Title: Identification, attraction and retention of talent in the Irish Public Sector: A proposed framework.

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Abstract

This theoretical paper aims to form an understanding of how a public sector talent management strategy can be affected during an era of restricted recruitment. The research additionally aims to offer a model for identifying, attracting and retaining talent during periods of difficult economic circumstances.

The Irish Public Sector offers an interesting case study due to its size and the proportion of expenditure that it spends on labour. The Irish state expended €53.1 billion in 2011 out of which 30% was exhausted on wages (DPER 2012). The number of individuals employed in the public sector showed a decline of 2.4% over the year to Q4 2011 bringing the total employed from 402,100 to 392,300 within the year. The total reduction in employment in the public sector over the three years from Q4 2008 to Q4 2011 now stands at 35,000 (-8.2%) (CSO 2012).

The Irish state is undergoing significant public sector change due to its reliance on the IMF and EU bailout funds which have come with certain budgetary requirements (Kelly 2009, Hazelkorn and Massaro 2010). A concomitant recruitment freeze, which has been relaxed somewhat recently, requires the Irish public sector to develop internal talent pools in the short to medium term. This paper aims to identify the talent identification and management strategies that prevail in the Irish public sector and a cross sectional analysis of these organisations will allow for innovative research.

Through a detailed literature analysis in the field this working paper identifies a lack of a conceptualised and specific definition of what is meant by talent and academia has great difficulty addressing these issues (Ashton and Morton 2005, Collings and Mellahi 2009, Gernal et al., 2012). In light of these difficulties, this research will present a detailed theoretical research design for further analysis in the area of talent management within Irish public sector organisations during times of strained recruitment.

The identification of talent will be provided as the first of its core themes. The paper proposes that competency frameworks, recruitment and performance management strategies enable these organisations to identify their talent. The attraction of talent has been identified during the research as a core theme within the literature. The attraction of talent is proposed to be mapped in the model under the headings branding, cultivating, financial reward and career opportunities. The retention of talent has been identified as playing a pivotal role for Irish public sector organisations where pay freezes and pay reductions have changed the dynamic of the Human Resource Development (HRD) realms of these organisations. The paper aims to map the retention strategies of these organisations with its good practice model through career opportunities, training and development, performance management and promotion strategies.

The practical advancement of issues within these organisations will be of benefit to practitioners both within these organisations and other external organisations facing an era of turbulent recruitment. In addition, the research will present a detailed theoretical research design for further analysis in the area of talent management within Irish public sector organisations during times of strained recruitment.
INTRODUCTION

The paper aims to develop a framework that identifies how Irish public sector organisations attract quality employees, ensure their potential is developed and safeguard the retention of these high performing employees for the organisation's benefit. The identification of talent in Irish public sector organisations offers an interesting opportunity for research into the ongoing quest for these organisations to deliver more with fewer resources in terms of their human capital (Murray 2010, O'Riordan 2011). The pace of economic and fiscal change, rising expectations of citizens, consumers and globalisation have all affected the Irish public sector since the Irish economic collapse in 2007 ensuring a challenging environment for those engaged in talent management.

Talent management as a term is greatly confused within HRD literature (Ashton and Morton 2005, Collings and Mellahi 2009, Gernal et al., 2012). Despite the range of terms offered, the underlying argument across the concerned literature has only highlighted the explicit utility that is to be fostered from talent as a tool and when correctly monitored and engaged (Chambers et al., 1998, Lewis and Heckman 2006, Björkman et al., 2007, Mellahi and Collings 2010). During times of great economic turbulence employees are expected to be innovative and talent management is an espoused and enacted commitment to implementing an integrated, strategic and technology enabled approach to human resource management (HRM) (Hughes and Rog 2008). The research aims to map these innovative strategies for its conceptual framework on the identification, attraction and retention of talent in the Irish Public Sector.

The literature on talent management draws heavily on private sector organisations and their practices. This can provide contradictory advice and fragmented theories when applied to large public sector organisations (Kerins and Carbery 2012). However, the recent trend in domestic talent management literature (Lewis and Heckman 2006, Collings and Mellahi 2009) may provide some clarity as we develop a framework for these public sector organisations. In terms of HRD and more specifically private sector firms, some advances have been achieved in the construction of integrative frameworks which enable this research to locate its work within the literature (Tarique et al., 2006, Tarique and Schuler 2010). However there is a noted lack of attention to frameworks for public sector talent management and more specifically for these organisations during times of great economic turbulence. The challenge for HRD professionals that has emerged is how does an organisation or indeed the
public sector identify its talent (Hambleton and Howard 2012). Irish public sector recruitment is centralised and competency focused through The Public Appointments Service, who provide recruitment, assessment and selection services for the Civil Service, Local Authorities, the Health Service Executive, An Garda Síochána and other public bodies. The research aims to analyse the competency frameworks which are applied to the recruitment and promotion opportunities of these organisations in order to ascertain their ability to attract, identify and retain the talent these organisations require at the present time and in line with their business strategies for the coming years (Thompson and Rainey 2003, Wallace Ingraham & Getha Taylor 2005). These public sector organisations will require a new strategy to develop internal and external talent pools to ensure the future core recruitment strategy is based on building and sustaining a high level of international credibility for the Irish public sector.

The first section of this paper examines the context of Irish public sector and the current Irish economic situation. The subsequent section analyses the public sector context in which talent management unfolds. Section three identifies the proposed framework for identifying, attracting and retaining talent management within Irish public sector organisations. This section will enable the creation of a number of hypotheses. The framework developed will increase our understanding of the complexities of talent management within Irish public sector organisations. This section is followed by a number of hypotheses.

Context of the Irish Economy and Public sector

The current Irish economic situation involves a cycle which has seen the economy shifting from one of Western Europe’s poorest countries and in just over a generation, Ireland had evolved into one of Europe’s most successful (Dorgan 2006). Prior to this economic downturn in 2007 Ireland had reversed the persistent emigration and knowledge drain which blighted the economy during the 1980’s. Ireland also constructed a desirable reputation of a thriving, knowledge-driven economy. Irish public sector organisations underwent an unprecedented rate of change (Devine 2008). The number of people employed in the public sector peaked in Q4 2008 at 402,100 (CSO 2012). Lauded by the OECD as the ‘Celtic Tiger’, Ireland seemed set to rival the Asian nations as a global role-model. However the massive gains seen over these years were unsustainable.

Since the emergence of the global financial crisis in 2007 Ireland and its economy has struggled in what is a severe national crisis and difficult global environment. The global economy is under huge stress and the global financial crisis is impacting all economies to varying
degrees, however the impact to the Irish economy is notable with a cumulative nominal GDP decline of 21% from Q4 2007 to Q3 2010 (Lane 2011). According to Fitz Gerald 2011 ‘the economy has sustained a massive drop in output, returning GDP per head to the level it was at almost a decade ago. Unemployment has regressed to extremely high levels at over 14% and there is a return to substantial emigration’ (p. 2). This places Ireland with the most effected countries in terms of impact to output performance during this period (Lane and Milesi-Ferretti 2010, Dellepiane and Hardiman 2011, Lane 2011). Ireland has also faced fiscal shifts in terms of income and expenditure. After more than a decade of budget surplus, Ireland has returned to baseline deficits of 11-12 percent of GDP in 2009 and 2010 (Lane 2011).

Much of this fiscal deficit is structural in nature and significantly, a spurt of economic growth alone will not restore fiscal sustainability. The topical issue of a recapitalisation of the Irish banking system pushed the overall general government deficit to 14.5 percent of GDP in 2009 and 32 percent of GDP in 2010, leading to rapid growth in the overall level of public debt (Lane 2011). Fitz Gerald 2011 argues that ‘crisis also presents an opportunity to reshape and refocus spending programmes’ (p. 1372). The implementation of the reform must also meet the politically sensitive nature of the state (Hardiman and MacCarthaigh 2010, Fitz Gerald 2011). The previous Irish government had introduced spending cuts as its principal method of fiscal stabilisation. They aimed to achieve this in two ways: (1) through seeking to reduce numbers in public sector employment (by imposing strict restrictions on recruitment, and by incentivising retirement), and (2) straightforward cuts to nominal pay rates and to social welfare payments– a strategy never before attempted. The current Irish Government have offered a period of respite in cuts to pay and welfare in lieu of labour relations harmony until 2014 called the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 colloquially known as the Croke Park Agreement Agreement. However taxation and cuts to services are currently taking its toll (Hardiman 2010). Declining public service numbers and the need ‘to do more with less’ (O’Riordan 2011) is impacting current and future talent management strategies of these organisations.

**Public Sector Reform**

Debates regarding the modernisation and reform of the Irish public sector are not a recent issue. The serving governments of the last five decades have released the Devlin Report in 1969, to the Serving the Country Better in 1985, the Strategic Management Initiative and Delivering Better Government in the 1990s, and more recently Transforming Public Services
in 2008. These continual reform attempts inevitably centre on embracing new management techniques, new structures and processes, new financial systems, and new technologies, and correspondingly seeking to clinch more dynamic approaches to delivery of Irish public services (Boyle and MacCarthaigh 2011). There has been notable improvements within the Irish public service however the (OECD 2008) review noted that ‘despite the reforms, the overall political and managerial systems in Ireland are still based on a compliance culture that emphasises controlling inputs and following rules’ (P. 170) the report also suggested that public service employees be encouraged to think outside of the institutional bureaucratic structure within which they operate or the institutional boundaries with which they are confined.

Despite the noted structural improvements of the previous decades which have been accelerated since the 1990’s (Boyle and MacCarthaigh 2011) the Irish Public Service remains segmented overall, allowing less than efficient policy development, implementation and service delivery. Over the last number of years, the Irish government has developed and introduced a suite of reforms to the way public expenditure is released to the public sector. These reforms present challenges to those involved in public administration (Downes, Kennedy et al. 2013). Despite this noted change the question of reforming the greatest asset in terms of public talent has only emerged in recent times as an issue (Christensen and Lægreid 2007, O’Brien 2010, McCracken, Brown et al. 2012).

Public Sector Talent Management

Confining talent management (TM) to a definition is a complicated process with many variables. There is a noted lack of clarity in the terms utilised in the TM debate leading to an absence of understanding in relation to the concepts involved (Lewis and Heckman 2006). This has resulted in a plethora of definitions being offered by the even greater overabundance of authors on the subject leading to an absence of a clear definition (Collings and Mellahi 2009). However some limitations have to be placed on the subject to allow for effective research. Talent management is an espoused and enacted commitment to implementing an integrated, strategic and technology enabled approach to human resource management (HRM)’ (Greer and Virick 2008, Hughes and Rog 2008, Schutz 2008). The commitment in this approach primarily emerges from the widespread conviction that human resources are an organisation’s main starting point for competitive advantage, basically an ‘essential asset’ that is becoming increasingly short in its supply (Hughes and Rog 2008, Shaheen 2010).
The theory of talent management has become entrenched in business from small enterprises to large public sector organisations and its conception, continuation, definition and growth is documented by means of reports, analysis and commentary. Talent management as a corporate area of focus has been building steadily and (Galagan 2008) argues ‘like a fast-approaching car, the closer it gets the more of it we are able to see clearly, despite the fact that there is no real roadmap and no single individual or group behind the wheel’ (p. 42). Collings and Mellahi (2009) argue ‘there has also been an alarming lack of theoretical development in the area’ (p. 305).

In terms of offering talent management frameworks (Lewis and Heckman 2006) exposed three distinctive categories of thought regarding TM. The first category exposed talent management as a collection of typical human resource practices, functions and activities such as recruiting, selection, development, and career and succession management. The second focused on the emergence of talent pools and the need to have appropriate talent and skills to address organisational demands. TM in this regard is viewed as a set of processes intended to ensure a satisfactory flow of employees into jobs throughout an organisation. The third and final perspective on talent management focuses on sourcing, developing and rewarding employee talent. (Hughes and Rog 2008), identified a criticism of each of the three categories they acknowledged. They are critical of the first perspective as it is more of the same HRM rebranded. They are critical of the second as it provides no gain in the understanding of the HR function and thus is unnecessary. The third perspective is criticised on the basis that little rigorous data is available to support either perspective. (Lewis and Heckman 2006, Hughes and Rog 2008).

A fourth category identified by Mellahi and Collings (2010) focused on ‘the identification of key positions which have the potential to differentially impact the competitive advantage of the firm’ (p. 145) (Boudreau and Ramstad 2005, Collings and Mellahi 2009, Huselid and Becker 2011). This category is based within the mentioned literature on the ability to identify key positions within the organisation that exert the greatest ability to increase competitive advantage within the organisation. Huselid et al., (2005) identified ‘A performers’ (p. 113) as those that are destined to fill the key positions identified in the fourth category.

Mass upward grade drift, system-wide rigidities and inflexibilities, abuse of the system of flexitime, high rates of absenteeism, and weak management are all symptoms of Irish public sector organisations. Reforming these public sector organisations is difficult in any environment however achieving increased efficiencies and managing talent in the Irish public sector is particularly difficult in an environment of severe fiscal restraint (Hardiman 2010). In
2008 Ireland found itself in the difficult position where they could no longer meet the public pay bill and had attained very little in the way of public efficiency. No mechanism was available for the downward revision of the relative costs of the public bill (Kelly et al., 2008).

Within these public sector organisations huge pools of the asset we describe as labour are available. Concern about the quality and quantity of current and future public leaders has led to calls for better talent management (Devine 2008). (Galagan 2008) argues that ‘every company organizes talent management in ways that best achieve their talent priorities’ (p. 42). These organisations recognize their requirements in terms of talent and purchase these capabilities in the employment market or construct them through learning, development, performance feedback and coaching, and succession processes (Lewis and Heckman 2006, Galagan 2008). The structure of the organisation in itself is important and how the organisation manages its human capital will ascertain how productive it is. When Hughes and Rog (2008) speak of the ‘essential asset’ they speak of the combined human resources of an organisation. With large public sector organisations, human resources are often the biggest asset by a very large margin and also the greatest expenditure. The current business and economic environment is exposing a host of weaknesses in the talent management practices of many organisations, as well as the lack of a comprehensive understanding of skills, capabilities, key workforces and top talent (Pritchard and Becker 2009). According to Pritchard and Becker (2009) ‘being able to provide employees with a clear career path, and the ability to develop without having to leave the organisation may be the key to both attracting and retaining these valuable employees’ (p. 814). It is creating new possibilities through combining different knowledge sets, and searching actively and widely for opportunity (Pritchard and Becker 2009, Tidd and Bessant 2011).

Managing talented employees in a time of economic crisis can raise its own set of issues. (McCartney 2010) introduces the questions ‘are organisations responding to today’s difficult economic conditions by cutting back or even abandoning their talent management strategies? Has the ‘war for talent’ turned into a ‘war on talent’?’ (p. 10). With the decline in demand faced by many organisations sources of competitive advantage are sought wherever possible. (Heinen and O’Neill 2004; Huselid, et al., 2005). Companies concentrating on managing talent deliver better results for stakeholders. Public Sector organisations are often weighted heavily in terms of expenditure in relation to wages making up the bulk and other forms of outlay the minority. Thus any attempt to cut costs must first look to the cutting of wages. With fluctuating economic forecasts and the current economic situation likely to remain
fragile in Ireland it is likely that increasing wages in an attempt to attract talent is an unlikely course of action. According to (Delfgaauw and Dur 2008) ‘if demand for public sector output is not too high, the equilibrium return to managerial ability is always highest in the private sector’ (p. 2). Thus private sector organisations are likely to receive higher levels of talent as they offer greater financial return.

Public Sector Different Talent Management

The examination and research of organisational talent provides an interesting comparison when examined through the difference between publicly and privately employed human capital (Hansen and Winther 2012). Human resources alone account for between 65 and 70 per cent of the annual running costs of government departments and agencies. It is therefore vital that the fundamental changes proposed in the HRM of the public service are underpinned by sound analysis and informed debate (Humphreys and Worth-Butler 1999). The returns from investment in labour in the public sector vary greatly from that in the private sector. Utility is often apparent in the private sector in the form of market returns (Southworth 2009). If the organisation performs and revenue increases the benefits of increased investment in training, development, promotion and other talent management processes become more palatable to management. Public sector reviews have encouraged the field to adopt and empirically test more contemporary theoretical models from the mainstream public literature (Boyne et al., 2002, Wart 2003, Wright and Pandey 2010).

These publicly employed people make up a significant proportion of the Irish labour force and this paper aims to specify this division further by examining the Irish public sector as these organisations are working with reduced numbers and budgets at a time when demand for services is actually increasing (health, social welfare, education etc.). With the interest in privatisation of public goods and organisations from external supranational organisations (European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund) with discussions on the sale of (Coilte, ESB and Dublin Bus) the Irish public sector is facing increased pressures from previously unknown sources. Public sector organisations must compete with private organisations and face new competition with public sector organisations privatising various parts of their operations (Pitelis and Clarke 1993, Harel and Tzafrir 2001, Ponak and Thompson 2001). These pressures have pushed Irish public sector organisations to continuously seek improvements in their performance and for this reason public specific talent identification, attraction and retention policies will have to be identified and encouraged.
**Identification:** Scott (2012) found that private-sector respondents were more likely to identify and provide a definition of key talent than respondents in the public sector or non-profit sector. The public-sector respondents also were less confident that they could retain key employees during an economic recovery than respondents from other sectors. Thus the identification of talent for public sector organisations will have to take account of long term talent requirements and the cycles of economic activity a modern economy will face. (Harel and Tzafrir 2001) identified that public sector management emphasises HRM domains that deal with employee selection because of the sector's high level of unionisation which makes the selection process more challenging. The challenge for Irish public sector organisations is introducing high performance work practices in order to overcome the turbulent environment and public demand despite the dwindling resources available to these organisations with which the satisfaction of Unions is traditionally won.

**Attraction:** Prior to the ‘Celtic Tiger’ era of substantial economic growth the Irish public service’s ability to compete and attract the best talent in the Irish workforce was becoming more of an issue for organisations (Humphreys and Worth-Butler 1999). With the difficulty of matching market rates of pay, there was evidence to suggest that public service organisations lost pace with competitors. This was corrected with social partnership arrangements and bench marking. With the mandatory 10% reduction in pay for new recruits to the public sector and the current wage reduction discussions taking place (extension to the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 colloquially known as the Croke Park Agreement agreement) there is little doubt that there will be a swing in the balance of attraction of talented personnel from the public service. While historically retention has not proved a crucial issue for Irish public service organisations at present, attrition rates are beginning to rise. The public service must pro-actively manage the skills and talents of the individuals it has by identifying and realising their full potential.

**Retention:** (Koketso and Rust 2012) public perception of the brand quality of public organisations has an impact on the retention of employees and can help to make an organisation an employer of choice as skill shortages remerge in the coming decade. The difference in retention of talent for public organisations lies in the fluctuations of income and expenditure cycles which effect retention strategies. The Irish economy had an average growth rate of approximately 7 percent and unemployment falling to around 4 percent (near
full employment). (Connor et al., 2012) during the Celtic tiger era. Inflation increased and benchmarking between Government and Public Sector negotiators led to increases in wage rates to keep them in line with increasing costs.

The dramatic turnaround for the Irish economy since the EU/IMF bailout has seen international and domestic account keeps focusing on the public pay bill as it aims to reduce expenditure to keep it in line with income (Callan et al., 2011). Thus the separation between public sector organisations and those in the private sector are that once a private sector organisation sees a reduction in income similar to the economic crash they go out of business as they can’t meet creditor’s demands (including wages to employees). The public sector must engage innovative policies and activities aimed at retention (Kerins and Carbery 2012, Singh, et al., 2012).

**Conceptual Framework of the Management of Talent in the Irish Public Sector**
The principal focal point of this working paper is to tender a conceptual framework for the management of talent in the Irish public sector. Frameworks are required to be rational (practical) and progressive (novel, innovative and enhanced on previous techniques) (Iles, Preece et al., 2010) to make them appetising to academics and practitioners. The need for talent management to adopt a system-level or strategic framework has been noted by a range of academics over the years (Wright and Snell 1998, Sears 2003) yet (Lewis and Heckman 2006) argue these authors have failed to outline how this should occur.

Some advances have been achieved in the construction of integrative frameworks which enable this research to locate its work within the literature (Tarique et al., 2006, Tarique and Schuler 2010). However in keeping with literature focus there is a noted lack of attention to frameworks for public sector talent management and more specifically for these organisations during times of great economic turbulence. Our conceptual framework on the Irish public sector offers an interesting case study in terms of its size, sectoral and institutional context. The HRD agenda of these organisations is being forged by external (IMF, EU and private sector demands) and internal factors (bureaucracy, public sector unions and staff needs) within the economic environment it operates. These external factors are captured in the proposed framework as the first or external tier of the proposed framework.

The proposed framework consists of three variables represented as tiers each offering an insight and amalgamation of the various concepts in modern talent management strategies within public organisations. Our aim is to conceptualise the identification, attraction and retention of talent within the Irish public sector (see Figure 1) and as such these three issues make up the second tier of the framework. Each tier of the framework acts as an identifier for a particular set of concepts within talent management for the Irish public sector. The application of these concepts in the proposed fashion will result in a set of desirable outcomes for the organisation which are represented on the third tier of the framework.

The identification, attraction and retention of talent have been identified as vital strategies within talent management for the Irish public sector and such take the first tier of our framework as they are the commonly agreed terms within the literature on talent management. The identification of talent is represented on the framework through competency frameworks and performance management. The second concept covers the attraction of talent through branding, cultivating and career opportunities. The retention of talent is proposed through career opportunities, training and development, performance management and promotion.
Identifying talent

The paper recognises the identification of talent as the first of its core themes. The paper proposes that competency frameworks, recruitment and selection strategies enable these organisations to identify their talent. The utilisation of competency frameworks for public sector organisations has been a hotly debated issue within academia (Waldo and Miller 1948; Rosenbloom and Carroll 1990; Robotham and Jubb 1996; Cira and Benjamin 1998). Irish public sector recruitment is centralised and competency focused through The Public Appointments Service, who provide recruitment, assessment and selection services for the Civil Service, Local Authorities, the Health Service Executive, An Garda Síochána and other public bodies (OECD 2006). The research aims to analyse the competency frameworks which are applied to the recruitment and promotion opportunities of these organisations in order to ascertain their ability to attract, identify and retain the talent these organisations require at the present time and in line with their business strategies for the coming years (Fernandez et al., 2003, Wallace Ingraham and Getha Taylor 2005, Riccucci et al., 2006). Galagan (2008)argues that ‘talent management concerns competencies what employees should know and be able to do and performance processes how to leverage those competencies by putting them in the right parts of the organization, and then measuring their impact on real goals’ (p. 42). The paper will allow for the competency framework of these organisations to be mapped in the construction of its model.

General recruitment for the Irish Civil Service is carried out at Clerical Officer and Principal Officer Grade with Professional and Technical posts filled through graduate entry. There is open resistance to recruitment at higher levels owing to the traditional career civil service model followed in the Irish civil service which favours internal promotion and career development models (OECD 2006). To remain competitive, public sector organisations will need to use innovative recruitment tactics in the future (Cober et al., 2004). The framework aims to enable the capture and development of innovative strategies which have been or which could be employed by the Irish public sector (Kerins and Carbery 2012).

Attracting talent

The attraction of talent has been identified during the research as a core theme within the literature. Attracting talent is challenging even for all organisations and furthermore for public sector organisations that can no longer offer large financial reward. Within the framework the term attracting talent develops branding, cultivating, financial reward and career opportunities as the tools used to attract the identified talent to Irish public sector
organisations. These terms are what (Iles et al., 2010) describe as symbolic and have their basis in reputation and status, Identity, Distinctiveness, Centrality and Enduringness (Sohrab 2009). A remarkable reputation can entice talent into organisations at any level (senior, technical, high potential, etc.) the promise of career progression (promotion, lateral promotion) or of competitive financial rewards (Glen 2007) will attract applicants to the compelling recruitment brand or HR reputation (Hannon and Milkovich 1996, Koys 1997, Chapman et al., 2005, Ferris et al., 2007). External and internal talent pools can be created during difficult economic trading environments allowing organisations provide for succession management and medium term organisational planning given the right tools (Glenn 2012).

The Irish Public Sector has faced increased obstacles in relation to pay and promotions which has created issues as the process of talent pool creation commences with branding or cultivating a reputation for the public service as a provider of competitive employment to new and experienced talent in the organization (Behn 1998, Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, Warner and Sullivan 2004, Glenn 2012).

The Irish public sector is faced with the task of developing its HR reputation in order to attract individuals with an interest in public sector work and the required talent to perform the work. A number of articles have examined why an organization’s HR reputation has become an increasingly significant aspect of building organizational capabilities (Holland et al., 2007, Tarique and Schuler 2010). (Lievens et al., 2001) identified a range of factors that influence a potential applicant’s attraction to an organisation i.e. the organisation's size or even the individual’s personality. (Konopaske and Werner 2005, Collings and Mellahi 2009, Tarique and Schuler 2010) discuss antecedents and covariates that attract people to International firms such as self-efficacy, marital status, and family attachment. This framework will enable an in-depth study of just how these variables affect the Irish public sector at this interesting time.

The Irish Public Sector has seen obstacles in relation to pay and promotions placed in its path. This has created issues for talent attraction as the process of external talent pool creation commences with branding or cultivating a reputation for the public service as a provider of competitive employment to new and experienced talent in the organization (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, Warner and Sullivan 2004, Glenn 2012);. External talent pool creation will enable the Irish public sector line up future talent in the medium term. Competition for talent within the Irish workforce is skewed given the current rate of unemployment of 14.6% (CSO 2012). This pool is indeed large yet the Irish public sector is restricted in its ability to recruit and reward talent. Thus the attraction of talent through standard means or what (Devine 2008) call identifying talented people and giving them what they want basically is a default
position in organisations with no formal talent management process common to highly competitive sectors such as banking and finance.

Branding is a term which has originated in the marketing realm but (Martin and Beaumont 2003) have found value in the term when applied to an organisation's recruitment policy. Traditional attraction methods of the Irish public sector are under threat with pension funds facing large scale reduction and a shift in the returns from labour towards the private sector all impacting on the branding of the public sector. Strong brand name recognition decreases the time needed to address applicant attraction. Organizations that do not enjoy brand name recognition must take a more aggressive role in attracting job seekers (Cober et al., 2004). With the recent Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 colloquially known as the Croke Park Agreement 1 and 11 agreements having a negative impact on the pay and pensions of public sector employees branding in order to attract the same level and diversity of employees will become an issue for future recruitment phases. The public sector is being forced to realise the importance of branding, with universities, primary care services, and high profile law enforcement agencies such as the London Metropolitan Police investing significant resources in building brands (Martin et al., 2005).

**Talent Retention**

The framework teases out talent retention into the concepts of training and development, performance management, promotion and reward. Glen (2007) argues “ultimately, it is the experience of the relationship that the person has within an organization that determines the longevity and the win-win consummation of the relationship” (p. 4). The paper aims to ascertain what strategies these organisations have employed to retain their core talent once it has been identified. Unless the public sector finds cost-effective ways to address its development needs, it may find additional challenges retaining talent and developing the leadership and other skills it will need for the future (Wallace Ingraham and Getha Taylor 2005, Manning 2012). The implications of training and development on the retention of talent are immense (Boyle 1997; Deery 2008). As work life balance requirements fluctuate and the returns from labour diminish in the public sector, employers are required to provide innovative retention policies which encourage staff to provide extra utility. Irish public sector organisations have training and development now reduced to an ‘absolute requirement’ (Humphreys and Worth-Butler 1999) however in the medium to long term linking training and development needs with business strategy of these organisations will encourage employees and ease retention issues for the public service.
Performance management has emerged from Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 colloquially known as the Croke Park Agreement 1 as a requirement of government in return for wage negotiation. However the implementation of performance management to the public sector has been a source of complication since the 1970 Thatcher demands of public services (Fryer et al., 2009) and has continued through the subsequent decades (Guthrie and English 1997, Christensen and Yoshimi 2001, Holzer and Yang 2004, Holzer and Kloby 2005, Yang and Holzer 2006). The major issue for Irish public sector organisations centres on the measurement of performance (Lemieux-Charles et al., 2003, Fryer et al., 2009), the lack of resources added to a lack of public approval for the reward of talent once identified (Jaiani and Whitford 2011) and an inability to deal with underperformance if identified (Kalyal et al., 2010). The framework encourages the amalgamation of performance management with business and HRD strategies already being employed within the organisation (Wang and Berman 2001, Bourne et al., 2003, de Waal 2003, de Waal 2004). Promotion and rewards when linked to performance management encourage performance (Kim 2010, Markovits et al., Moynihan and Pandey 2010).

Promotion and reward have the same effect upon employees of the public and private sectors (Perry et al., 2010). However a school of thought exists where the public service ethos is viewed as a way of life (Rayner et al., 2011). Cuts in wage rates and pension entitlements of public servants have become the norm in the OECD (Lodge and Hood 2012). This is a distinct era in Irish history and this framework will enable further research to capture the exact impact these reward reductions are having on the Irish public service.

**Organisational Benefits**

Tier three of the framework allows the working paper to extricate the organisational benefits which are attached to more complex terms attached to the initial three terms. These benefits include Tier three examines the organisational benefits accrued from an effective talent management strategy. Business and HR strategy alignment, talent pools (external and internal), increased skill base, increased motivation and retention of “A performers”.

Linking the HRD strategy and more specifically the talent management strategy to the medium and long term business strategy of the organisation will lead to increased utility for the organisation (Becker and Huselid 1999, Combs et al., 2006, Huselid and Becker 2011). The link between the business and strategic initiatives will allow for innovation and adaptation of HRM systems, which influence skills and motivation within the workforce,
impacting on creativity and productivity, which subsequently drive profitability, growth, and ultimately offer competitive advantage. The research will analyse the business strategies of these organisations with the aim of identifying approach’s to identifying, attracting and retaining sufficient talent in the specific areas they will be required in the medium to long term (Manning 2012).

In relation to Irish public sector organisations the business strategy is often independent of any talent management strategy (Humphreys and Worth-Butler 1999). Internationally although dominantly in the private sector however linking the two has strong roots in academia through the last number of decades with (Tichy et al., 1982, Devanna et al., 2006) encouraging HR departments to understand the business strategy of their organizations and encouraged them to restructure their human resource organisation and practices to support it. (Jackson and Schuler 1990) outlined HR undertakings (assessing HR demand/supply, implementing programs and evaluating outcomes) and linked these organisational variables (e.g. the organization's strategy, life cycle stage, competitive environment) over several time horizons (Lewis and Heckman 2006). Thus to ensure the alignment of these two apart variables in the public sector efforts should be made to include HR staff in the organizational decision-making process (Guo et al., 2011).

Organizations often employ talent pools in that the company recruit the best people and then select them for positions rather than trying to select specific people for specific positions. External and internal talent pools can be created during difficult economic trading environments allowing organisations provide for succession management and medium term organisational planning given the right tools (Glen 2007). The employment of talent pools is endorsed by (Kesler 2002, Lewis and Heckman 2006). However Glenn (2012) develops a division between external and internal talent pools. The development of internal pools has been linked with succession management (Jackson and Schuler 1990, Rothwell and Kazanas 1994, Lewis and Heckman 2006). International organisations have been regaining control over the career development of their high potential employees and once again assessing and developing smaller groups in line with the business strategy (Yarnall 2011).

The Irish public sector has a vast internal talent pool to draw from however the implications of highly restricted recruitment practices since the international financial crisis materialised in 2008 has meant a gap has emerged of 5 years where potential talent has not been recruited externally (Parry 2011). (Glenn 2012) however introduces the notion of external talent pool development and believes that public sector organisations can successful attract talent
externally through effective branding and cultivation of talent outside the organisation (Glenn 2012). This branding affects different states in diverse ways due to their lack of associational some may experience difficulty in generating sufficient pools of quality applicants (Gabris et al., 2010). The Irish case has seen an increase in industrial tension over the worsening financial returns from labour in the public sector and this will undoubtedly have an impact on its attractiveness to future talent either externally or internally. This framework will enable research into the damage external forces are causing public organisations to become isolated from external talent pools (Stier and Ventures 2007).

The competency frameworks identified earlier in the paper enable an organisation to increase its skill base through advanced talent competency design (Draganidis and Mentzas 2006, Tarique and Schuler 2010). There is little available literature in the field of public sector competency frameworks and the development of an enhanced skill base and it is intended that this framework will enable a detailed examination of the Irish example. Analysing the business strategy and training and development needs of these organisations will identify requirements in the medium to long term and coherent framework development will allow these organisation to meet these requirements (Sparrow and Bognanno 1993, Cannon-Bowers et al., 1995, Crawford and Nahmias 2010, Milner et al., 2011). This framework will enable further research to measure the impact of an inability to rewards or engage these talents once identified (Geary and Murphy 2010).

The application of these competency frameworks to Irish public sector organisations will be reviewed an line with the literature where the validity of these frameworks is mooted to work best when constantly tested and reviewed (Crossley and Jolly 2012). The aim here is to identify the right people for the right job by the competency that has been associated with the role (McClelland 1973). The frameworks are open to interpretation and the framework developed in this paper will enable analysis of the Public Appointments Service and its benefits to the organisations they serve and how they interpret and implement these frameworks.

Increased motivation through enhanced talent management strategies has been mooted throughout the literature (Rynes et al., 2005, Schuler et al., 2011, Lawler III et al., 2012, Levenson 2012). The difficulty for Irish public sector organisations is that opportunities to offer traditional motivators have diminished and innovative strategies must now be employed (Kerins and Carbery 2012). The application of this framework to these organisations will enable the strategies to be mapped and analysed for further research in the area. The results of applying this framework to the Irish public sector in this difficult trading environment will
offer insight into innovative strategies being employed by these organisations as they implement performance management right across the sector in a response to the demands of government in response to wage bargaining (Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 colloquially known as the Croke Park Agreement 1 and Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 colloquially known as the Croke Park Agreement 2).

The retention of “A” performers through enhancing talent management techniques has been identified as an import factor for private sector organisations (Handfield-Jones et al., 2001, Collings and Mellahi 2009, Grobler and Diedericks 2012). However very little primary research exists on the retention of talent in the public sector at any level (Boyne et al., 2010). Traditionally retaining “A” performers has not been an issue for Irish public sector organisations due to strong pension entitlements and favourable working environments however the previously mentioned reductions in returns from labour in these organisations may impact the retention of these personnel. (Boyne et al., 2010) asked if the impact of public organisations performance has any implications for the retention of senior management. Internationally there have been some links between public organisations performance and a turnover of senior management however in the Irish case the removal of staff at any level in the public sector is fraught with difficulty.

**Conclusion**

According to Andrews (2006) “Ultimately the civil service has a significant role to play in the future development of the social and economic wellbeing of this country. It is critical that we continue to attract people of the right calibre and that we recruit, promote and develop senior managers that we require into the future” (p, 5). When applied to the Irish public sector today this context set the background for an interesting study of a rare economic environment to develop an effective talent management strategy. It is hoped that this research will stimulate further analysis in the area of talent management within public sector organisations. This will be enhanced by model contained within the paper and applying it to these organisations in order to harness primary data. The next phase of this research will involve a round of semi structured interviews with Human Resource Managers in the various public sector organisations. This process will ascertain the impact of the embargo on recruitment and the implications of the current national economic environment is impacting the public sectors ability to create opportunities to manage and engage talent effectively. Further analysis of these interviews will enable any formal and informal talent management strategies
engaged in these organisations to be harnessed and employed with greater precision to achieve utility within these organisations.

The research addressed the scant literature on talent management within the Irish public sector and significantly, within public sector organisations during an era of restricted recruitment. The practical advancement of issues within these organisations will be of benefit to practitioners both within these organisations and other external organisations facing an era of turbulent recruitment. During times of great economic turbulence managers are expected to be innovative and talent management is an espoused and enacted commitment to implementing an integrated, strategic and technology enabled approach to human resource management (HRM) (Greer and Virick 2008; Hughes and Rog 2008) which encourages competitive advantage. The framework developed in this paper aims to map these innovative strategies for its future best practice model in the area.
Bibliography


