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Exploring the talent retention strategies of Cape Coast Technical University in Ghana

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Orientation: Educational institutions are ranked highly as the performance of their talented staff gives them a competitive advantage. Higher educational institutions (HEIs) and for that matter technical universities in Ghana, however, have the challenge of retaining their talented staff.

Research purpose: To explore in the Ghanaian context the talent retention strategies employed by HEIs (technical universities) as a critical aspect of the talent management (TM) process.

Motivation for the study: There is limited literature on TM in HEIs in Ghana and especially on talent retention in the technical university context.

Research approach/design and method: A qualitative research approach and a case study design were adopted in this study, and 20 academic and management staff were purposively sampled and interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide.

Main findings: The study found that the university's retention strategies employed included fair handling of staff promotions, settling of lawsuits and legal tussles, training and development measures, awards and recognition of talented staff, and better conditions of service for its talented staff.

Practical/managerial implications: This research provides insights into how talents are retained and specifically examines the talent retention strategies for which technical universities, institutions and human resource practitioners could employ.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributes to TM literature by providing empirical evidence from the HEI context. It also extends the TM literature with evidence from technical universities in Ghana, as previous studies have been predominantly conducted in western contexts.

Keywords: talent; talent management practices; talent retention strategies; higher education institutions, Cape Coast Technical University.

Introduction

Undoubtedly the issue of attracting, developing and retaining talents is a critical issue for all organisations worldwide (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Coy & Ewing, 2007; Keller & Meaney, 2017). Globalisation and technological advancement of the business world are giving rise to the importance of the internal resources of organisations (Gallardo-Gallardo, Nijs, Dries, & Gallo, 2015; Lina, 2018; Mohammed, Hafeez-Baig, & Gururajan, 2020; Sharma, 2019). As stipulated by the resource-based view, organisations can gain a competitive advantage when they focus on internal resources (e.g. talents) by managing and retaining them effectively and efficiently (Al Aina & Atan, 2020; Al-Dalahmeh, 2020; Barney 1991).

Talents are unique strategic resources that can be used in achieving sustained competitive advantage (Dries, 2013) as, drawing on the resources-based view (Barney, 1991), they are seen as strategic intangible resources of organisations. Thorne and Pellant (2007) define talent as individuals with ability above others and who do not need to put in too much effort to achieve targets set. This is because of their competencies and other performance attributes that are over and above the ordinary human resource. This view is supported by Tansley (2011) who reveals that talents are high-performing employees who are seen to contribute significantly to the performance of an organisation and its future leadership and development. From these definitions, it is deduced that talent is an organisational member that offers a significant contribution to their employing organisations to help achieve its goals.

Based on who talents are, talent management (TM) can be described as the process of attracting, identifying, developing, engaging and retaining those employees who are high performers and whose output is of great value to the organisation and by whose contribution a sustainable success is achieved (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015). Bradley (2016) in considering TM from a higher educational environment found that it is a primary component of strategic human resource management, which can improve a university's performance over the long term by understanding the strategy devised through its talented individuals.

In addition to the improvement in university performance through talented staff members, there are several benefits for those institutions that invest in talents and TM. The specific strategic focus of TM systems leads to higher scores in measures of financial outcome, such as company profit, company and talent productivity and market value, and increases nonfinancial outcomes at the company level, such as job satisfaction, employee motivation, commitment and work quality (Al-Abbasi & Masri, 2020; Mohammed, Hafeez-Baig, & Gururajan, 2019; Venkateswaran, 2012). Talents assist in increasing the rankings and profits of higher educational institutions (HEIs) (Akpey-Mensah, 2018; Bradley, 2016; Kusi, Opoku-Danso, & Afum, 2020).

There is extant literature on how TM practices influence retention (Erasmus, Grobler, & Van Niekerk, 2015; Koshy & Babu, 2013; Ngozwana & Rugimbana, 2011; Panday & Kaur, 2019; Towns, 2019). Likewise, TM practices effectively implemented are seen to lead to organisational performance (Al Aina & Atan, 2020; Jooss, Burbach, & Ruël, 2019; Miiro, Othman, Sahari, & Burhan, 2016), which extends to superior performance in HEIs, (Al-Abbasi & Masri, 2020; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Eghbal et al., 2017; Kusi et al., 2020; Riccio, 2010; Sharma, 2017; Tyagi, Singh, & Aggarwal, 2017) and other industries (Dang, Nguyen, Habaradas, Ha, & Nguyen, 2020; Garg, 2014; Yeswa & Ombui, 2019). These indicate that TM is a strategic human resource management process, which is highly beneficial to all sectors and its effect cannot be overemphasised.

However, findings from the literature indicate that in public universities in Ghana TM is not popular, and there are no specific policies when it comes to managing talents (Acheampong, Asare Bediako, & Acheampong, 2019; Akpey-Mensah, 2018; Appau, Marfo-Yiadom, & Kusi, 2021). The absence of such policies reveals the lack of commitment and interest in managing talents in HEIs (Akpey-Mensah, 2018; Appau et al., 2021). This lack of commitment in managing talents had led to the inability of HEIs to retain their talented staff. In this competitive global labour market, it is critical for HEIs to build human capital. Consequently, academic institutions have started to rethink their procedures and policies to achieve better attraction, development and retention of their academic talents.

In Ghana, the role of HEIs in national development is greatly hampered by a number of challenges such as lack of adequate funding, inefficient management, poor remuneration, heavy teaching loads and inadequate infrastructure (Utulu, 2000), which, among others, have been revealed by the Technical Committee Report (Afeti et al., 2014). According to the report, the greatest challenge faced by technical universities is their inability to recruit and retain qualified staff members with relevant practical and professional experience. This is because the type of skilled professionals that the technical universities require are also those highly sought after by industry (Acquah, Frimpong, & Borkloe, 2017; Bourne, 2017; Strebler, Neathey, & Tackey, 2005). In this regard, technical universities are unable to compete for staff with industry, which is able to offer better remuneration packages (Acquah et al., 2017; Afeti et al., 2014). Consequently, effective talent retention strategies ought to be developed to retain talented academic staff in HEIs.

Research purpose and objectives

This study is motivated by the call for the implementation of TM in various contexts to forge an in-depth understanding of the importance of TM (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen, & Scullion, 2019). Our study, however, is narrowed to explore strategies for academic talent retention that has become a critical aspect of TM in technical universities as revealed by the 2014 Technical Committee Report (Afeti et al., 2014) in Ghana. The questions that we pose and try to answer, to achieve this, are, 'how do technical universities retain their talented staff?' and 'what retention strategies do the universities implement to achieve an effective talent management process?'

Literature review
Talent management practices and strategies in higher educational institutions

The implementation of TM is critical for every organisation. Studies have been conducted in various industries and sectors about TM practices and how they are implemented in their context (Bethke-Langenegger, Mahler, & Staffelbach, 2011; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2019; Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier, 2013). These studies reveal the effectiveness of TM as it gives organisations a competitive edge (Barney, 1991; Dries, 2013). Talent management practices and strategies have been widely studied as being a predictor of the success and competitiveness of organisations (Atwah, Aitah Feras, Al-Shalabi, & Aljamal, 2013; Knott, 2016; Morton & Ashton, 2005).

To ensure effectiveness in the implementation of TM practices, extant literature (Anlesinya & Amponsah-Tawiah, 2020; Anlesinya, Amponsah-Tawiah, & Dartey-Baah, 2019; Bolander, Werr, & Asplund, 2017; Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Meyers, Van Woerkom, Paauwe, & Dries, 2020; Thunnissen, 2015) has discussed various TM philosophies and typologies. While some advocate for exclusive approaches (Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011; Meyers et al., 2020) where only

identified talented employees become the focus of the TM process, others maintain that all workers have some specific talents that can contribute to the success of organisations (Iles, Chuai, & Preece, 2010; Stahl et al., 2012) – therefore calling for an all-inclusive approach. Still, others advance the argument for more responsible TM and advocate for a hybrid approach (Anlesinya & Amponsah-Tawiah, 2020). In supporting the all-inclusive approach, Anlesinya and Amponsah-Tawiah (2020) developed a model that purports to guide TM practice in a socially responsible way. They further argued that inclusivity, corporate responsibility, equity and equal employment opportunity are the key underlying principles of a responsible TM system.

In addition to the approaches to the implementation of TM practices, studies have been conducted on factors supporting TM implementation. For instance, a paper by Bradley (2016) discussed three main issues relating to managing talent in higher education. The study revealed, firstly, that aligning important positions with the university's strategy was critical to implement a successful TM. Also, alignment with metrics helped to strategically identify, reward and promote talented individuals. Such individuals are those with skills, experience and motivation, which are required for effective performance in those critical positions.

Thirdly, Bradley identified TM's alignment with management as a means to help universities firmly incorporate TM with the day-to-day management of the university. The effectiveness of this alignment depends on retaining the talented faculty who can sustain this alignment. These findings imply that TM implementation can be effective when it is based on certain factors that range from a strong culture and alignment with the strategic vision of the university including retention of talented staff members.

A study by Kusi et al. (2020) sought to examine the effect of TM practices on the organisational performance of public universities in Ghana. Testing the mediating role of leadership support in that context, the study found that TM practices, namely talent attraction, talent development, talent engagement and talent retention practices, were a major predictor of organisational performance. Leadership support proved to be positively associated with TM and organisational performance except for talent engagement.

In another study, Akpey-Mensah (2018) sought to explore the value of integrating TM into the overall human resource activities in public universities in Ghana. Using a qualitative research approach and exploring three public universities out of 10 public universities, the study found that the term 'talent management' was not popular with the universities. There were no specific policies in place to guide the management of talent. The interviews revealed, however, that staff members perceived TM to have the potential to reduce high academic staff turnover and recommended the integration of TM into human resource management activities.

Studies on TM practices reveal that TM practices mostly implemented are defining and identifying talent needs, discovering talent sources, attracting talents, developing the potential abilities of talents, strategically deploying talents, retaining talents and evaluating and aligning TM activities (Eghbal et al., 2017; Erasmus, Naidoo, & Joubert, 2017; Heinen & O'Neill, 2004; Hejase, Hejase, Mikdashi, & Baseih, 2016). These studies further reveal that majority of organisations have specific TM strategies in place, with varying degrees as to the success of the implementation of these strategies (Hejase et al., 2016). These findings imply that TM practices are well known in HEIs, but their effectiveness lies with the strategies and organisational and leadership factors supporting the TM practice. The next section reviews the literature on strategies employed by HEIs to retain their talented staff members.

Talent retention strategies of higher educational institutions

Retention of talented employees is one of the most critical issues that educational institutions face today as a result of the fact that talents have become the driving force of organisational success. Strategies in the retention of academic staff have been investigated (Bradley, 2016; Erasmus et al., 2017; Theron, Barkhuizen, & Du Plessis, 2014).

A study by Theron et al. (2014) investigated the factors influencing turnover and retention of academic staff in South African universities and found that compensation and recognition, as well as management support, were the possible factors that could encourage staff members to stay. Similar studies (Koshy & Babu, 2016; Towns, 2019) examined the various factors influencing faculty in retaining their staff members and found that there is a significant relationship between compensation, empowerment, training and development, health insurance as well as performance appraisal and the retention of faculty. The authors advocate for more encouragement and reward for research activities as well as sabbatical leave for faculty. This indicates that compensation alone does not suffice in influencing academic staff to stay longer at their universities.

In addition to reward and compensation strategy in retaining academic staff, Matongolo, Kasekende and Mafabi (2018) examined the effect of reward strategy, people orientedness and leadership and development on talent retention in HEIs in Uganda and found that there was a positive and significant association between people orientedness and talent retention. In the study, it was revealed that employees are mostly motivated by rewards, recognition, respect and trust, passion for work, success, good working conditions, growth and promotion, as well as training and development. Similarly, in exploring effective strategies for talent retention in HEIs, Towns (2019) identified open communication among employees and leadership, the influence of innovation, flexibility and appreciation, that is, the feeling of being valued.

From their study on the impact of the different policies and practices on the retention of talented human resources, Rodríguez-Sánchez, González-Torres, Montero-Navarro and Gallego-Losada (2020) developed a model of work–life balance strategies. The strategies that formed the model included flexibility, non-monetary benefits, external activities and employer branding. In addition, the importance of personalised training and education programmes to retain the best talents was also revealed in the study.

Consequently, university leaders need to employ adequate and appropriate retention strategies if they intend to keep their talented staff members. This can be done when policies guiding the implementation of TM practices are formulated, and leadership support and the right retention strategies are implemented. This study, therefore, explores how technical universities in Ghana are strategising to retain their talented staff members.

Research design
Research approach

To address the research purpose and research questions, this study adopted a qualitative research approach (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). The exploratory research design was used in order to discover insights into an under-explored research area (Rahi, 2017). A case study research method was used. Case studies are used to explore or investigate phenomenon within its context or explore a problem within a number of real-life contexts (Saunders et al., 2012; Yin, 2009). The case study method was employed in this study to gain a rich understanding of the higher educational context of talent retention. The qualitative approach was employed because of its ability to enable the researchers to collate and analyse the views and experiences of both the management staff and the academic staff of the university as narrated in their own words. This corroborated the exploratory research methodology as the authors explored (in detail) the life experiences of the participants relative to the retention of talents.

Research participants and sampling method

A purposive sampling method was used to recruit a total of 20 staff members comprising five members from the management team of the university (the Appointments and Promotions Board) and 15 academic staff members from the departments in the university. Each of the participating management team members had been in their current position for more than 2 years. The purposive sampling technique was used to select these participants as they have managerial experiences and the responsibility of managing plans related to TM and human capital development of the university. The academic staff selected to participate were staff members who had been in the university for more than 5 years and who had knowledge of the university's talent retention drive.

Research setting

The study was set in the general administration of the technical university of the first author. All respondents were interviewed in their own official offices, at a time suitable for the interviewees. This setting was convenient as it afforded them a relaxed atmosphere they were used to.

Research instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data from the research participants. A semi-structured interview guide is a type of interview guide that does not follow a strict or formal list of questions (Kvale, 1996). This interview guide provided a well-planned and consistent approach that helped in interviewing the research participants (Flick, 2018). Individual interviews were used to collect rich qualitative data for the first time as no similar study had been conducted in the institution (Keeley et al., 2016).

The interview guide comprised six questions, which were constructed based on the research purpose, research questions and insights from the literature review. The six questions were complemented by questions to probe the subjective views of respondents on talent identification processes, talent development practices and retention strategies. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to provide their own experiences and insights as well as opinions while providing examples (Rahi, 2017). Examples of some of the questions asked are, 'please share with me your views about academic talents and how does the university retain its academic talents?' Next, based on the responses, the interview was guided using follow-up, direct or indirect questions such as 'you mention talent retention, could you elaborate on the measures the university is using to retain its talented staff?'

Data collection

To gather data from the participants, in-depth interviews were conducted. All respondents were officially invited. The interviews were face-to-face and conducted individually. Informed consent forms were duly signed by the respondents. Consent was sought after explaining the objectives of the study to the participants and assuring them of confidentiality and anonymity. The informed consent included a summary of the study objectives as well as permission to record the discussion. In addition, the confidentiality of respondents' names was ensured. The interviews were recorded, and notes were taken of important points. Each interview lasted for 30–45 min. After the interview, the recorded content was carefully evaluated, and a synopsis of events was formulated before undertaking the procedures for transcription. Each audio-recorded interview was then transcribed word for word.

Next, the respondents were given the transcriptions for their evaluation with regard to the accuracy and interviewer's interpretations and impressions of the statements and,

where needed, the data were revised accordingly. Data were collected during the period from February 2020 to March 2022.

Data analysis

The data analytical method employed was the thematic approach. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is used for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. This form of analysis was used because a 'rigorous thematic approach' can produce an insightful analysis that answers the talent retention practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97).

After transcripts were evaluated by the respondents, the researchers read each transcript several times to familiarise themselves with the data. The transcripts were generated by the use of MS Word. Using MS Word, manual coding was done using pre-codes from the literature. Codes in qualitative inquiry are most often words or short phrases that are developed through the process of labelling and organising qualitative data to identify different themes and the relationships between them. Its purpose was to transform the data into a form suitable for analysis and also to make it easier to interpret participants' feedback. Again, assigning codes to words and phrases in each response is about recognising, which helps better in analysing and summarising the results of the entire exploratory study.

These generated codes were consolidated into themes through which explanations on how the university retains its talented academic staff were established. To uphold the confidentiality of study participants, we labelled each participant as respondents 1, 2, etc.

Strategies employed to ensure data quality and rigour

To ensure a high level of quality and integrity of the data, the study adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985, 1986) criteria for quality in qualitative research. The five criteria, namely credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and authenticity (Cope, 2014; Osei Boakye, Dei Mensah, Bartrop-Sackey, & Muah, 2021), demonstrate the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings.

The study ensured credibility by presenting and reporting exactly the respondents' statements while illustrating with quotes. Transferability was ensured by synthesising the thick descriptions of the various respondents into phrases such that findings could be generalised to other readers with similar experiences (Cope, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Osei Boakye et al., 2021).

Dependability was established with the audit trail, which involved maintaining and preserving all transcripts, notes, audiotapes, etc. Authenticity was ensured by reporting each participant's experiences in such a way that it maintains

respect for the context of the data and presents all perspectives equally so that the reader can arrive at an impartial decision. Confirmability was determined by linking the data to their sources. This was carried out by ensuring that interpretations given to the texts were actually in line with the original interview and not the authors' opinion (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Osei Boakye et al., 2021). As in bracketing, the authors set aside their potential prejudices and biases (Creswell, 2009).

Results and discussion

The main objective of this study was to explore how the university retains its talented academic staff and the retention strategies employed. The study found that there are strategies rolled out by the university to retain its valued and talented staff members. Respondents believed that a well-engaged staff member is most likely to be committed to the institution. Among the retention strategies enumerated are fair handling of staff promotions, settling lawsuits and legal tussles, training and development, performance appraisals, awards and recognition of talented staff, giving of responsibilities and allowances, office environment and office space for staff and better conditions of service for its talented staff. To retain academic talents, the following strategies were revealed by the study.

Talent development and deployment

The study found that developing talents and deploying them effectively were major factors in the attainment of the university's competitiveness. It was revealed by the respondents that talent development was key to retaining staff. It came to light that the minimum qualification for a lecturer is a PhD degree; therefore, many of the staff members have been given full or partial scholarships to further their education in various universities in Ghana and abroad. One dean stated that:

'I think we should grow the talents around PhD works because it is a focused specialized area of study. Once someone has gone for a PhD and is back, he has some specialized knowledge and the University should have some mechanism of putting that specialized knowledge to use in order to remain competitive.' (R3, Male, 43, Management Team)

Corroborating this fact, an official of the Human Resource Department remarked that:

'[S]o, we do mentor our talented staff so that the person will be developed further and also, with the staff development policy for instance, you make people know that, they have the opportunity that we can give them specific scholarship for them to upgrade themselves.' (R1, Male, 40, Management Team)

Consequently, some of the academic staff confirmed that some staff members who were recently recruited have been sent for further studies to acquire PhDs because the university anticipates that the skills and talents will help the faculties when they will come back from studies. By that,

these staff members stay longer with the university. As one staff member suggested:

'… [S]o, we think, by recognizing the talents through use, making use of their talents gives some recognition. And then giving opportunities for further studies, once we have them, I mean the opportunity, we will also help to encourage, kind of motivate the staffs who have this particular skills and abilities.' (R3, Male, 43, Management Team)

This indicates that talents are harnessed through staff development practices, such as full and partial scholarships to staff members to develop themselves accordingly with the intention of getting them to stay longer with the university. This is in line with findings on talent development practices by Eghbal et al. (2017) that development programmes are designed and implemented based on the gap between particular skills and developmental requirements of faculty members. Similarly, the findings corroborate earlier results obtained by Rudhumbu and Maphosa (2015) who saw HEIs' strong desire to improve the ability of their talented staff through knowledge development.

Performance appraisal

Performance appraisal as a practice was recognised by all respondents as being a tool that helps identify the strengths and deficiencies in staff output. This study found that performance appraisal was, however, tied to the promotion process, and therefore, it is carried out once in 4–6 years, and in some cases, they are not carried out at all. This was a strategy used to ensure that talents are identified and given the necessary opportunities in order for them to stay. This view was expressed by almost all participants:

'… [D]ocuments that you submit for promotion, these are all ways and means of trying to elicit that kind of skill and the ability that you have … so for us, to be able to identify high performing staff, we do appraisals' '… so appraisals help us to identify very high performing staff.' (R5, Male, 54, Management Team)

However, most of the academic staff members criticised the practice of linking appraisals to promotion of staff. They expressed the view that it was important to assess the needs of staff members and to plan development programmes for staff ahead of time instead of waiting to assess staff members' performance only when they apply for promotion. Some of the participants therefore suggested the practice of annual performance appraisals. One respondent remarked:

'Linking performance appraisals to promotions is good but how does one assess staff needs? Why wait till promotions are applied for? Let's do annual appraisals.' (R18, Male, 36, Academic Staff)

Some respondents from the Human Resource Directorate explained that effort is being made to organise appraisals annually. This view was corroborated by some of the participating deans who said their faculties have begun annual staff appraisals to enable their staff members to benefit from some training opportunities and to identify

talents and skills of their staff in a bid to get them to stay longer. For instance, respondent 3 opined that:

'… [W]e see how far we have come when it comes to research or community service and the abilities and so based on annual performance appraisals, then we will be able to now identify people who are doing well.' (R3, Male, 43, Management Team)

These findings on performance appraisal are in line with earlier studies by Koshy and Babu (2016) who stated that a well-instituted performance appraisal system could give feedback that leads to training and development programmes and retention. Further findings by Koshy and Babu (2013) indicate that organisational commitment is gained when employees participate in the appraisal process.

Equity in staff promotions

On promotion criteria, it was revealed that faculty members have over the years complained about biases in promotion procedures that had resulted in lawsuits and legal tussles, rendering the university's work environment unconducive:

'Until we see some fairness in the promotion process, staff will be apathetic to say the least ….' (R6, male, 42, Academic staff)

'… There are a lot of biases in the promotion process.' (R11, Female, 44, Academic staff)

Other participants retorted that in terms of the fairness of staff promotions, it was important to build trust in the system. One respondent said that it was important for:

'… [E]nsuring that people are properly placed. You see, if somebody is due for promotion, ensure that the person has what it takes to be promoted and the person goes through the due processes to be promoted.' (R5, male, 54, Management Team)

Therefore, management had put in measures to ensure that promotion criteria as specified in the conditions of service and the university statutes will be followed diligently and without any biases in order to instil trust in the system anew. Most of the academic staff members acknowledged this effort by management to rectify the situation, as shown in the following quote:

'[N]ow we have government policy, scheme of service that also gives directions because with the scheme of service, you are be able to promote somebody to do something or to transfer somebody to do an activity, and this is helping to put some fairness into the system.' (R2, Male, 51, Management Team)

'Trust is built over time, we are hoping that these new schemes of service will be followed to the letter.' (R16, Male, 43, Academic staff)

This finding confirms earlier findings by Salau, Falola and Akinbode (2014), which sought to imply that when management disregards the major role played by a promotional system, the achievement of corporate goals suffers. Again, the study revealed that when talents are given a fair opportunity for promotion and are promoted when they are due, they become motivated and they continue to make positive results and it leads to retention.

Improved conditions of service

Management is aware of the dissatisfaction of university staff concerning conditions of service, which is a major cause of talented staff leaving the university. Respondent 5 remarked that:

'[W]e are now negotiating with the government to have better conditions of service possibly the same as that of the traditional universities and currently the government is working hard at it to ensure that we come at par with the traditional universities.' (R5, Male, 54, Management Team)

Some other respondents shared a similar view about having lost great talents in the past because of disparity in the conditions of service of technical universities and the traditional universities:

'One of my colleagues just left … if he had everything, or even if not the same package as the traditional universities, he would have preferred to stay here. So, he has left.' (R4, male, 56, Management Team)

'Improved conditions of service are now helping those with PhDs to stay.' (R9, Male, 35, Academic staff)

'I had calls from many of my staff, while trying to engage them, you know on their intention to leave, especially those who have gone to do PhDs and have come with PhD that is comparable to PhDs in the traditional universities. For the reason of lack of improved conditions of service. With these improved conditions, we are better placed.' (R3, Male, 43, Management Team)

'The conditions of service under which we worked cost us the loss of great talents.' (R14, Female, 43, Academic Staff)

Much as literature holds that compensation alone does not give retention (Koshy & Babu, 2013), the situation in the university seems to reveal that compensation, empowerment and better conditions of service are key to retaining staff (Matongolo et al., 2018; Theron et al., 2014).

Conducive work environment

The study revealed that the general work environment and proper employee engagement were a strategy to get staff retained. Legal tussles that engulfed the university because of unfair treatment are being handled to ensure a better work environment:

'[W]e have put in place measures to cut down legal issues as best as possible; as a way of stabilizing the system and once we stabilize the system, people will become happy and would want to continue to stay.' (R5, Male, 54, Management Team)

This finding as revealed by this study in ensuring minimal legal tussles is in line with earlier findings made by Chandrachud and Athavale (2015), which holds that universities can promote faculty mobility by overcoming legal and administrative obstacles.

In line with the university's intention to make staff happy, it is putting up a block of offices to ensure that office space for staff is made available. Most of the respondents acknowledged the effort of management in building more offices for staff, as evident in the following quotes:

'Office accommodation has been provided and one new block is almost completed so staff in my department are comfortable now.' (R17, Female, 36, Academic Staff)

'[W]e are doing our best to ensure that most lecturers and administrative staff are provided with conducive office space that is why that engineering block is under construction.' (R5, Male, 54, Management Team)

Respondent 4 shared some experience in the past about the lack of a conducive work environment, which was impeding their work and not making it comfortable for staff members:

'If you take, for instance, the office space and environment, the faculty on its own could not provide. Even with office space, we needed furniture, we could not provide, if the department needs the basic things to work with, the logistics, everything is centralized. It's not decentralized so we push for the things that the staff needs so that the general administration will provide them.' (R4, Male, 56, Management Team)

This finding indicates that the work environment holds the key to talent retention as earlier findings from Matongolo et al. (2018) hold that trust, respect, good working conditions and good working relationships encourage talents to stay. In addition, findings from Towns (2019) uphold a flexible work environment as a stress reducer for university staff and keeps staff members better engaged.

Awards and recognition

This study revealed that measures have been put in place to recognise talented staff for their outstanding performance. Both the management team and the academic staff members acknowledged the need for awarding and recognising the output of talented staff, as stated by one respondent:

'Therefore, awards for best teacher, best researcher among others have been outlined to boost talented staff morale. Other awards for innovation and support for the university's mission will be rolled out as well.' (R5, Male, 54, Management Team)

Some respondents also shared their experiences concerning with measures put in place to recognise talented staff:

'Then we honour those, who excel, particularly, the staff who coached students and other researchers.' (R8, Male, 44, Academic Staff)

'We are planning to have an open day to award best teacher, best innovator, etc., identify 5 or 6 awards, we are working on a policy for that. We should be prepared to spend to encourage staff to put in their best.' (R4, Male, 56, Management Team)

'… [T]hen you can also create an avenue where you showcase the product of that person so that it becomes like awareness creation to the whole community for them to know that this guy has this talent and has been able to come up with this product, so we are trying to promote it.' (R2, Male, 51, Management Team)

Other respondents, however, remarked that their departments are yet to see how these measures unfold. Although management has set up committees to oversee these measures of recognising staff output:

'Our department is yet to roll out any of such recognition of staff and awards.' (R13, male, 38, Academic Staff)

This is in line with a policy to recognise staff members for their contribution to scholarly work as well as the teaching and learning pursuits of the university. 'To encourage and motivate staff, there is a move to engage staff who excel to be given extra responsibilities as heads of department, directors of directorates', etc. These, participant 5 revealed, would go a long way to motivate staff members to work harder and earn some allowances as well.

These findings reveal that the university believes in recognising the contribution of its talented staff and in line with earlier findings from Theron et al. (2014), employees need some form of rewards as an acknowledgement of their dedication and contributions. It is also in recognition of talented staff dedication that Matongolo et al. (2018) revealed that instituting a form of strategic rewards helps change the attitude of talents towards their work and their intention to stay longer with the university.

Limitations and recommendations

Although the findings of this study are insightful, there are some limitations worthy of note. There is limited literature on TM practices in the Ghanaian context as well as in HEIs. This presented a limitation to the discussion of findings in the context of local literature. Secondly, the use of one HEI (technical university) is a limitation as a broader-based study involving a larger sample from other universities could hone in to validate exploratory insights as presented in this article.

Based on the findings and conclusions that have recognised the importance of both teaching and research activities to technical education, the study recommends that the university needs to identify pivotally high value-added roles in these activities. Collings and Mellahi (2009) have developed a framework that views TM as the architecture required to develop and sustain organisational success. The implementation of TM should therefore be given serious attention and measures should be put in place to ensure that TM is aligned with the university's strategy, and is aligned with the standards that govern the identification, development and reward of talented individuals in order to ensure that the skills and experiences and motivation of the staff members are fully tapped (Berger & Berger, 2003; Bradley, 2016; Cheese, Thomas, & Craig, 2008; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020; Theron et al., 2014).

As research is of paramount importance in HEIs, as one way of identifying talents and staff needs, a TM retention strategy that would secure sponsorship from the government and other research institutions should be seriously pursued. In addition, it is recommended that a human resource strategy for researchers initiative as implemented by Chandrachud and Athavale (2015) should be introduced. This will ensure

that a specific strategy for attracting, developing and retaining academic talents and researchers is adopted, and a strong research culture is fostered. Again, it is recommended that annual performance appraisals should be fully implemented in all faculties to enable the needs assessment of staff members to be effectively conducted.

It is also recommended that all incentives and broad motivational packages are fully outdoored for the university community to understand and embrace. If they are still on the drawing board, it is recommended that they are officially rolled out to encourage faculty to appreciate them.

Conclusion

In line with the resource-based view, whose tenets stress on how firms accumulate and utilise resources they possess to attain and sustain competitive advantage and ultimately superior performance, the current study underscores the university's firm acknowledgement of academic talents as a great internal resource and how they are being managed effectively to ensure their retention. The study explored how the university identifies its talented academic staff while determining the strategies employed in retaining them. Based on the findings from the study, it can be concluded that strategies used in retaining talents of the university include fair handling of staff promotions, settling lawsuits and legal tussles, training and development measures, performance appraisals, awards and recognition of talented staff, giving of responsibilities and allowances, provision of a conducive office environment and office space for staff and better conditions of service for its talented staff members.

Data availability

The data used for this study have been stored and can be made available upon reasonable request to the author.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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