


# Graduate Development Program as an Interventional Strategy for Talent Management

Neeta Baporikar, Namibia University of Science and Technology, Namibia & University of Pune, India\*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0676-9913>

Isaac O. Randa, Namibia University of Science and Technology, Namibia

## ABSTRACT

Organizations have recognized the need to have a workforce that can give the company direction and help it adapt to continuous market changes. Many organizations have taken note of this ever-changing competitive market and implemented the graduate development program (GDP) to ensure the development and consistent supply of its talent pool. Adopting a qualitative research design with research instruments that allow interaction with all key stakeholders, the objective of this paper is to assess GDP as an interventional strategy for talent management in the context of Namibia. The study findings are mixed as it shows that current and past employees feel that the GDP implementation is not effective due to their negative perceptions about the identification of outside talent, and yet the findings did reveal that the GDP has resulted in improved talent sets and an enabling environment to recruit, develop, and retain staff in critical positions.

## KEYWORDS

Advancement, Criteria, Education, Human Resource, Knowledge, Management Organization, Training, Value

## INTRODUCTION

Organizations have been dedicating enormous amounts of resources, time, and effort to the recruit high-quality young graduates (McDermott, Mangan, & O'Connor, 2006). This is not only done to raise the organization's intellectual capital but also to enable the organization's growth and constant innovation through the management of the graduates' talent. Talent management (TM) has become a genuine consideration for many organizations, especially during times of uncertain and competitive business environments (Oppong, 2013). Thus, it has been receiving enormous attention from the industry as well as academics in recent years (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Hejase, Mikdashi, and Bazeih (2016) note that organizations must rethink their TM approaches best control their human capital as these organizations will be positioned positively to succeed in the ever-changing and highly competitive markets. However, how the various TM approaches are adopted depends on the organization and the

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\*Corresponding Author

target group (McCracken, Currie, & Harrison, 2016). Exclusive and subjective approaches ensure that appropriate development strategies are put in place for the correct skills and competencies to be developed within the “talent pipeline”, thereby ensuring that relevant and strategic positions are filled by capable and competent personnel. On the contrary, exclusive objective approaches attract, recruit and retain talented individuals, thereby assisting the organization in gaining a competitive advantage (Baporikar, 2017a). There are many TM tools and practices that like career planning; competency management; high potential employee management, learning, and development; performance management; leadership development; succession planning; recruitment, professional development, retention, and GDP (Baporikar, 2013; 2016; 2017b). Further today, the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs young intellectual graduates due to the changing competitive landscape. However, key challenges with any recruitment and more so with graduate recruitment is whether the expectations of the graduates are met, the satisfaction of the graduates with regards to the job features, and especially the role of the graduate development strategies within the organization (McDermott, Mangan, & O’Connor, 2006). Hence, many organizations introduce GDP to develop graduate competencies, enhance commitment, and achieve high levels of managerial competency as well as to increase the progression of such graduates within the organization (Garavan, 2003). GDP is one tool in the TM kit for any organization. GDP is a special program where organizations recruit high academic achievers and graduates from university to develop their potential and make them *organization-fit* for critical, specialized, technical and key leadership positions. Employers like graduates who are ready for work, possess good communication skills, share skills and appreciate the nature of the business and organization (Pearson, 2001). McDermott, Mangan, and O’Connor (2006) reveal that graduates consider salary levels, career planning, mentoring/counselling as crucial and above all prioritize challenging and interesting work when joining an organization. Therefore, it is vital that organizations analyze the gap between their expectations and the graduate expectations, before adopting GDP if they are to retain this bright young talent and remain competitive in the current market.

## BACKGROUND

NamPower (NP) is the sole Namibian national provider of both locally generated and imported electricity and one of the values is to build employees’ capacity, which means allowing each employee to be trained and developed (NP, 2014). This is reflected as the fourth strategic pillar for 2019 to 2023 with the theme “driving organizational and operational excellence”. In support of this pillar the following initiatives exist:

- Building an ethical, engaging, and high-performance culture;
- Achieving and retaining top employer status involves recruiting and retaining top talent to prepare a leadership profile and rank as a top employer; and
- Develop additional capabilities to meet the new market requirement, which includes securing the new skills, and capabilities required in the new market environment.

In pursuit of this goal, NP introduced GDP as a strategy for TM with engineering graduates aimed at empowering them by giving those opportunities to work in a variety of disciplines and functions. The program incorporates rotation and placements during which candidates are involved in several roles to get practical training that meets their immediate and future needs and those of the company. However, over the years, the recruited engineering graduates have had a higher attrition or turnover rate in the organization (NP, 2014). Poorly managed GDP results in low return on investment, retention levels and failure of the graduates to realize their potential, a key factor in achieving employability (Clarke, 2017). Thus, rapid turnover in GDP apart from costing the organization in terms of resources allocated results in losses in terms of organizational knowledge and talent pool (NP, 2018). Several

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