

TALENT MANAGEMENT AND RETENTION IN EVENTS COMPANIES: EVIDENCE FROM FOUR COUNTRIES

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A variety of social, economic, and political factors (such as enhanced labor mobility, refugees' phenomenon, and immigration) have led to a volatile business environment and a changing labor profile in the events industry. Against this highly competitive and volatile background, events management businesses must deal with the challenging task of effectively attracting, managing, and retaining their talented employees contributing to their competitive advantage. This study aims at exploring talent management and retention strategies in the events industry. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected with semistructured interviews from four countries: the UK, the US, Greece, and Australia. Participants in this study recognized the strategic value of effective talent management. The findings suggest that the main strategies to retain talent in the events sector in the Western context include a friendly and open access culture, teamwork, mentoring, leadership, compensation, succession planning, and training and development as the key strategies to retain talent. More importantly, events companies should focus on staff engagement; highly engaged employees are more aligned with the company's vision and culture. This enables managers reduce staff turnover and enhance job satisfaction.

Key words: Talent; Retention; Events; Engagement

Introduction

The key characteristics of the events industry include the worldwide interest in major events, the competitive environment, and the economic and tourism impact of events to cities and even countries. For example, consumers look for authenticity,

which brings benefits to the host community (Van Der Wagen, 2007). The most challenging characteristic is the temporary nature of most events. Nevertheless, the events sector is a major contributor to domestic and international tourism in all countries. Business events such as conventions introduce countries to international business



travelers that could potentially result in investment and other business activities (Clark, Dimanche, Cotter, & Lee-Rosen, 2017). The economic importance of conferences to a country is far more recognized by the UK's main competitor countries than in the UK (All Party Parliamentary Group [APPG], 2011).

A variety of social, economic, and political factors (such as enhanced labor mobility, refugees' phenomenon, immigration, and BREXIT) (Tlais, Martin, & Hofaidhllaoui, 2017) have led to a volatile business environment and a changing labor profile in the events industry. Against this highly competitive and volatile background events management businesses must deal with the challenging task of effectively attracting, managing, and retaining their talented employees contributing to their competitive advantage (Baum, 2008). Oladapo (2014) highlighted the dilemma and challenges of addressing the lack of talent, as well as the need to reformulate strategies in order to invest in human capital to combat shortages of skills and talent in the events industry. In addition, structural and perceptual challenges of work in the events industry—such as low pay, seasonality, poor work–life balance, fast paced, deadline driven (Clark et al., 2017; Deery, 2009)—intensify the events businesses task of effectively managing and retaining talent (Hejase, Hejase, Mikdashi, & Bazeih, 2016). The events industry is perceived to be a low-paying, low-status, and casualized industry with few career opportunities (Deery, 2009; Martin, Mactaggart, & Bowden, 2006). The events industry, similarly to hospitality and tourism, is characterized by high turnover rates due to working unsociable hours, low pay, and high levels of casualization (Deery, 2009). Key causes of high turnover rates include a variety of factors. For example, Deery (2008) suggested that job satisfaction and organizational commitment impact on employees' intention to leave. Iverson and Currivan (2003) found that job opportunities, routinized jobs, and personal attributes among others impact on turnover. Clark et al. (2017) stated that the impact of “the human capital challenge on the industry is considerable and the departure of experienced professionals from the industry suggests a loss of valuable experience and expertise” (p. 427). Hanlon and Jago (2004) acknowledged that staff leave events companies as in most events

personnel are seasonal. Managers are challenged with motivating people to stay and work at the next event. Another key challenge for organizational leaders is the need to address demographic changes and find talented employees, to replace the 70 million Baby Boomers who will be soon be retiring (Oladapo, 2015). These challenges create the need for more complex and systematic approaches to talent retention at event organizations.

Moreover, in most countries recruitment of staff in the events industry is done through migrant labor (Deery, 2009). Some countries such as the US, the UK, and Australia do not have sufficient populations to staff this growing industry (Deery, 2009). For example, the Australian government offers specific visa arrangements for people to work in the hospitality and tourism industry; however, the challenge is that the time this visa (Working Holiday Visa) is offered is limited, hence the skills do not stay in the country. Baum (2008) acknowledged the need to have specific technical skills to work in the industry and added that people need to have the ability to cope with the emotional and aesthetic labor required, hence the industry should go beyond the traditional recruitment pools for jobs in the hospitality, tourism, and events industries. Deery and Jago (2015) proposed that people entering the events industry should have a number of skills, ranging from being creative to being strategic and possessing strong management skills. Therefore, the breadth of skills makes it a challenge to define talent. Similarly, Scott and Revis (2008) acknowledged that most organizations give their own meaning to talent as there is often variance relating to skills required for careers in the events industry. They continue that there is a need for consistency in terms of defining talent in the industry, and of determining most appropriate talent retention strategies. A need for more specific definition of talent in the hospitality, tourism, and events industries has also been identified by D'Annunzio-Green (2008).

Talent management should be at the forefront of an organization's agenda (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014); however, despite its importance human resources management in the events industry has been characterized as reactive and temporary (Clark et al., 2017). Indeed, talent management is perceived as a vital and at the same a great challenge for all hospitality and events businesses

(Baum, 2008; Deery & Jago, 2015). Attracting and retaining talent is fundamental for organizations that want to remain top performers; however, it has been a constant source of concern for events practitioners (Deery & Jago, 2015). Finding and keeping top employees is critically important as the needs of employees and employers have changed profoundly (Baker, 2014; Baum, 2008). For example, conventional responses and approaches to employee learning and development are no longer so relevant in this complex and competitive environment (Christensen-Hughes & Rog, 2008).

Hanlon and Jago (2004) stated that event organizations are different than generic organizations due to the way they pulsate, as they transform their structure overnight, they have fluctuating workforce numbers, therefore different retention strategies should be considered. Deery, Jago, Fredline, and Dwyer (2005) defined events as “any public or private activity consisting of a minimum of 15 persons with a common interest or vocation, held in a specific venue or venues, and hosted by an organization” (p. 109). This may include (but not limited to): conferences, conventions, symposia, congresses, incentives meetings, marketing events, and other. Although the events industry is large with a variety of events organized, there is paucity of research on staff retention and talent management in the events industry. Deery (2009) stated that events are part of the tourism industry, hence the discussion of these topics are examined in the context of the hospitality and tourism industry. Only recently human resources management in the context of events has attracted the interest of researchers because of the particular dynamics of work in the sector (Baum, Deery, Hanlon, Lockstone, & Smith, 2009, p. xvi). Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016) stated that the field of “talent management has been frequently criticized for a lack of sound empirical evidence” (p. 32); however, they believe the field of talent management is changing with evidence of more research. Nevertheless, their research on literature on talent management shows evidence that there is very little research published in hospitality, tourism, and events. Thunnissen (2016) proposed that contextually based research on talent management should be conducted in order to integrate models and theories from other fields into more specialized sectors. In light of this, the current study

explored talent management and talent retention in the Western events management environment from the organization’s perspective. The purpose of this study was to explore talent management strategies, with an aim to provide events management stakeholders with the relevant knowledge on talent, talent management, and propose tools to improve the retention of talented employees.

Literature Review

Talent and Talent Management

Human capital has been identified as not only a way to cope with environmental uncertainty but also as a source of competitive advantage (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, & González-Cruz, 2013; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014; Meyers, van Woerkom, & Dries, 2013). Businesses need to allocate their resources appropriately considering their current and future employee requirements, through effective talent management practices. Meyers and van Woerkom (2014) defined *talent management* as the “systematic utilisation of human resource management (HRM) activities to attract, identify, develop, and retain individuals who are considered to be ‘talented’ (in practice, this often means the high-potential employees, the strategically important employees, or employees in key positions)” (p. 192). Although talent management entails various aspects such as attracting, identifying, developing, and retaining individuals, the current article focuses on the retention of talented employees. This is because the events industry is characterized by high employee turnover, often losing talent that can contribute to its competitive advantage (Baum, 2008; Dawson, Abbott, & Shoemaker, 2011; Deery, 2009). Recruitment and selection in the sector have been identified as very challenging in part to the highly labor-intensive nature of the industry, as well as due to the fact that is considered as a less than ideal place to work (Christensen-Hughes & Rog, 2008). Customer service skills can be transferred to other industries, which makes many highly-skilled employees seek jobs elsewhere (Baum, 2008). Talent management may help address these issues. The effectiveness of talent management depends on its strategic alignment to the organization’s goals, vision, and culture (Thunnissen, 2016).

A range of issues have been considered by different studies in the conceptualization of talent. For example, the degree of inclusivity in talent management (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013), the demand and the supply of talent (Cappelli, 2008), business strategy alignment to talent management (Kim & Scullion, 2011), or even the differences between talent management and managing human resources (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013).

Talent is often characterized as high-potential and high-performance employees (Collings, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). These individuals are perceived as best in class, indicating exceptional skills and abilities in a certain area or in various activities regularly (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). These individuals also have other qualities such as experiences, leadership skills, learning potential, cognitive ability, and certain characteristics that give them potential to effectively and successfully perform (Dhanalakshmi & Gurunathan, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Govaerts, Kyndt, Docky, & Baert, 2011). Schuler (2015) noted that talented employees:

Are special, have competencies valued by the company, behaviours aligned with the company's values, are hard to find, are hard to replace, can add a great deal of value to the company, have options to leave at any time, and can help shape future strategic directions of the company. (p. 48)

The above description is quite potent in enabling organizations to choose who they consider as talented employees. Indeed, organizations should "know" who their valuable employees are (Höglund, 2012; Iles, Chuai, & Preece, 2010; Schuler, 2015). Specifically, talent is determined by the suitability of an employee's strengths and skills for a specific situation and/or job position (Iles et al., 2010; Meyers et al., 2013). Talented employees also have the potential to be a strategic tool both for the organization and the employee (Christensen-Hughes & Rog, 2008; Collings, 2014; Govaerts et al., 2011). Talent can be perceived as a strategic rare resource that can flow freely, therefore employees that are flexible can travel where they want to go and demand the salary and working conditions that they seek (Govaerts et al., 2011). At the same time events managers must ensure that availability of suitable talent is constant and aligned with the organization's

objectives to contribute to its success (Baum, 2008). Accordingly, employees perceived as talented are of enormous value to their organizations, and it is critical for events organizations to retain talent through effective talent management practices.

On the one hand, studies propose that the contingency model should be adopted to explain and justify the different approaches to talent and talent management, as a response to the context and workforce characteristics (McCracken, Currie, & Harrison, 2016). According to Lepak and Snell (2002), this approach is associated with the human resources allocation in organizations. Stahl et al. (2012) similarly suggested that pools of talent are differentiated from other groups such as senior executives and talent management practices are designed to address different career paths. This approach is associated with unitarist views where the organizational goals are above the interest and expectation of other stakeholders (Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier, 2013a). On the other hand, the pluralist approach suggests that talent management should be adapted and differentiated for talent pools, for example the "millennials" or "generation Y" (McCracken et al., 2016). The decreasing number of this labor force is forcing organizations to develop such strategies to attract and retain this group more effectively. For example, graduates are an important pool for talent and recruiting and retaining them is regarded as important in talent management (McCracken et al., 2016). This approach proposes that the employee's view should also be considered for talent management (Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier, 2013b). The purpose of this article is to provide a more generic definition of talent and overview of talent management in the events industry without focusing on specific talent pools, hence it adopts the pluralist approach.

Many studies propose that talent is either a characteristic of people or natural ability. Many propose that talent is innate and therefore cannot be easily managed (Davies & Davies, 2010). Others propose that talent is a deliberate practice and can be learned from experience (i.e., De Haro, 2010; Ericsson, Prietula, & Cokely, 2007). Despite the studies on two approaches Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) suggested that there is seldom reference to these in HR practice, which "tends to take a more pragmatic approach to managing talent" (p. 294).

This study draws from the work by Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013), who proposed that there are two approaches to *talent management*, the inclusive and the exclusive approach.

In terms of the *inclusive approach*, Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) proposed that talent includes everyone in the organization. Every employee contributes and adds value to the organization with his/her strengths. They argue that in the services industry specifically, that are around people employed, talent is vital for high-quality service delivery. Every employee is equally treated, and an egalitarian distribution of resources is evident across all employees. Therefore, according to this approach “talent might refer to the entire employee population” (Silzer & Dowell, 2010, p. 14), and organizations should support their employees and encourage them to demonstrate their full potential (Chang, 2009). In terms of the *exclusive approach*, talent refers to high performers. Stahl et al. (2012) defined talent as a “group of employees within an organization who are exceptional in terms of skills and abilities” (p. 27). It also refers to those as high potentials, as reference to these employees who have the qualities to effectively perform and contribute further to the organization (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013).

The inclusive approach may be appealing; however, the literature suggests that talent management should follow the exclusive approach, which is more prevalent approach to management at developing employees (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). There are some criticisms on this approach as employees’ performance and evaluation may be done in an objective approach and may reflect the opinions of line managers (Pepermans, Vloeberghs, & Perkisas, 2013), or may be biased (Silzer & Church, 2009). Interestingly, Collings, Scullion, and Vaiman (2011) reported the existence of bias in defining talent and talent management, with great influence from the US context and the adoption of Northern American thinking by US scholars. Powell et al. (2012) added the impact on most studies of the private sector and multinational companies’ context, which raise a question of whether current studies on talent embed this context, which urges the need for insights beyond the US context influence and debate. This study attempts to identify which of the two approaches is more evident and potentially

effective for events organizations. It also responds to the call for studying talent in different contexts with an aim to provide a broader approach to talent management in the events industry.

Employee Talent Retention Strategies for Event Management Organizations

Various factors and strategies have been identified in the literature to aid employee retention these relate to both the organization and the employee (Govaerts et al., 2011). *Organizational*-related factors impacting retention include training, opportunities for career progression (Bharwani & Butt, 2012; Deery, 2008; Moncraz, Zhao, & Kay, 2009), challenging and meaningful work and increased responsibilities (Christensen-Hughes & Rog, 2008; Govaerts et al., 2011; Yang, Wan, & Fu, 2012), and compensation policies (Brown, Thomas, & Bosselman, 2015; Chan & Kuok, 2011; Deery, 2008; Moncraz et al., 2009). Talent management activities in organizations in the UK include in-house development programs that mainly focus on coaching, mentoring, and buddying (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development [CIPD], 2006a).

For managers, specifically, mobility within organizations or between organizations has a positive impact on their skills, offers more career opportunities, and higher pay (Carbery, Garavan, O’Brien, & McDonnell, 2003). Other factors related to the working environment are high degree of integrity and respect towards the employee, effective open communication, and managers’ understanding of the value of talent (Christensen-Hughes & Rog, 2008; Kontoghiorges & Frangou, 2009; Moncraz et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2012). Positive interactions and communication of supervisors/managers with talented employees can foster relationships and enable management to understand employee needs, in turn take actions to address them, contributing to retention. Abson (2017) proposed that leadership matters in events as it contributes to developing human capital effectively. Effective recruitment is also important in retention (Moncraz et al., 2009; Pizam & Shani, 2009). This is because potential employees may have unrealistic expectations of hospitality work and its people-intensive nature and may not have suitable personal characteristics for the job and fit with the culture.

In view to people's characteristics and despite various practices that the organization can take to retain talent the literature also points to *employee*-related factors that can influence talent retention such as age, seniority, level of education, and gender (Govaerts et al., 2011). In particular generational differences are important. For instance, Generation Y employees, who entered employment at the turn of the century and likely targets of talent management, are highly demanding of their employers perceiving career advancement and challenging work more important than Baby Boomers (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Maxwell and MacLean (2008) stated that the ageing workforce is leaving organizations with their talent approaching retirement without necessarily an equivalent supply of young talent. This poses challenges to organizations in finding and attracting talent. At the same this could be seen as positive. Christensen-Hughes and Rog (2008) proposed that:

As the baby boom ages, this pool of retirement-age individuals looking for alternative working arrangements will grow every year. This is a tremendous opportunity associated with this enormous pool of re-entrants for employers that can adopt policies and practices to accommodate their interests. (p. 754)

Accordingly, events organizations must understand which employees are talented and adopt effective talent management practices in order to retain talent. Scullion and Collings (2012) and Clark et al. (2017) suggested that younger workers are mainly motivated by the social environment and put more emphasis on balance between work and life, whereas the older workers in career development opportunities. They also proposed that employing staff based on personality and attitude benefits organizations, especially when they achieve a strong fit between the organization and the employee. Karatepe and Uludag (2007) found that front line employees who had difficulty spending time with their family or in keeping social commitments were likely to be emotionally exhausted, which impacted negatively on their job satisfaction.

To retain talented employees, organizations cannot solely focus on the monetary aspects, but emotional and cognitive aspects are also at play that can contribute to the talent retention (Thunnissen

et al., 2013a). Employee retention is key to the success of organizations especially in the services sector, where their success depends on a high-quality experience. Managing and retaining employees and volunteers in the events industry is extremely important (Deery, 2009). Dermody, Taylor, and Young (2004) suggested that employees in the industry are initially motivated by money, but they remain in their jobs because of the work environment. Van der Wagen (2007) suggested that as events are temporary in nature, there are few opportunities to redress mistakes.

Retaining staff in the events industry is difficult due to the stop/start nature of running events (Deery, 2009). For the purpose of this article a distinction was made between paid staff and volunteers. The study focuses on paid staff as small amount of research is undertaken examining retention in the events industry; most research has looked at volunteers (Deery, 2009). The events industry is characterized by high and low activity, which leads to the need for sound and caring supervision. It is important for managers to recognize the exhaustion and burnout that occurs. This requires sensitive and professional supervision and special attention to the physical and emotional well-being of staff.

Method

Using a qualitative approach, data were collected from four countries: the UK, the US, Greece, and Australia. Specifically, 13 semistructured face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with experienced Events Managers, HR Directors/Managers, and Line Managers at 13 different events companies to gain the organization's perspective on talent management and talent retention strategies, focusing on talent identification. The profiles of the events companies are presented in Table 1. The sample was representative of managers in each organization that had access to information relevant to the study, or they were managing people themselves; they were all full time. Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016) proposed that most research on talent management focuses on managers and HR representatives, making the sample of this study a good combination of participants. In addition, they stated that most research is conducted in Europe with focus on talent identification, retention, and

Table 1
Sample

Country	Type of Company/Type of Events	Number of Employees (Appr.)	Code of Participants	Position in the Company
Greece	Events and catering	90	PGR1	Director of operations
Greece	Wedding–parties	55	PGR2	Account manager
Greece	Personal events	75	PGR3	HR manager
US	Corporate events	220	PUS1	Director of operations
US	VIP events	290	PUS2	HR director
US	Conferences–meetings	210	PUS3	Director of operations
US	Corporate events–cultural events	115	PUS4	HR manager
Australia	Corporate events	110	PAU1	HR manager
Australia	Cultural events	185	PAU2	Director of operations
Australia	Parties–Wedding	80	PAU3	Director of operations
UK	Golf–organizational events	65	PUK1	Events manager
UK	Festivals–cultural events	200	PUK2	Events manager
UK	All types	130	PUK3	HR director

recruitment, hence this study provides an overview from four different countries and settings. Three interviews were conducted in the UK, four interviews in the US, three interviews in Greece, and three interviews in Australia. Most studies are conducted in the Anglo-Saxon context, but Tlaiss et al. (2017) and Davidson, Timo, and Wang (2010) called for more research on talent management in different contexts. Moreover, studies (Akrivos, Ladkin, & Reklitis, 2007) suggested that career strategies in hospitality and tourism in Greece seem to be similar to those in the UK and Australia. Differences were not identified in terms of country and nationality (Akrivos et al., 2007; Thais et al., 2017), therefore these four countries were chosen for the purpose of this study as they provide similar context and potentially the grounds to be able to generalize the key findings.

The interviews focused on understanding the organization's perspective on managing and retaining talented employees. In particular, the questions focused who is considered as a talented employee in the events industry and the strategies and practices of the organization to retain them. The epistemological orientation of this study was within the field of interpretivism (Gray, 2014). The focus was on the perceptions, actions, and meanings managers in events companies attach to talent and talent management. The research design combined qualitative findings with the interpretation from the researcher (Savin-Baden & Howell, 2013).

The research was undertaken using a nonprobability sampling technique, as sampling was made based on clear selection criteria. This method may have limitations in terms of intended generalizations, however all participants chosen worked in events companies. This focus ensured the selection of managers who had similar roles and had overall responsibility of staff working in events. Convenience sampling was used with the interviewees in Greece and the UK, as the participants came from the author's network. These were chosen based on their willingness to participate in the study and their availability at the time of the study (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). In the US and Australia snowball sampling technique was used to identify the participants. Potential participants were identified from LinkedIn and the first interviews were arranged. Then these managers introduced the researcher to other people in similar companies that would be willing to participate to the study. The population and the sample of the study was considered to be homogenous, as participants were chosen based on their position in the company, their profile, and the access to information (Etikan et al., 2016).

Bryman (2008) claimed that it is almost impossible to establish how many interviews may be needed for a study, giving a minimum of 12 and 20. This number may enable researchers to reach a theoretical saturation point with "thematic exhaustion." The researcher considered these numbers and conducted in total 13 interviews. The author noted

that after a while (during the 10th interview) the participants were repeating issues, challenges, and other topics already discussed in previous interviews. Moreover, the time limitation and availability issues as the study took place at four different countries the sample was found to be adequate.

The data collection was done with semistructured interviews. The semistructured interview design was divided into four themes, (a) employee and organizational profile, (b) defining talent, (c) managing talent, (d) current retention policies. These themes were based on the review of previous academic and practitioners' literature as well as the professional and academic knowledge of the research team. Interviewees were contacted with an interview protocol, a list of questions, and all ethics forms. Meetings took place at the participants' offices where discussions lasted between 45 min and 2 hr, the longest. The discussions started with factors that contribute to turnover in the events industry, then moved to identifying and defining talent in their organizations. Talent management and talent retention were then discussed to identify the initiatives and strategies implemented in the organizations of this study.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was adopted to analyze the data from the interviews. Thematic analysis was used to determine, analyze, and report patterns (themes) in the data. Themes are patterns identified in the data that aid in the description and explanation of the phenomena under investigation, in this case talent management and talent retention. Six stages were utilized to identify the themes that aid in explaining talent management and talent retention in the events industry. Data were transcribed, and then through reading initial ideas were noted. Coding then took place, putting them into subthemes. Each subtheme was reviewed based on their meaning and relationships with focus on talent and talent retention. Naming themes was next and finally each theme was refined with its relevance to the project.

Results and Discussion

Three major concerns were identified and related to the discussions mainly on what talent is considered in the industry, what managers do in terms of

talent management within their organizations, and finally on talent retention strategies. The results are discussed below.

Talent

Various characteristics of talent were identified. Drive, personality, experience, customer orientation, high potential, organizational fit, and high performance were recognized as key characteristics. Education was mentioned by participants only when they were discussing talent in managerial roles. Personality and drive in terms of ambition to progress were identified as the most important attributes. All managers in all four countries identified attitudes and personality as the key drivers for success and key attributes they looked for in potential employees. PUS4 said "we look for personality and it is key for us, skills you can train." The data analysis identified that personality referred to attributes such as willingness to learn, commitment, attitude, and ability to be flexible. Personality of an individual was considered as a more important characteristic than education and experience, particularly in more operational roles for an individual to be considered talented. PUK3 stated that, "first and foremost potential employees must have a good personality, we do not really focus on their technical characteristics." Similarly, Abson (2017) in her study acknowledged that personality is central to event management. Clark et al. (2017) identified specific traits as important of personalities of people working in events, such as detail orientation, face pace, and deadline driven. In more managerial roles, relevant experience and education of an individual was given more gravity, in recruitment or promotions.

Customer orientation of an individual was another important attribute. This was not surprising given that the events industry is a service industry that aims to satisfy customer needs. Other characteristics such as strong potential to develop and consistent high performance were also significant. However, all participants mentioned that the personality, the drive, and the ability of an individual to fit within their organization's culture were key attributes that determine talent, confirming Thunnissen's (2016) study. Considering that each organization has its own distinct organizational

culture, a talented employee is based on the organizational context. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned characteristics of talent were shared across the data set offering insights into defining a talented employee within the events industry. PUS3 stated:

I think it is down to people's drive. If somebody puts himself or herself forward they shouldn't be rejected. In my experience, they are never rejected. Yet, there are people that are identified as talent and are encouraged more than others. So, I think the encouragement is for a small amount of people who are regarded to be a talent.

Managing Talent and Talent Retention

The data showed that events organizations take both an exclusive and inclusive approach in managing talent. Organizations can take an inclusive or exclusive approach to talent management (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). The exclusive approach assumes that talent is an elite or special group of individuals in an organization, whereas an inclusive approach assumes that all employees have talents that can be used in the organization. This is to say, that organizations considered that all their employees had strengths and the ability to be talented at their chosen job roles. At the same time organizations distinguished a "special" group of individuals who were considered as the top talent. In practice, this means that most organizations offered various initiatives to all their employees to promote their development, progression, or offer extra benefits for higher performance. However, it was also evident that workforce differentiation existed, because organizations also had initiatives that were offered solely to a certain "special" group of individuals, showing evidence that a hybrid approach was used in the sample organizations. More specifically PUK3 said that, "talent need to be further nurtured and developed through constant training and learning, but at the same time people must want to be developed." The analysis showed that organizations take both an exclusive and inclusive approach; therefore, a "hybrid" approach (Stahl et al., 2012) was evident.

Participants in this study recognized the strategic value of effective talent management, especially at the recruitment process. Similarly, to Barron, Leask, and Fyall (2014), managers in this study

proposed that more emphasis should be placed on personality rather than the technical ability during recruitment. This practice enabled them to achieve better person-organization fit. Managers in the US and UK stated that they make prospective employees demonstrate their personality through a 2-3-min talk on a subject relevant to their job. This way they adopted a behavioral interview style during which they were given the opportunity to evaluate whether they were fit to the organizational culture. The researcher was surprised to note that organizations appeared to place emphasis on personality and attitudes rather than technical skills and/or prior knowledge and degrees. Nevertheless, it was made clear by the respondents that a university degree was important when they were hiring for senior management positions.

Interestingly, most participants in the study (9 out of 13) identified the benefits of developing a successful brand for their company in terms of human resources practices. More specifically, PUK4 said, "people come to work with us because of our reputation as employers, they know what they will get, and our brand provides them with some security and safety in their employment." Employers showed what extrinsic and intrinsic benefits employees may have if they work for this specific organization. In highly competitive markets an employer strong brand was essential. This helps attract candidates who want to work for an "employer of choice." Positive employer brands have been found to help employees embrace the organization's values, mission, vision, and become more loyal and committed. Christensen-Hughes and Rog (2008) suggested that employees in these organizations find that they are valued, and opportunities exist in these companies.

Talent management was identified as a companywide activity, for which managers shared responsibility on its implementation. PGR1 said that, "we all participate at talent management and retention. It is not only the senior management teams that are accountable for these policies. Each line manager is also responsible to manage his/her team effectively." Christensen-Hughes and Rog (2008) similarly proposed that "responsibility for talent management leadership, its effective implementation, and the strength of its results, rather than being the exclusive responsibility of HR is increasingly

being shared with other managers in the organization” (p. 752).

Talent Retention Strategies and Initiatives

The analysis indicated that retention of talent was a *daily continuous practice*. PAU2 said, “Keeping good employees is not something that you do on occasion or at a certain time, you must do things daily. You must give them everything they need to do their job properly every day.” A number of factors were identified that contribute to daily retention such as management team, internal communication, organizational culture, empowerment, organizational support, work–life balance, salary, working conditions, appreciation, and recognition. Although all the factors recognized played a role in talent retention, some factors were deemed as more important by the participants, such as internal communication, staff engagement, management team, empowerment, organizational culture, organizational support, and work–life balance. Some participants referred to compensation; however, it was not identified as a key retention factor. They all said they paid their employees more than the average in the sector in their area to avoid losing them for monetary reasons.

The *organizational culture* is a factor that significantly contributes to talent retention because it can influence the daily experience of talented employees. Participants proposed that an organizational culture should promote learning, create a family-oriented and open environment, where employees are appreciated and recognized for their work. Only organizations in the US suggested they operated a “buddy system” where new members of staff were linked with more experienced member. More specifically, PUS3 stated, “they feel they become part of the team quicker if we buddy them with someone who has been working with us long time.” This approach has been accepted in other studies as an efficient way to develop teams in the industry (Barron et al., 2014; Christensen-Hughes & Rog, 2008). PUS4 stated, “we organize after Christmas parties for our staff, we socialize with them together to celebrate the success of our events and the beginning of a new year.” This initiative enabled them to develop a family-friendly environment. Managers believed that such working

environments make employees more loyal and committed to the organization. Studies propose that the employer branding and the formulation of employee value proposition (Christensen Hughes & Rog, 2008; Stahl et al., 2007) position organizations as appealing employers and may contribute to effective talent management and retention strategies (Thunnissen et al., 2013b).

Empowerment was another prominent factor evident in the data that contributes to retention. Participants proposed that organizational policies should promote the empowerment of talented employees by offering a certain level of autonomy, and the feeling their ideas and opinions are heard. In view to this, and linked to internal communication, it was found that other strategies contributed to empowerment such as regular meetings. For example, the manager of a big corporate events company in New York (PUS2) stated that, “staff have meetings on a weekly basis where they are encouraged to say what they think, provide feedback on events they worked for and propose ways to overcome challenges.”

A good level of *internal communication* between the management team and talent was found to be significant in talent retention. Event managers suggested that with good communication they help their employees with customer-related problems, problems between team members, guidance on career development and progression opportunities, as well as on personal issues that may arise. This enabled them to be informed regarding satisfaction levels of talented employees and be aware of any intentions that the employees may have to leave the organization. This way they proposed talented employees feel valued and supported by the organization. Developing rapport and a low power-distance relationship between managers and talented employees could contribute to retention as well in the industry. Christensen-Hughes and Rog (2008) suggested that good supervisor–employee relations is a means of developing an engaged workforce.

Good *work–life balance* was also found to contribute to talent retention. Although studies suggest that neither the employee well-being nor the expectations of society receive attention in the academic talent management literature, this study proposes that work–life balance in the events industry is valued. Poor work–life balance is often associated with customer service and hospitality work

(Deery & Jago, 2015). In their study, Clark et al. (2017) proposed that professionals choose family over career due to the working conditions in the events industry such as late nights, weekend, and holiday shifts, which make them feel they are missing out on the routine of normal life. Therefore, organizations should seek to aid talent to achieve a better balance between work and life based on the needs of the individual. This is even more critical when considering the changing generational employee profile. In particular, for Millennials (Generation Y, born after 1980), a key talent pool for organizations, work–life balance is a significant factor that they pursue to achieve (Lub, Bijvank, Bal, Blomme, & Schalk, 2012; McCracken et al., 2016). The managers recognized the need to help their employees maintain good work–life balance. They ensured with proper scheduling that all employees have 2 days off each week, although this was challenging especially during peak periods. To address this issue, they proposed they hire temporary staff to replace people when necessary. Some of them (in the US and Australia) proposed they focused on recharging emotionally and psychologically, hence they offered their staff the opportunity to choose their shifts when possible, which provided a sense of flexibility, autonomy, and respect.

Engagement of talent was also found to play a role in retention. The link between engagement and retention has been established by a number of previous studies (Bhatnagar, 2007; Christensen-Hughes & Rog, 2008; CIPD, 2012; Dhanalaksmi & Gurunathan, 2014; Karatepe & Olugbabe, 2016). Most organizations in this study pursued to engage employees through various practices, such as employee celebrations, team outings, friends and family days, in order to encourage relationship building between employees. Participants also noted the importance of offering training and learning opportunities, empowering employees, providing benefits and rewards related to performance in order to promote engagement. Retention strategies need to be tailored to individual employees, which is not something that currently concerns most organizations. Most training and development programs were found to be generic (i.e., on sales skills) rather than tailored to individual employee's needs. In agreement to Barron et al. (2014), this study proposes that there is need for encouraging

employees' involvement and for showing them how their contribution assists in the achievement of organizational goals. Participants proposed that highly engaged employees were more aligned with the company's vision and culture. This also enabled managers to identify employees at risk, therefore they could then work to prevent their exit and hence reduce staff turnover and enhance job satisfaction. All the factors and practices mentioned in this section also relate to employee engagement. This is because organizational and employee development practices can be considered as antecedents to engagement. In other words, all factors and practices promote engagement of talented employees, what is important is for the organization to understand, what are the most effective practices within its own context.

Conclusions

This study aimed at providing organizations in the events industry with the knowledge to not only understand the contemporary workforce environment, but also effectively manage and retain talented employees who can contribute to the success of the organization. By evaluating the managers' perception of talent and talent management in the events industry this article has identified some approaches and areas of good practice with talent retention initiatives. In terms of contribution to knowledge, the findings suggest that managers in the events industry consider talent as those who take a step further and contribute to the success of the organization. Talent management starts at the recruitment process, as organizations were found to be keen to hire talent that understand the purpose of their job and are willing to undertake tasks. Key characteristics of a talented employee were found to be personality, drive, customer orientation, high potential, and high performance. Additionally, being driven and having the right personality that fits with the organization's culture is a critical attribute for an individual to be considered as talent. Personality tests to ascertain attributes of each employee could aid events organizations to define and identify talent within their organization. Moreover, relevant experience and technical skills were also mentioned as important characteristics; however, they play a more important role in high managerial job roles.

Evidently, this study proposes that talent as identified by the participants, implies above-the-average ability or performance (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). In response to Thunissen et al. (2013b), this article provides a framework to address the gap in the literature on presenting more evidence on how organizations define talent identified.

An important finding of this study suggests that event organizations in four different countries value the personality and the attitude that potential employees demonstrate over subject-specific skills and knowledge. More emphasis was placed on whether they seem to fit the organizational culture, as they claimed with their own training and development schemes, they may provide their employees with the necessary technical skills to perform their jobs. Consequently, it is suggested that events organizations should develop such recruitment and selection tools to be able to identify traits and personalities that match the industry culture such as demonstrations and scenarios, among others.

The author does not intend to promote either of the two approaches on talent management, but rather to present what the participants in the study propose. It is evident from the data that the majority of event organizers take a “hybrid” approach to talent management. Therefore, they may adopt both the inclusive and exclusive approach to talent and talent management. In other words, following the inclusive approach all employees are considered talented and are offered opportunities for development. However, in view to the exclusive approach, which seemed to be more prevalent, workforce differentiation also exists where a certain pool of “special” individuals, considered top talent, are provided with distinct development opportunities (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013). In agreement to Thunissen et al. (2013b) and Stahl et al. (2012), managers identified challenges in adopting this approach, but they highlighted the importance of taking into account the employees’ views, willingness, and commitment to following and implementing talent management approaches. This “hybrid” approach to talent could be perceived as positive. In agreement to Meyers et al. (2013), this study also proposes that it is pivotal for events organizations to focus on pools of talent and high performers identification and provide them with opportunities for further development. This is because on the one hand,

it offers opportunities to all employees enabling them to feel supported and develop their individual talents. On the other hand, certain employees that have the personality, drive, and performance can access distinct opportunities to maintain their motivation and improve their performance.

This study provides some *practical implications* for events companies. It is important for organizations to find such approaches that fit with the organizational culture and talent management needs. For instance, excessive focus on the exclusive approach could create extreme competition between team members. In contrast, excessive focus on the inclusive approach may seem fairer, but it can lead to unnecessary costs and can limit the budget to spend on business-critical employees. In agreement to Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013), a better understanding of the current employee profile in the organization, such as understanding generation characteristics and their needs, can aid organizations to adopt a suitable approach.

Retention of employees is a daily process. Organizations must consider the daily working environment that they create for their employees. This means events organizations could focus on developing policies that create a positive organizational culture where talent feels engaged, they feel empowered, and supported in their professional development. The management team plays a critical role in retaining talent, for instance through having good communication, creating rapport, and supporting talented employees. In this respect, organizations could ensure that the management team has the necessary knowledge and skills to understand the needs of talented employees and their responsibilities as effective leaders. Learning and training opportunities could be offered to the management team to develop their leadership skills. Moreover, organizations could ensure that the management team has sufficient time and resources to be effective leaders and contribute in retaining talent.

Another aspect of talent retention pertains to specific retention initiatives. These initiatives should be personalized to address each employee’s needs. Talented employees look for a challenging work environment. Progression opportunities (such as career development), training, and learning initiatives are key to retain talented employees. As such, organizations could aim to provide initiatives that

encourage the development of talented employees. Moreover, organizations cannot ignore the role of offering a competitive salary, benefits, and rewards to talented employees. Such factors can create an appealing employee package; although, they were not clearly identified as a key factor to retention in their organizations. Training and development were key factors in talent retention. Organizations valued employee development and viewed it as means not only to empower staff, help them develop, and progress within the company but also as a key tool to success. Trained and developed employees were found to be effective and more efficient. They were also found to be satisfied with their job, hence this reduced turnover. Personalized training and development programs were found to be more effective, with emphasis places on leadership training schemes. Van der Wagen (2007) concluded that event managers need to possess strong leadership skills to transform organizations, to hold creative vision, and have strong decision-making skills.

Organization's should also be aware of their reputation in the job market in order to be able to attract and retain talented employees. Due to the highly competitive employee market they should aim to build a positive reputation of the organization as an employer. Creating an attractive employee package, where career development, training, and learning are at the forefront, can contribute to this reputation. At the same time, providing a positive organizational culture and a competitive salary should not be ignored.

It was interesting to note that all organizations generally recognized the need to develop a family-friendly working environment with open door policy that allows for better communication. This was found to contribute to organizational loyalty and lower turnover. Good communication had a significant influence on employee engagement and empowerment. The findings suggest that regular meetings, memos, notice boards, and HR-related software work well for all employees. As events employees work at different venues technology enables better communication and engagement. Event organizations could use a range of such software programs and applications to interact with their employees. This initiative may also contribute to the success of encouraging relationships among employees.

This study proposes a new view on talent and talent management in the events industry, which may help practitioners in staff evaluation, retention, and development practices. The findings of this study are potentially of interest of all event organizing companies whose strategy is to attract, retain, and manage their employees and especially talent.

This study has some *limitations* and provides scope for *further research* mainly due to the weakness of identifying and securing more interviewees. Although there is evidence provided from four different countries, more empirical data may contribute to the reliability and perhaps generalizability of the findings. The author recognizes that this study presents the view of some event managers; however, the fact that the participants are from four different countries counterparts this. A definition of talent and talent management retention strategies have been identified, the author recognizes the need for conceptual development. The researcher identified the need to develop two different definitions of talented employees, one for operational roles and another one for managerial roles. Further research could be conducted to separate what defines talent at different levels of the hierarchy in events organizations. Differences may be examined at country and/or cultural level, as talent may be implemented differently across different contexts (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Models may be developed to describe the characteristics and outcomes of talent (Silzer & Church, 2009). Finally, in view to the pluralistic approach and Thunissen et al.'s (2013) suggestion, the employees' views on talent management should be considered when formulating strategies. This may also provide scope for further research on graduate talent pool and suitable talent management practices for graduate labor market.

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