

**Talent Management in Ireland: An
exploratory study into how companies in
Ireland manage talent in their organisations**

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Talent Management in Ireland: An exploratory study into how companies in Ireland manage talent in their organisations

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my original research work except for specific sources that are referenced in the text and in the bibliography. Furthermore, this dissertation has not previously been presented for other assessment to any other university or learning institution.

Signed:.....

Date.....

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Abstract

Talented people are the source of competitive advantage and if managed properly they can make a difference to an overall business performance. Talent management is a concept that helps organisations manage their human potential and get the best of it. The title of this dissertation '*Talent Management in Ireland: An exploratory study into how companies in Ireland manage talent in their organisations*' is followed by the research question '*to explore contemporary talent management process as it is practiced in Ireland*'.

This dissertation attempts to define talent management, to explore its main theories and concepts, to identify the key issues and barriers associated with the successful talent management, to identify the best practices of talent management and to identify practitioners' perspective on talent management in Ireland.

The research found that talent management is a developing process in Ireland especially in the Public Sector. There are gaps between theory and practice that are noticeable within an Irish context. There is much to be done in the Public Sector as recruitment freeze and legislation are on the way to a successful implementation of talent management.

Furthermore, the researcher found that in Ireland the aim for the further development of talent management is full implementation of the process within organisations. The research project points out the lack of one clear definition of talent management and assistance for practitioners which may be the reason why talent management is not well developed in Ireland.

1. Introduction

An effective way to manage human capital within an organisation is always the most challenging process for human resource management professionals. These days it is not important how many talented people organisations possess or how they recruit them but how these talented people are managed within organisations in order to develop their potential and make the best use of it. Recently, talent management has become a very popular process and at the same time has become the catchphrase among business and human resource individuals. More and more organisations have implemented talent management process to manage more effectively talented human capital that could be the source of competitive advantage. It is interesting how talented people may make a difference within companies and be the source of the success and sustainable competitive advantage. Talent management is an inspiring concept and this is the reason the researcher has decided to conduct the research in this field.

The title of the research project is '*Talent Management in Ireland: An exploratory study into how companies in Ireland manage talent in their organisations*'. The intention of this research and also the research problem area is to explore talent management as it is practiced and perceived in Ireland. As talent management has gained on popularity over the years and is still an underdeveloped process, the researcher wants to explore how it works in Irish organisations. The researcher would also like to analyze what the strategies and attitudes are towards talent management in Ireland and what is the best practice of talent management within an Irish context. Furthermore, the researcher would like to explore the main concepts and theories proposed by researchers and investigate if they are present in Ireland. Additionally, the researcher aims to research if talent management is perceived in the same way across different industries in Ireland.

1.1. The background of the problem

The source of competitive advantage has changed over the years. These days the most important source of competitive advantage is human capital which is talented and which possess potential. A considerable amount of pressure has been put on organisations to recruit, retain and manage talented people. Therefore within the academic community and business world the concept of talent management transpired.

Talent management is one of the most popular business concepts but it is still rudimentary and there is no one clear definition of talent management that would set the right direction for practitioners. The term of talent management was first used in late 1990's by McKinsey Group (1998). Since then, the researchers have been discussing about the meaning of talent management, the definition of talent and potential, the best practice of talent management and if it is worth fighting for talented people. Despite the fact that it was more than a decade ago, researchers as well as practitioners are still seeking answers for questions related to talent management and processes involved in this concept. There is also lack of empirical evidence that confirms the best practice and the best strategy for talent management.

1.2. The research question and research objectives

As we experience economic crisis, to survive the company needs to have a sustainable competitive advantage. This competitive advantage has changed over years and these days it is human capital which is the source of competitive advantage. If managed proficiently talented people will influence an organisation to a large extent and they may be the source of the business's success. The important thing is not only to recruit the talented people but also to manage them in a certain way to release their potential. The researcher has decided

to do the research project in talent management because she is interested in the gap between theory and practice that is noticeable in the process of talent management.

The way talent management is practiced in Ireland has also triggered the researcher's attention. Ireland seemed to be one of the world's wealthiest countries in the late 1990's. Companies all over the world were coming to Ireland and settled their headquarters across the country. Ireland benefited the great economic and business development but during the economic crisis this development languished. At this time to survive in the Irish economy companies have to possess the features to let them stand out of the crowd. The researcher is interested if talent matters for Irish companies in time of reformation after the economic crisis.

The rationale behind choosing this topic is that the researcher would like to work in the future as a professional of talent management process. Furthermore, as a student and person who has worked in companies where talented people were not managed properly, the recruitment processes were not designed to hire the best and the brightest people and where talent was not appreciated, the interest in this process grew. Additionally, the researcher thinks that the research project may add some new and fresh information on the concept of talent management and at the same time may proof former strategies and theories.

The research question of the dissertation is '*To explore contemporary talent management process as it is practiced in Ireland*'. First of all the researcher aims to explore the definition of talent management from point of view both researchers and practitioners. The researcher also would like to explore processes, attitudes and strategies concerning talent management which are practiced in Ireland and also worldwide. Additionally, the

researcher would like to explore the barriers and issues with talent management as perceived by researchers and Irish human resource professionals.

The research objectives of the dissertation are as following:

1. To define talent management.
2. To explore the key theories and concepts of talent management.
3. To identify the key perceived issues concerning talent management process.
4. To explore the best practices of talent management.
5. To identify perceived barriers to successful talent management process.
6. To identify practitioners' perceptions of talent management process in Ireland.

1.3. The approach to dissertation

The researcher intends to achieve the research objectives by the secondary research and the primary research. The secondary research is the critical literature review based on academic journals. The primary research includes individual in-depth interviews with four human resource professionals from Ireland.

The secondary research covers the main concepts and theories of talent management as they are perceived worldwide by researchers. I also approximate the origin of the concept of talent management, main definitions concerned with this term and issues addressed to this process.

The primary research covers the Irish perspective on talent management. The researcher interviewed four HR professionals from Ireland and explored with them concepts and theories mentioned in the critical literature review, perceived issues and barriers related to talent management and their perception of talent management in general.

The researcher has planned to do the research in Ireland in a more general term as she would like to take into consideration different industries. Every industry has its own attitude, strategy and way of operating and the researcher wants to explore either the talent management and its strategy and determine if it is the same in each industry. Focusing on more than one industry the researcher feels it is more objective and valuable to the topic.

1.3. The justification for the project

Talent management emerged in the late 1990's and is still a developing concept in a research field. There is a gap between theory and practice. There is also a lack of assistance for practitioners and a lack of research which confirms both practical steps in implementing talent management process as well as effectiveness of this process.

Talent management seems to be a challenge for HR departments because there is still a problem in recruiting and retaining talented employees as well as with managing these people. Also, in spite of the financial crisis, workforce demographics and skill shortage, talent management will continue to be one of the most important challenges. During the last few years, we have seen the emergence of the concept of talent management as a strategic approach, but there is still not enough information about the practical side of this concept.

The researcher thinks that the research project can bring some new, fresh information for practitioners about talent management concept. Moreover, it can bring some new information about practices that are applied in Ireland. This research gives an overall look at the attitude of Irish companies towards the talent management process. The research also shows perceptions of talent management process from different industries which may affect the way talent management is perceived in general. There are still discussions on how talent management should be implemented and applied to business strategy so it can

be more effective. This research project can develop the concept of the most effective strategy for talent management process and can highlight the most common issues and difficulties that should be taken into consideration.

1.4. The organisation of the dissertation

The dissertation includes five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction and it covers the main aspects of the research project as: background of the problem, interests of the researcher in this problem, research question and objectives, approach to project, justification for project, organisation of project, scope and limitation to project and contributions of project. The aim of this chapter is to introduce reader to the topic and to present objectives of the research project. The second chapter will include the critical literature review which is the secondary research based on academic journals. This literature review will cover the definition of talent management, main concepts and theories of talent management, best practices of talent management proposed by researchers and perceived issues concerned with talent management. The third chapter will involve research methodology and methods. This chapter will cover research philosophy of the dissertation and methodology used in the research project. The third chapter will discuss research methods with their strengths and weaknesses. Also this chapter will cover the justification for chosen methods used in dissertation. The fourth chapter will concern data analysis and findings of quantitative primary research. The researcher will present and illustrate the findings of the primary research with accurate links to the secondary research and to research objectives. The fifth chapter will include the general conclusions. In this chapter the researcher will summarize findings according to objectives and also will point out general issues and concepts that raised in during this research.

1.5. Scope and Limitations to the research

The researcher can distinguish two limitations to the research project: time and access. The researcher started a full time job at the beginning of April which can influence her research project. The researcher may not be able to have full-time hours for studying and conducting the research. Additionally, the researcher may not be able to be as flexible as she used to be working part time before. This flexibility may limit access to library and also to people with whom the researcher wants to do the interview to the primary research. Time limitation is connected also with the submission date of dissertation, as the date changed at the beginning of this year. Another limitation is access to professionals that would be able to take part in the primary research. These days it difficult to get important information about companies because of competition and confidentiality, that is why some professionals may not agree to participate in individual in-depth interviews or may cancel it just before the due date. Furthermore, the researcher may not have access to contact details of people who might be willing to do the interview.

Another limitation is interest in talent management process. The researcher is interested in talent management and acknowledges that others might have drawn different conclusions based on their values.

1.6. Contributions of the research project

The research project that the researcher conducts may contribute to further development and improvement of the concept of talent management. It may influence the way the talent management is perceived and highlights the main issues, problems and gap between theory and practice. This research may attempt to clarify the definition of talent management, the meaning of talent and potential within an organisation. Also the research project may highlight new issues and new barriers to talent management process which are perceived in Ireland. Moreover, the research project concerning talent management may put in order and points out the main theories and concepts and at the same time highlights problems connected with these theories and their shortcomings. The researcher would like this project to contribute towards the enhancement of further development of talent management in Ireland and in the academic community. Additionally, the dissertation aims to point out how talent management is perceived in different industries, what may influence the development of best practice according to the industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

These days successful organisations are those with a competitive advantage that allows them stand out amongst competitors. The source of competitive advantage has always shifted over time. People and how they are managed are becoming more important because many other sources of competitive success are not as powerful as they used to be. Product and process technology, protected or regulated markets, financial resources and economies of scale are traditional sources of competitive advantage which can still provide a competitive success but to a lesser degree because organisation culture and capabilities derived from how people are managed are more vital these days (Pfeffer, 1994, pp. 10-11). The value of human capital is strongly dependent upon its potential in order to contribute to the competitive advantage or core competence of the organisation. Not all employees possess the skills that are equally unique and valuable to a particular firm. If practitioners understand which forms of human capital have the potential to be a source of competitive advantage and identify, develop and deploy strategically this potential, organisations may be able to gain a competitive advantage (Lepak and Snell, 1999, pp. 45).

According to Boudreau and Ramstad (2005, p. 129) ‘the traditional service-oriented HR focus must be extended to a ‘decisions science’ that enhances decisions about human capital’. This ‘decision science’ is called ‘talentship’ and it includes talent segmentation or identifying pivotal talent pools where the quality and availability of human resource makes the biggest difference to strategic success of the organisation. The talent decision science is vitally needed today as it is important to enhance talent decisions concerning structures, behaviours, capability, learning, collaboration, shared culture and the like (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005, p. 131).

As talent has become more important in the organisations and at the same time it has become the source of the competitive advantage, researchers distinguished the process of talent management. The term talent management gained on popularity in the late 90's and it is still a challenging and developing process for practitioners and for researchers. Practitioners as well as researchers seek more information on how to manage the best and the brightest people within an organisation, how to identify talent and potential among employees, what is the best practice for managing talent and which processes should be included in talent management.

2.2. The definition of talent management

Talent Management was officially born and gained popularity when McKinsey published the research 'The War for Talent' in 1997-1998 (Chambers et al, 1998, Iles, Preece and Chuai, 2010). This research has identified talent management as a critical business challenge (CIPD, Talent Management: an overview, 2013)

Talent management is the implementation of integrated strategies and processes designed to increase productivity in a workplace by improving processes for attracting, developing, retaining and utilizing people who possess required skills and aptitude to meet business needs (Sunday, 2011, p. 179). Most definitions of talent management 'suggest the need to identify, select and develop the right people to ensure they realize their potential and hence make a positive contribution to organisational performance' (Collings, McDonnell and Scullion, 2009, p. 7). CIPD conducted research and they developed a working definition for talent management which is 'the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention and deployment of those individuals who are of particular value to an organisation, either in view of their 'high potential' for the future or because they are

fulfilling business/operation-critical roles' (CIPD, Talent Management: an overview, 2013).

According to Santhoshkumar and Rajasekar (2012, p. 38) talent management is about identifying a person's skills, traits and personality, and offering him or her a matching job. The authors also argue that talent management has a different meaning to different organisations. For some of them, talent management is about the management of high-worth individuals and for others it is about how talent is managed generally (Santhoshkumar and Rajasekar, 2012 p. 39).

According to Lewis and Heckman (2006, pp. 139-141), there is a disturbing lack of clarity regarding the definition, scope and overall goals of talent management. They identify three distinct thoughts regarding talent management. The first thought, defines talent management as a collection of typical human resource practices, functions, activities or specialist areas e.g. recruiting selection, development, and career and succession planning. The second perspective of talent management concerns concept of talent pools which means that talent management is a set of processes designed to ensure an adequate flow of employees into jobs. The third perspective concerning talent management focuses on talent generically – without regard for organizational boundaries or specific positions. All three perspectives are unsatisfying for authors as they do not add any understanding of how to manage talent (Lewis and Heckman, 2006, Reilly, 2008, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, Morgan and Jardin, 2010, Burkus and Osula, 2011) . Collings and Mellahi (2009, pp. 304-305), refer to Lewis and Heckman that there is not a single consistent or concise definition of talent management and they recognize and add the fourth stream 'which emphasises the identification of key positions which have the potential to differentially impact the competitive advantage of the firm'.

It is noticeable that there is no one clear definition of talent management process and there is no attempt to create this clear definition. Researchers are struggling to define talent management in one particular way. Available definitions reflect many different perspectives on talent management and cause the confusion among practitioners.

2.3. The meaning of talent and potential

The process of identifying and managing talent and high potential has become increasingly important for organisations. It is crucial to identify the talent that already exists in the organisation and the employees who have potential to be effective and successful in other future higher positions. In order to be effective in talent management processes companies need to understand what talent and potential are.

The term talent means a person's value or natural abilities. Talent in organisations can be applied to three distinct aspects: an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities, a specific person and a group. Also, in some organisations talent can refer to the entire employee population (Silzer and Dowell, cited in Silzer and Church, 2009, pp. 379-380, CIPD, Talent Management: an overview, 2013). From the research conducted by CIPD the working definition of talent is: 'talent consists of those individuals who can make difference to organisational performance either through their immediate contribution or, in the longer-term, by demonstrating the highest levels of potential' (CIPD, Talent Management: an overview, 2013).

Santhoshkumar and Rajasekar (2012, p. 40) define 'critical talent' as an individual with a highly developed skills and possessed deep knowledge of not just work itself but also of how to make things happen within an organisation.

The term potential is used to suggest that an individual has the qualities e.g. characteristics, motivation, skills, abilities and experiences, to effectively perform and contribute in different roles in the organisation in the future.

Every organisation differs in its definition of potential and talent, but the most common problem in many organisations is that different definitions of potential are used internally by different managers and executives (Silzer and Church, 2009, pp. 380-383). Authors also point out that it is important to note that identifying talent potential for future roles is completely different from matching an individual's skills and abilities to existing immediate position.

2.4. The key concepts and theories of talent management

2.4.1. Strategic talent management

Collings and Mellahi (2009, pp. 305-306) propose the theoretical model of strategic talent management. This model is concerning the definition of strategic talent management which is based on three elements. The first element is that effective talent management will have an indirect positive relationship with organisational performance, through motivation, organizational commitment and extra-role behaviour which act separately or in combination with one another. The second element of definition emphasises the development of talent pool of high potential of high performers to fill the positions that have an impact on an organisation's sustainable competitive advantage. In addition, organisation should also differentiate between employees who are strategic performers and those who are not. The third element of this definition focuses on recognition of the importance of differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate the filling of key positions in an organisation with competent employees and ensuring their continuous

commitment to the company. According to Collings and Mellahi (2009, p. 307), the identification of pivotal talent positions should be the first stage in any strategic talent management system. Organisation can draw upon to fill pivotal talent positions. By ‘having identified the pivotal talent positions within an organisation, the key for strategic talent management system is the development of a talent pool to fill these pivotal positions’ (Collings and Mellahi, 2009, p. 307). Talent pool should be focused on managing risks associated with pivotal positions i.e. potential mismatch between employees and skills which means too few employees to meet business standards or too many employees resulting in redundancies (Collings and Mellahi, 2009, p. 308).

Boudreau and Ramstad propose ‘The HC BRidge Decision Framework’ which is a model that shows logical connections supporting ‘talentship’ and how talent is related to strategic decisions (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2006; Lewis and Heckman, 2006). ‘The HC BRidge Framework’ is based on three anchor points which are efficiency, effectiveness and impact. The efficiency anchor point describes what resources are used to deliver HR practices. The typical indicators of this efficiency would include cost-per-hire and time to fill vacancies. The effectiveness anchor point relates to how HR policies and practices affect the talent pools and organization structures to which they are directed. The impact anchor point refers to the strategic impact of changing the talent pool and illustrates the fundamental differences revealed by a focus on talent decisions (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2006, p. 132).

Strategic approach to talent management is strong and persuasive as CEO’s and HR directors are now likely to distinguish talent management among their key priorities. To gain competitive advantage organisations need to develop a strategic approach to talent management that both suits their business and gets the best of their employees. (CIPD, Talent Management: an overview, 2013). The research conducted by CIPD demonstrates

that interest in talent management is caused by mix of external and internal organisational demands such as ‘increasingly competitive global markets, skills shortages, demographic trends and corporate governance and business strategy’ (CIPD, Talent Management: an overview, 2013). The benefit of organisation-wide talent management strategy is that it focuses on investment in human capital and also places it high on the corporate agenda. Furthermore, it can contribute to other strategic objectives e.g. building a high performance workplace, encouraging learning organisation, adding value to the ‘employer of choice’ and branding agenda and contributing to diversity agenda (CIPD, Talent Management: an overview, 2013).

2.4.2. Critical Talent Management

Shen (2011, p. 51) proposes the term critical talent management which arises from developments in workforce planning. There are three key components in critical talent management: collecting production and employee data and conducting in-depth analysis, gathering and analysing information and trends to forecast challenges that your workforce will need to address and using predictive analytics to formulate talent philosophy. Collection of data and forecasting provide a medium to communicate with leaders about the best way to utilise talent within an organisation (Shen, 2011, p. 51). These three key components allow HR to move from a conventional order-taking position to a dynamic partnering role. According to Shen (2008, p. 56) ‘through analytics, people are linked to jobs where critical success factors have been studied and enabled, while the organisation reaps the benefit of increased overall productivity and profitability’. HR should involve members with finance and consulting skills in order to conduct a comprehensive workforce profile, assess what skills the organisation will need in the future and to create forecast and

scenario models. In this case, HR department has an opportunity for growth as it will be more credible to expedite discussions with stakeholders.

2.4.3. Supply chain model for talent management

According to Cappelli (2008, pp. 74-76), talent management is a matter of anticipating the need for human capital and setting out a plan to meet it. Current responses to talent management fall into two equally ineffective ‘camps’. The first one and the most common, is to do nothing, anticipate no needs at all and make no plans for addressing them. The second, is concerned with complex and bureaucratic models for forecasting and succession planning (Cappelli, 2008, pp.74-76). In response to these two ‘camps’, Cappelli proposes supply chain model for talent management. This model involves four principles. The first perspective is ‘make and buy to manage risk’. Talent is expensive and that is why companies should estimate their needs and plan to hire from outside to make up for any shortage. The second perspective is ‘adapt to the uncertainty in talent demand’. There is the uncertainty in demand, and employers have two ways to adapt to it. The first way is to break up development programmes into shorter ones and the second way is to create an organisation-wide talent pool. The third principle is to ‘improve the return on investment in developing employees’. This principle concerns two approaches of doing so. The first approach is to get employees to share in the costs of development. The second approach is to maintain relationship with former employees in order that they may return someday. The final, fourth principle is ‘preserve the investment by balancing employee-employer interests’. Employees leave because they find better opportunities and the key to preserve organisation’s investment is to balance the interests of employees and employer by having them share in advancement decisions (Cappelli, 2008, pp. 77-81).

2.4.4. Integrated talent management

According to Morgan and Jardin (2010, pp. 25-26), integrated talent management (ITM) involves four interrelated practices: measurement of organisational and individual capability gaps, alignment of strategy, organisation design and people, development of talent and expansion of organisational and individual capabilities. ITM focuses on delivering the critical organisational and individual capabilities which are required to meet or exceed strategic business objectives over time. Morgan and Jardin (2010, pp. 26-27), propose a 'MADE' framework which consists of: Measure, Align, Deploy and Expand. Measure stands for continuous identification and quantification of capability gaps which focus on the right tasks to increase individual and organisation capability. Secondly, Align stands for aligning strategy, organisation design and talent. If they are not aligned it does not matter how talented people are, the underlying systems and processes are so misaligned that they are not able to achieve their goals and objectives. Deploy in 'MADE' framework stands for hiring, positioning and exiting of talent. The most important decision is how to deploy talent in a way that supports both strategy and individual development. Finally, Expand stands for planned actions that increase capabilities in the organisation, leadership, technical, professional and personal levels (Morgan and Jardin, 2010, pp. 26-28).

2.4.5. Global talent management

Global talent management is defined as ‘the strategic international integration of resourcing and development of key talent involving the proactive identification, development and deployment of high performing and high potential strategic employees on a global scale’ (Collings, McDonnell and Scullion, 2009, p. 9). The global talent management aims to facilitate success of the Multinational Enterprises’ business operations through identifying, developing and deploying the organisation’s key managerial talent in the context of business needs on a global basis. Collings, McDonnell and Scullion (2009, pp. 9-10) argues that success in the global business is driven by a small number of high potential, exceptional people, usually managerial employees who fill key strategic positions within the MNE’s global operations. They also argue that it is a few ‘key’ or ‘talented’ people within an organisation which can provide a unique source of competitive advantage and there are a number of qualities which separate the ‘few’ exceptional employees from the rest (Collings, McDonnell and Scullion, 2009, pp. 9-10). Authors distinguish three types and characteristics of people that are relevant for global talent management in the multinational enterprise. These types are: mavens, connectors and salesperson. Mavens are characterized by their ability to accumulate and import knowledge. They are aware of business trends and how the best take advantage of the international marketplace. When mavens gain relevant information they are willing to share it with colleagues and other stakeholders and take a degree of pleasure in sharing this information. Connectors are defined as people with well-developed networks of contacts relevant to the global business operations. They possess the ability to span many different areas reflecting a wide range of networks developed through personal as well as professional live. Salespeople are characterized as those who ‘have the skills to persuade

us when we are unconvinced of what we are hearing' (Collings, McDonnell and Scullion, 2009, p. 14). Their challenge in global business will be developing an awareness of cultural idiosyncrasies and cues and at the same time ability to adapt their social interactions to different national cultural contexts (Collings, McDonnell and Scullion, 2009, pp. 11-14).

2.4.6. Total quality management applied to talent management

There are five common pain points of ineffective talent management: reducing unwanted turnover, improving weak succession planning, losing top talent, matching right people to wrong jobs and training the wrong personnel. Stevens (2008, p. 16) states that a Six Sigma/Total Quality Management approach can help to minimize the five common pain points and accomplish the level of quality improvement necessary for the management of intellectual capital. By using the TQM approach organisations focus on identifying the causes of failure of otherwise qualified employees. By applying Six Sigma/TQM to talent management there would be an accurate measure of the individual's skills, competencies, motivational drivers, work habits, and potential for developing future competencies. Stevens (2008, p. 16) proposes the talent audit system which is an information repository where a company has an inventory of strengths and weaknesses for all employees in every key position within an organisation. The talent audit system will help to place the right people in the right position. When it comes to reducing the unwanted talent, the talent system audit accurately and systematically predicts the effectiveness of recruiting the right talent and avoiding the wrong talent. Another pain point is improving weak succession planning and with the talent audit system it will be possible to expand succession planning not only to a small number of key executive positions but to all levels in the organisation. Additionally, one of the primary causes of

top talent turnover is poor job fit. Talent audit identifies that a large proportion of job dissatisfaction is a result of these job mismatches. Also with the help of a talent audit database, an organisation would possess a complete list of strengths and weaknesses for all employees in all key roles which would improve identification of job performance. By identifying which skills are critical to distinguish top performers from weaker or marginal performers and which managers will thrive in which role, organisations are able to improve job matching. Finally, training needs to be designed to each individual job function and by using the complete inventory of strengths and weaknesses found in a talent audit database, organisation can tailor its training to individuals that need it the most (Stevens, 2008, pp. 16-18).

2.4.7. The war for talent

Another concept of talent management is ‘The War for Talent’, the research published by McKinsey Group, which involves the case studies of twenty companies out of seventy seven regarded as rich in talent (Chambers et al, 1998, pp. 45-46). Better talent is worth fighting for, but at the time when the need for superior talent is increasing, companies find it difficult to attract and retain good people. According to authors, it is possible to win war for talent, but first companies must elevate talent management to a burning corporate priority. After that, the senior management team should answer the question ‘why a smart, energetic, ambitious, individual would want to come and work with you rather than with the team next door’ (Chambers et al, 1998, p. 46). Having this in mind, the company must turn its attention to how it is going to recruit talent and develop this talent. ‘Creating a winning employee value position means tailoring a company’s “brand” and “products” – the jobs it has to offer – to appeal to the specific people it wants to find and keep. It also

means paying what it takes to attract and retain strong performers (the “price”)’ (Chambers et al, 1998, p. 50).

The research conducted by McKinsey Group, suggests that there are three qualitative challenges faced by companies. The first challenge is that the more the complex economy demands the more sophisticated talent is. The second challenge faced by organisations is the emergence of efficient capital markets that has enabled the rise of small and medium companies which are targeting the same people as large companies. And the third challenge is increasing job mobility (Chambers et al, 1998, pp. 47-48).

McKinsey Group states that superior talent is going to be the prime source of competitive advantage and every company which wish to exploit must adopt a talent mindset throughout the organisation (Chambers et al, 1998, p. 49).

The research suggests that there are a number of specific steps to do with development that companies should take to complete their talent program. The first step is to put people in jobs before they are ready. People learn by being put in situations that require skills they do not have and the key to development is ‘a big job before I expected it’. The second step to take is to put a good feedback system in place. Good feedback and coaching raise everyone’s potential and not only that of the high flyers. Another step on the list is to understand the scope of company’s retention problem. According to authors, most companies recognize they could improve recruitment and selections and only few realize they have a retention problem. And the last step is to move on the poor performers now. The cost of carrying people who are not failing but they are neither leading the way in company is enormous. Their low productivity decrease the performance of all they work with teams and high performers (Chambers et al, 1998, pp. 54-57).

In 2000, McKinsey Group released an update to 'War for Talent' which is called 'War for Talent, Part Two'. This research confirmed that the war for management talent is dramatically intensified. Additionally, the research shows that demographic and social changes have played a big role in the trend of 'War for Talent'. Also the update confirmed that companies which are doing the best job in managing their talent are delivering better results for shareholders. As talent management is not the only driver of better performance it is clearly one of the most powerful (Axelrod, Handfield-Jones, and Welsh, 2001, pp. 9-10).

The update to the research also found that if the 'A' player is paid additional 40 percent more to hire, it could bring company an overall return of 100 percent or more in one year. Although, both studies in 1997 and in 2000 'revealed the gap between awareness of the talent issue and an effective response to it' (Axelrod, Handfield-Jones, and Welsh, 2001, p. 11).

'The departure of talented employees can actually benefit a company, depending on where those individuals are hired. Therefore organisation must learn how to lose certain battles in order to win the war' (Somaya and Williamson, 2008, p. 29). According to Somaya and Williamson (2008, p. 29) turnover hurts organisations because of the increased administrative costs associated with recruiting, hiring and training new employees. Also, companies lose many resources because employees are repositories of human capital which is an organisation's knowledge, skills and know-how. On one hand, the assumption of 'War for Talent' is that employees are lost to competitors. On the other hand, employees also leave to join potential cooperators and this situation can benefit the organisation in means of the creation and strengthening of business relationship with those business cooperators. Authors' argument is that employee mobility is not a game of win-or-lose – 'a

company might lose the human capital of former employees but it can also retain access to the social capital it shares with them' (Somaya and Williamson, 2008, p. 30). Somaya and Williamson (2008, p.31) propose that instead of using defensive or retaliatory strategic response to employee turnover, companies should apply a relational approach. In defensive approach, the managers are taking steps to reduce the motivation of employees to leave. In retaliatory approach, organisations are taking actions to threaten or harm departing employees or the companies that hire them. In a relational approach, proposed by Somaya and Williamson, companies are taking steps to maintain a positive relationships with former employees (Somaya and Williamson, 2008, p. 31). The benefits of well implemented relational approach are as follow: enhancement of access to potential clients, increased pool of human capital and generation of organisational good will.

In contrast, Pfeffer (2001, p. 248) argues that fighting the war for talent is hazardous for organisation's health. According to the author, companies which are fighting the 'war for talent' are fighting the wrong war and are often using the wrong methods. Pfeffer (2001, p. 249) gives a list of scenarios that happen in a war for talent. First of all, there is an invariable emphasis on individual performance and at the same time diminishing of teamwork. Secondly, there is a tendency to glorify the talents of those outside the company. Another unhealthy thing is the creation of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The fourth thing on the list is a de-emphasis of fixing the systemic, cultural and business process issues. And finally, there is the development of an elitist, arrogant attitude (Pfeffer, 2001; Collings, McDonnell and Scullion, 2009). Pfeffer argues that having an attitude of wisdom permits an organisation to take action even as it doubts what it knows, because of that it continues to learn even as it acts. The war for talent has been embedded within theory which states that organisational performance is essentially the aggregation of individual

performances and that people are essentially unchanged in terms of their abilities and capabilities, which is why selecting and keeping the right people is so crucial. Fighting ‘the war for talent’ can cause the company to focus always on getting better, more talented employees, mostly from outside instead of fixing the culture and system of management (Pfeffer, 2001, pp. 257-258)

2.5. Talent management best practices

McCauley and Wakefield (2006, p. 5) present eight best practices of talent management according to a study on talent management which was conducted by the American Productivity and Quality Center and the Center for Creative Leadership. The first best practice is to define ‘talent management’ broadly. The second best practice is to integrate the various elements of talent management into a comprehensive system. The next practice is to focus talent management on their most highly-valued talent. The fourth best practice is to get CEOs and senior executives committed to talent management work. Another best practice is to build competency models to create a shared understanding of the skills and behaviours the organisation needs and values in employees. The sixth best practice is to monitor talent system-wide to identify potential talent gaps. To excel at recruiting, identifying and developing talent, as well as performance management and retention is the next best practice proposed by the study. And finally, the eighth best practice is to regularly evaluate the results of their talent management system (McCauley and Wakefield, 2006, p. 5).

According to Blakely (2012, pp. 12-13), there are top ten talent management strategies which every organisation should consider. The first strategy is to identify your top five percent of important functions. By this, the company can identify the most critical functions not only these concerning leaders but also key roles that affect the bottom line.

Another proposed strategy is that ‘backfill’ does not equal recruitment. Companies should use corporate growth and three-year project portfolio to define talent requirements and at the same time those requirements and talent gaps should be guidelines for recruitment strategy. Another top ten strategy is to understand what motivates your team. It is important to understand how employees can be more effective in their roles or how organisation can help them address their work-life balance challenges. The fourth top strategy is to give employees the keys. The new workforce is demanding in creating a career path that suits their individual preferences. Employees have new expectations and elements like a learning management system that gives control over their development plans or an internal job marketplace within an organisation may provide advancement opportunities that will fulfill these new expectations. The next top ten strategy is to socialize HR now. This strategy means that it is important to get a major social presence and monitor organisation’s social standing and branding as these days employees participate in social networks, they share information about employers with each other and the world. To deliver the numbers is another strategy that stands out for measure what you manage. The author proposes four steps towards developing a clear reporting plan: understand that the metrics your organisation needs to improve; determine a source system to record the data required to support the metrics; select an analytics platform to analyze the data collected and share the numbers, and allow your organisation’s leaders take action (Blakely, 2012, p. 13). Another top strategy is to provide a reason to stay, meaning if an organisation recruits the best there must be a solid development plan in place. Providing an opportunity to help employees achieve their personal best will motivate them to stay at a company. Recognize star leaders and invest accordingly is the seventh of the top ten strategies. It is more effective and faster to have an internal leader than to insert external candidate into the position. The ninth strategy is to integrate. There is a need for an

integrated talent management solution and the modern technology will be the key enabler for realizing talent management strategy. The last top ten strategy is to embrace uniqueness instead of one-size-fits-all. It is important to create a talent management strategy that centers on recognizing the unique drivers and needs of each group within an organisation (Blakely, 2012, p. 13).

According to Sunday (2012), critical success factors for effective talent management include integration with strategic goals, CEO participation and HR management. Also the talent mindset has to be embedded throughout the entire organisation. He states that there are five strategy perspectives on talent management. The first is process perspective which includes all processes needed to optimize people within an organisation. It is belief that the future success of the company is based on having the right talent. The second is cultural perspective which states that talent management is a mindset and that you must believe that talent is needed for success. The next is competitive perspective states that talent management is about applying the same personal development path process to everyone in the organisation but accelerating the process for high potentials. Another perspective is HR planning which claims that talent management is about having the right people matched to the right jobs at the right time, and doing the right things. The fifth is change management perspective which uses the talent management process as a driver of change in the organisation (Sunday, 2012, p.181).

On the other hand, Burkus and Osula (2011, p. 5) propose three evidence-based strategies delivered from the research reviewed by them. The first strategy is to grow star talent. It is more cost effective to focus on employees who are not performing at the 'A' level but whose performance demonstrates that capacity. Buying talent is either unsuccessful or expensive. Another strategy is to create deliberate practice opportunities. Usually it is

difficult as projects takes months to complete. However, the separate elements of an individual's job can be practice deliberately and developed. And the third strategy is to open training programs to all. Employees should have the opportunity to advance as a result of deliberate practice and performance improvement. Also, this allows organisations to recognize individuals who show a desire to develop not just those with assumed abilities (Burkus and Osula, 2011, pp. 5-6).

CIPD (Talent Management: an overview 2013) proposes features of talent management strategy based on their research. The first feature is alignment to corporate strategy. It must be a priority to ensure that talent strategy is closely aligned with the corporate strategy. Another feature is to apply inclusive or exclusive approaches. Inclusive approach is adopted by organisations which involve all employees to engage in talent development. Other companies adopt a more exclusive approach where the focus is on segmentation of talent according to need and talent management process relates to key or high-potential individuals. CIPD also distinguishes a blended approach where talent management is used with attention to all employees as a talent group but with special focus given to a particular group or groups. The next feature of talent management strategy proposed by CIPD is involving the right people. When it comes to participants, the research showed that there is an existence of structured selection processes that increase the perceived value of talent programmes and the motivation of participants to perform. Another group of people that should be involved in talent management strategy are managers especially those on visible senior-level. Also involvement of directors and senior management in 'talent panel' should be ensured. HR specialists have an important role to play. They provide support and guidance in the design and development of talent management process that fulfill the needs of the organisation (CIPD, Talent Management: an overview, 2013).

In contrast, Coulson-Thomas (2012, pp. 36-37) lists the disadvantages of prevailing approaches to talent management. According to him, many talent-related activities are general, expensive, time-consuming and disruptive. The rationale behind it is that by the time these activities deliver needed outcomes, the organisation may face very different challenges and opportunities and requirements may be changed. People identified as very talented in one organisation, may not perform the same high levels in other company: 'buying high performance can be expensive, as a star in one context may not do so well in another' (Groysberg 2010 cited in Coulson-Thomas, 2012, p.36). Talented people are not only costly to recruit but also difficult to manage and retain. Exceptional people can create problems if they are not properly managed. Directors, executives and leaders should think twice whether their approaches to talent management are affordable, delivering or missing opportunities (Coulson-Thomas, 2012, p.40).

It is noticeable that there is lack of one clear best practice for talent management. Some of the practices are similar from the point of view of researchers but there is lack of one successful best practice. Practitioners are still seeking the step-by-step recipe for successful talent management process.

2.6. Conclusion

Talent management was given the high level of popularity over the past decade and is rapidly developing as a research field but it still remains relatively poorly defined and there are many areas and questions that need to be explored (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; McDonnell, 2011). There is a need for guidance on the tools that are most effective in identifying talent and who should be involved and committed to identification of talent within an organisation. In addition, there is an issue concerning what the definition of talent and potential is and how these definitions are used in a company. There is also a challenge in measuring the success and effectiveness of talent management system because very little effort has been made in this area. These examples of questions addressed towards researchers prove that there is a gap between theory and practice (McDonnell, 2011, pp. 170-172).

There is a long list of best practices and concepts but researchers as well as practitioners are still not satisfied with the outcomes of them. It is clear that talent management should be aligned and integrated with the overall business strategy and values to be effective. Also, there should be a talent mindset within an organisation and involvement of the CEO and other top executives. The element which is missing is step-by-step instruction on how to do it effectively and which way of doing it is the best.

For some organisations talent management is more important in time of economic uncertainty. It is perceived as ‘a key survival strategy to differentiate organisations from their competitors and position them to benefit from the eventual improvements in business and consumer confidence’(CIPD, Talent Management: an overview, 2013). CIPD and a range of expert collaborators has been studying what strategies organisations need to apply in order to respond to current and future macro and micro challenges. Their six part series

are as following: the new global talent realities, talent and changing values, talent clusters, talent measurement insight, talent partnership throughout and beyond the organisation and talent sustainability coming out of the recession (CIPD, Talent Management: an overview, 2013). It is important for organisations not only to develop current talent management practices but also anticipate future challenges and opportunities and develop talent strategies for the future. CIPD suggest the future direction of talent management that should be taken into consideration.

3. Research Methods and Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explain research methods and methodology that are used in the dissertation. The choice of research methods and methodology is based on the research 'onion' (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012, p. 128) which covers six layers: research philosophies, research approaches, methodological choice and strategy, time horizon and research techniques and procedures.

The research question of the project is *'To explore contemporary talent management process as it is practiced in Ireland'*. The purpose of the primary research is to identify and explore the talent management practices in Ireland. The researcher wants to study Irish attitudes, strategies and opinions on talent itself and talent management process. Also, the researcher aims to explore differences between industries in perceiving talent management process. The objectives following the research question are as follows:

1. To define talent management.
2. To explore the key theories and concepts of talent management.
3. To identify the key perceived issues concerning talent management process.
4. To explore the best practices of talent management.
5. To identify perceived barriers to successful talent management process.
6. To identify practitioners' perceptions of talent management process in Ireland

The first five objectives are included both in the secondary research and the primary research of the project. Through the primary research the researcher also covered the last

objective which is identifying practitioners' perceptions of talent management process in Ireland.

3.2. Research philosophy

The research philosophy term relates to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 127). According to Crotty (1998 cited in Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 128) at the every stage of the research, people tend to make assumptions. These assumptions about human knowledge and the nature of realities shape how the researcher understands the research question, the methods used and how the researcher interprets the findings. The research philosophy acceded by the researcher reflects assumptions about the way he or she views the world. We can distinguish four philosophies in the research process: positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism. According to Bryman and Bell (2003, pp. 16-18) two philosophies are involved in business research which are positivism and interpretivism and an interpretivism philosophy is highly appropriate in the case of business and management research (Bryman and Bell, 2003, Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012).

On one hand, positivism is concerning the natural science, collecting data about an observable reality and search for regularities and relationships to create law-like generalisations. In this philosophy the researcher may use existing theories to develop a hypothesis. In addition, a positivist approach to research is that the research is conducted as far as possible and in a value-free way. Additionally, it is said that outcome of positivist research is totally objective. (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 135). It is said that a positivist researcher will be likely to use a highly structured methodology to facilitate replication (Gill and Johnson, 2010 cited in Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 135).

On the other hand, interpretivism is a term contrasting to positivism. The practitioners of interpretivism share a view ‘that the subject matter of the social sciences – people and their institutions – is fundamentally different from that of the natural science’ (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 16). Another characteristic of interpretivism is that social scientists are required to grasp the subjective meaning of social action. In addition, the researcher is part of what is observed and research is driven by interests (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 16).

‘Interpretivism advocates that it is necessary for the researcher to understand differences between humans in our role as social actors’ (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.137). This definition emphasizes the difference between conducting research among people rather than about objects. A crucial part of interpretivism philosophy is that the researcher has to enter the social world of the research subject and understand their world from their point of view – what is called an empathetic stance. (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.137)

The researcher decided to choose the interpretivism philosophy because the research was driven by the researcher’s interest in talent management process. The researcher understands the context of social actors which means that as humans we play a part in life and we interpret this life in accordance with the meaning we give to it. The researcher wanted to research different interpretations and attitudes concerning talent management to present different views which may be helpful to have a better understanding of talent management process in Ireland. To do so the researcher adapted an empathetic stance and understood the world from the point of view of the research subject. As a HR student and after conducting the secondary research, the researcher has the better understanding of the world of HR professionals who participated in the primary research. The researcher chose interpretivism because the research is not truly value free. The questions were devised by

the researcher on the basis of the secondary research and overall opinions of talent management in the business world and also on the researcher's interest in the subject.

3.3 Research approach

We can distinguish two research approaches: deduction and induction. Deduction is the approach that confirms there is the nature of the relationship of theory and research. The researcher, on the basis of what is known about the particular concept deduces a hypothesis that must be then subject to empirical scrutiny. (Bryman and Bell, 2003, pp. 11-12). Deduction approach does not depend on observation or experience, it is a matter of logic. On the other hand, induction is the approach where the researcher infers the implications of his or her theory. Induction involves drawing a conclusion from one or more particular facts of evidence.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p. 144) distinguish the major differences between deduction and induction. According to authors, on one hand, deduction concerns scientific principles and there is a move from theory to data. There is a need to explain casual relationships between variables. Deduction involves a collection of quantitative data. In addition, within a deduction approach there is an application of controls to ensure validity of data and this approach is highly structured. In deduction, there must be a research independence of what is being researched and there is a necessity to select samples of sufficient size. The logic behind deduction is that when the premises are true, the conclusion must be true. According to generalisability, deduction is generalising from the general to a specific terms. Also, use of data collection is to evaluate propositions or hypothesis which relate to an existing theory. In deduction, the researcher's aim is falsification or verification of theory.

On the other hand, induction is an approach through which the researcher is gaining an understanding of the meanings humans attached to an event. Also, there is a close understanding of the research context. Induction is a collection of qualitative data and there is a more flexible structure to permit changes and the realization that the researcher is a part of the research process. The logic behind induction is that premises are used to generate untested conclusions. The generalisation in inductive approach is from the specific to the general term. Also, data collection is used to explore phenomenon, identify themes and create a conceptual framework. Finally, induction is used for the generation or building of theory (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, pp. 143 -148).

We can also distinguish abduction which is included in research approaches. This approach is combining deduction and induction instead of moving from theory to data or the other way, it moves back and forth. Abduction begins with the observation and then it works out a theory of how a particular event occurred. The logic behind the abduction is to generate testable conclusions. What is more, the abduction is generalising from the interaction between the specific and general terms. Data collection in abduction is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, locate them in a conceptual framework and test. The theory around abduction approach is either generated or modified (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, pp. 144-148).

In the research project the researcher chose the induction approach. The researcher did individual in-depth interviews. This method is a qualitative method which involves induction. The researcher collected the qualitative data in order to establish different views and opinions of talent management and to generate the theory. The nature of the topic is complicated because on one hand there is a wealth of literature from which the researcher can define theoretical frameworks but on the other hand there is much debate on these

frameworks. Inductive approach helped the researcher to collect data that expressed different points of view of talent management. The other reason for choosing an inductive approach is that the researcher preferred to have smaller number of respondents but with a more valuable response than a large number, as it is in deductive approach, with less meaningful answers. Additionally, the researcher did not want to test theory as it usually happens in deductive or abductive approach, the researcher wanted to develop a richer perspective on theory that already exists in literature, to explore a phenomenon and identify themes and patterns connected with it. The rationale behind choosing an induction approach is that the researcher infers the implication of theory found in the secondary research and the researcher is a part of the process. Also, the researcher gains an understanding of the meaning that humans, in this case HR professionals, attach to talent management process. Furthermore, the inductive approach allows a more flexible structure and permits changes which is very important while doing individual in-depth interviews as the researcher, from the flow of conversation, may decide to change or ask different question.

3.4. Research choice

We can distinguish two research designs: quantitative research design and qualitative research design. Quantitative research design is usually associated with positivism and a deductive approach. However, there may be a use of inductive approach where data is used to develop theory. Quantitative research examines relationships between variables. These variables are measured numerically and statistical techniques are used to analyse them. This design of research is associated with survey or experimental research. The most common strategies used in quantitative research design are questionnaires, structured interviews and structured observation. The second research design – qualitative – is

associated with an interpretive philosophy. 'It is interpretive because researchers need to make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meanings expressed about the phenomenon being studied' (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 163). The research approach to qualitative method is inductive. Although, some qualitative research designs start with deductive approach which test an existing theory. The characteristics of quantitative research is that the researcher studies meanings and relationship between responses using a variety of techniques. Data collection process in qualitative research is non-standardised. The main strategies used in qualitative research are: case study, action research, Grounded Theory and narrative research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, pp. 162-164).

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, pp. 164-166) in methodological choice there are two methods: mono-method and multiple-method. Mono-method is a method when you use a single data collection technique and corresponding data analysis procedures i.e. quantitative study or qualitative study. The multiple-method is when you use more than one data collection technique and analysis procedures. In multiple-method, we can distinguish multi-methods and mixed-methods. Multi-methods are restricted to either multi-method qualitative studies or multi-method quantitative studies. On the other hand, in mixed-methods we can combine two techniques i.e. qualitative or quantitative (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, pp. 151-152).

In the research project the researcher used mono method – qualitative study. The researcher wanted to explore the already known theory and that is why she decided to do individual in-depth interviews. The researcher thinks that individual in-depth interviews might be more informative and valuable than for example questionnaires. From discussions the researcher may get other information which had not been planned before. The researcher thinks that qualitative method is restricted to collect only basic information and

facts as customarily there are diminutive questions and these questions are close-ended or multiple-choice with no allowance for expressing one's own opinion or experience.

3.5. Research Strategy

Preparing for the primary research the researcher had cogitated about two research strategies: survey and interviews. These two research strategies are the most popular among business and management studies. The survey strategy usually involves a deductive research approach. Surveys which use questionnaires are popular as they allow the researcher to collect standardized data from a large population in an economical way and allows an easy comparison (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012 pp. 176-177). In addition, a survey strategy is easy to explain and to understand. Also the questionnaire is easy to administer. This strategy allows the researcher to collect data and then analyse it using descriptive and inferential statistics. Data collected by the survey can be used to suggest both possible reasons for particular relationships between variables and produce models of these relationships. On the other hand, there is limit to the number of questions used in a survey strategy and these questions are usually close-ended or multiple-choice. The problem with multiple-choice questions or fixed-response questions is that alternatives given in the questions may not allow a fully correct answer. Additionally, respondents may be not willing or unable to provide desired information.

When it comes to interviews, we can distinguish a wide range of possibilities. Firstly, interviews are categorised as: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured or in-depth interviews. Structured interviews, also called interviewer-administered questionnaires, involve questionnaires which are based on standardised or identical set of questions. These interviews are structured to use quantifiable data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012 p. 374). In semi-structured interviews the researcher

has a list of themes or and some key questions to be covered, but their use may vary from interview to interview. The order of questions may also be different depending on the conversation and additional questions may be required. The unstructured interviews, also called in-depth interviews, are informal. The main purpose to use this type of interview is to explore in-depth a general area the researcher is interested in. The interviewer does not have to have a list of questions, although he or she needs to have a clear idea on aspects that need to be explored (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012 pp. 374-375). One of advantages of in-depth interviews is that they uncover greater depth of insights unlike focus groups or surveys. Also, the responses are made directly and it is not difficult to determine exactly who made what point. In-depth interviews are not formal and there is no formal list of questions so the researcher can get intriguing information and can ask additional questions where required. One of the disadvantages of in-depth interviews is that the data is difficult to analyse and interpret. Also, the quality of in-depth interviews depend heavily on the interviewer skills.

Secondly, there is another typology which distinguishes between standardised and non-standardised interviews. These types of interviews are distinguished according to the nature of interaction between the researcher and those participating. Standardised interviews include interviewer-administered questionnaires. Non-standardised interviews include one to one or group interviews. In one to one interviews there are alternatives which can be face-to-face, telephone and Internet/intranet interviews. In group interviews there can be an alternate Internet/intranet mediated group interview.

The researcher decided to focus the research project on in-depth interviews. The data obtained by in-depth interviews are more valuable than data obtained by survey or focus groups as the responses are made directly, the interviewer is allowed to add additional

questions and there is no confusion on which point was made by whom. The researcher's intention was to traverse the perception of talent management in Ireland and to do so, in-depth interviews was the best prerogative. A survey would not allow the researcher to gain information about professionals' opinions and would not allow the researcher to ask additional questions. By choosing the individual depth interviews, the researcher gathered valuable and objective information.

3.6. Time horizon

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p. 155) distinguish two time horizon approaches: 'snapshot' and 'diary'. 'Snapshot' approach refers to cross-sectional time horizon and 'diary' refers to longitudinal time horizon. Cross-sectional research is the study of a particular phenomenon at the particular time. The cross-sectional project is time constrained and it usually involves survey technique but also allows the researcher to do qualitative method. On the other hand, the main characteristic of the longitudinal approach is that it has to study change and development and it is not time constrained. The researcher usually has an abundant amount of time to study the particular phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2012, pp. 155-156).

The primary research's time horizon was cross-sectional. The reason the project was time constrained was because the researcher had to submit the dissertation on the 16th of August 2013. Additionally, the researcher did not study any change and development of phenomena. The primary research is based on opinions, attitudes and approaches to talent management.

3.6. Data collection

In the research project the researcher collected data through secondary research and through the primary qualitative research. The secondary research covered the first five research objectives and the primary qualitative research involved exploration of all research objectives.

3.6.1. Secondary research

Firstly, secondary research included a literature review which helped the researcher to establish theoretical roots of the study and through which the researcher acquainted herself with the available body of knowledge in the area which is talent management. The literature review is an important and essential part of every research. Through secondary research the researcher covered the first five research objectives which involved the definition of talent management, the key theories and concepts, the key perceived issues of talent management, the best practices of talent management and perceived barriers to talent management process.

3.6.2. Qualitative primary research

The qualitative technique of the primary research included individual in-depth interviews. This method is one of a direct, non-disguised methods. The researcher had decided to choose individual in-depth interviews because they helped her to uncover the greater depth of insights of the topic than, for example, focus groups or survey. In-depth interviews were very helpful to find out imperative information and to understand the context of talent management. The researcher recorded all individual depth interviews so she could avoid the hindrance of making notes which may result in insufficient data collection or gaps in the notes.

Through the qualitative research the researcher analyzed all research objectives. The researcher explored the information from the secondary research, which included the first five research objectives and the researcher ascertained the last objective which include the practitioners' perceptions of talent management process in Ireland.

3.6.3. Data Analysing

'Qualitative data are likely to be characterized by their richness and fullness, based on your opportunity to explore a subject in as real a manner as is possible' (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 546). In qualitative research, meanings are delivered from words not numbers and as words may have multiple meanings or unclear meanings there must be a great care to explore them.

According to Miles An Huberman (cited in Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 564) the process of doing analysis consists of three concurrent sub-processes: data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data reduction includes summarizing and simplifying the data collected or focusing on some parts of this data in order to transform the data and condense it. Data display involves organizing and assembling data into summary diagrammatic or visual displays e.g. matrices and networks. A data display allows the researcher to make comparisons between the elements and to identify any relationships, key themes or trends (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 565).

The researcher took an inductive approach to the primary research. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, pp. 566-578) proposes a number of inductively based analytical procedures to analyse qualitative data which are as follow: Grounded Theory Model, Template Analysis, Analytic Induction, Narrative Analysis and Discourse Analysis. The Grounded Theory Model is a research strategy that use an inductive approach to develop

grounded theory around the core category that emerges from data. The Template Analysis is a list of the codes or categories that represent the themes found in the data that have been collected. This strategy combines both inductive and deductive approaches. The Analytic Induction is the process of collecting and analysing data to understand the research topic that is composed of a number of repeated steps to find a valid explanation. The Narrative Analysis is the collection of data through narratives (complete stories). Finally the Discourse Analysis covers a variety of approaches to the analysis of language. It is concerned with 'how and why individuals' language is used by individuals in specific social contexts' (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 577).

The researcher decided that all individual in-depth interviews would be audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed as soon as possible after each interview. Each interview is saved as separate word-processed file. As the researcher wanted to develop grounded theory the procedure that is used in the primary research is Grounded Theory Model which included open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

3.7. Ethical Issues

Research ethics is ‘the standard of the researcher’s behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of a research project, or who are affected by it’ (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p. 680). The code of ethics recognizes the general categories of ethical issues that occur across many approaches to research. These ethical issues are as follow: integrity and objectivity of the researcher, respect for others, avoidance of harm (non-maleficence), privacy of those taking part, voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw, informed consent of those taking part, ensuring confidentiality of data and maintenance of anonymity of those taking part, responsibility in the analysis of data an reporting of findings, compliance in the management of data, ensuring the safety of the researcher (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, pp. 230-232).

The ethical issues connected with this research project were concerning confidentiality and anonymity of those taking part in individual in-depth interviews. Some professionals did not let the researcher publish their names, or their company’s name. That is the reason the researcher did not publish any name in the research project. Additionally, all tapes after transcription were erased and transcripts were sent to participants.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter involves data analysis of the primary qualitative research. The researcher aim is to summarize and present findings to the reader. Four in-depth interviews were conducted in this research. The researcher interviewed four HR professionals from different industries in Ireland: The Mobile Industry, Business Consulting Industry, Agribusiness Industry and Public Sector. Each respondent was asked seventeen main questions (Appendix 1) concerning talent management and themes associated with this process. When the conversation required better understanding of the problem, aspects or opinion, additional questions were asked. The average time of each individual depth interview was 40 minutes. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed into word document. Transcripts were also sent to participants.

In the following analysis, the researcher references to responses of participants as: Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3 and Respondent 4. The first Respondent is the HR professional from the Mobile Industry. The second Respondent is the HR professional from the Business Consulting Industry. The third Respondent is the HR professional from the Agribusiness Industry. And the fourth Respondent is the HR professional from the Public Sector.

4.2. Results from Qualitative Data Analysis

Q1: Talented people are the source of competitive advantage – do you agree with this?

All Respondents agreed that talented people are the source of competitive advantage and it is extremely important to have talent within an organisation. Respondent 1 said that:

‘Hire and Retain the Best is one of the key values of this company and we have strong recruitment practices in place to drive it.’

Respondent 2 argued that it takes more than talent to be successful and people need to be engaged and have a sense of purpose and commitment in their role. Also, they need to continually adopt and develop over time. In contrast, Respondent 4, said that people who possess particular talent can contribute in a positive way to an enterprise but in the Public Sector the term competitive advantage would not apply.

Responses from individual depth interviews supported the opinion of Pfeffer (1994) that people and how they are managed within an organisation are becoming more important because other sources of competitive advantage are not as strong as they used to be. Furthermore, some Respondents confirmed opinion of Lepak and Snell (1999) that value of human capital in an organisation depends upon its potential in order to contribute to the competitive advantage as not all employees possess skills that are important and valuable to a particular company.

Q2: Do talented people make a difference in the overall performance of the business/company?

According to all Respondents, talented people do make a difference in overall performance of the business. Respondent 1, said that every employee within the company has its own objectives which link to the business plan. These objectives then link into the overall strategic goals of the company and that is why it is important to have talented people who allow company to achieve its goals. On the other hand, Respondent 2 and Respondent 4, argued that talented people can make a difference but only if the company has a well-executed talent strategy in place. Without good talent management process, talented people might cause an organisational problems e.g. issues of morale or frustration. Respondent 3, said that for talented people to make a difference, a company also needs a good succession planning.

Q3: Is there one clear definition of talent/potential in your organisation?

Two Respondents have a definition of talent and potential in their organisations: Respondent 1 and Respondent 2. These definitions are as follow:

Respondent 1:

‘We define high performer and high potential in our organisation. High Performers are those people who are consistently rated 1 - the highest level of performance rating scale 1-4. High Potential are those who are capable of moving to Director Level in the next 4-5 years’

Respondent 2:

‘We define potential in terms of being able management complexity, learning ability, interpersonal sensitivity and leadership capability’

In contrast, Respondent 3, said that people could not put a finger on what exactly talent is. According to Respondent 3, talent is all skills that come together within one person and it is more than one skill or one personality. On the other hand, Respondent 4, argued that definition of talent has not featured in Public Sector organisations as the focus is on definition of corporate objectives.

Results from individual in-depth interviews confirmed the theory of Silzer and Church (2009) that each organisation has its own definition of talent and potential. None of the Respondents referred to the entire workforce as a talent or potential. Respondent 1 refers to a definition of high performers as those who score high rates in performance rating scale this may confirm an opinion of Silzer and Church (2009) that matching talent for higher positions is not the same as matching skills and abilities to the existing positions.

Q4: What is talent management in your opinion?

Each Respondent provided the researcher with own definition of talent management, but in some cases it came with a difficulty.

Respondent 1:

‘It is about retaining and developing your best and most talented resources’

Respondent 2:

‘Talent management is the sourcing, selection, engagement, retention and development of people’

Respondent 3:

‘With talent management you have to first see the skills that somebody has and then you have to try to grow these skills of the talent and build on weaknesses. So that the person grows as individual and the organisation grows as a side effect of that’

Respondent 4:

‘I think it begins firstly with recruiting the people with the required skills. Then, the newly recruited person has to be integrated into the team of organisation. This is supported through training and development as appropriate so that individuals are enabled to align their activity to the organisations action plan that comprise the overarching Corporate Plan’

Respondents confirmed the opinion of Collings, McDonnell and Scullion (2009) that most definitions of talent management suggest the need for identifying, selecting and developing the right people and ensure that those people make a positive contribution to organisational performance. The results from individual in-depth interviews also confirmed argument of

Santhoshkumar and Rajasekar (2012) that for each organisation talent management has a different meaning. For some organisation talent management is about managing high potential individuals and for some it is about how talent is managed in general.

Q5: How do the company try to attract ‘talented’ people?

Two Respondents (Respondent 1 and Respondent 2) agreed that they try to attract talented people through strong employer brand. Respondent 1 said that there are three activities that are involved in attracting talented people within organisation. Graduate Programmes and attending graduate fairs is the first activity they practice towards attracting talented people. The second activity is achievement of ‘Excellence Through People’ standard which is correspondent with the opinion of Respondent 2 who said that the company try to attract talented people through developing and maintaining a strong employer brand. The third activity to attract talented people mentioned by Respondent 1 is creation of specialised recruitment practices which include competency based interviews and psychometric testing to ensure a fit for the organisation culture.

Respondent 3, answered that the company try to attract people by engaging with colleges and communicating the company’s vision and mission to the population at large. Moreover, they try to maintain the status of Ireland’s largest agribusiness and because they are the best, people come to them. Respondent 3 also added that if someone is interested in a career in agribusiness industry, their company is the first and the best to come and work for.

The response of the Respondent 4 was that in the Public Sector over the past few years there were a recruitment freeze and that was the reason for not having any activity in order to attract talented people. Usually, the recruitment was through advertised competitions

and short-listing criteria. Additionally, interviews focused on determining skills and competencies required.

Q6: Is process of talent management fully implemented in your organisation?

One out of four Respondents agreed that talent management process is fully implemented in the organisation. Respondent 1 agreed that talent management is fully implemented in the company with the HIPO programme in place which develops and rewards high potential employees. Additionally, the Respondent 1 mentioned that HIPER programme is currently being launched which involves high performers. The response of Respondent 2 was not clear as he did not want to answer the question with yes or no response.

The Respondent 2 said that:

‘We believe we do a good job but continually look for improvements.’

Respondent 3 and Respondent 4 said that the process of talent management is not fully implemented in their organisations. Respondent 3 admitted that they want to appreciate talent within their organisation and they would like to put in place different schemes that would encourage it e.g. training managers scheme, graduate scheme, further education scheme and up-skilling scheme. The response of Respondent 4 was that as talent management is not fully implemented in the organisation, there are performance management programmes and performance indicators for specific areas of operation.

Q7: Is talent management transparent to everyone in the organisation?

Three out of four Respondents agreed that talent management is transparent to every employee in the organisation. Respondent 2 said that people policies and practices are documented in their intranet and they are available to all employees. Respondent 3 explained that talent management is transparent to everyone in the organisation as they want to recognize all talented individuals ‘from GEO right up to CEO’. In contrast, Respondent 4 said that talent management is not transparent to everyone in organisation because it has been largely focused on leadership and development of more dynamic forms of leadership in Public Sector organisations.

Q8: In your opinion what is the best practice of talent management?

According to Respondent 1, the best practice of talent management is a good robust strategy for retaining and rewarding talent within the organisation.

Respondent 2 said that it is important to segment the workforce and categorise people because one size does not fit all. According to him, the best practice:

‘evolves to suit people as they progress through their career covering the areas listed in the definition of talent management’.

Respondent 3 assumed that the best practice of talent management is aligning the process with the strategy and also involve everybody in the company in talent management.

According to Respondent 4, the best practice of talent management is first to recruit people with the required skills and then integrate these people successfully into the organisation.

The section from the secondary research chapter describing the best practices of talent management confirmed that there is a long list of best practices of talent management process. Some of the best practices were mentioned by Respondents. Respondent 1 listed the retention and rewarding as the best practice in talent management which confirms the opinion of McCauley and Wakefield (2006) that one of the best practices is to excel at recruiting and retention. Respondent 1 also supported the opinion of Sunday (2012) whose one of three best practices in talent management is HR management. Respondent 2 confirmed opinion of McCauley and Wakefield (2006) that one of the best practices of talent management is to focus on most-highly valued people. Answer of Respondent 3 confirmed the argument of McCauley and Wakefield (2006) that CEO and senior management should be involved in talent management. Also he confirmed the best practice of Sunday (2012) is to integrate talent management with strategy, get CEO participation and good HR management. Respondent 4 confirmed both opinions of Blakely (2012) to integrate talent management and of McCauley and Wakefield (2006) to excel in recruiting and retention.

Q9: Should talent management be aligned with the business strategy?

All Respondents agreed that talent management should be aligned with the business strategy. Furthermore, Respondent 2 said that:

‘No it should be more than that – it should be part of it. Strategy is about the fit of an organisation with its environment. Therefore integrating people and purpose are critical.’

In contrast Respondent 4 suggested that:

‘There should be a conceptual flexibility so that talent does not get locked into pre-existing thinking. Strategy has to be forward looking.’

Results from individual in-depth interviews confirmed that talent management should be integrated and aligned with business or corporate strategy. The primary research also reflected the results of CIPD (2013) research which says that to gain competitive advantage companies need to adapt the strategic approach to talent management that both suits the business and gets the best from its employees. Talent management itself can also contribute to other strategic objectives set by organisations.

Q10: Who should participate in talent management process within the organisation (everyone or only 'A' players? Who should be responsible for talent management process?)

This question was confusing for some respondents. The researcher had to explain in some cases that in the theory there are different opinions on who should be involved in talent management process and also there are different opinions on who should be responsible for talent management. After explaining the main theories that arises from this question, the responses were as follow. Respondent 1, said that the employees are responsible for their performance. In the organisation the Manager rates the performance and HR and Senior Management approve the programme. Respondent 2, related to previous question and said that employees should be segmented and categorised. This answer proved that in this organisation despite the fact that talent management process is transparent to everyone, only 'A' players are taking into consideration in talent management process. Respondent 3, said:

‘Talent Management should be available to all employees as you never know who your next CEO or Manager is going to be. Involving all employees can be very useful for you and your organisation.’

According to Respondent 4, talent management has to be driven and guided by Corporate Management team. Also Respondent 4 added that fresh eyes from an external agency or consultancy might be engaged to overcome areas of organisational myopia.

Q11: What are the top talent management programmes in your organisation?

Respondent 1, listed two top talent management programs in the organisation which are HIPO and HIPER. HIPO programme involves high potential within an organisation and HIPER programmes involves high performers within an organisation. As the Respondent mentioned in previous question, the HIPO programme is fully implemented and the HIPER programme is still being launched.

Respondent 2, mentioned that the major emphasis is put on the measurement of the potential in the organisation. There are assessment centres done at the graduate entry level, middle management and 'senior middle' level. These assessment centres are supported by career development planning, coaching and formal training. Additionally, the company emphasises self-managed development and gives high potential talent exposure to projects and stretch assignments.

Respondent 3, said the top talent management programs in the organisation are all schemes mentioned in previous question i.e. training managers scheme, graduate scheme, further education scheme and up-skilling scheme.

Respondent 4, stressed the importance that talent management programmes are only emerging as something to be explored in the Public Sector. For now all effort is placed on leadership in the Public Sector and the programs connected with this are: NUI Galway Study Leadership in the Irish Civil Service: A 360 Review of Senior Management Capability.

Q12: What are the biggest barriers to successful talent management process in an organisation?

According to the Respondent 1, the biggest barriers to successful talent management process in the organisation are the retention of talent, ensuring that an organisation has the correct reward structures in place and ensuring there are specialised development programmes in place for that talent.

According to both Respondent 2 and Respondent 3 the biggest barriers are money and time. The Respondent 3 added that time is a bigger barrier than money as it is hard to address all aspects of talent management in a time-constrained world.

Respondent 4 said that the biggest barriers to talent management process are those factors that impede it i.e. the legacy of centralised bureaucratic culture, political constriction, and the necessary legal framework that Public Sector must work within.

Q13: What are the biggest issues concerning talent management process in your organisation?

According to Respondent 1, the biggest issue in the company concerning talent management process is ensuring that all employees are motivated and not only those within a talent management programme.

Both Respondent 2 and Respondent 3 mentioned again time and money as the biggest issue of talent management process. Respondent 2 also said that matching needs and requirements could be one of the biggest issues as it is tricky. According to him, line managers do not always appreciate their role in the process and lose sight of it because of

other pressing issues. Respondent 3 added that engagement is also a big issue in talent management process as it is hard to engage all employees within company.

The Respondent 4 said that:

‘The biggest challenge that is faced by Public Sector Organisations in the current prolonged period of straitened financial circumstances is the ever diminishing amount of resources. Given that it is now the fifth year of a recruitment freeze dwindling personnel numbers have impacted severely on Human Resources. The emphasis on financial reporting has the danger of tying up energy and activity in backward focus rather than forward strategising.’

Q14: Is your organisation losing good employees for competitors?

Three out of four Respondents agreed that they are not losing good employees for competitors. Respondent 1, said that it is not happening currently as they invested heavily in their talent to retain them. The response of Respondent 3 was that the organisation is not losing talented people for competitors because if someone wants to work in the Agribusiness he or she is working for them. According to Respondent 4 it is unreal to answer this question because there is a recruitment freeze in the Public Sector.

Only Respondent 2 admitted that sometimes it happens that the organisation is losing good employees for its competitors.

Q15: The concept of War for Talent: is it worth fighting for talented people these days?

All Respondents agreed that it is worth fighting for talented people these days. According to Respondent 2, demographics dictate the war for talent because half of the workforce is over 50 years old and birth rates are declining in most countries.

Respondent 3, stressed the importance of fighting for new talented people and for people who are already in the company because it is really expensive to lose experienced staff.

In contrast, Respondent 4 said that as he indicated the importance of competitive advantage in competitive commercial sector such a 'war' could give a rise to significant HR problems in the long run. According to him, this war for talent does not take place in a Public Sector.

Results for the primary research confirmed both opinions on 'War for Talent' presented in the secondary research. Firstly, yes it is worth fighting for talent these days and paying what it takes to attract and retain star performers (Chambers et al, 1998). Secondly, Respondent 4 confirmed the opinion of Pfeffer (2001) that fighting for talent might be hazardous for organisational health.

Q16: Do you identify high potential employees for higher future roles in an organisation?

Three out of four Respondents admitted that their organisations identify high potential employees for higher future roles. Respondent 1, said that they identify high potential employees for more senior roles and recognise them as having the potential to become a director in the future for the current programme. Respondent 2, said the organisation is identifying the high potential employees for higher positions by running high potential

assessment centres. Respondent 3 listed succession planning as the form of identifying high potential employees for higher future roles. He also added that the organisation has scoring mechanism and they are doing 180 degree appraisal. According to the score the organisation is appointing people for higher positions. Additionally, Respondent 3 mentioned that the organisation has a very good internal promotion scheme. In contrast, the Respondent 4 said that talent management is beginning to be explored in Public Sector and it will be developed there. That is why he refused to answer the question.

Q17: Are you planning any changes to talent management process in your organisation?

Respondent 1, is not planning any changes to talent management process only the full implementation of HIPER programme. Respondent 2, said that more needs to be done for people not considered as high potential but who are important for organisation. Respondent 3 said that they would like to fully implemented talent management system but he did not want to give any more information because it was sensitive to talk about changes to talent management programme. Respondent 4, repeated the answer from previous questions that talent management is now beginning to explore but it will be developed across Public Sector organisations.

4.3. Findings

The aim of the primary research was to study the Irish perception on talent management. Four HR professionals participated in the research and findings are based on their opinions, and experience. Taking into consideration four industries as following: the Mobile Industry, the Business Consulting Industry, the Agribusiness Industry and the Public Sector, it is noticeable that more developed industries (the Mobile Industry and the Business Consulting Industry) have better implemented and managed talent management process within their organisations. Also their attitudes towards talent management are different.

In Ireland, talented people are the source of competitive advantage and they are essential in the organisation which confirms the theory of Pfeffer (1994). Although, in the Public Sector the term of competitive advantage is not applied. According to Respondent from this industry, the competitive advantage is applied in more competitive industries and it is not present in the Public Sector.

According to Irish HR professionals, talented people do make a difference in an overall business performance under three circumstances: when their objectives are integrated with business strategic objectives, when the company has well-executed talent strategy and when company has a good succession planning in place. Although, without good talent management process in place, talented people may cause organisational problems such as: issues of morale and frustration.

Not every company in Ireland has its own definition of talent and potential. Two out of four Respondents provided the researcher with such a definition. In the Public Sector definition of talent and potential has not featured as the focus and effort is directed towards definition of corporate objectives.

However, in Ireland each company has its own definition and meaning of talent management which confirms the theory of Silzer and Church (2009). These definitions include the main processes of human resource management towards the most talented within the company i.e. recruiting, selecting, sourcing, training and development, engagement and retaining. Some of the definitions are directed towards talented people who are participating talent programmes within companies, some are directed towards talent management in general. These response confirms the argument of Collings, McDonnell and Scullion (2009).

Irish practitioners try to attract talented people by a number of activities. The most popular activity is to attract talented people through strong employer brand. Other activities include: graduate programmes, attending graduate fairs, achievement of 'Excellence Through People' standard, creation of specialised recruitment practices, engaging with colleges and communicating company's vision and mission to the population at large.

One out of four Respondents agreed that talent management is fully implemented in the company. The rest of participants are still launching the process and programmes or schemes associated with talent management process. However, in the Public Sector, talent management is at the beginning of implementation and it is aimed to be developed. Furthermore, it seems to be implemented only for leadership positions in the Industry.

Additionally, in Ireland talent management is transparent to all employees. Three out of four HR professionals agreed that in their organisations talent management is transparent to everybody. All policies and practices are usually available to everybody on Intranet. It is important to notice that in some organisations despite the fact, that talent management is transparent to everyone it only includes high potential employees.

Although, in the Public Sector, talent management focus is directed only towards leadership positions which means it is not transparent to everyone in the organisation.

According to Irish talent management practitioners, the best practices of talent management are as following: good robust strategy for recruiting and retaining talent within an organisation, segmentation and categorisation of employees, aligning talent management with strategy, involving everybody in the company and recruiting and integrating people.

All Irish Respondents agreed that talent management should be aligned with the business or corporate strategy. Moreover, it should be the part of the strategy. However, it is not clear from the point of view of Irish HR professionals who should be participating talent management process and who should be responsible for this process. On one hand, everyone should be involved in talent management process as it may be very helpful for an organisation. On the other hand, employees should be categorised so that ‘A’ players are involved in talent management process. When it comes to responsibility, on one hand the corporate management team should be responsible for talent management process but an external opinion from consulting agency may be helpful. On the other hand, employees are responsible for their performance. Managers are rating this performance and it is approved by HR and senior management team. It is clear that in Ireland, there is lack of assistance

for practitioners when it comes to participation and responsibility associated with talent management.

In Ireland the top talent management programmes are: HIPO (high potential), HIPER (high performer), measurement of the potential, assessment centres supported by development planning, coaching and formal training, self-managed development, training scheme, graduate scheme, further education scheme, up-skilling scheme and 360 review of senior management capability.

When it comes to the biggest barriers to talent management in Ireland, the professionals listed lack of retention of talent, lack of correct reward structure, lack of specialised developmental programmes, time and money, centralised bureaucratic culture, political construction and legal framework that Public Sector must work within. It is noticeable that in the Public Sector the biggest barrier is a government and legislation that are one the way of talent management.

According to Irish HR professionals, the biggest issues concerning talent management are motivation of all employees not only those involved in talent management programmes, time and money, matching needs and requirements as it is tricky, line managers not appreciating their role, engagement and recruitment freeze in the Public Sector. There was nothing mentioned about not clear assistance for practitioners, no clear definition of talent management and talent itself.

In Ireland companies usually do not lose employees to competitors. Three out of four Respondents of individual in-depth interviews agreed that they do not lose employees for competitors as they heavily invested in talent recently and if somebody wants to work in particular industry she or he wants to work for them. In the Public Sector recruitment

freeze caused that it is not a current issue to this industry. Only one Respondent admitted that sometimes the company is losing good talented employees for its competitors.

‘War for Talent’ is present in Ireland. All Respondents agreed that it is worth fighting for talented individuals. This fight is dictated by demographics as most of the workforce is over 50 and declining birth rates. Moreover, it is important to fight for new talented people and current employees as it is very expensive to lose experienced staff. Although, Respondent from Public Sector assumed that fighting for talented people may rise significant problems to HR when it is on the long term.

High potential employees are identified for future higher position in Ireland. Companies are doing so by high potential assessments, succession planning, 180 degree appraisal, internal promotion scheme. Although, in the Public Sector it is not present phenomena as talent management is only beginning to explore.

Irish professionals are planning some changes to talent management within their companies. Some of these changes include: full implementation of talent management, full implementation of talent management programmes and development of talent management in the Public Sector. There is also a need to do something for people not considered as high potentials but still important to the organisation.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to conclude the research conducted in the dissertation. This research was completed through the secondary research and the primary qualitative research. The secondary research was based on academic journals and the primary research was based on four individual in-depth interviews. These individual in-depth interviews were done with HR professionals from Ireland who come from different industries. The research question of the dissertation is *'To explore contemporary talent management process as it is practices in Ireland'*. The research objectives of this project are as following:

1. To define talent management
2. To explore key theories and concepts of talent management
3. To identify key perceived issues concerning talent management process
4. To explore the best practices of talent management
5. To identify perceived barriers to successful talent management process
6. To identify practitioners' perception of talent management process in Ireland

All objectives were achieved through the secondary and primary research. The researcher achieved main aims of this project which are to define talent management, to explore main theories and concepts of talent management process, to identify both perceived issues and barriers to successful talent management process and to identify opinions, attitudes and strategies practiced in Ireland.

5.2. Research Objectives Defined

1. To define talent management

The definition of talent management seems to be problematic both for researchers and practitioners. The term of talent management was officially born in the late 1990's and there is still lack of one clear definition in an academic source. The lack of one clear definition is causing confusion among practitioners who seems to have problem with defining talent management process. Also there is lack of scope and overall goals of talent management. As Collings, McDonnell and Scullion (2009) suggest most of the definitions of talent management concern identification, selection and development of talent within company so that it can contribute to organisational performance in a positive way. Although, talent management is also about managing talent and none of the definition is concerning this field. The primary qualitative research shows that for HR professionals from Ireland it is also problematic to define talent management. This research also confirms the argument of Santhoshkumar and Rajasekar (2012) that each organisation has its own definition of talent management and there are two directions towards defining talent management. One direction is towards defining talent management as it is about managing high potentials within a company and the second direction is towards defining talent management as it is about managing talent in general.

It is noticeable that there are four distinctive thoughts regarding talent management as suggested by Lewis and Heckman (2006) and Collings and Mellahi (2009). The first thought refers to talent management as to a collection of typical human resources practices, functions, activities and specialist areas. The second perspective on talent management defines the concept of talent pools. The third thought focuses on talent management generically and the fourth thought emphasizes identification of the key positions that have

potential to impact the competitive advantage of the company in the future. All these perspectives are not satisfactory for researchers and they are still seeking one, clear definition of talent management process.

The researcher thinks, that the problem with defining talent management may also be connected and evolves from the definition of talent and potential. Silzer and Church (2009) assumed that every organisation has its own definition of talent and potential. The primary qualitative research confirms this argument but also shows that some organisations do not have any definition of talent and potential. It is hard to define talent management process when there is no definition of talent or potential itself. Organisations may not be able to manage talent properly without clear perception of talent as it is difficult to identify talent. Also, the lack of one clear definition of talent and potential may influence the decisions about talent within a company as managers and executives may use different definitions internally.

2. To explore key theories and concepts of talent management.

In the secondary research the researcher explored the main theories and concepts of talent management process. Strategic talent management, critical talent management, supply chain model for talent management, integrated talent management, global talent management, total quality management applied to talent management and the 'War for Talent' are those theories and concepts that are the most popular within the phenomenon of talent management. Some of the concepts are more developed than others. From an Irish perspective only strategic talent management and integrated talent management are present and practiced in the country . Although, it seems like concepts and theories are only at the beginning of exploration in Ireland. None of the Respondents mentioned any of the

concepts but alignment of talent management with the strategy and integration of this process within an organisation.

Among researchers, the most popular concept seems to be the 'War for Talent' as it comes with some controversy. For some researchers, it is priority to fight for talent and get the best and the brightest people for the company and price does not matter. Although, some researchers think that fighting for talent may be hazardous for the organisation and it may rise some other problems. Also, researchers assumed that 'star' employee in one company may not be the high potential in another.

There are many concepts and theories of talent management present in literature and practice. However, there is lack of research confirming their effectiveness and influence on the overall business performance. The researcher also noticed the lack of assistance for practitioners. There is no instruction on how to the best implement these theories and concepts into real life.

3. To identify key perceived issues concerning talent management process

This objective was mainly achieved by the primary qualitative research. However, the researcher is able to point out issues concerning talent management raised in the secondary research.

The main perceived issues concerning talent management pointed by Irish HR professionals are motivation of all employees not only those who are participating talent management process, matching need and requirements, time, money, engagement and recruitment freeze in the Public Sector. Some of the issues listed by participants of the individual in-depth interviews are clearly connected with the economic crisis that had hit Ireland few years ago. Recruitment freeze in the Public Sector, time, money, engagement

and motivation are aspects that had arisen within the crisis and Ireland still need to move along with them.

From the secondary research, the researcher assumed that issues concerning talent management are the definition of talent management, lack of assistance for practitioners, lack of research confirming effectiveness of talent management, long list of best practices with lack of advice and no clear explanation of best practices. Also the issue associated with talent management is threatening it as a catchphrase and fashion in a business world.

4. To explore the best practices of talent management

This objective was achieved both by the secondary research and the primary qualitative research. From the academic point of view there is a long list of best practices for talent management. Although, there is no agreement on one best practice that would be the most effective. The best practices listed in the secondary research that are the most popular and worth attention are: to define talent management broadly in the organisation, to get CEO and senior management participation and commitment to talent management process, to excel at recruiting, identifying, developing, performance management and retention, to evaluate the results of talent management system, to understand what motivates employees and to provide reason to stay, to integrate talent management practices, to align talent management with corporate strategy, to adopt talent mindset, to create deliberate practices opportunities, to open training to all, to apply inclusive or exclusive approach to talent management and to apply HR planning. According to HR professional from Ireland, the best practices of talent management is to have a robust strategy to recruit and retain employees, to segment and categorise people, to align talent management with business strategy, and to recruit and integrate people into organisation. It is clear that each company has its own recipe for best practice concerning talent management. It is important to

mention the argument of Coulson-Thomas (2012) who listed disadvantages of talent management activities which according to him are general, expensive, time-consuming and disruptive. Two Respondents, confirm these disadvantages by mentioning twice that the biggest issues and barriers to successful talent management are time and money.

5. To identify perceived barriers to successful talent management process

This objective was achieved both through the secondary research and through the primary research. From the secondary research, the researcher assumes that barriers to successful talent management arise from poorly implemented talent management process in the organisation. Lack of alignment with corporate strategy, lack of motivation and engagement, lack of commitment of the CEO and senior management and also lack of clear definition of talent management are barriers to successful talent management process. From the Irish perspective, barriers to successful talent management are as following: lack of retention and reward structures, lack of specialised development programmes, money, time, legacy of centralised bureaucratic culture, political constriction and legal framework that the Public Sector must work within. The researcher, assumed that barriers to the successful talent management in Ireland are caused by effects of the economic crisis because most companies are still facing them and are trying to recover from such crisis.

6. To identify practitioners' perception on talent management in Ireland

Ireland seems to be a developing country when it comes to talent management. Only one out of four participants said the talent management process is fully implemented in the organisation. However, in the Public Sector it is only at the beginning of implementation and legal framework, bureaucracy and recruitment freeze are in the way of talent management development in this industry. The researcher studied four different industries and all industries have their own way of operating and conducting which reflects on talent

management. Every industry is using talent management in particular way. It is noticeable that more developed industries like the Mobile Industry and the Business Consulting Industry have the better talent management in place. It is also connected with the environment which the industry is operating in and with the financial situation of the company. In Ireland there is still a need for guidance from the academic community on how to implement and develop talent management. From the researcher's point of view, participants were not similar with themes concerning talent management. There seem to be gaps between theory and practice and these gaps are seen in Ireland. Talent management is not fully developed in Ireland as three out of four people said their plan for future is to fully implement talent management systems and programmes within company and do something for people not involved in talent programmes but still important for organisations. It is clear that talented people are the source of competitive advantage in Ireland and organisations are trying to possess them mainly through the strong employer brand and 'Excellence Through People' standards. Also, engaging with colleges is an important part for Irish organisations. According to the primary qualitative research, Irish employers do not lose people for competitors. Only one out of four Respondents agreed that sometimes it happens that employees are leaving to work for their competitor. Additionally, it is worth fighting for talent according to Irish HR professionals. This 'War for Talent' is dictated by demographic in Ireland as most of the workforce is over 50 years old and birth rates are declining. It is worth to fight for new talented people and existing employees because it is very expensive to lose an experienced employee. Although, from the Public Sector point of view, fighting for talent may be problematic for HR departments in the long term. Moreover, Irish companies are identifying high potential employees for future roles through succession planning, high potential assessments, 180 degree appraisal,

and internal promotion schemes. Although, in Public Sector this phenomenon is not present because of the recruitment freeze.

5.3. Conclusion

The research project achieved all six objectives. The researcher, through the secondary research and the primary research, brought closer the main aspects, themes, attitudes and opinions associated with talent management. Talent management still seems to be underdeveloped and under-defined but this dissertation may contribute to a better understanding of the concept and development of talent management especially in Ireland. The dissertation may also point out the main issues and barriers concerning the process which may influence the further development of the theory and practice.

The attention should be paid on the Public Sector because it seems to be the less developed industry when it comes to talent management. From the primary research, the researcher assumed that the main reason in the Public Sector for not implementing and developing talent management is recruitment freeze but also government and legislation. The situation of the Public Sector is well known in each and every country but maybe it is talent management which is able to change this situation and make the Public Sector one of the best industries as it used to be. Other industries, do not have a problem with talent management but they are still struggling to fully implement talent management.

The Researcher would like to pay attention to the research conducted by CIPD (2013) and a range of expert collaborators that studied what strategies organisations should apply in order to respond to current and future macro and micro challenges facing the business world. The six part series may be the recommendation for further research in talent management as well as they may contribute to development of the process and improve

talent management process within organisations. CIPD found six themes associated with talent management: the new global talent realities, talent and changing values, talent clusters, talent measurement insight, talent partnership throughout and beyond the organisation and talent sustainability coming out of the recession (CIPD, Talent Management: an overview, 2013). Focusing on these six areas of talent management may contribute towards the further development of the process and at the same time may help organisations face new challenges and opportunities which should be reflected in new talent strategies.

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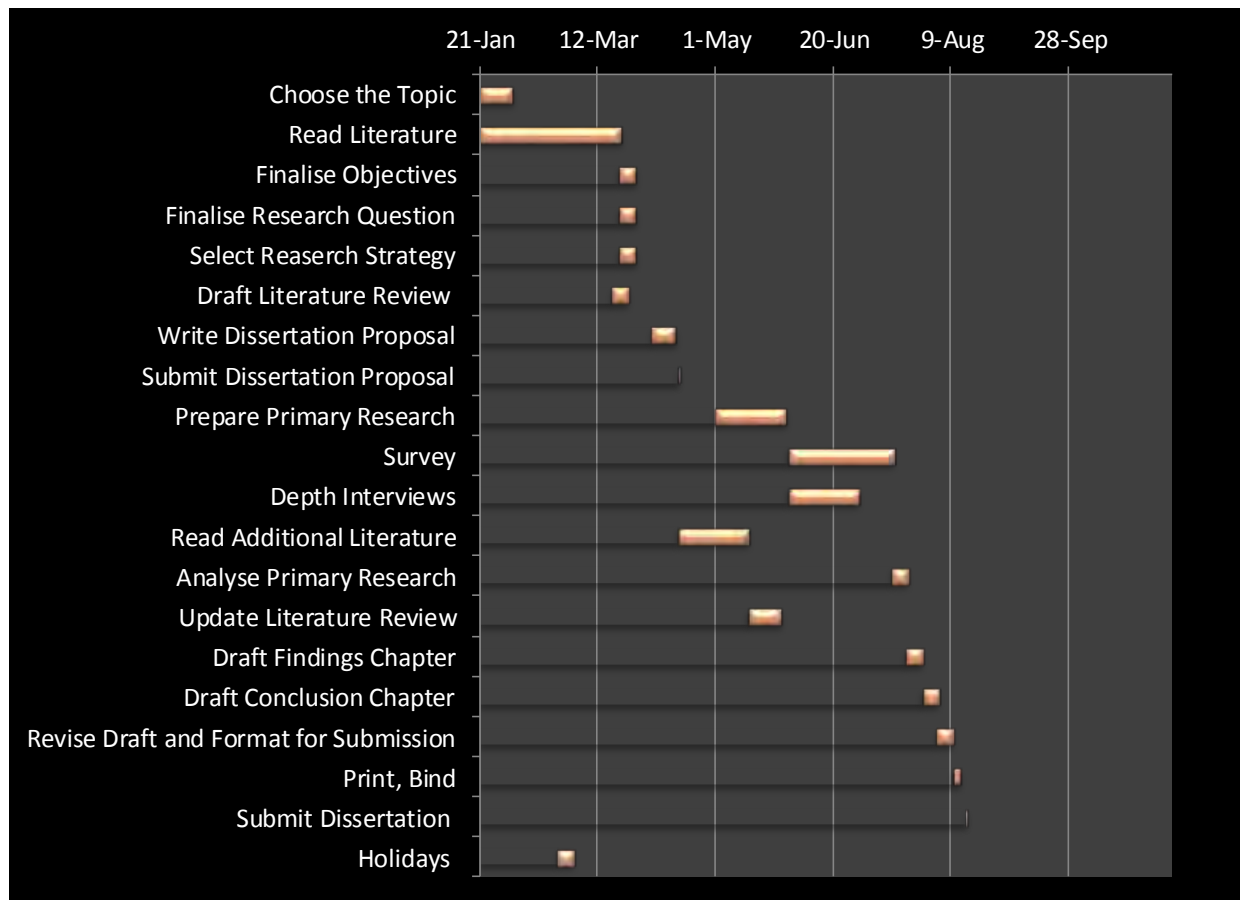
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – In-depth Interview Questions

1. 'Talented' people are the source of competitive advantage – do you agree with this?
2. Do 'talented' people make a difference in the overall performance of the business/company?
3. Is there one clear definition of talent/potential in your organisation?
4. What is talent management in your opinion?
5. How do the company try to attract talented people?
6. Is process of talent management fully implemented in your organisation?
7. Is talent management transparent to everyone in the organisation?
8. In your opinion what is the best practice of talent management?
9. Should talent management be aligned with the business strategy?
10. Who should participate in talent management process within the organisation (everyone or only 'A' players) and who should be responsible for talent management process? How it works in your organisation?
11. What are the top talent management programmes in your organisation?
12. What are the biggest barriers to successful talent management process in an organisation?
13. What are the biggest issues concerning talent management process in your organisation?
14. Is your organisation losing good employees for competitors?
15. The concept of 'War for Talent': is it worth fighting for talented people these days?
16. Do you identify high potential employees for higher future roles in the organisation?
17. Are you planning any changes to talent management process in your organisation?

Appendix 2 – Gantt Chart



This Gantt Chart shows the process of writing this dissertation. The researcher met all deadlines and was successful in fulfilling all of the tasks. Good time-management and motivation were the reasons of completing this project on time.