

Chapter 18

Global Perspective on Talent Management: The South African Experience

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ABSTRACT

Today, no country can claim that its business can be local or national due to the effects of globalization. The world of business has become international. In this new millennium, few economies can afford to ignore global business opportunities. The globalizing wind has broadened the mind sets of executives, extended the geographical reach of firms, and nudged international business into some new trajectories. One such new trajectory is the concern with national culture. This has a tremendous impact on the subject matter of talent management for any country, economy or nation. Africa is no exception. Though there is a considerable body of research suggesting a link between language, communication and how gender – and leadership – gets ‘done’ in organisations, there is very little research on global perspective for managing talent especially in the African context. This chapter intends to fill that gap and in particular deals with global perspective of talent management in the African context.

INTRODUCTION

Africa has shown tremendous potential in recent years, with 27 of its 30 largest economies expanding rapidly since 2000. Once considered the “hopeless continent”, the average purchasing power in the region has risen by a third in the past decade, nations are showing signs of political stability and foreign investment is accelerating. Looking to lay the groundwork for the next stage of growth, many of these countries are committed to investing in their people. Currently constrained by a lack of talent, today’s leading African organizations are raising their sights, assuming responsibility, broadening their leadership development focus and learning forward. These corporations recognize the quality of leaders as a key strategic differentiator, and they are not waiting for public sector literacy programs and education initiatives to deliver results. However, in markets depressed by low skill sets, how do you best engage

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the broad spectrum within an organization, from illiterate employees to experienced, highly educated professionals? How do you immerse employees in an experience that will build critical business, leadership and management capabilities? In today's competitive and fast-paced economy, how do you bridge talent gaps faster, accelerate skill development and increase application on the job?

With the liberation of trade policies, transnational companies moving production to low-cost areas and the corresponding growth of global supply chains, increased globalization has resulted in socio-economic and cultural challenges. Further, talent now takes many forms, from migrants, crossing borders (temporarily or seeking new homes), students gaining degrees and expatriates on assignment to tourists, refugees and business travelers (Baporikar, 2013a). Consequently, the demand for skills has countries working hard to develop policies that will attract talent with human and technological skills to support economic growth, retain talent and even reverse talent migration. In a "reverse brain drain" effect, China and India, for example, encourage their educated nationals to return and fill jobs at home (Kuptsch, & Pang, 2006). Along with the understanding the need to hire, develop, and retain talented people, organizations are aware that they must manage talent as a critical resource to achieve the best possible results. Few, if any, today have an adequate supply of talent. Talent is an increasingly scarce resource, so it must be managed to the fullest effect. Are today's leaders able to do more with less? The idea of managing talent is not new. Four or five decades ago, it was viewed as a peripheral responsibility best relegated to the personnel department, today talent management is an organizational function that is taken far more seriously (Baporikar, 2013a). Though there is a considerable body of research suggesting a link between language, communication and how gender – and leadership – gets 'done' in organisations, there is very little research on global perspective for managing talent especially in the African context. This chapter intends to fill that gap. After delving in detail on the existing literature on talent management the chapter will in particular deal global perspective of talent management in the African context and thereby hopes to contribute and add to the talent management knowledge base in African context.

Country Perspective: South Africa

With the Government struggling to act, businesses confront the talent shortage head on. Coined in 1997, the "war for talent" has echoed throughout the corporate world and remains a critical concern today. For South African organizations, this challenge is especially real. Despite significant advancements, for the past five consecutive years South African corporations have identified an inadequately skilled workforce as the greatest challenge inhibiting business growth (Pennington, 2013). The government has proven slow to respond. Relative to the international community, the nation's education system ranks near the bottom, considered 138 out of 144, in maths and science (Moolman & Breidenthal, 2013). Although secondary enrolment remains high, few students successfully graduate from a tertiary institution. Even after achieving an advanced degree, many South Africans do not necessarily have the skills demanded by businesses (Wits, 2013).

With rising rates of emigration, retaining the top talent capable of driving organizational competitiveness is increasingly difficult (Kerr-Phillips & Adèle Thomas, 2010). To outpace competitors in growth and profits, South African organizations are not relying on the public sector to address the talent gap. Instead, many companies are taking responsibility, elevating the organization's profile by investing in foundational business, leadership and management skill development. However, to drive competitive advantage on a global scale, companies are challenged to move beyond general capability building,

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