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Talent Management Practices In Kuwait: An Empirical Study

Author: Huda N. Besiso

Master of Science in Management , School of Business, Economics and Law

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Huda N. Besiso
School of Business Economics and Law, Gothenburg

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Abstract

The aim of this paper was to investigate the application of Talent Management (TM) practices by kuwaiti employers. For data collection, twenty Human Resource Management (HRM) professionals were interviewed from various organizations in different industries in Kuwait. Data collected was analyzed using the grounded theory. The findings of this paper reveal that HRM professionals agree on the terminologies of talent management practices. Kuwaiti organizations consider training and development as one of their retention strategies. Moreover, HRM professionals indicated their preference for external recruitment because it gives them a wider variety of options and lets them focus on the skills and competencies that they need.

Key words: Talent Management (TM), Recruiting. Retaining, Hiring, Succession Planning, Training, Performance Management, Talent Pool, Human Resources Management (HRM), Kuwait

1. **Introduction**

Kuwait is considered a fairly small country with a total area of almost 18,000 KM^2 located at the top of the Arabian Gulf bordering Republic of Iraq from the North and The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from the South and West. In 2016, the population of Kuwait was recorded to be 4,451,979 where Kuwaitis formed 30.3% of the population and expats represented 69.7%. The total number of Kuwaitis in the workforce is 447,120; whereas at the same time, the number of Non-Kuwaitis in the workforce is 2,259,100 (see appendix 2). (Public Authority for civil information report, 2017)

Salih (2010) stated that the surge of the oil production in the gulf countries have led to the inclination to employ non-nationals. Of course, employment was not only concentrated on the oil

and gas sector but all sectors. Forstenlechner (2009) explained that one of the main reasons for hiring expats was the low cost involved. The author further added that the government started to realize the downsides of flooding the workforce with expatriates years later. However, Naithani & Jha (2010) mentioned that the private sector will continue to rely on the expatriate labor. Ali & AlKazemi (2006) mentioned that it is challenging to apply talent recruitment practices in Kuwait since expatriates can't switch between employers without the approval of the current one. Such lawful practices limit expatriates from obtaining opportunities that arise in the market and move freely from one company to another which as a result will affect the pool of talents in Kuwait.

Most countries employ tactics like quotas for each industry to increase localization percentages (Looney & Hamad, 2004). In November 2010, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor of Kuwait issued a new Kuwaitization law that sets new ratios for national employment in the private sector, which ranges from as low as 2% to as high as 67% depending on the sector (www.mosal.gov.kw, 2017). The undersecretary of (Manpower & Government Restructuring Program) MGRP, Mr. Fawzi Majdali, stated that the new set percentages will help achieve the goal of MGRP to lower the unemployment rate of nationals (Alwatan newspaper, 2014). Kapiszewski (2006, P.5) discussed the expatriate situation in the Gulf Countries Council (GCC) and said that "… a forceful approach to localization, like the quota system, has encountered strong opposition from local businessmen, as potentially harmful, and adversely affecting productivity and profitability of firms." According to Bhanugopan and Fish (2007) that pursuing localization was mainly because of the high unemployment rate, and the un-balanced distribution of the wealth of the nation. Figliolini (2008) argued that localization can be successful on the long run if good recruitment and retention policies are in place.

Numerous organizations consider Talent Management (TM) as a critical element of the human resource practices because it is considered as strategic and integrated approach to Human Resources Management (HRM) (Hughes & Rog, 2008) . Talent Management includes searching for talent, acknowledging their skills, recruiting them, developing and promoting them and finally retaining them in the organization (Tansley, 2011; Schweyer, 2010; Beheshtifar et al., 2012). Other authors regarded TM as a program that the organization runs to identify top performers (Lacey and Groves, 2014). In short, talent management is about finding those individuals with the skills and

the competencies to learn and grow with the organization. However, there is no consensus on the notion of talent management(Collings &Mellahi,2009) .

This paper aims to provide an overview of the talent management practices in– locating, evaluating, developing and retaining talents in Kuwait. By reviewing the available literature, it was found that there is almost no material examining the Kuwaiti organization's understanding and application of TM except a study that was found to discuss talent management in Kuwait in general (Sidani and Al Ariss, 2014; Al-Athari and Zairi, 2002). Therefore, this study is assumed to contribute to the literature -because of the lacking of theory on talent management- with empirical data from Kuwait (Collings &Mellahi,2009).

Based on the objectives of this study, the two main research questions are:
How do Kuwaiti organizations define Talent Management?
How do Kuwaiti organizations implement Talent Management practices?

The theoretical framework used is the grounded theory which is an inductive approach that enables the researcher to create concepts based on collected empirical data. It has been used since the 60s in different fields and studies.

Data has been collected by relying only on a primary source of data by conducting 20 interviews with HR professionals from various sectors. The specific number of interviews has been conducted to conform with the guidelines of the Graduate School for a master project. The interview questions covered the practices of talent management -locating, assessing, developing, retaining. The questions has been developed based on the general practices of talent management in the literature. The interviewees have been also asked about their conceptualization of talent management concept.

This study is structured in the following way. First, it provides a critical review of the literature on talent management and it sheds light on its perspectives. Second, the study describes the methodology that is followed. Third, the grounded theory as a theoretical framework and its relevant literature is presented. Fourth, the empirical data which was collected from interviews is

offered. Fifth, the discussion part where the empirical data is compared with the literature in order to confirm or disconfirm the previously established work of various scholars. Finally, the conclusion is provided which also explores the practical and theoretical contribution of this study. Moreover, this study proposes several recommendations as well as presenting various suggestions for future studies.

2. Literature Review

As the global market is characterized by rapid and increased change in demands, talent management has been regarded as the main tool to meet such complex demands by various organizations (Nilsson & Ellstro¨m,2011).Talent management has become pivotal component of the organization's human resource strategies and has gained growing interest in the field of Human Resource Development (Nilsson & Ellstro¨m,2011). An overview of the various definitions and benefits of Talent management is going to be tackled in the literature review of this paper. Also, the different aspects of Talent Management is going to be addressed such as recruitment, career management, training and development and succession planning (Bhatnagar, 2007).

2.1. Defining Human Resource Management

Despite the frequent updates and modifications, Human Resource Management (HRM) has been a model that is adopted by many organizations around the globe. Meyers et al. (2013) explained that the concept of HRM was interchangeable with personnel management that is solely responsible for pure administrative tasks such as recruitment and monthly processing of paychecks. A good HRM system can help an organization gain competitive advantage through its human capital who regarded as the vital asset which help companies to achieve high performance (Boxall, 2003) and improved sales (Beh & Loo, 2013) . The HRM unit deploys various practices to build and develop talented employees of the organization(Meyers et al. ,2013). These best practices include activities such as recruiting, training and development, career management and any practice or activity that increases organizational performance by enhancing an employee's knowledge, productivity, expertise and satisfaction (McLean & McLean, 2001). However, as Iles et al. (2010) pointed out, although HRM practices have been around for a long time, still there is no clear & specific steps that organizations should employ in order to assess and maintain the

supply of talented people. Therefore, HRM should ensure the success of the organization by facing such a challenge (Porkiani et al., 2010).

2.2. Overview of Talent Management

Lewis and Heckman (2006) stated that there is still no consensus on the meaning of talent management Mellahi & Collings (2010, p. 4) defined Talent Management as the "activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions, which differentially contribute to the organization's sustainable competitive advantage."According to Beheshtifar et al. (2012), Talent Management is the process of pinpointing and identifying high performers in the organization who will have a high chance in taking a leadership role in the organization structure in the future. Another definition of talent management is that the series of steps that the organization follows in order to attract, develop and retain high performers in the organization (Rothwell, 2006). However, McDonnell et al. (2010) stated that talent management is viewed as an opportunity for the organization to establish a web of talented individuals within the organization. Silzer & Dowell (2010) examined talent management from a different angle and said that it is not just loose and independent processes but is a set of interconnected processes intended to attract, develop and retain talent to achieve the strategic objectives of the organization. In summary, talent management is a broader multi-faceted notion to attract, retain, and develop talent (D'Annunzio-Green, 2008).

2.3. HR Function and The Strategy of The Organization

Donkin (2007) , defined the strategy as the plan that the organization is going to implement and the tools used to execute the plan .The author added that the role of the HR department is confined to prepare the tools that the organization would use to achieve its strategy. These tools include having sufficient resources and capabilities to implement the strategy successfully. In several instances, HR is considered a strategic partner to the organization and is not merely confined to its old image of being of an administrative use (Losey et al., 2005; Bissola & Imperatori, 2014).

The HRM is a function that has three activities. The first activity is the purely administrative role, which includes the hiring, staffing, compensation and training. The second activity is being a business partner. In this activity, the communication between the HR function and the various departments within the organization must be done through a senior HR manager his role is to help

in implementing talent management and support the other units. Finally, the third activity is being a strategic partner as the HR department will contribute to the organization's strategy from an HR point of view. Thus, it becomes clear that integrating the HRM into the organization's strategy would allow for the human capital of the organization to become a strategic differentiator. (Lawler, 2005)

2.4. The Importance of Talent Management

Talent management is essential for many reasons. Effective talent management assures that companies can successfully recruit and retain vital talents (Hughes & Rog, 2008). Moreover, human capital is considered as a source of achieving sustainable competitive advantage due to the fact that it is hard to imitate by other rivals (Anitha, 2014). Earlier, Barney (1991, p. 102) defined organization competitive advantage as "implementing a value creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors."

Competitive advantage that comes from human capital is valuable and inimitable (Campbell et al., 2012). Ordóñez de Pablos (2004) added that the new human capital can be an added value to the organization and enhance its competitive advantage when the employee knowledge is fully utilized by the organization. However, this is not the case as it takes time to have the new employee adjusted to the new environment, which comes at a cost to the organization (Campbell et al., 2012). It has been shown that high achievers do not sustain and keep the same level of performance when moving to a new organization (Athey, 2004). The challenge for any organization is to secure and protect its knowledge base which is represented by its human capital (Tseng, 2010). One way to achieve this goal is through having the knowledge base woven into the system of the organization and not just with a few individuals(Michaels et al., 2001).

2.5. Locating Talent

A critical practice of the HR function is to find the right people to fill the right place in the organization (Meisinger, 2005). Cappelli & Keller, (2014) discussed that employing a person who lacks the proper skills and competencies would be costly for the organization and might lead to sacrificing its competitive advantage. Therefore, HR managers have become aware of the consequences of hiring inappropriate people and have started to grasp the importance of hiring

talented employees. Grigoryev (2006) added that employees are also realizing the importance of obtaining some skills that are in demand by employers and will give them the chance to be very efficient and be labeled as talented. However, searching for talented people is not easy.

2.5.1. Recruiting Key Individuals

Cappelli & Keller (2014) addressed that one of the main concepts of Talent Management revolves around finding, recruiting & developing talented employees. Hanif & Yunfei (2013) confirmed that recruitment is costly to the organization and hence organizations expect their staff to stay with them for lengthy periods. A core feature of talent management is to assess staff skills and competencies in order to enhance them and encourage career mobility within the organization (De Vos et al., 2009). Kull & Brandt (2007) argued that organizations fail in their recruitment processes because mostly they look at the credentials which do not tell them much about the performance of an individual. Organizations should rely on hiring for competencies, which is the strong base for talent management (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

2.5.2. Employee Competencies

According to Cappelli & Keller (2014), a competency is defined as the innate characteristics of a person which lead him/her to exhibit superior performance. Therefore, a competency is a measurable characteristic or feature of a person, which allows for distinguishing a poor performer from a superior one. Negwaya et al. (2014) added to the concept of competencies by saying that it is about the ability of a person to quickly adapt to changes and to have a present mind to alter the approach to different situations, which is considered as a leadership skill. The authors added that being competent is about having the motivation and the ability to work within teams. Another example of competencies are content knowledge, motives, self-concept, cognitive and behavioral skills (Cappelli & Keller, 2014).

2.5.2.1.   Recruiting for Competencies

When considering talent management, Cunningham (2007) stipulated that an organization can take either of the following choices. First, matching the talented individual with the job role he/she was hired for that matches the already existing role in the company. Second, it can customize the role to make it more suitable for the skills and competencies of the talented person. It is about

concentrating on the newly recruited employee's skills & competencies and the job that will be created. Cunningham (2007) suggested a solution for an organization when it finds it difficult to hire highly capable individuals. The author mentioned that the next best alternative is to hire someone who has a great track record of learning development which will allow for preparing the employee for the role with specific and customized training and development process.

2.5.3. Outsourcing locating a talent

A notable trend that is practiced by many organizations these days is the Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO) (Lawler, 2005; Grainge, 2007). RPO is the process in which an organization assigns external recruitment to a professional recruitment agency. Hansen (2007) argued that outsourcing some of the HR functions, recruitment in this case, may prove to be beneficial for the organization. To some organizations, this process allows the HR department to focus on talent management and other strategic issues since recruitment agencies are provided with a list of competencies that ensures hiring the individuals with perfect potential performance and to reduce turnover for the organization(Grainge, 2007). Having said this, an RPO is not intended to replace the HR department but rather provide a specialized and professional solution for recruitment related issues (Grainge, 2007).

Cheatle (2001), as cited by Kull & Brandt(2007) mentioned that outsourcing for executive positions is sometimes referred to as headhunting. Despite this, headhunting or outsourcing for executive positions, is sometimes not successful because it is time consuming . For this reason, Davenport et al. (2010) recommended promoting internal staff by assessing their potential and training them to take up high positions in the organization.

2.6. Assessing Existing Talent

Sharma (2015) discussed that it is critical that an organization keeps on board the members of the staff who are the most capable and would be able to absorb the additional tasks to face the slowing economy. Usually, it is cheaper to invest in developing internal talented staff than recruiting new ones (Gundling et al., 2016). In order to achieve this goal, an organization must first assess the potential of their talented staff through applying a competency model that reflects the job's required skills and behaviors (Meyers et al., 2013; Dries, 2013). This will allow the organization

to develop and train current staff, as well as recruit new staff based on the competency model. This can be achieved either through assessment centers or conducting psychometric tests (Nijs et al., 2014; Church & Rotolo, 2013).

Assessing a talent in an organization necessitates the use of performance management & performance measurement (Busi & Bititci, 2006). The authors further explained that the performance measurement is the technical measures that are used to assess and evaluate staff performance whereas performance management is the umbrella where results of the performance measurement are used to improve the performance of the individual.

2.7. Developing Talent

When an organization has talented people amongst its staff, it is essential that the organization provides learning & performance improvement opportunities for those individuals (Frank & Taylor, 2004). Promotions from within, comprehensive training and skill based pay are ways of talent development (Stahl et al., 2012). Not all organizations deliver high and well-designed development possibilities. However, there are established development tools that an organization can utilize such as job experience, coaching and mentoring ,training, succession planning and career management (Michaels et al., 2001).

2.7.1. Job Experience

Part of the development process is acquiring the experience to grow in one's career. Michaels et al. (2001) stated that experience is very important for those who are considered as having high potential. Moreover, the authors acknowledge the importance of expanding the abilities of employees through assigning tasks or projects to them that they may or may not have experience in. It is critical for an organization also to have a well-planned progression plan for each employee. The authors added that the role of the organization is to assign employees to different tasks or projects, not just bigger tasks in the same line of the employee specialty, because this makes a talented employee excel in many tasks and enjoy wider and a versatile job experience. (Michaels et al. ,2001)

2.7.2. Training

Training is a critical HRM practice since it upgrades employee satisfaction level resulting in organizational success (Memon et al., 2016). Companies that provide their workers with various kinds of learning, including informal and formal training & development chances at work, help in equipping the high potential employees with the skills & knowledge they might need (Shuck et al., 2011). Reflected from literature, training & development encourage and enhance the employee's talent (Nilsson & Ellstro¨m, 2011). Talent management is accompanied with various HRD practices like training & development of talented workers (Nilsson & Ellstro¨m, 2011) .The allocation of the right person in the right position in the company with providing the related training courses depending on the strategic objective of the company, leads to competitive advantaged and high performance of the company (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). This explains the association between training & development and talent management.

Training should be evaluated in terms of its impact and importance by improving the organization due to the high cost associated with it (Daniels, 2003). Franck & Tylor (2004) pointed out that the advancement in technology has encouraged organizations to shift training online, which will reduce the cost and help in tailoring training programs that are suitable for talented people.

2.7.3. Succession Planning

Succession planning is a new concept that is receiving a wide appeal amongst organizations (Iles et al., 2010). It is now considered as one of the cornerstones of talent management (Meyers et al., 2013). It is about creating an environment of investment in human capital through searching within the organization for high potential employees who would be suitable for key positions (Stahl et al., 2012). As mentioned by Durst & Wilhelm (2012), succession planning is important for the long and the short term. As for the long term, it helps the organization identify employees' potential, which would allow for better allocation of resources and utilization of human capital. For the short term, it helps in locking the choice of successors for key positions.

Hanif & Yunfei (2013) mentioned that it is cost-effective to utilize the human capital resources that the organization has rather than hiring new ones. In this way, succession management planning has established its importance for organizations because it prepares successors. Therefore,

Cunningham (2007) encouraged organizations to take bold steps in investing in junior managers and fresh graduates because this gives the organization a wider and a diversified pool of talented staff.

2.7.4. Career Management

Career management is an integral part of talent management (Michaels et al., 2001). Career management is defined as the "attempts made to influence the career development of one of more people" (Arnold, 1997, p. 19), as training courses and career advice & monitoring (Sturges, et al., 2002). Cunningham (2007) addressed the primary goal of career management is to highlight the development growth options of high potential employees rather than just prepare them for a position in the organization. The author explained that career management gives an employee the chance to advance in his/her career whether vertically or horizontally. Career management opens a wide range of possibilities for an employee to gain other opportunities in the organization (Ismail et al., 2011). For example, a high potential employee might be relocated to another department where his/her skills are in high demand and have been mastered as well (Ismail et al., 2011).

2.8. Retaining Talent

Retention is one of the issues that is considered troublesome for organizations (Ahuja, 2016). For this reason, it is noticed that many organizations all over the world take great care in retaining their talented staff. The reason that organizations ought to do this is that there is fierce competition for talented people for the most part (Tafti et al., 2017). In addition, it is very costly to replace a talented employee (Haider et al., 2015). In the meantime, organizations would have to invest a lot of time and money into these new hires which might demotivate internal talented employees causing the organization to be stuck in a turnover cycle (Tafti et al., 2017).

A reason why some talented employees decide to stay with the same employer for a long period is the financial package (Stahl et al., 2007). Although financial package is an important consideration for a talented employee when deciding to stay with the organization, there are other reasons that might come into play (Tlaiss et al., 2017). The authors added that some of these reasons might include factors such as work-life balance and flexible working hours .

One of the tactics that organizations might use to retain their talented employees is the use of creative opportunities for growth and development (Aguinis et al., 2012). This is executed through

devising programs for talented people that will create challenging roles that stretch the limits of their abilities and competencies (Govaerts et al., 2011). Furthermore, the authors explained that these programs will provide talented employees with the chance to learn new knowledge as they work. It is worth mentioning here that employee development programs can also be considered as a retention tactic deployed by an organization(Ghosh et al., 2013).

2.9. Terminating Wrong People

The discussion that was presented so far has examined the importance of finding, assessing, developing and retaining talented employees. However, it is equally important that the organizations get rid of workers who are labeled as not productive in their organizations or do not have good working relationships(Berger,2004) . On the other side, the organization can work on trying to extract the best from these misfits in case they are placed in the wrong job (Creed, 2011). The author added that can be achieved through special development programs with close supervision. Cappelli & Keller (2014) stated that if these actions are not successful, then it is best for the organization to get rid of those employees.

3. Theoretical Framework

An inductive approach has been followed to adopt a sound theoretical framework, in which the grounded theory was partially applied. The theory was first written by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 and has been widely used in different fields and studies.
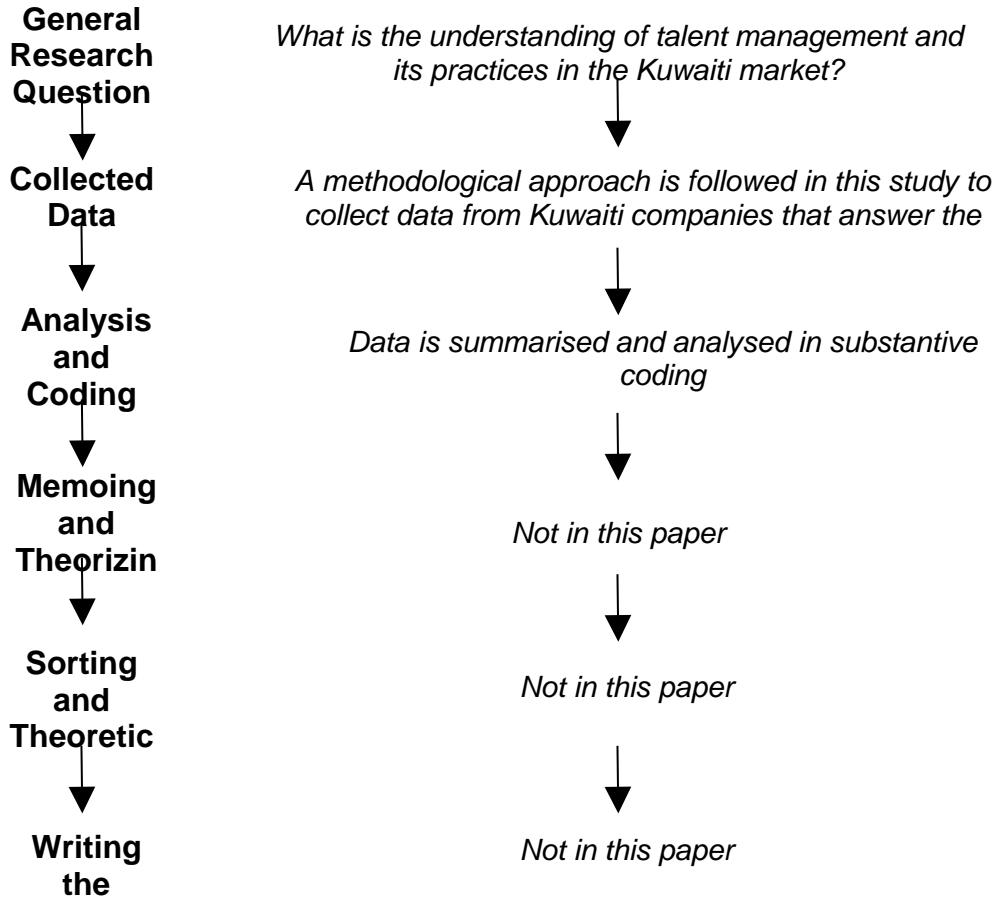
The theory was chosen since it follows an inductive methodology. It consists of a "set of [...] research procedures leading to the emergence of conceptual categories. These concepts/ categories are related to each other as a theoretical explanation of [certain] actions" (Grounded Theory Institute) under study. Such a methodology suits the research question of this paper. As mentioned earlier in this paper, there is lack of consensus on a definition for talent management as well as its best or most valid practices (Lewis and Heckman (2006)). This research paper comes to contribute with empirical data from the Kuwaiti market, hoping to make an addition to the field and facilitate the development of the knowledge in the Talent Management area.

The methodology is briefed here as taken from by Glaser:

1. A General Research Question: the researcher starts with a "general research topic, but no predetermined research 'problem' ", For the research at hand, the broad question is: How is talent management defined and practiced in sample Kuwaiti companies?

2. Collecting Data: based on "intensive interviews, often combined with participant observation". In this study, the researcher interviewed the applicants. The methodology section (next) has more information on the interviews.

3. Analysis: "Relating data to ideas, then ideas to other ideas". In this stage, data can be analysed through summarizing it using what the theory calls "substantive codes". The collected data, in this study, was mainly summarised into 5 main codes(1) The understanding , (2) locating, (3) assessing, (4) developing and (5) retaining of talent.

4. Memoing: "Memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships".

5. Sorting and Theoretical Outline: which means the "conceptual sorting of memos into an outline of the emergent theory, showing relationships between concepts".

6. Writing: writing the theory in its final form.

The last three steps (4-6) of the theory were not followed in this paper as they go beyond the stated objective of this research as well as due to time and cost limitations.

The figure below shows the summary of the grounded theory methodology and how it is applied to the research paper at hand.

General Research Question	What is the understanding of talent management and its practices in the Kuwaiti market?
Collected Data	A methodological approach is followed in this study to collect data from Kuwaiti companies that answer the
Analysis and Coding	Data is summarised and analysed in substantive coding
Memoing and Theorizin	Not in this paper
Sorting and Theoretic	Not in this paper
Writing the	Not in this paper

Research Theoretical Framework, based on the grounded theory

Some researchers in the field of talent management used the grounded theory, such as Ingram (2007)   who applied it to study organizational and external factors and how they influence talent management programs.

It must be said that it can be sound counterintuitive to use only part of the theory for this research. This may not contribute enough value for the field. However, given that the talent management studies started to grow lately, the researcher hopes that in using the grounded theory, she helps establish a direction on how the data should be analysed and then clearer theories or concepts should be reached.

4.   **Methodology**

Researchers with different scientific backgrounds follow different data collection methods. In social sciences, researchers use qualitative research methods for data collection. Although that is not a rule, since some social sciences can follow quantitative research methods (Neville,2007). Qualitative research was described by Neville (2007, p.3) as "more subjective in nature than quantitative research and involves examining and reflecting on the less tangible aspects of a research subject, e.g. values, attitudes, perceptions". Neville (2007, p.3) defined quantitative research as "…collecting and analyzing numerical data; it concentrates on measuring the scale, range, frequency etc. of phenomena". This paper uses qualitative research methods to answer the research question that aims to identify talent management by Kuwaiti organizations and study how they apply TM practices. Data is studied and analyzed using the grounded theory as a theoretical framework (refer to the section "Theoretical Framework" for more details).

4.1. Data Collection

Primary data has been collected by conducting 20 interviews with HR professionals in different industries in Kuwait. Interviews enable interviewees to deliver their own perceptions and interpretations of what are going on in reality. Czarniawska (2013, p.48) stated that 'What people present in interviews are but their interpretations of the world'. Both structured and semi structured interviews have been used. The interview questions, provided in Appendix 1, were developed to cover the angles that were discussed and reviewed from the literature . The questions have been structured in a way that they are grouped under each category or practice of talent management. Interviewees were given the opportunity to express their opinions regarding the current practices of talent management in Kuwaiti organizations and were encouraged to elaborate and share examples. Their answers helped in gaining a wider understanding of the talent management topic as well as its applications in Kuwaiti organizations.

Interviewees were asked the permission to record their interviews beforehand. Moreover, interviews recorded were transcribed later so as to be able to refer to the interview in the research paper. Transcribing requires time and effort though it is a more convenient and a practical way to get hold of the topics discussed in the interview.

4.2. Target population

Marshall & Rossman (2014) suggested that the range of interviews number can be from 10 to 100 people, which varies from one study to another. Twenty interviews have been conducted with HR professionals in Kuwait according to the guidelines by the Graduate School for a master project. Most interviewees work in the private sector in different fields, to name a few: oil, services, education and investment. The target was to interview professionals from different sectors in order to gain a better understanding of the application of talent management. The average years of experience for interviewees is 40 years. The minimum years of experience is 1 to 25 years to reflect better on the interview questions and provide sound answers. Three interviewees were female while the remaining were male. It was important to represent both genders in order to get a different perspective on TM practices and its application. Appendix 3 shows a table that presents interviewees companies and sectors in addition to their age and years of experience. For confidentiality purposes, the names of interviewees and their organizations were replaced with their initials and alphabet coding retrospectively. Another reason for doing so is to be objective in our analysis of the data (Saunders et al., 2012).

4.3. Data Analysis

Interviews were analyzed by using the grounded theory which is commonly used in the qualitative research ([1]). Using grounded theory the substantive area of this research is talent management. The substantive population is the HR professionals. The data has been further grouped and coded according to the talent practices in the literature: locating, assessing ,developing, retaining, and presented in the empirical material section.

4.4. Discussion of Methodological Limitations

Interviews are a reliable source of data collection though it is not satisfactory to rely on interviews only. One of the possible disadvantages of interviews is that the interviewee might feel uncomfortable to record her/his interview. Moreover, Silverman (2013) has discussed that the interviewer is responsible towards the interviewees in different ways and he stated (p.167) "first, the interviewer is given the responsibility of presenting the research to the respondents." Providing the interviewee with information about the interview's topic is the researcher responsibility in which it is unethical to provide insufficient information about the research topic before the interview. However, the interviewee might be affected by the preliminary information provided

which might cause subjectivity in his/her answers to try to fit the answers within the frame of the study.

5.   Empirical Data

5.1. Defining Talent Management (TM)

When conducting the interviews with the HR and Training specialists in Kuwait, it was found that most of the organizations are aware of the concept. The interviewees were asked to define TM, thus many of them defined it as the practice of exploring, attracting, developing and retaining talented people. The responses showed a general and shared understanding of the key concepts in TM. However, when it came to the history of talent management practices in each organization, responses varied. The oldest practice in the sample goes back to 2005, while the most recent goes back to 2016.

It is noticed that not all of the companies apply TM such as organizations 4,6,12, 14 and 17. The reasons varied. For example in organization 17 TM couldn't be applied due to the very limited number of staff in the HR team who are focused on other routine but key HR duties. For company 14, the interviewee said that there are prerequisites for applying talent management that the company didn't have yet. They gave examples as "a solid talent acquisition platform, effective and updated job descriptions, a defined competency framework for the company and for the job families ...".

With respect to gaining a competitive advantage from talent management, most participants who reported they practice TM confirmed its importance for their organizations. For instance, according to company 11, talent management is believed to be a key practice that improves the company's financial position and makes talents be more engaged and productive, which results in more rewards for the company.   Moreover, the interviewees 1, 2 and 3 (from the same organization) as well as the inteviewees from companies 5, 7, 9, 11 and 15 confirmed the importance of TM as well. It is worth mentioning that organization 4 (which doesn't practice TM) confirmed the importance of TM. On the other hand, company 8 said that talent management may not necessarily be valuable. "Helping my organization that is for sure, but to gain advantage over

competitors I don't see it that way. In our industry, most of the organizations started to look after their talents" (interviewee 8). As for company 13, the interviewee provided another perspective saying "when a firm is implementing a value creating [talent management] strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors and when these other firms unable to duplicate the benefits of this strategy, then we can say the firm has a sustained competitive advantage".

5.2. Locating Talent

With respect to locating talent, the majority of the interviewees have agreed that they are able to locate their talented staff mainly through internal talent identification. Interviewee 15 stated that "we give priority to internal recruitment." According to interviewee 1, the ideal situation for his organization is to hire from within. If the talent is not found, interviewee 1 stated that they recruited from the local market. Nonetheless, some of the interviewees said that they do external recruitment using various tools such as websites and headhunting agencies (companies 8 and 17).

The selection process is based on a mix of competencies, skills and other personal merits or traits. Interviewee 9 stated, "we recruit people based on the knowledge not based on degrees or certificates. We use psychometric tests for leadership positions." This holds true especially for key senior positions within the organization, where the focus is on both knowledge and behavioral traits. As far as other roles in the organization are concerned, interviewee 7 mentioned that recruitment depends on the employee skills and competencies. Interviewee 13, also indicated the importance of critical thinking, communication skills and leadership in choosing their talents. Most of interviewees indicated that they create the job role first and then find an employee for it. They don't try to create jobs for talented people as, some said, this practice would put the created roles at risk in the future should there be a lack of the specific talent.

5.2 Assessing Talent

All the interviewees have confirmed that they understand and value assessment of their talented staff. Many of them linked TM with performance assessment, and reported the latter as being a key practice for other practices such as training and development, rewards and succession planning.

There were variations in the ways of assessment and appraisal that the sample organizations follow. For instance, according to interviewee 11, they reported that they use the 9-grid box method, along with the balanced scorecard and key performance indicators (KPI's). Company 9 mentioned they apply the 360- assessment method twice a year. Company 15 said they, too, assess staff performance twice a year using individual and departmental performance criteria to evaluate their staff.

5.3 Developing Talents

Most of the interviewees claimed that they develop talents through special training programs, succession plans or promotions and benefits. As attested by some of them, the special training programs help prepare talented employees for leadership positions in the future. For instance, company 9 stated that it employs coaching and offers training programs from external providers for their talented staff. Company 15 provides training and rewards for their talented staff in their effort to develop their skills and engagement. Company 5 offers promotions to develop their talents.

In regards to succession plans, the organizations varied in respect to whether they have clear plans or not. However, most of those who have plans said that they don't share them with their staff. But one company (8) said that they do if they expect that the employee wouldn't make use of this piece of information to be more demanding of benefits.

5.4 Retaining Talent

The results strongly suggest the almost unanimous opinion of interviewees that retaining talent is very crucial (even company 4 which said they don't practise TM). However, the procedures and steps that they take to retain talented employees varied from one organization to another. One side like interviewee 7 said "we try to understand [the employees'] needs and hence work on their career plans, training and development needs and any type of rewards" in order to maximize the potential of retaining them. However, on the other side, organization 11 admitted that retention is an ad hoc process in his organization. He confirmed that there should be a proper system for retention though.

Regarding the employees who are terminated or have resigned, the majority of the interviewees agreed that it is mostly for financial and compensation related reasons. Some of those who said so, like interviewee 1, said they don't prefer to distort the balance of their pay scale by adjusting the pays of some staff only. Organization 11 said that they conduct "exit interviews" in order to determine the reasons for resignation/termination, as this helps the organization in enhancing the rate of talented employees' retention.

6.   Discussion/data analysis

6.1. The Understanding of Talent Management

This study found that Kuwaiti organizations were aware of the concept of talent management. In addition, it was observed that most Kuwaiti organizations acknowledged that talent management acts as an interconnected chain of practices that starts from attracting and ends with retaining talented employees. These findings conform with the findings of Laff (2006), Cunningham (2007), Berger (2004) and Schweyer (2010).

When it comes to creating competitive advantage for the organization, it was noticed that the majority of Kuwaiti organizations forecast that proper implementation of talent management practices have a major role in giving their organizations the edge they wanted over competitors, which correlates with the findings of Ordóñez de Pablos (2004). Similarly, Whelan, & Carcary's (2011) on achieving a long-lasting competitive advantage, mentioned that talent management is the best approach to follow. This justifies why some of the major organizations in Kuwait were keen on implementing talent management in their organizations.

6.2. Locating Talent

It was discovered during data analysis that most Kuwaiti organizations prefer to hire internally however this contradicts with the findings of Schweyer (2010) and Kull & Brandt (2007) that the majority of organizations prefer to hire externally before even considering internal talents.

In addition, most of the interviewed organizations agreed that the recruitment practices should be based on the competencies and skills of the individuals and not on merits or qualifications. This finding is adjacent to the findings of Cappelli & Keller (2014).

6.3. Assessing The Performance of Talents

A few of the inteviewees indicated that they use balanced scorecards, aided with personal Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), to assess talented staff. Phillips (2005) states that the balanced scorecard is the most efficient way of measuring performance because it enhances the deployment of resources and enables an easy comparison of the different talents inside the organization. In addition, the data shows that some studied Kuwaiti organizations conduct the assessment of staff based on individual performance criteria only, rather than both individual and organizational criteria (the latter approach is practised in a few organizations only (1, 5, 13 and 15)).

6.4. Development of Talents

The majority of the respondents were almost unanimous on the importance of developing talents. This confirms the views of Michaels et al. (2001) that the development of talented employees is very crucial since it helps in enhancing their skills and competencies. It also helps talented employees become prepared for leadership positions.

However, some organizations were not found to be keen on dedicating a special budget for talented employees but rather they have a training budget for all staff. This contradicts with the findings of Phillips and Phillips (2004) that a larger portion of the training budget should be allocated to high potential employees and possible successors.

Studies have established the necessity of organizations to have succession plans prepared in case of resignations of talented staff (Cunningham, 2007). Unfortunately, the sample organizations varied in the fact that they have not seem to have succession plans in place despite realizing its importance.

Finally, the interviews show that Kuwaiti organizations emphasize the importance of giving underdeveloped employees a second chance by providing them with specialized training to

enhance their skills. If all the steps taken do not boost employee performance, then the last resort is to terminate the employee. Termination is good for the organization in this case, as it sheds the extra fat from the organization and helps in regrouping its efforts to achieve optimum performance. The findings confirm with the findings of (Berger, 2004)?

(rephrased referring to literature review) However, it is difficult for Kuwaiti organizations to lay off underdeveloped Kuwaiti employees due to the imposed quota that they have from Manpower & Government Restructuring Program (MGRP), a division of MOSAL. Therefore, Kuwaiti organizations will continue to try to develop their underdeveloped Kuwaiti employees in a hope that they will reach the required skills and competencies (Alshahed newspaper, 2014)

6.5. Retaining

A unanimous agreement amongst Kuwaiti organizations is that retention of talented employees is a cost effective strategy, which coincides with Herman's research (2005).

As part of their retention strategies, it is found that most studied organizations provide their employees with training, development and monetary compensation. This meets ends with Uren's (2007) statement that the engagement and commitment of talented employees is closely related to the development that they receive from their organizations.

On the other side, when asked about turnover reasons, some interviewees mentioned that two of the key reasons are salaries and benefits. Some of these organizations use these reasons as solutions to tackle retention problems. Most organizations, though, have indicated the importance of knowing other potential reasons for resignations in order to plan on improving their retention strategies.

6.6. Implications of the research

6.6.1. Practical

One of the practical implications of this research is that TM is appealing, as a concept, and most Kuwaiti organizations do have the mentality for TM. However, it is very hard to deploy all the practices of TM in Kuwaiti organizations. As mentioned earlier, part of this is attributed to the fact

that the country is enforcing Kuwaitization on the private sector, which by definition can propose challenges to organizations intending to practise proper TM.

To further elaborate, and based on the empirical data, it's been observed that some Kuwaiti organizations practise pseudo talent recruitment. They know how to spot a talent, however, they are forced sometimes to choose less qualified candidates because the candidate is Kuwaiti and this satisfies the guidelines of the regulatory government agencies.

The same applies for retention and termination practises. Kuwaiti organizations find it difficult to lay off Kuwaiti employees because of the aftermath and the way the regulatory bodies will react. Hence, it appears that TM practices are not mature enough in Kuwait, not because the managements are not capable but because of the government restrictions.

6.6.2. Academic

From an academic point of view, this study is unique because it is amongst the few studies that were conducted on the gulf region or Kuwait. Thus, the study is a chance to contribute to the available literature with more empirical data and thus help develop more concise theories and concepts. In addition, it can inspire further academic studies of TM practices in other countries to try to examine the influence (if any) of national and cultural variables on talent management practices.

7. Conclusion

During the process of interviewing HR professionals, the research have concluded that the term "Talent Management" is well known by Kuwaiti organizations. However, the results in terms of applying the practices of talent management were varied. More importantly, most interviewees were unanimous on agreeing that integrating the HR practices within the organization strategy provides competitive advantage.

Furthermore, it was found that most organizations in Kuwait prefer to recruit internally. The rationale behind recruiting from within is that it is cost effective because external recruitment is said to be more expensive than local recruitment (Kull & Brandt, 2007). Some of the organizations

seemed to have a career plan for their talented employees, and help them in building up their succession plan for key positions.

The organizations that were selected in this study have all indicated that they measure their employees' performance, but they varied in the tools. It was observed that based on the interviewees responses, the performance of the employee should be tied with their development plan.

For recruitment practices, is evident from the results that most organizations rely mostly on competencies and some other behavioral variables more than certificates.

It was discovered that the most prominent strategy for organizations to retain talented employees is through identifying them first. The majority of the sample organizations stated that they retain their talented employees through giving them training, lucrative packages and/or provide them with promotions or a better career paths.

In a nutshell, it is evident from the data that there is awareness about TM in Kuwait, yet the practices are not that unanimous or mature. This can be understood since the whole field of study is new and thus the market practices shall witness improvement in the coming years.

7.1. Recommendations for future research

During the course of this study, it was found that the basis of understanding of talent management is present in the minds of management of Kuwaiti organizations. Furthermore, it was observed that some of the organizations have already started practicing and applying talent management. This indicates that Kuwaiti organizations are getting ready to take part in the quest for talent. Therefore, it is important that Kuwaiti organizations realize the importance of applying talent management strategically and thereby provide the organization with the competitive advantage against rivals who do not pay much attention to talent management practices.

For this purpose, it is recommend that Kuwaiti organizations follow talent management to the full. Omitting to apply any of the talent management practices dampens the efforts of the organization as it breaks the link between the interconnected talent management practices. The first thing that

this study recommends Kuwaiti organizations to do is to locate talent from within the organization. This can be achieved using a set of sophisticated measures which examine the skills, competencies and behaviors of all employees in the organization. The results of these tests are then analyzed carefully in order to determine the talented employees in the organization. These talented employees will be the basis for a talent pool which will help in feeding the organization with the needed talented individuals for key positions. Organizations are also advised to give priority to internal recruitment and devise a succession plan. With this in mind, organizations should provide all employees with training and development programs which are tailored for enhancing the competencies and skills of employees. Of course, the training and development for high potential employees should be different from those of the remaining employees. This will enable the organization to focus on this group of talented individuals in order to equip them with even more advanced skills. The performance assessment of employees should be done on a continuous basis which will assure that the training and development programs are revised continuously. Taking these steps will ensure that successors are identified within the organization to fill the gap. Implementing all the above steps would lead to increasing the retention of talented employees. For this reason, it is strongly recommended that Kuwaiti organizations keep the HR function and do not outsource it because a third party will never be able to capture the essence of the organization and hence will fail at linking talent management to the strategy of the organization. Keeping the HR function internal would help in achieving a better alignment of talent management practices with the strategy of the organization.

Since it was established during the course of this study that talent management is underdeveloped in Kuwait, it is advised that researchers continue to investigate talent management in Kuwait. Future research might be conducted to examine whether organizations are actually implementing talent management strategies as described by these organizations. Another possible area of study could be to examine if poor talent management practices are one of the determinants of outsourcing the HR function. Future research can also evaluate and assess whether Kuwaiti organizations are successful in creating succession plans that help in feeding the pool of talent.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Questions
Defining Talent Management

·   What is your understanding of the concept of Talent Management?

·   When did you start applying the concept of Talent Management?

·   Why did you take the decision to apply it?

·   How does your organization implement talent management?

·   How well do the Talent Management procedures fit with your organization's' strategy?

·   In your opinion, did Talent Management help your organization in attaining an advantage over competitors? Please elaborate with citation of actual cases that took place.

Locating Talent

·   Were you successful in identifying Talent within your organization? If not, why?

·   How do you usually find and recruit talented people from outside your organization? What actions do you take?

·   What are the basis of the recruitments from outside your organization? Does it basically depends on the competencies and skills that a candidate has or does it depend on other set of criteria? Explain.

·   Does your organization have specific job descriptions for each role that it wants to hire for?

·   Do you think that it is best to have job descriptions pre-set or to be assigned based on the competencies that a talented person has? Why?

·   How does your organization determine the skills needed for any important position?

Assessing Talent

·   Do you think that measuring performance of talented people is essential?

·   How does your organization measure performance of talented people?

·   What is the criteria that your organization use to measure performance? Is it based on individual outcomes or based on the overall outcomes of the whole department/organization? Why?

Developing Talent

·   What are the steps that your organization take to develop its employee's skills?

·   Is the resources allocated for development the same for all employees or is it based on the skills level that employees has? What do you think is best?

·   Does your organization have in place a well-defined succession plan for talented employees?

·   Do you inform and prepare employees as successors or do you just prepare them without informing them that they are successors of current talented individuals?

·   With all the training and development that you provide your employees with, how do you deal with those that their performance is under bar?

Retaining Talent

·   How do you rate the importance of retaining talent within your organization? Do you it is better to retain talented people or hire new ones from the market?

·   How does your organization retain talented people? What are the steps/procedures taken in this case?

·   What is the turnover rate at your organization? What are the reasons for termination/resignations? How do you try to maintain resigned talented employees?

Appendix 2

Nationality	Gender	Public	Private	Non-Employed	Total
Kuwaiti	Male	178882	46271	5919	231072
	Female	164458	42881	8709	216048
	Total	343340	89152	14628	447120
Non-Kuwaiti	Male	94915	1663769	14372	1773056
	Female	48826	432922	4296	486044

	Total	143741	2096691	18668	2259100

Table 3: Cross-Tabulation of nationality and workforce sector

Source: Public Authority for Civil Information (2017)

Appendix 3

Interviewee no.	Initials	Title	Organization	Gender	age	exp	sector	Organization
1	P.P.	HR and Training Manager	Alkhorayef	M	57	2	Oil Sector	A
2	W.D.	HR Supervisor	Alkhorayef	M	42	5+	Oil Sector	B
3	R.V.	HR Supervisor	Alkhorayef	M	38	4	Oil Sector	C
4	M.F.	Head of Recruitment and Personell	Arab Open University	F	35	6	Education	D
5	M.D.	HR and Admin Manager	Boubyan Takaful	M	48	5	Insurance	E
6	H.H.	Group HR Manager	Al-Yaquot Holding	M	47	21	Oil Sector	F
7	M.N.	HR Director	GUST	M	42	12	Education	G
8	F.R.	Director of HR Services	Success Hub Co.	M	34	13	HR Services	H
9	M.K.	Corporate HR Manager	Alghanim Industries	M	37	17	Automobile	I

10	A.K.	BUSINESS SOLUTIONS Managing Director	ACTIONRICH	M	48	25	Business Solutions	J
11	F.R.	Strateegic Business Partner	Profiles International MENA	M	43	20	Training Services	K
12	F.K.	HR - Recruitment, Compensation & Benefits	AUK	F	31	7	Education	L
13	F.J.	Group Manager – Human Resources Management	Al-Marar Group Holding Companies	M	43	20	HR Services	M
14	N.H.	Specialist, HR Applications	Kuwait Gulf Oil Company	M	38	15	Oil Sector	N
15	A.Q.	Deputy HR Manager	aLHASAWI GROUP	M	40	15	Services	O
16	M.G.	HR and Administration manager	KFIC	M	40	13	Finance & Investment	P
17	A.H.	HR Manager	Tijan Dental	M	35	7	Health	Q
18	S.T.	HR Manager	Al Essa Group of Companies	M	43	10	Services	R
19	A.B.	HR Manager	Advance Future Group International	F	38	5	Services	S
20	A.S.	HR Specialist	DHL Global Forwarding	M	27	1	Services	T

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Huda N. Besiso
School of Business Economics and Law, Gothenburg

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