce, direct and edit large scale projects with a research dimension;
- Enhanced analytical thinking combined with research and writing skills but also with the ability to communicate ideas effectively with colleagues;
- Enhanced ability in all of the undergraduate mentioned skills; and
- All of the above in a little more depth plus the addition of perspective and experience gained from undergraduate study e.g. awareness of impact on different audiences, better understanding of strategic issues, a more rounded and mature package of different attributes.

Perceptions of Talent and Talent Management in the SG

Employees were asked of their perceptions of the idea of ‘talent’. The responses given were varied and although some of the words used to describe talent were similar, there was lack of clarity over what the term meant amongst staff at all ranking levels. The most common replies are detailed as follows:

- An ability to carry out a task well;
- Having an aptitude or skill which can be developed;
- A quality or ability that is valued;
- Someone with knowledge and experience;
- Differing abilities and skills within the workforce;
- Outstanding ability in a specific field of activity;
- Natural ability or latent ability;
- Skills and abilities which are not common place; and
- People with specific skills or aptitudes which have

been identified as being valuable to the organisation both presently and in the longer term.

The notion of ‘talent management’ was also probed. Key comments are noted below, again illustrating wide variations. It should be noted that a few respondents did not understand the concept at all:

- Ensuring that existing qualities and abilities are recognised and used to maximum effect and that potential ones are identified and developed;
- To ensure skills transfer to other people to help grow the ‘talent pool’;
- Harnessing and directing skills and abilities;
- Ability to use the skills of the workforce to the best advantage;
- Managing those skills/abilities; and
- Helping to identify and develop that talent.

Line Management Results

The 45% of respondents with line management responsibility were asked how often they discussed employees’ skills sets with their staff. The results indicate some disparity in this regard. For example, some met regularly, having one-to-one meetings monthly, fortnightly team meetings and the sharing of good practice as necessary. In contrast, others only met at compulsory times such as appraisal reviews. Approaches to the management of talent in the line management respondent results also varied, with responses typically citing the use of coaching, on-the-job knowledge transfer, getting to know staff and having belief in their abilities.

Line managers were also asked if they felt that there exists a direct relationship between graduates skills (employees with a degree) and those regarded as talent in the SG workplace. It was identified; that although the Fast Stream programme identifies the relationship in a corporate sense (minimum requirement of a 2:2), general consensus from the management sample across grades A to C was that experience and the ability to meet objectives was just as important.

Interviews

The interviews offered critical understanding of what the SG does, as well as their organisational terminology and approach to managing talent. Involving key stakeholders in the SG (Senior HR Manager, Talent Management Team member and Developmental Advisor) they offered both policy and operational perspectives.

The pertinent findings for the purposes of this paper can be grouped into two main areas, namely, talent management policy in the SG and skills, talent and the graduate.

Talent Management Policy in the Scottish Government

From a policy perspective, an inclusive approach to talent in the SG was evident, with all staff viewed as such and managed within the expectations of their banding levels, with the ideology that training and development opportunities available to all. The exact nature of the L and D activity (specific to each banding level) was highlighted as emanating from: ‘annual developmental appraisals, course programmes, training being aligned to business needs, corporate programmes and access to learning centres’. This emphasis on improving the skills and abilities at each grade specific competency level facilitates employee movement to the next. However, all staff interviewed felt there should be more L and D opportunities for staff and that the organisation needs to examine how best to operate talent reinvestment, during an employee’s lifecycle. It was suggested that the challenge for the SG is determining how to build available management information regarding employee skills, into HR decision-making. It was acknowledged that there has been substantial work to improve workforce planning via data sourcing e.g. analysis of appraisal data, to see what skills are required to take the business forward and who has and who should have these skills, to meet forecast needs. The other apparent and important factor in this challenge is also about how the SG can support and develop employees who are not yet in the identified categories of talent and developing talent. Findings indicate that staff members in both management and non-management roles are still unsure what the terms mean. As a result line managers and staff at all levels need to understand what is being measured and what is expected of them for the idea of potential to prosper across the whole of the SG.

Skills, Talent and the Graduate

When the interviewees were asked about graduate talent, they spoke about the culture of the SG and the need to recruit graduates on the Fast Stream annual programme, not for Band A posts or Band B posts if via internal promotion. This highlights that employees often equate graduate talent with the Fast Stream programme and that this early labelling applies to talent mostly sourced from outside the organisation. It should be noted, however, that individuals can apply via the in-service nomination to access this label if they so desire. It is conceded that perceptions of the rigorous and competitive nature of the fast track stream for existing employees could have the potential to confuse the expectations for graduates in other parts of the organisation.

It also emerged it was good for a business to have a number of graduates, but the challenge was to keep these people (although SG attrition rates are comparatively low),

especially if they entered at a lower level and were not able to progress quickly enough, indicating the importance of successful engagement and the fulfilment of employee potential. It would seem the SG values the experience a person can bring to posts across Bands A-C, rather than simply the qualifications they have. Graduates are helpful to an organisation in terms of talent and the SG has a large number of graduates, but it was stressed frequently that graduate status does not automatically mean they are the best person for the job. The only time there was a general consensus for a required degree was in professional positions e.g. legal or accountancy based roles.

DISCUSSION

The empirical research has identified current talent management practice across bands A-C in the SG and provided some insight into skills development and expected attributes of graduates. The emergent thematic strands identified are the crucial role of the line manager in the effective management of talent to effectively enable learning and development activities and recognition of graduate skills and attributes as a marker for internal progression and succession management.

Line Management Roles in Leadership and Development

A vast number of HR functions are increasingly being devolved to line managers (Harrison, 2006), as reinforced in the interview findings within the SG. Line managers play a critical role in creating a learning environment where individuals can feel trusted, respected, included and talented. Also, to facilitate the effective learning and development of their staff, line managers would need to be coaches, mentors, appraisers and role models (Reid et al., 2008). Nevertheless, findings show that issues exist over employee access to L and D opportunities and employer’s return on investment. An annual or departmental review of skills investment was found to be of benefit, with emphasis on skills sharing post investment. The interviews highlighted that there are opportunities for employees to grow and develop within the SG, moving away from offering only formal training courses to a focus on individual staff and their needs. Findings show that 71% of staff use Personal Development Plans (PDP’s), allowing a clearer picture of skill gaps to be captured across the business.

Succession Management, Skills Transfer, and the Graduate

The findings from both questionnaires and interviews

provided useful information on both the scope and value of graduate attributes in the SG and how the graduate resource fits within the current talent or potential framework in bands A to C. Results distinguished clearly between levels of graduateness i.e. differences between under and postgraduate attributes. However, it was apparent that outwith the specifically designed fast track scheme, being a graduate was not always an absolute pre-requisite to being identified as talent, with a great deal of support shown for the home grown approach to knowledge and skills acquisition. Many members of SG staff in bands A-C take up the plethora of L and D opportunities available to them throughout the year, although only 15% opt to study externally, despite the extensive support. This begs the question of how valuable a degree is perceived to be in these employment bands from a cultural perspective. Research subjects who were studying externally said that they were doing so to increase their confidence, credibility and employability. Increased analytical abilities were frequently noted by subjects as an accepted attribute of graduates. It was also clear from both questionnaires and interviews that there is a clear correlation between notions of graduateness and corporate perceptions of talent. It seems though, at a local 'cultural' level, the equality of the "potential" approach highlights the chances of non-graduates to be equally considered in the process, despite issues of degree currency. The SG wants to improve its employee soft skills, particular attitudes and behaviours in an attempt to improve upon the success of its organisational culture. The role of the graduate in this, across grades A-C, although acknowledged is still to be discovered. As the potential missing link in the SG's approach to succession planning, the graduate who has been identified as talent within the ranks could help define role behaviours and play a key part in skills transference activity. The findings indicated clear and coherent skills sets associated with graduate status, yet the pervading culture reinforces the "common sense" over "intellect" debate, with no indication that having a degree or the associated attributes will help with internal promotion across the bands. The evident danger of no clear distinction or value set for external qualification attainment means that the path into the talent pool can become ethereal and hard to place. Although an organisational competency framework exists to aid progression and planning, it would perhaps make sense to re-examine attributes and skills as markers across role behaviours. Within the SG competency based succession planning is a key corporate goal and good practice means it is becoming a more reliable area. The SG has become better at dealing with both long and short term succession planning, although it is conceded that a more strategic approach using employee administered self-data capture to the transference of skills would be of benefit to the organisation. The analytical skills of the graduate could be of great benefit to the process and the pursuit of external skills and knowledge of great benefit in the long term.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Academic literature indicates that organisations generally struggle with defining talent. The SG does not have a definition specifically for 'talent' but instead focuses on 'potential'. Their Fast Stream programme is mainly for graduates entering directly and in effect, the SG is working from the top down, adjusting the SCS definition of potential to the Band C fit and testing how this may apply to those in lower bands A and B. This emphasis on promoting and nurturing its own talent will most certainly continue to be a priority, with the reality of tightening budgets and the expected focus on existing resources. Since the SG has a developmental programme for all Band levels (including SCS), it builds-up its talent pipeline. However, despite the finding that the SG offers valuable training, supply does not always meet demand, potentially resulting in employee frustration and de-motivation. Interview findings indicate that the SG has an appropriate system for progression, but that improvements could be made on transition from one level to another, in terms of clarity of required skills and attributes. The role of the graduate, either current or aspiring should be clarified in the current system of 'potential', alongside what 'talent' means and how this should best be managed. The connection with graduate attributes was made in both the questionnaire and interview data, yet there is no clear indicator for internal promotion regarding the value of an HE qualification or how it can be used. This is in direct contrast with the fast track scheme which demands a minimum of a 2:2 and is highly competitive. So, although the SG details very specific banding levels within its competency framework, more clarity is required in respect of what is expected in terms of daily accessible behaviours/skill sets. It is recommended that a holistic skills audit is carried out in tandem with Oracle E-HR, facilitating easy match of skills, qualifications and competences with projects at short notice, such as carried out at Birmingham City Council (CIPD, 2010b). Thus, allowing the business to fully benefit from the existing talent pool at all points in the employee life-cycle.

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