

TALENT MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION: IMPLICATIONS OF JOB EMBEDDEDNESS- A RESEARCH AGENDA

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Abstract *In the current business scenario, talent management is known as a popular retention strategy for talented employees, but how talent management leads to greater employee retention is an unexplored terrain. Based on an extensive literature review, the present article suggests a theoretical framework that introduces job embeddedness as an intervening variable for exploring how talent management practices influences employee's intention to stay. In addition, it discusses the influence of talent management practices on various dimensions of job embeddedness. The multiple propositions suggested provides HR practitioners with insights to strive for retention of talented employees through talent management, by focusing on various initiatives that increase the link, fit and sacrifice dimensions of embeddedness.*

Keywords: *Talent Management, Job Embeddedness, Employee Retention, Link, Fit, Sacrifice*

INTRODUCTION

The irreversible shift from the industrial age to informational age has given rise to knowledge jobs, which has intensified demand for high caliber managerial talent. This increasing demand along with growing propensity for employees to switch the company has made employee retention a real concern for organisations. Study of Hay Group shows that in next 5 years, the global turnover rate is expected to rise from 20.6 to 23.4 percent (Hay Group, 2013). Deloitte's Human Capital Trends Study 2014 identifies retention as one of the top two people issues of organisations (Bersin, 2013).

Due to the huge differential value created by a talented employee, the recent researches in human resource area tend to focus on retention of talented employees than of entire workforce. No organisation can even imagine hazards of losing a top talent, especially to its rival organisation. At times, even a single employee can change the destiny of the organisation. McKinsey and Company highlight the importance of talented employees by pointing out that a best software developer can write 10 times more usable lines of codes than average developers (Michaels, Handfield- Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). Over the last few years, managing top talent has become a hot topic of discussion among academicians and HR practitioners. The combined pressure of demographic, workforce and market forces has made managing talented employees a herculean task. It is in this scenario the HR practitioners and consultants

advocates 'talent management' as a panacea for dealing with all talent-related issues and in last one decade it is evolving as a valuable human resource initiative for talent retention. Talent management that includes identifying, developing and cultivating of those individuals who are of great value to an organisation, gains prominence because of its claim on reducing turnover of talented employees which is a serious concern of organisations.

Even though practitioners and consultants praise talent management for the miracles it can create in an organisation, how talent management leads to greater employee retention, seems to be an unexplored terrain. Not many studies have focused on how the talent management practices lead to increased talent retention rates. Like any other management strategy, talent management cannot directly influence the retention behaviour of employee. So what could be the attitude developed in talented employees that may influence their behaviour is crucial in understanding the role of talent management in employee retention. The term employee retention used throughout the article refers to the retention of talented or high potential employees identified by the organisation, and to whom the talent management initiatives are focused.

The objective of this article is to develop testable propositions concerning the link between talent management practices and employee retention, and the mediating influence of perceived job embeddedness. This paper starts with an

overview of talent, talent management, job embeddedness, and turnover intentions. In the next section the proposed conceptual framework and testable propositions for future research are presented. The conclusion summarises the major findings of the study and possible managerial implications.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Talent

The starting point for any Talent Management research must inevitably be an exploration of what is meant by 'talent' (CIPD, 2007) but it is really hard to find a universal definition of talent. There are numerous definitions of talent found in the academic Human Resource Management (HRM) literature. Similarly human resource practitioners' literature also contributes various organisation-specific definitions of talent which are highly influenced by the industry type and nature of the work. Such definitions are dynamic and can vary between organisations, or within the same organisation over time (Tansley, 2011).

Talent can be conceptualised in two broad ways- object and subject approach. In object approach, talent refers to personal characteristics or an innate ability that manifests in a particular field, whereas in the subject' approach talent refers to a person or persons of talent who possesses special skills or abilities. Even though the object approach has a better fit with the etymological meaning of talent (Tansley, 2011), the subject approach seems to have much more prevalence in organisational practice and talent management literature (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, & González-Cruz, 2013).

In an article of Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) definition of talent which takes a subject approach to talent concept is given as "talent as individuals who can make a difference to organisational performance, either through their immediate contribution or in the longer term by demonstrating the highest levels of potential" (CIPD, 2007).

Talent Management

Talent Management (TM) is a term in common currency today but became popular after McKinsey & company coined the term 'War for talent' in 1997 for their research on talent management & practices (Michaels *et al.*, 2001). Since then there was a huge explosion of literature in the talent management area which is still continuing. This growing numbers of articles and books on the topic make one believe that 'talent management' is a well-defined area of practice supported by extensive research and a core set of principles, but in fact, a majority of them lack empirical research support.

Talent management lacks a consistent definition and clear conceptual boundaries (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Ashton & Morton, 2005; Lewis & Heckman, 2006) and is considered as a complex and continually evolving concept (Lockwood, 2006). Lewis and Heckman (2006) through an extensive review of the literature identified three distinct strains of thought around the concept of talent management which includes- rebranding the human resource management in the label of talent management, concentrating on the development of talent pools, focusing on talent generically irrespective of its organisational boundaries or specific positions. Collings and Mellahi (2009) incorporated a fourth stream which emphasizes the identification of key positions rather than the talented individuals.

The novelty in the term talent management and its associated legitimacy has fascinated many organisations to rename their human resource management system. But unfortunately they fail to differentiate talent management from normal human resource management, so the criticisms like old wine in new bottle emerges. Human resource management is a wide umbrella of numerous employee related practices, but talent management is a focused strategy which aims at high potential employees or talented employees.

For defining talent management, it is important to consider the two major approaches to talent management- exclusive and inclusive approaches. The exclusive approach follows the 'workforce differentiation' concept and understands talent as an elite subset of the employees in the organisation who can make a difference to the organisational performance (CIPD, 2007). The inclusive approach is often from 'humanistic' considerations, and suggests allocation of all of the organisational resources equally among employees, as everyone in the organisation has potential 'talent' (Iles, Chuai, & Preece, 2010). These approaches to talent management have emerged based on the subject approach of talent. Even though inclusive approach seems appealing, it is exclusive approach is the most prevalent approach to talent management found in HR practice and widely supported in the literature (Ready, 2010; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013). In this article, talent management takes an exclusive approach with the definition given by Blass (2007) who defines talent management as the additional management processes and opportunities that are made available to people in the organisation who are considered to be 'talented'.

Employee Turnover

Over past five decades, academicians and management practitioners have shown sustained interest on the employee turnover concept, as voluntary employee turnover is always a key concern for the organisations. Turnover is defined as the "individual movement across the membership boundary of an organisation" (Price, 2001). Often studies focus on

voluntary turnover, as actual turnover fails to distinguish between cases where individuals have decided to leave and cases where they were forced to leave like death, retirement and dismissal. Voluntary turnover is the “voluntary cessation of membership of an organisation by an employee of that organisation” (Morrell, Wilkinson, & Loan-Clarke, 2001).

Managing turnover is crucial for any organisation because of the huge cost associated with a same, which includes the cost associated with pre-departure, recruitment, selection, orientation & training, and lost productivity (Tracey & Hinkin, 2008). Researchers have identified several factors that contribute to turnover, ranging from demographic factors to job embeddedness, and thereby suggesting different new strategies that go well beyond traditional solutions to increase the retention rates. The raging demand of talent employees and difficulty in managing them had shifted the focus of literature to talent retention than employee retention in general. Academicians and practitioner are much concerned about the various practices that may reduce the employee turnover rates. Whenever the discussion focuses on talented employees, the talent management comes into picture and is positioned in human resource management literature as an effective strategy for reducing turnover of talented employees.

Job Embeddedness

Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, & Sablyn (2001) developed a new perspective to view employee retention, job embeddedness, which represents a broad set of forces, both on-the-job factors and off-the-job factors that influences an employee’s decision to stay in the organisation. The more embedded an employee, lesser will the chances to leave the organisation. This construct challenges the conventional wisdom of employee dissatisfaction as a major predictor of quit and role of money in making them stay. It threw light to various other reasons for leaving which may be unrelated to their jobs and in many cases it could be an unexpected event or shock (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Inderrieden, 2005).

The critical dimensions of job embeddedness includes (1) ‘link’ that refers to formal or informal connections that employee holds with individuals, organisation, and community, 2) ‘fit’ which is the perceived compatibility or comfort of the employee with an organisation and with the environment, and (3) ‘sacrifice’ that represents the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that are forfeited when quitting the organisation. These dimensions include both on-the-job and off the job, that can be represented by three-by-two matrix, that includes six dimensions-links, fit, and sacrifice associated with the organisation and with the community (Holtom, Mitchell, & Lee, 2006).

Studies highlight that embedded employees have lesser intentions to leave the organisation (Bambacas & Kulik, 2013; Bergiel, Nguyen, Clenney, & Taylor, 2009; Mitchell *et al.*, 2001). Apart from a single construct, each dimension of job embeddedness also contributes significantly to lower the turnover intentions. It is been identified that better the fit dimension, the higher the likelihood that the employee feels professionally and personally tied to the organisation. Similarly higher the number of links between the employee and the organisation as well as the community, the more will be his binding with the organisation. Also, when more an employee has to give up when leaving, the more difficult it will be to leave the organisation (Mitchell *et al.*, 2001). In short, higher the dimensions of embeddedness- fit, link and sacrifice, higher will be employees’ intention to stay in the organisation.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OUTLINING THE IMPACT OF TALENT MANAGEMENT ON TURNOVER INTENTIONS AND THE ROLE OF JOB EMBEDDEDNESS

In this section, the reasoning of the framework is discussed and testable propositions concerning the relationships between talent management, job embeddedness and intention to stay are developed. The objective of the suggested framework is to explain the role of job embeddedness in the relation between talent management and employee’s intention to stay.

Relation between Talent Management and Employee Turnover Intention

Organisations are very concerned about the employee turnover as they recognise talented employees as source of competitive advantage. Talent management is considered as the most adopted human resource initiative to tackle with talent turnover issues. Researchers have identified that when perceived level of talent management practices increases, turnover intentions observed in talent employees decreases (Oehley & Theron, 2010; Plessis, 2010; Sonnenberg, 2011).

When organisations employ more talent management practices, it signals an organisation’s interest in investing in its people. This may enhance the psychological connection between organisation and the employees. These psychological responses may result in lesser turnover intentions. Certain studies have figured out variables like psychological contract (Tuin, Brouwer, & Bovee, 2010; Sonnenberg, 2011) and organisational justice (Gelens, Hofmans, Dries, & Pepermans, 2014) as intervening variables in the relation between talent management and behavioural outcomes like turnover intentions.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

Instead of viewing the relationship between talent management and intention to stay through most frequently studied psychological variables, this article look through job embeddedness perspective. Job embeddedness is a broad array of influences that enmesh the employees in the organisation or makes them stay back in the organisation, which is been a key factor in understanding why people stay in an organisation (Mitchell *et al.*, 2001). Talent management provides number of additional opportunities to high potential

employees and create an organisational environment in which employees enmesh. Employees may become highly embedded as the organisation facilitates in creating close links in the organisation, providing good fit jobs and thereby enhancing the sacrifices they have to make while leaving the organisation. The embedded employees show greater tendency to stay back with the organisation. So talent management through creating highly embedded employees enhances higher intention to stay among employees. These relationships linking Talent Management Practices, Job Embeddedness, and Intention to Stay is proposed as a model that is diagrammatically represented as shown in Fig. 1.

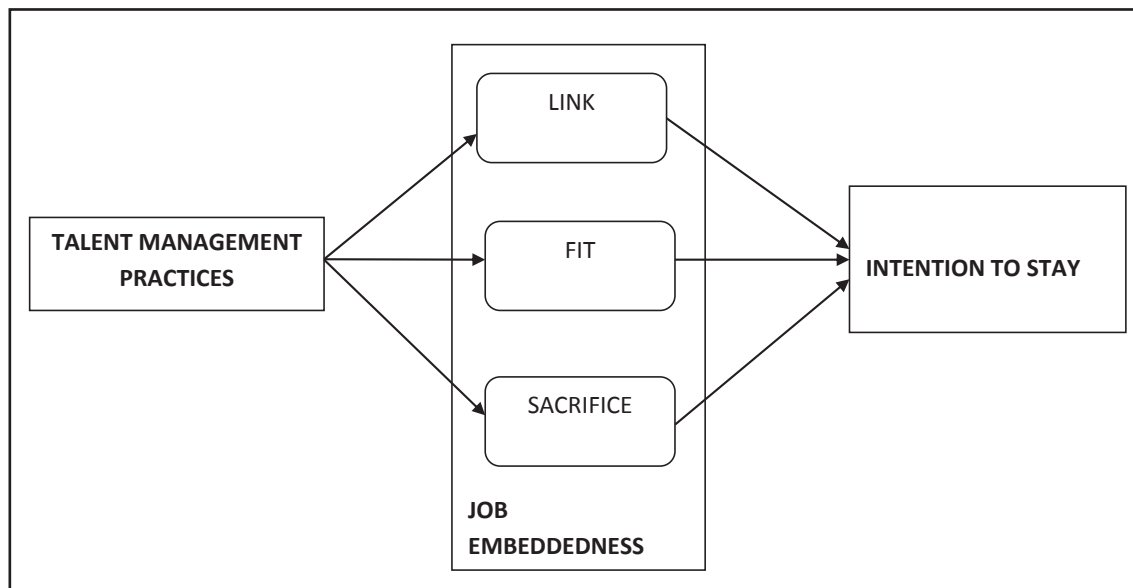


Fig. 1: Proposed model linking Talent Management Practices, Job Embeddedness, and Intention to Stay

Talent Management Practices and Link

The dimension of link refers to the connections between an employee and other employees, groups, or organisations, includes both on-the-job and off-the-job links. On-the-job links or links-organisation considers the formal and informal connections that exist between an employee, other people, or groups within the organisation, whereas, off-the-job links or links-community addresses the connections that exist with the community (Holtom *et al.*, 2006). Talent management practices may contribute in increasing the connections both in the organisation and community, which significantly influence the turnover intentions of the employees.

According to CIPD (2015) high-potential in-house development schemes, coaching, mentoring and buddying schemes are identified as the organisations' most commonly used and effective talent management activities. These activities may link the hi-potential employees with more senior leaders and top management executives, thereby increasing on-the-job links of the employee. Mentoring is an excellent practice to cultivate strong bonds between

a hi-potential employee and his mentor, which may make the employee more tied with his mentor as well as the organisation (Holtom *et al.*, 2006). In addition cross-functional project assignments, internal secondments provided as part of talent management initiatives can also create more opportunities for the employee to develop a stronger network in the organisation, which may make his turnover decision tougher.

Organisations may also provide opportunities to join courses leading to a management/ business qualification (for example MBA) which may link the employee with the nearby communities and enhancing off-the-job links. Similarly encouraging the participation in external conferences, workshops and events can help the employee to develop a network outside the organisation. Even though not common, organisations may provide external secondments which provide temporary transfer for a temporary assignment outside the organisation, which also is an opportunity to develop off-the-job links. In short, the role of talent management in increasing the links of the employees cannot be ignored, leading to Proposition 1.

Proposition 1: Talent management practices may positively influence the link dimension of job embeddedness.

Talent Management Practices and Fit

The dimension of fit in job embeddedness concept refers to an employee's perceived compatibility or comfort with the organisation (on-the-job fit) and the larger community (off-the-job links). It is really important that the person's values, career goals and plans for the future must "fit" with that of the organisation as well as the bigger community. The first place to focus in building fit in the organisation is in the recruitment and selection process (Holtom *et al.*, 2006). The organisations practicing talent management, consider competencies as the building block (Dalziel, 2004) and conducts recruitment and selection of external talent based on the competencies of the position. So only those candidates who have competencies to excel in that position may be hired. Also, talent management promotes potential assessment to be applied in recruitment process which provides a clearer picture of a candidate (Berger, 2004), thereby increasing the on-the-job fit. Even though 'recruit heavily from the local communities' can increase fit of the employees, this hiring practice may not be favoured by the talent management that highlights the competencies-based hiring.

Studies show that satisfaction with training and development opportunities is a best predictor of organisational fit (Dyk, Coetzee, & Takawira, 2013). Talent development, being a main activity of talent management, ensures that the most suitable development initiatives for high potential employees may be adopted for improving the competencies that the employees lack for his/ her career ahead.

Bambacas & Kulik (2013) highlight the influence of the performance appraisal and organisational rewards on the fit dimension. Talent management promotes unbiased performance appraisal and potential assessment based on the organisational competencies, and organisational rewards are decided based on these assessment results. The recent development of talent analytics promotes more objective measures in deciding the performance and potential level of the employees, which may also significantly contribute in increasing the on-the-job fit. So it could summarised as Proposition 2.

Proposition 2: Talent management practices may positively influence the fit dimension of job embeddedness.

Talent Management and Sacrifice

Sacrifice dimension in job embeddedness represents the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that an employee has to forfeit while leaving the organisation. It may

be understood as psychological and material exit barriers in leaving an organisation. When the sacrifice increases, the employee has to give up more when leaving which makes the exit from the organisation difficult. It was identified that satisfaction with career opportunities (Dyk *et al.*, 2013), and employee development activities (Bambacas & Kulik, 2013) increase employees' perceptions of sacrifice (Holtom *et al.*, 2006).

Any additional benefits an organisation provides which will be lost while leaving the organisation makes the sacrifice dimension higher. Talent management, by definition itself is the additional opportunities provided to talented employees. So increase in number of the talent management initiatives in the organisation can cause significant increase in the cost of leaving the organisation, which can be summarised as Proposition 3.

Proposition 3: Talent management practices may positively influence the sacrifice dimension of job embeddedness.

Talent Management Practices, Job Embeddedness and Turnover Intentions

Being the additional management practices provided to talented employees in order to nurture them and elicit positive work attitudes, talent management may link the employees more tightly to the organisations, provide more fit in their job domains, and enhance the benefits they have forfeit while they quit. This in turn enhances the intention to stay of employees. Literature have investigated the role of human resource practices on job embeddedness and turnover intentions, and identified that job embeddedness shows a mediating effect in the relation between various human resource practices and turnover intentions (Bergiel *et al.*, 2009; Bambacas & Kulik, 2013; Ghosh & Gurnathan, 2015). Bergiel *et al.*, 2009 identified that Job embeddedness fully mediated the effect of compensation and growth opportunities on turnover intention. Talent management are additional initiatives provided to talented employees in addition to normal human resource, so the embeddedness it creates is ought to be more than the normal human resource practices.

Talent management is a mutual investment relationship, where employees are benefited with career development and organisations with enhanced performance. Hom, Tsui, Wu, Lee, Zhang, & Fu (2009) established the mediation effects of job embeddedness on the relation between mutual investment employment relationship and turnover intention. In addition, it ensures the participation and involvement of the employees in the organisation and position itself as commitment based HR strategy. The influence of commitment-based HR practices on employees' intention to quit is mediated by job embeddedness (Ghosh & Gurnathan,

2015). Being a commitment based practice as well as mutual investment relationship, talent management practices confirms the influences on turnover intentions, through job embeddedness. In short, this article suggests the mediation role of job embeddedness leading to Proposition 4.

Proposition 4: Job embeddedness mediates the relation between talent management practices and intention to stay of employees.

DISCUSSION

In the present paper, a theoretical framework that introduces job embeddedness as an intervening variable for exploring how talent management practices influences employee's intention to stay is been presented. The current paper may offer insights for academics as well as for HR practitioners, in developing a future research agenda and in managerial practice.

Research Agenda

The developed research agenda consists of propositions linking talent management practices, job embeddedness and intention to stay. An empirical study to test the proposed model in organisations can ensure more legitimacy for talent management as a retention strategy. Studies can attempt to analyse the variations in embeddedness and intention to stay of employees in organisations with different levels of talent management maturity in the organisation. Longitudinal designs may be the most appropriate, even though a bit challenging, which can help to study how talent management practices influence job embeddedness which will in turn lead to employee intention to stay.

Implications

From a theoretical point of view, there is a lack of theoretical support on how talent management practices help in retaining high-potential employees. Despite talent management having a direct influence on turnover intentions; this article discusses the influence of talent management initiatives in creating embedded high potential employees and thereby leading to lesser turnover rates, which may provide a research agenda in future studies on the topic of talent management. An empirical study that takes into account the variations in talent management practices and job embeddedness and its effects on outcome variables such as turnover intentions would more insight into the model that would show the direction and strengths of these relationships.

On the practical side, this paper encourages HR practitioners to assess the role of job embeddedness in the relation between talent management and employee retention, instead of merely

focusing on efforts for the talent retention. Furthermore, the multiple propositions provide HR practitioners with insights to strive for retention of talented employees through talent management, by focusing on various initiatives that increase the link, fit and sacrifice dimensions of embeddedness, and thereby increasing the retention rates of the employees.

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