The definition of talent and the influence it has on the implementation of talent management practices in Irish hotels

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MA Human Resource Management

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Abstract

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- **Borna Forsek**

This study aims to identify how Irish hotels define talent and what attributes they value in their employees. With this definition, the research aims to evaluate if the implementation of their talent management strategy is in line with their own definition of talent.

In order to answer the objectives of this research, a qualitative method was used in the form of semi-structured interviews with senior managers in a sample of hotels located in Ireland.

The findings indicate that hotels in Ireand are aligned in their definition of talent and the attributes they most value in employees. However, there were variations in the implementation of talent management and development practices which indicates that the definition does not directly influence the choice of talent management practice.

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Contents

List of figures

List of appendices

Chapter 1 "Introduction"

The hotel industry has always been regarded as a transient industry for many people. It is characterised by low pay, unsociable working hours, dealing with often unsatisfied guests that leaves workers feeling isolated and emotionally fatigued (Deery Leo Jago, 2015). This physical and emotional toll on hospitality workers leads to many seeking employment in other industries where their customer service skills would have more market value or where they might find a better work-life balance. In most of the hospitality related literature we can see the same theme emerging. Therefore, finding and retaining qualified and motivated workers has always been hard for hospitality organizations (Barron, 2008).

Talent management is emerging as a positive way of engaging the workforce. The practice gained popularity in the 1990s when McKinsey and Company defined the "war for talent" in response to the difficulties organizations faced in finding and retaining their best employees (Barron, 2008). In this research the author will examine the hotel industry in Ireland to see what are the qualities that the industry values in its employees and whether talent management activities are being put into practice in accordance with these values. The author will also examine whether those hotels that engage in these activities have seen a positive benefit from implementing these programs. In the literature, employee engagement is seen as an influential factor in retaining employees and increasing productivity. The available research such as that of Yeung (2006) of the Ritz Carlton and Mkono (2016) indicate that there are positives of working in the industry and that retention is influenced by the approach hotels take towards their employees. Furthermore, the author will examine to what degree do hotels engage in talent management activities and whether they use inclusive or exclusive talent management within their organisations. There is a lot of debate in the research of talent management as to what approach is best. Some researchers argue for exclusive approaches such as Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Lewis and Heckman, 2006 where organizations develop talent pools and focus their attention on a few high performers. This allows the organization to focus their resources where they would have the most impact. On the other hand, another stream of thought is developing in the area of talent management where researchers argue for an

inclusive approach. Deery Leo Jago (2015) found that employees who are excluded from these talent pools have lower motivation and therefore are not as productive. They have an increased risk of leaving an organization. In an industry that is seeing a large turnover it is important to know which form of engagement would bring the biggest return on investment.

According to Price Waterhouse Coopers (2016) report on European hospitality trends, Dublin is at the top of the list when it comes to growth forecast for 2017. It is estimated that an additional 15 hotels or 5,000 rooms are needed to meet the growing demand. There are 13 new hotels in the pipeline with a combined total of 3,500 rooms to be completed by 2020. As more hotels are added to the inventory, this will create more jobs and demand for trained and experienced workers. There is already competition for hospitality skills among existing hotels and the introduction of more jobs will mean that existing hotels will have to compete even more to retain their talented employees. Therefore, hotels will have to differentiate themselves in terms of their talent management strategies in order to retain their key talent. Maxwell & MacLean (2008) found in their research that engaging in talent management activities has a positive influence on employee retention and in turn, the bottom line.

Even though there is a lot of research on talent management and its influence on employees, there is little research on whether its implementation is properly managed. Ross (2013) states that a clear definition of talent has to be developed before a strategy can be put in place. The aim of this research is to examine if the implementation of talent management in Irish hotels is in line with their own definition of talent.

Chapter 2 "Literature review"

2.1. The definition of talent

One of the biggest challenges of talent management is defining what is talent exactly (Ross, 2013). According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary online, talent is defined as "a special often athletic, creative, or artistic aptitude", a "general intelligence or mental power" or "the natural endowments of a person" (Talent, 2017). This shows that talent is an above average ability or skill that a person can possess. Sabuncu and Karacay (2016) agree that talent is an extraordinary skill and ability that can increase the competitive advantage of an organization through efficiency and productivity. Though, they also note that there is doubt whether talent is an innate quality or it is something that can be trained. This makes defining talent in the context of an organization very difficult. Organizations have many ways to define talent within their own context. Whether it is through developing a competency framework for each role or designing a 9 box grid; before any talent management system can be implemented, a clear definition has to be made on how the organization defines what it considers talent (Ross, 2013). Once an organization has a clear definition of talent it needs to implement a talent management strategy to manage and develop talent. Watson (2008) identifies three distinct elements of talent management which are:

- Talent selection
- Talent development
- Talent retention

Talent management is therefore a way of attracting, developing and retaining talent within the organisation. In this review of the literature the author will focus on the philosophies of talent management and how they influence the implementation of talent development within organizations.

2.2. Talent Management

In the 1990s the term talent management was developed by McKinsey and Company as a response to the "war on talent" by many organisations (Barron, 2008). Companies, large and small were having trouble finding talented workers as the shift in demographics saw many baby boomers starting to retire. However, the new entrants into the labour force were lacking the skills and experience to replace the now exiting baby boomers (Oladapo, 2014). Furthermore, the economy today is very different than just a few decades ago. Today almost 50% of work being done is knowledge work. This means that talent and human capital are key to an organization's competitive advantage (Oladapo, 2014). For this reason, Maxwell & MacLean (2008) state in their research that engaging in talent management activities to attract, retain and develop the best talent is imperative for organisations who wish to become successful. The companies that are successful today all have a competitive advantage whether it is in the product, the service, the people or any element that is difficult to imitate by the competition.

In hospitality, that element is service quality, property location and available resources such as access to training materials, international talent if part of a multinational chain or even local knowledge of staff. The property location is an element that cannot be changed. Hotel facilities are a differentiating factor that is difficult and costly to change. Hotels with better facilities will be awarded higher star ratings and will be able to charge higher prices. However, hotels that are not able to compete on star rating, facilities or location can compete on service quality. The knowledge and skill of their workforce is what will set the hotels apart. However, the hospitality industry is regarded as a low-skill, low pay and long hours career (Barron, 2008). It is difficult to attract new graduates to the industry as they are looking for more lucrative opportunities in other industries. There is a negative perception of the hospitality industry as a less than desirable choice for school leavers (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2015). Therefore, in order to improve their competitive advantage, hotels and hospitality organizations will need to develop management strategies such as talent management to ensure that they have a steady supply of good quality employees.

Furthermore, Deery Leo Jago (2015) also describes hospitality as a low skill industry and Bharwani and Butt (2010) confirm that what differentiates hospitality organisations is the quality of service delivery and this is a specific skill that creates a great competitive advantage for those organizations that can harness it. However, there are many different streams of thought on how to implement talent management in organizations. In the following sections, the author will discuss the various streams of thought on talent management and the lens through which they can be implemented.

2.2.1. Talent management streams

To engage in talent management, organisations and more importantly HR practitioners need to understand exactly what talent management is. In the last 20 years there have been many studies done on the definition of talent and talent management. However, these studies are very specific to certain industries, they are heavily focused on US culture and most of all, there is still a lack of a universal definition on what talent management encompasses (Kaewsaeng-on, Kane & Vundla 2015; Deery Leo Jago 2015; Thunnissen 2016).

There are several elements that need to be explored when looking at talent management. What are the activities involved in talent management? Who will these activities target? And finally, what is talent? In regard to the focus of this research, the researcher will look at the nature of talent and its use in the hospitality sector.

2.2.1.1. Talent management vs. HRM

In their research, Lewis and Heckman (2006) as cited in Christensen and Rog (2008) defined three popular definitions of talent management. The first stream or definition is that talent management activities are "a collection of typical human resource department practices...such as recruiting, selection, development and career and succession management" (p. 744). For this reason, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate talent management from regular human resource activities. (Thunnissen, 2016) What sets talent management apart?. The difference between talent management and regular HR practices is the level of integration with the organizational strategy and the buy in from senior management (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Deery Leo Jago, 2015). Talent management is

an integrated approach where each element ties into the strategy and the goals of the organization. As pointed out by Collings & Mellahi (2009) most CEOs agree that talent management is on top of their agenda when thinking about competitiveness as they realize that skills and experience are what differentiates them from the competition. By taking this approach, senior management is signalling that they need to attract and retain key skills (talent) to succeed. Talent management emphasizes hiring the right people, developing their skills and engaging them in the workplace to decrease turnover and increase productivity and innovation (Christensen Hughes & Rog, 2008).

2.2.1.2. Developing talent pools

The second stream of talent management is the developing of talent pools according to staffing needs of the organisation. The way this stream of thought on talent management differs from regular HRM is that it focuses on having a line of succession to replace talent within an organisation. This is very beneficial in terms of the hospitality industry that has a very high attrition rate. When an employee leaves, they take their skills with them and out of the organization. It is important to have a number of employees identified and trained to take their place in order to ensure a smooth transition. The talent pool stream of thought is by far the most prevalent in talent management literature. Lewis and Heckman (2006) argue that developing a talent pool is the essence of talent management as it identifies a group of individuals that are above average performers with exceptional skills. However, according to Gelens, Hofmans, Dries, and Pepermans (2013) sometimes identifying a group of employees can alienate those that are not selected and demotivate them resulting in a drop in performance. This will be discussed further in a following subsection of the literature review.

2.2.1.3. Identifying talent through performance

The third is identifying talented individuals and filling positions with A players while at the same time managing C players or underperformers out of the organisation. This third stream of recognizing and developing talent as an exclusive approach has been criticised by Collings & Mellahi (2009) as being impractical. If organisations staff all positions with A players they are over spending on talent that does not bring a lot of strategic advantage

to the organisation. As talent management is an integrated approach with business strategy, it is important to deliver the best results while keeping costs as low as possible.

2.2.1.4. Strategic roles

Even though most of the literature cites Lewis and Heckman (2006), Collings & Mellahi (2009) propose a fourth stream of talent management that focuses on strategic positions and making sure they are staffed with talented individuals, rather than focusing strictly on talent alone. The rationale behind this approach is that it is the position that is strategic to the business and that individuals can be trained to perform those duties.

Collings & Mellahi (2009) state that there should be a clearer definition within organisations of strategic and non strategic roles that add to the competitiveness of the firm. When these roles are identified then a talent pool should be developed and HR activities such as recruitment, engagement and talent selection should be used to fill these positions. Therefore, the fourth stream is a combination of all the previous streams of thought on talent management. The fourth stream has a rising interest in the academic and business community, however, the prevalent stream at the moment is the third where high potential individuals are identified and selected for future succession.

2.2.1.5. Individual vs. collective talent

The third stream of talent management has gained a lot of traction, and its aim is to focus on specific talent that individuals have and develop it further. Often, this involves selecting an exclusive group of individuals who are then groomed to progress within the organization (Maxwell & MacLean, 2008). These are called high performing individuals or HiPo's and are selected based on their potential. Even though it is evident in literature that this approach is prevalent in talent management, researchers such as Maxwell and MacLean (2008) notice that an exclusive approach might alienate other employees and in turn decrease their motivation and performance. This is confirmed by Swailes and Blackburn (2015) who looked at the attitudes of employees inside and outside of talent pools within organizations. They found that those employees who were selected as talent saw more career prospects and were more motivated unlike those who were outside and felt less support from the organization and fewer career opportunities. What we know

from Deery Leo Jago (2015) is that those employees that are not engaged and do not feel supported by their organization are more likely to leave in search for better opportunities elsewhere. Christensen Hughes and Rog (2008) agree with this statement and add that the leading cause of employee attrition is the misdirection of training and support away from those who are underperforming towards those that are performing well. Therefore, it is difficult to select a few employees who would have a greater impact on the business with an exclusive approach since those who are excluded will feel demotivated and in turn, the quality of service and guest satisfaction would decrease.

2.3. Talent management philosophies

Urbanocova and Vnouckova (2015) in their research of talent management philosophies determined that the way organisations see talent is how they will approach talent management. They looked at the way talent is perceived and found that it is very cultural and depends on where the organisation is located. They have found that in individualistic or western cultures, talent is seen as something innate that leads to great performance whereas in eastern cultures it is seen as an achievement that can be trained and nurtured. They analysed the talent management philosophies developed by Meyers and van Woerkom (2014) as seen below:
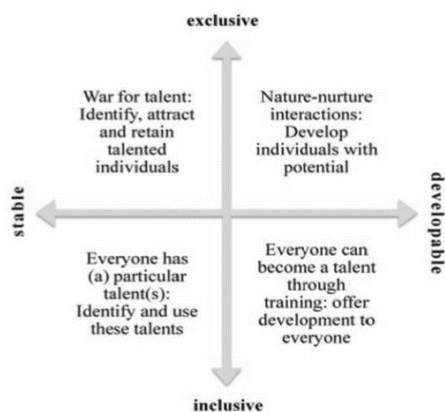
Figure 1. - Talent Management Philosophies. Source: Meyers and van Woerkom (2014) in Urbanocova and Vnouckova (2015)

From the above table we can see that there are four categories of talent management philosophies and depending on the philosophy the employer subscribes to is how they will construct their talent management strategy.

As stated by Santhanam, Kamalanabhan and Dyaram (2014) the hospitality industry is very labour intensive and hospitality organizations can only sustain a competitive advantage if they have a strong and capable workforce. As mentioned earlier, each employee has many roles within a hospitality organisation that influence the outcome for the business as there are many touch points between customers and employees. Therefore, an inclusive philosophy should be taken into account by HR Managers and General Managers when thinking about designing a talent management strategy within hotels. Developing the talents of all employees that influence the guest experience should be set as a priority.

Therefore, in order for organisations to implement a talent management program they can follow one of the three philosophies of high performance organization systems. The best practice, the best fit and the resource based view of human capital. Below the author will outline the three lenses for implementing talent management within an organization.

Best practice

The best practice approach assumes that there is one practice that is better than the rest. According to Expert Training Systems plc (2015), the best practice approach looks at case studies of organizations that are similar and then tries to transplant these practices from the original organization to the host organization. This is the easiest way to implement talent management practices into an organization because they have already been developed in a similar organization and the HR practitioners and management only need to implement it in their own organization. In an older study, but widely cited, Purcell (1999) argues the benefits and risks of best practice approaches. His argument is that best practice is in fact a good model to follow, however, most companies that go this route do not do so effectively or efficiently. In turn, the best practices are not implemented

correctly and fail to deliver results. This is due to a highly contextual nature of HRM practices. As talent management is a collection of strategically focused HRM practices, it is important to align them to the goals of the organization. In order to do so another method is available and that is best fit.

Best fit

The best fit approach builds on the best practice approach in that it adopts already developed practices, but tweaks them to "fit" the organization (de Leede and Looise, 2005). De Leede and Looise also argue that the best fit approach requires an organization to innovate in its approach to HRM and talent management policies. The organization must look at its business strategy and align its processes to complement the wider direction of the business. These processes are:

- Selection
- Training
- Appraisal
- Reward
- Job design
- Involvement or engagement

The goal of all of these strategies is to create a competitive advantage that the organization can leverage to differentiate itself from its competition. However, in this research the focus is talent management and there is a strong argument in academic and business circles that talent management is just a different name for general HRM policies. This argument will be discussed in a following subsection of inclusive vs. exclusive approach to talent management. Regardless, talent management can be implemented as a best fit approach when the organization decides what policies are in line with business strategy and what policies will help the organization achieve its goals that are specific to the organizations context.

Resource based view

The third implementation strategy is the resource based view. This strategy or school of thought developed as a response to a highly competitive environment in the 90s by Barney

(1995) who argued that the main source of an organizations competitive advantage lies in the resources that it already has. Barney (1995) states that as environments change so must the organization and the only tools at its disposal are the ones that they have. Therefore, organizations have to look inside to find the "skills abilities and resources that are unique to them" in order to properly differentiate themselves from the competition (Barney, 1995, p. 53). This is an important lens through which organizations can view talent management in hospitality. As mentioned earlier, the main differentiating factor that hospitality organizations have influence over is the service quality and delivery. This is exclusively the domain of human capital and the talents and skills within the organization. Darcy, Hill, McCabe and McGovern (2014) further advance the resource based view as a route to organizational sustainability. While today competitors can easily copy products, service delivery styles and amenities, people are the one resource that cannot be easily copied. By investing in their human capital through strategic HRM policies and talent management, organizations can retain and develop their talented employees; a resource most scarce in hospitality (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2015).

2.4. Inclusive vs. Exclusive approach to talent management

Throughout this chapter there has been reference to both exclusive and inclusive approaches to talent management. There are disagreements between academics on which approach is best. The exclusive approach identified and supported by Lewis and Heckman (2006) as cited in Christensen and Rog (2008) state that organisations should focus on individuals that exhibit talent and skills. The concentration of resources should go towards these individuals that poses the skills necessary for the organization to succeed. However, as identified by Urbanocova and Vnouckova (2015) this might not be the best approach. Organizations need to identify the culture of where it operates and their business model. Furthermore, over the last few years there has been a change in the understanding of talent management. Since the financial crisis at the end of the 2000s many companies have had to adopt how they view their employee resources. Coolings (2014) argues that organisations need to take into account more of their stakeholders and not just generating shareholder value through short termism. Talent management philosophies are moving

toward a more pluralistic approach where employee wellbeing is valued and recognized as a driver of higher performance.

Inclusive talent management, however, is a lot harder to define and in turn, create and implement. Swailes, Downs and Orr (2014) identify key elements of inclusive approaches. They argue that managing talent is highly influenced by its context. Someone who is identified as a talented employee in one setting, might not perform as well in another while doing the same job. This is due to the resources that are available to them, the team that they work in and also their state of mind. To put this in a hospitality context, someone who is a great front office manager in a city hotel, might not perform as well or even well at all in a resort hotel despite having "talents" to do so. The differences between exclusive and inclusive talent management philosophies are described in the following sections.

2.4.1. Exclusive approach to talent management

The exclusive approach to talent management means targeting specific individuals with perceived above average aptitude and skill in a particular role (Gold, Oldroyd, Chesters, Booth and Waugh, 2016). These individuals are recognized through their exemplary performance and are included into a pool of other employees for further development (Stahl, Bjorkman, Farndale, Morris, Stiles, Trevor and Wright, 2016). Stahl, et. al. (2016) identified that most companies view talent management as a system that focuses most of its energy on a select few. They classify employees into segments and reward and incentivize them accordingly. The employees at the top of the performance curve receive the most incentives and rewards. Those in the middle will receive less, and those at the bottom are incentivized to leave the organization. The percentage of top employees that are identified as top performers vary from organization to organizations. Furthermore, the criteria by which they are selected differs depending on the values that each organization puts on culture, skills, values, etc. The most often cited reason for adopting the exclusive approach to talent management is that it allows the organization to strategically allocate resources where they will have the highest return on investment (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). The CIPD (2013) in their study of talent management across many organizations found that most will organize talent management activities in this way

around specific groups of employees. Only small businesses of 50 or less employees would engage in talent management for the entire workforce. Swailes (2012) argues that this is because in large organizations the top performers disproportionally add value to the organization through their productivity. Therefore, it makes perfect sense to invest in their development as they are the firms competitive advantage. However, in recent times, there has been a shift towards a more inclusive approach to talent management which states that all employees can be considered as talent.

2.4.2. Inclusive approach to talent management

It is only in the last few years that inclusive talent management is gaining traction. The CIPD study from 2013 as mentioned in the previous section found that the majority of organizations adopted the exclusive approach. Yet the same study a few years later found that the number of organizations following the inclusive approach to talent management has increased to half of those studied (2015). The inclusive approach to talent management involves looking at the entire workforce and finding the hidden talents that can add value to the organization (Swalies, et al., 2014). Stahl et al. (2016) found that the inclusive approach is just as effective as the exclusive to identify talent, it is difficult to implement on a large scale. The problem with implementing the inclusive approach is that in any given context there will always be those that perform better than others and thus again creating exclusive talent pools. Even though it would be easy to argue that an inclusive approach is not sustainable as we cannot give everything to everyone, it can also be said that a fair distribution of resources allows organisations to find talent where no one thought to look (Turner and Kalman, 2015). Turner and Kalman (2015) further argue that the difference between an inclusive and exclusive approach is transparency and the availability of development opportunities for everyone and not just a select few. Swailes et al. (2014) confirm that this offers better opportunities to all employees and in turn allows the organization to find hidden talents within their ranks. On the other hand, they also admit that in the end this again leads to exclusivity as only the ones who pass the threshold of performance will be considered for further development. Still, in terms of hospitality where everyone is the face of the company towards the clients or guests, hotels should consider including their entire workforce in a talent management program. Sarkar

(2015) points out that the employee base should be just as diverse as the organizations client base. In hospitality, the client base is extremely diverse and by the same logic, the organization should ensure that it utilizes talent management practices in recruitment and training to its advantage.

2.5. Talent Development

After discussing the philosophies of talent management, the author will review a more specific element of talent management which is talent development. Talent development is one of three elements of talent management identified by Watson (2008). The main focus of talent development is creating a strategy to best develop its talent pool through identifying individual skills, deploying them correctly and making sure they are always available (Garavan, Carbery and Rock, 2012). There are many reasons why developing talent inhouse is preferable to trying to acquire it from outside the organization. Gusain (2017) identified the main reason for organizations choosing to develop talent from within was that the earlier companies start focusing on developing an individual's talents, the greater their impact on the organization. The benefits of this are future leaders who are familiar with the organizations business, structure, strategy and values. This creates a great return on investment for organizations that implement development programs successfully. However, since the cost of developing talent can vary from $90,000 to $250,000 it also carries a lot of risk (Gusain, 2017). If after finishing this program the employee decides to leave the organization, all the resources that were invested are effectively lost. Most employees who decide to leave after going through a talent development program do so because they feel neglected and disengaged from the job and the organization. Therefore, the design of a talent management program should include continuous engagement of potential talents (Gusain, 2017). This is of particular concern to hospitality organizations as Walsh and Taylor (2007) point out that hospitality professionals are very mobile and will leave organizations if they feel that they cannot learn any more in their current position.

2.6. Talent development in the hospitality industry

The hospitality industry is known for its transient nature and a high turnover of employees. Santhanam, Kamalanabhan and Dyaram (2014) summarised the main drivers of employee turnover in hospitality and those are: poor selection of employees at the recruitment stage, lack of proper training for employees, few career growth opportunities, nonaligned performance management systems and poor compensation compared to similar industries. These findings are also echoed by Christensen Hughes and Rog (2008) who add a poor work/life balance into the equation. It is therefore important for hospitality senior managers and HR practitioners to pay closer attention to employee engagement and inclusion into training and marketing the industry as one which provides good career advancement. According to Watson (2008) the hospitality industry is one of the highest growing industries with an annual growth rate of 8%. Yet Watson also identifies many issues that impact the negative perceptions of the industry such as bad recruitment practices and not enough synergy in the training provided to future managers.

As mentioned previously, a study done by Walsh and Taylor (2007) on hospitality employees found that a large majority of hospitality employees, but particularly graduates will leave when they have learned all that they can in their current position. However, even if they leave the organization, most will still stay within the industry. This is consistent with the findings of Mkono (2010) who argues that those who stay in the hospitality industry do so because of their personality type. Those who do not have the correct personality for working in hospitality will quickly realize and leave on their own. It is therefore very important to correctly identify potential talent and take into account their willingness to make a career within the industry. Walsh and Taylor (2007) further identified a concept of organizational commitment. They identified emotional commitment and economical commitment. The emotionally committed employees will identify with the goals and mission of an organization. The economically committed will look for monetary rewards for the work performed and are willing to leave in search of this reward. Identifying both of these types of commitment would help in developing a strategy to retain talent regardless of their commitment.

So what is talent in hospitality?

Garvan, et al. (2012) point out that hospitality organizations are in dire need of practical skills. This is confirmed in a recent study by Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2015) who state that Irish hotels are constantly looking for skills in the higher craft level skills. This includes skilled cooks, reception and front of house staff, waiting and bar staff. They point out that more organizations will have difficulty recruiting staff with specific knowledge on health and safety regulations, allergens, management skills, etc. In the past, the industry used to rely on the education sector to train for skills, however, recently more and more institutions have moved away from teaching practical skills to more management and general business subjects (Barron, 2008). This is putting a lot of pressure on hospitality organizations to train and develop their own workforce. For this reason, creating a talent management program and aligning it with the goals of the organization is increasingly important to develop and retain.

An example of a good talent management strategy is described by Yeung (2006) who analysed the Ritz Carlton and their emphasis on developing their staff to better serve their guests. What is interesting about their approach is that they used an inclusive approach and they did not train for skills, but values. All employees at the Ritz Carlton are included in this development and as a result, the specific hotel was able to reduce their turnover to just 15% as opposed to the regional average of over 29%.

This example shows how the Ritz Carlton strategy both increased staff satisfaction with their work and also reduced turnover to allow further investment in development.

Other hotels are developing talent using graduate management programs (Watson, 2017). These programs aim to attract fresh graduates to the industry and develop them into future managers. However, Watson (2017) points out that recent graduates are looking for quick career advancement and require a lot of investment to stay in the industry.

Chapter 3 "Research question"

The author of this paper aims to identify the nature and definition of talent within hospitality organizations in Ireland. Furthermore, how does this definition influence the philosophy and implementation of talent management within hospitality organizations in Ireland. At present, talent management is an evolving field and there are many

interpretations of the best way to utilize it. Different types of organizations will define talent in the way that best suits them and they will deploy talent management practices accordingly.

The author of this study will examine the following objectives:

Objective 1: Identify the definition of "talent" within hospitality organizations in Ireland

Sub-objectives

1. Is there a clearly defined vision of "talent" in Irish hotels
2. Is there a common definition of talent for all Irish hotels or does each hotel define talent according to their own context?
3. How did this definition come about? Was it organic and created based on organizational needs or was it structured and planned?

Objective 2: to examine if the definition of talent has an impact on the implementation of talent management strategy within Irish hotels

Sub-objectives

1. How have Irish hotels structured their talent management strategy
2. Which philosophical framework do they subscribe to? Exclusive, inclusive or mixed?

Objective 3: Examine the extent to which developing a talent management framework has benefited the hotel in managing their inhouse talent

Sub-objectives

1. Identify the key areas where hotels have skills vacancies
2. Identify how they have implemented talent management strategies to fill those roles
3. What is the main focus of talent development? Career management, succession planning or skills re-training?

Chapter 4 "Methodology"

This chapter will outline the philosophical and practical considerations of this research. The author will analyse the various methods available and present the rationale for selecting a specific method. This chapter will also pose the main research question and how the author has collected and analysed the data.

In all types of research the goal of the researcher is to be as unbiased and balanced as possible (Warren and Karner, 2010). In this research the author will try to find out the "truth" to the best of their ability. Yet, since the research is conducted by people some bias will be present depending on the values and beliefs of the researcher (Greener, 2008). It is up to the researcher to present their beliefs and values by outlining their methodology and philosophical view of the world in order for others to understand how the research was conducted. Therefore, in this chapter the author will discuss the various philosophies of conducting research and express the rationale for choosing a specific philosophy and research method.

4.1. Research Philosophy

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) developed the research onion of research philosophy. They outlined how each level from the top down influences research design and identified three top level assumptions about research philosophies: ontology, epistemology and axiology.

4.1.1. Ontology

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) describe ontology as the philosophy of the nature of reality. This is the view in which our reality is constructed and how we see the world. Bryman (2016) goes further in describing ontology as the view of social entities such as organizations or culture and how they are constructed. Bryman differentiates between Objectivism and Constructionism.

Within ontology, the objectivist philosophy sees the organization as one entity and external to those that are part of it. The organization to them is an object capable of doing and learning. Also, this view of the world suggests that organizations and cultures are "repositories of widely shared values and customs into which people are socialized so that they can function as good citizens or as full participants" (Bryman, 2016, p32) This view of the world corresponds with a unitarist view of organizations where each member is working towards a common goal.

The philosophy of constructionism on the other hand sees the organization as a manifestation of small interactions of all its parts. Each part having an impact in the construction of the organization; giving it the ability to be constructed and re-constructed depending on the interaction between all the actors. The constructionist view of the world corresponds with the pluralist perspective where each part of an organization has their own goals and the negotiation and agreement between these parts make up the organization.

The researcher sees the world through an objectivist ontological philosophy. Talent management as described in the literature is a way of promoting the company culture and socializing all actors for the benefit of the organization as a whole.

4.1.2. Epistemology

Epistemology is the nature of knowledge and an answer to the question "to what extent can we know something is true?" (Greener, 2008, p34). Is a phenomenon an objective reality that can be measured or is it a manifestation of an interpreted reality? Epistemological views guide our views as to what data is valid and best reveals the truth. There are two main views of what constitutes valid data and they are positivism and interpretivism. These are two contrasting views that offer researchers a wide variety of data collection methods (Bryman, 2016).

Positivism is closely related to the ontological philosophy of objectivism. It emphasizes the scientific and empirical method of data collection where the most valid data is collected through a large sample and allows for large scale generalizations (Saunders et al., 2016). Positivist focus on uncovering facts that are observable and measurable and in their view the only credible way to observe reality.

Interpretivism on the other hand is critical of the positivist approach to research in the social sciences (Bryman, 2016). Interpretivists argue that humans create their own reality and therefore social research cannot make sweeping generalizations on human experience. Interpretivists aim to develop an "understanding of human action rather than the forces that are deemed to act on it" (Bryman, 2016), p28.

In this research, the author will follow the interpretivist philosophy. Talent management is given meaning by the people who are involved in developing it. Therefore the author will look to uncover the meanings that are given to the process of developing talent management and its implementation in the organization.

4.1.3. Axiology

Saunders et al. (2016) describe axiology as values and ethics that guide our research. The values of the researcher have a great impact on the choice of research topic and the research philosophy. They argue that it is important to be aware of our own values and ethics as researchers in developing our topic and research design. Our values can greatly impact the results of the study if we are not aware of them. Therefore, it is important to develop a personal value statement as part of our research that would show whether our own biases have had an effect on the research. The personal value statement will be part of the limitations of this study.

4.2. Research Paradigm

Research paradigms are clusters of believes that guide research (Greener, 2008). There are several paradigms as described by Saunders et al. (2016) and they are Interpretive, Functionalist, Radical humanist and Radical Structuralist. These paradigms deal with the internal organization of cultures, societies and organizations within the objectivist-constructionist ontological philosophy. The two opposing forces are the regulation paradigm vs. the radical change paradigm. Researchers looking through the regulation perspective look at how things can be improved within the current way of doing things. On the other hand, the radical change perspective is concerned with developing entirely new ways of functioning.
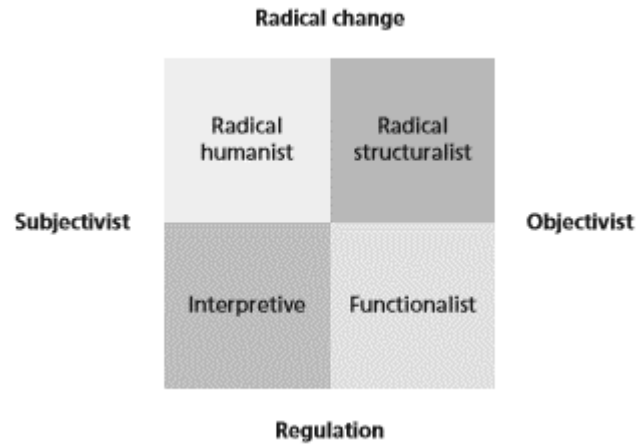
Figure 2. Four paradigms for organisational analysis (Saunders et al., 2016)

In this research, the researcher will take the regulation perspective as talent management is already an established term. The aim of the research is to see how talent management can be improved in organizations who are already using it. Therefore, the end paradigm in this research is Functionalist; a mix of a regulation perspective and an objectivist ontological philosophy. Even though in most cases the functionalist paradigm is used in cases of objectivist/positivist research it can be used in interpretative research as well (Saunders et al. 2016). This is important as the personal values of the researcher are objectivist, but the research is interpretivist.

4.3. Research Strategy

Along with the research philosophy, the research strategy plays an important part in designing research. There are three research strategies as described by Saunders et al. (2016). They are all concerned with developing theory, but the way they go about it is different. The three strategies are deduction, induction and abduction.

4.3.1. Deduction vs. induction vs. abduction

Greener (2008) explains the difference between an inductive and deductive approach. A deductive research strategy starts by looking at the available theory and then developing hypotheses. The hypotheses are then put through rigorous testing to make sure that they are either correct or false. Induction on the other hand looks at collecting data first and

organizing it. The researcher then develops a theory from the data and explains it in the context of already available literature. Abduction is the mix of the two where the researcher uncovers a "surprising fact" that leads them to develop theories that are different than the original (Saunders et al. 2016, p148). Saunders et al. (2016) state that research can use a combination of strategies to achieve their goals.

This research uses a combination of strategies. Even though deduction is often associated with objectivism and positivism, this research started through deduction. The author looked at secondary sources of data in the literature and developed a series of questions to uncover whether their assumptions about talent management are correct or false. Therefore, this research is a combination of deductive and inductive strategies.

Another variable associated with research strategy is the data collection strategy. Will the research data be quantitative, qualitative or a mixture of both. The choice of these three strategies has a very strong influence on research design.

4.3.2. Quantitative vs. qualitative

Quantitative data deals with numbers and statistics and is often associated with a deductive approach. When collecting quantitative data, researchers will use surveys or methods that will allow them to collect large amounts of data that they will analyse. Qualitative data is associated with interviews and collecting data that is subjective and needs to be interpreted to construct knowledge (Greener, 2008).

This research uses a qualitative strategy to construct knowledge of talent management in Irish hotels. Since the current literature points to a wide variety of definitions of talent and the methods to implement talent management it is therefore best to analyse why there are specific variations in the definition. How does or does the definition, if different, influence the implementation of talent management philosophies and practices in hotels?

Many studies on talent management have used the quantitative approach to gathering data and as such were not able to dig deeper into what elements define talent. Therefore, a qualitative method was deemed most appropriate for this research as the researcher wanted to understand the process behind developing a definition of talent.

4.4. Research design

Warren and Karner (2010) identify three methods of gathering qualitative data. These are field research, interviews and analyzing textual or visual records of the time period or subject being studied. For the purpose of this research, the author has chosen to use interviews. Saunders et al. (2016, p372) view interviews as a way to "gather valid and reliable data that are relevant to your research question(s) and objectives".

There are many types of interviews and the most common division is structured semi structured or unstructured. The difference between the two is that a structured interview has a set of questions and each participant is asked the exact same questions in the same order. This helps quantify the data and helps avoid any bias in the questions and answers.

On the other hand there are semi structured or unstructured interviews. These are a lot more informal and they allow the researcher to dig deeper once they found an area that they would like to explore. In this research, the researcher is looking to find meaning in the definition of talent in Irish hotels and a semi structured interview is the best choice for this task. The questions will serve as a guide as they are linked to the three objectives. However, if there is an area that is mentioned during the interview that the researcher has not foreseen then the semi-structured interview allows for further probing.

4.5. Sample

As mentioned above, the primary data for this research will be collected using semi structured interviews. The interviews took place over a 3 week period where 8 interviews were conducted. The researcher contacted 20 managers at 20 properties around Ireland. Their contact details were found using LinkedIn, Google and calling various properties around the country.

All subjects were managers at their properties. The rationale for choosing managers as opposed to line level employees is because talent management programs are implemented by management in order to develop line level employees. The research itself deals with how talent is defined and how talent management is implemented. Therefore, it made

sense to interview those who were the decision makers in defining talent and implementing the program.

After making initial contact via email, the researcher was able to secure 8 interviews with managers from 8 properties. These included HR managers, Front Office managers, F&B managers and Meeting and Events managers. All of these areas are either operational departments that depend on talent to deliver service to guests and clients or stakeholders in developing a cohesive talent management program. Unfortunately, most subjects that were contacted were either on annual leave at the time this research was conducted or they declined to participate.

4.6. Interviews

The interviews, as mentioned previously were semi structured. This allowed the researcher to ask probing questions and explore the subject. Therefore, the questions were open ended and designed to give the subjects a guide and space to talk about the subject.

Due to time constraints, all interviews were done by phone and recorded. All participants were informed that the interviews were strictly confidential and anonymous. After the interview, the researcher transcribed the audio recording and stored both the audio and transcript on their PC. This has allowed the researcher to have all of the data in one place for the analysis.

4.7. Data Analysis

After the interviews have been transcribed they will be analysed through a process of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves looking for patterns and connecting them to each other to develop an understanding of the subject (Saunders et al. 2016) This process offers great flexibility in analysing qualitative data by allowing the researcher to make connections between subtle clues given by the respondents. After the major themes have been established they will be categorized according to the objectives of the study.

The interview questions are already segregated as per the objectives, but there might be themes that come out of answers to other questions that could apply to all categories. It is therefore important to have a structure into which to slot certain themes that emerge.

Saunders et al. (2016) identify two approaches to analysing data. The deductive and the inductive approach. The deductive approach aims at developing themes in accordance to the established theories discussed in the literature. This is a controversial method as it may unfavourably direct the researcher away from what the data is presenting. The second method is the inductive approach and that is developing an understanding and theory from the data itself and afterword linking it to the established theory.

The researcher will choose the inductive approach as the data might not match with the theory. In this case, the research will offer possible explanations as to why this is.

4.8. Limitations

Even though the researcher has tried to create a flawless study, it is not feasible in the time that the researcher took to do this study. The researcher had only 6 months to complete the research and it would not be feasible to get a large enough sample in that amount of time. The sample size, could have been larger in order to be more representative of the many views of talent management in Ireland. Also, considering the number of hotels in Ireland, the researcher was only able to get 8 participants despite sending out many requests for participation. Furthermore, the researcher himself has at one point been part of the hospitality industry and it is possible that personal values and biases have influenced the data analysis of this research. The biases could be as the researcher has been exposed to talent management programs in hospitality in the past and might view some programs more favorably than others. Even though everything was done to minimize the effect of personal biases the researcher cannot guarantee that their expectations and values did not influence the end result of the research.

4.9. Ethical considerations

This research was conducted on managers in a hospitality setting who were all willing participants. All participants gave their informed consent to be a part of this research and the researcher did their best to explain the objectives. The participants were also made aware that they may request to be removed from the research at any point with no consequence to themselves or their organization.

Chapter 5 "Analysis and Findings"

This chapter will present the findings that were uncovered through the 8 interviews that the researcher has conducted as part of this research. The findings will be ordered in line with the research objectives and sub objectives and will show what is the perception of talent and how are talent management systems implemented within Irish hotels.

5.1. Objective 1 - Identify the definition of "talent" within hospitality organizations in Ireland

Sabuncu and Karacay (2016) described talent as an extraordinary skill and ability that a person possesses. The Merriam Webster dictionary also defines talent as an exceptional skill and ability or "a special often athletic, creative or artistic aptitude". However, the research shows that the definition of talent in hospitality or at least Irish hotels is not a specific skill or ability. It is the attitude of the person and their approach to doing the job. This is clearly shown through the interviews conducted as part of this research. The researcher asked all the participants to define in their own words what they would consider talent in an employee. After a short pause the definitions that they gave didn't mention any specific skill but rather:

"So… in the hotel here in [name of hotel removed] we define talent as… umm, you know, people or employees who have evident passions for what they're doing and more important than that, that they strive every single day to get better at what they are doing and that they want to do that for the years to come" (Participant 1)

"Umm, I suppose it is the kind of people that we see that have the potential to be developed in line with the business needs or business strategy" (Participant 2)

"Talent is someone with the potential to achieve more. It's seeing potential in someone. Whatever job they have they need to take a leading role and the next stage for us is to develop them" (Participant 3)

"Someone that goes beyond the call of duty… Someone who works at an exceptional level and tries to go the extra mile… In a hotel customer service is essential and its someone who is showing true leadership from the time that they begin with us" (Participant 4)

27

"Colleagues will interact with guests and their attitude, behaviour will be considered talent. Skills that you'll need for example kitchen, restaurant can be trained so definitely the primary focus is the personality behaviour and attitude" (Participant 5)

The rest of the participants followed the same direction in describing talent in their own words which shows the researcher that talent, when applied to hospitality organizations in Ireland, is not a specific skill, but rather an attitude. Of course, when the researcher probed deeper and asked one participant to describe their perfect front office employee, the answer shifted from abstract qualities to the more practical and measurable skills. The participant mentioned that front office employees have to:

"be fully presentable… polite, courteous, attentive, will pick up on the little things like body language… they will also need good organizational skills… multi-tasking… finance…" (Participant 8).

These are skills that are very valuable, but they are different to the overarching definition of talent mentioned which is "passion", "leadership", "potential". Current literature defines talent management as a strategic way of developing an organizations human capital and looks at potential rather than specific skills which would be the domain of HRM (Thunnissen, 2016). Employees who are considered talented are the ones who enjoy the work that they do and do it well regardless of which department they are in and what their role is. This is in line with the research done by Yeung (2006) on the Ritz-Carlton, a hotel chain that focused on developing attitudes and values in order to increase productivity and employee satisfaction.

The first sub objective of this question is whether there is a clear definition of talent in Irish hotels? Ross (2013) argues that before any talent management system can be put in place, an organization must clearly define what it considers talent. It is clear from the responses in this research that there is a consensus in Irish hospitality on what talent is or what talent looks like. Irish hoteliers consider passion and attitude as the primary talent they look for in people. This is supported in the literature by the study conducted by Mkono (2010) who found that personality and attitude will determine whether an employee will stay and find success in the industry or move on. Due to the high attrition

rate in the hospitality industry and the costs involved in recruitment and training, it is important to manage those that are passionate about their work and perform well.

The second sub objective is to see whether this definition of talent is consistent between all hotels or does it change depending on the environment in which the hotel operates?

The participants in this research work at independent hotels, multinational chains, city hotels and rural resorts. The overall consensus of all participants is that talent is the same across all types of hotels. However, there is one notable finding that needs to be addressed from a participant that oversaw a change in their hotel ownership from independently operated to being part of a large chain. This participant, when asked to describe if there were any changes that they noticed in how talent is managed between the two stated:

"*[before].. say, you'd have a head of department with multiple controls over [muffled voice] such as a front office manager was also IT manager and was also in charge of running a lot of other elements… now there is a lot of departmentalization coming in where they say, you don't need to worry about that anymore… we have an IT guy and the IT department taking over… it's reidentifying some of the talents that used to be there… while it doesn't necessarily take away from the talent it takes away from the responsibility which can often encourage talent…*" (Participant 3)

The definition of talent did not change, but the responsibility of those involved changed so that they could focus on their area and become more structured. This links back to the best practice, best fit and resource based view where each organization will structure itself based on their own context. In this case it seems that while part of the group, the best practice approach is used to standardize processes throughout the group.

The third sub objective is to find out how the definition of talent came about. Was it an organic evolution depending on current needs or was it a planned structure taken as best practice?

The answers were mixed and while those that are part of multinational chains such as Participant 3 in the quote above, those at independent hotels define talent organically.

"No, it's definitely organic and we don't have a set policy on what is considered talent." (Participant 6)

"we are a new enough organization so we can develop the definition ourselves. We haven't adapted anything from other organizations." (Participant 2)

5.2. Objective 2 – Examine if the definition of talent has an impact on the implementation of talent management strategy within Irish hotels.

The purpose of this objective is to examine if the definition of talent influences the decision on how to develop talent in Irish hotels. To do this we have to see how have Irish hotels structured their talent management strategy. The research sub objectives will help in analysing the findings from the interviews.

The findings from the 8 interviews that were conducted found that talent management is not as common as the researcher originally thought. There are a few hotels that state that they do not have a clear talent management strategy.

When asked whether they had a talent management strategy in place, Participant 6 stated: *"No, that's the honest truth and this is something that we're working on"*.

Participant 3 stated *"At the moment we have a leadership development program"*

Participant 1 stated: *"We don't have a talent management system per se, but we keep track of people's productivity and make sure we know who is performing and who isn't. We have performance reviews every 6 months to make sure everyone is on track."*

Even without a clearly defined talent management program those hotels that state that they do not engage in talent management, do have programs to develop their employees and bring their performance and career in line with the organization. As this research is based on talent development within talent management the findings indicate that all hotels do in fact develop their employees in a strategic way.

The second sub objective is to examine what kind of talent development framework do hotels in Ireland subscribe to? Are they inclusive of all employees, is there a selected few that are chosen by management or is there a mixed approach?

When asked to describe how talent is chosen to participate in the development program the responses were as follows:

"we train everyone to the same standards, but investing in someone who we know will leave for any reason doesn't make a lot of business sense. We would rather invest in people who are studying hospitality and want to make it their career… Those that indeed have a passion for hospitality and will stay for the long term.. but we treat everyone the same and we don't discriminate if we see talent in someone and not someone else… Discriminating would be unfair and against our values" (Participant 1)

"the basics are that it depends on their performance in their current job. We use performance appraisals to mark those who are doing well and we are looking at guest and colleagues comments. We also look at the effort that they put in themselves" (Participant 2)

"Whatever job they have they need to take a leading role and the next stage for us is to develop them. We want to identify that spark in people. A good manager knows how to notice it." (Participant 3)

"We interview people interested in the program what skills they have and why they're interested in the program? One of the criteria we look at is what they have done with the company. Have they gone beyond the call of duty to learn new things instead of just regular day to day work… People can apply for it, but to go to the next stage you will be shortlisted. The same criteria applies whether they go the extra mile, etc." (Participant 4)

"We would tell them that we see potential and we will put them in a program" (Participant 6)

"Yes, the program is available to everyone regardless of which department they're in" (Participant 7)

The findings indicate that there are mixed approaches to selecting candidates to be part of a development program. In some hotels these programs are available to all that apply and then are selected, in others, managers select those that perform well and invite them to be part of the program. Even though a lot of hotels use an inclusive approach where development programs are application based, other hotels create an exclusive talent pool of candidates that they develop into future leaders. This is further complicated by the response from Participant 1. Even though they practice inclusion and develop everyone the same, they realize that in hospitality and the fluid workforce, it is difficult to make business sense to do this. On the other hand, participant 7 outlined a reason why they use the inclusive approach as there are so many different skills that people can contribute so it would not be fair if people were excluded:

"We do look at their past performance and it is very important that they all pass their probation, but we cannot grade everyone based on their past performance because not everyone will have the same exposure. So if someone working in food and beverage is applying for a duty manager program, of course they won't have as much knowledge as someone who worked in another department where they have more exposure." (Participant 7)

This shows us that some hotels recognize that it's not about experience, but about the willingness to progress and apply themselves and is thus in line with their view of talent and their definition of the same.

5.3. Objective 3 – Examine the extent to which developing a talent management framework has benefited the hotel in managing their inhouse talent

In order to answer this question, there are a few sub objectives that need to be answered. The first sub objective is to find out which areas do hotels have critical skills vacancies. In the literature, the researcher quoted the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2015) who found that the number one skill shortage in Ireland is for high level practical skills such as experienced receptionists, waiters, chefs, etc. The findings indicate that this is

correct in the hotels as participants mentioned the same concerns as mentioned in the literature as per the examples below:

"Definitely and everyone has felt this across the industry. Chefs mostly and it's mostly monetary reasons. There are a lot of tech companies getting involved and taking people out of our positions and offering higher rewards for similar positions. They can transfer their skills over to those positions." (Participant 3)

"Most hotels lack chefs at the moment and it takes us a lot of time to find chefs. Most of the chefs that we're taking in we're building them up. Chefs are sought after everywhere and they can choose where they work. They can work somewhere where they get paid double, work Monday to Friday, etc." (Participant 4)

It seems that chefs and kitchen staff are the most sought after skills in the industry. The findings also reveal that this is due to those skills being transferable to other industries. As described by one participant:

"People are now more competitive and there are opportunities at Facebook or Google where they also need waiters or chefs and they can work 9-5 so that's our competition." (Participant 2)

The findings suggest that hotels have a lot of competition for the same positions and it is difficult to compete on working conditions alone. In the literature, the researcher identified that one of the main reasons for attrition in the hospitality industry is unsociable working hours and relatively low pay. Therefore, hotels must find new ways of either attracting talent or training from within.

The researcher found that most hotels use their development program to re-train their employees for positions where there are skills vacancies. As the responses show:

"Yes of course we do have a lot of opportunities for people to move into positions such as kitchen porters into chefs, etc… The company will fund their training and education in order to bring up their skills… The amount of people taking advantage of it is less than in other areas, but there are a lot of guys taking advantage of it" (Participant 3)

"*At the moment, we're looking for chefs or anyone who is interested in being a chef. They work through the kitchen as kitchen porter, etc… There is a huge focus on that at the moment. When they start from the bottom they have a commitment to the hotel*" (Participant 4)

"*Yes, we use quiet periods to upskill our workforce.*" (Participant 5)

Therefore, to answer the second sub objective, some hotels have turned their attention of developing people and re skilling them to fill vacancies that are difficult to fill through outside recruitment. On the other hand, there are hotels that use their talent development programs in order to fill leadership roles rather than focusing on filling skills gaps. When asked how does their hotel deal with a skill shortage when it occurs, participant 2 stated "*Sometimes we have to restructure the departments and develop people [into managers] to manage these skills shortages*".

The main reason for this is given by Participant 5, but this opinion is commonly shared by other participants: "*Turnover is high. There are lots of seasonal workers that go back to college, traveling, etc. 30% of our workforce will be structured and fixed. Others will be fluid depending on time of year, etc. We don't do too much to maintain the fluid workforce.*"

Participant 1 as stated previously also believes that it wouldn't make business sense to invest in people that are not passionate about the industry and participant 7 stated "*Hospitality is an easy job to get into so a lot of people are taking it just because they can't get anything else. So they are not there because they want to, but because they have to. Someone who wants to be there will get a lot more out of it.*"

Regardless, hotels still invest in all people, but those that are seen as true talent will get the most benefit.

Chapter 6 "Discussion"

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the implications of the findings in this research and possible future research to address any limitations. The findings are generally in line with the current body of knowledge as found in the literature.

The primary research question is what is the definition of talent in Irish hotels and whether this definition influences the type of talent management strategy implemented in hotels. The first objective was to identify the definition of talent in Irish hotels. The definition given by all respondents was that they define talent as an abstract form of attitude and behaviour and the willingness to do more than is required. There was no reference to specific skills or knowledge that someone would need to possess in order to be considered a "talented" employee. The literature on talent in hospitality is more specific in terms of what it looks for in employees that would be considered talent. The literature suggest that these are employees with specific skills that add to the functioning of the hotel and those that have practical experience. The discrepancy between the literature and the findings in this section can be attributed to the limitations of the researcher as not being a skilled interviewer as the specific skills were identified in other questions. Yet, the findings do show that hotels have a clear definition of who they consider valuable in their operation. As Ross (2013) identifies the need for a clear definition in order to correctly position a talent management program, the findings are in line with the literature in regard to aligning their talent management programs with their own definition.

The talent development programs identified in the findings range from exclusive talent pools to inclusive programs that encompass all employees in the organization. However, some hotels do not state that they have a talent management program in place. They do manage their employees and their performance, but they do not engage them as talent. However, looking at the responses and the programs that they have in place, the researcher can conclude that they are indeed talent development programs even if the respondents do not identify them as such. Of the responses that do not mention having talent management programs, the researcher has identified that they identify talent through performance as per the third talent management stream mentioned in the literature. Participant 5 and participant 6 state that they have a fixed percentage of long serving staff

and that they do not engage their fluid workforce. This is emphasized by Participant 1 who does not see a business sense in developing those that could ultimately leave the organization for better opportunities. Yet, the organization that participant 1 belongs to does give everyone an equal chance towards development even though they are not as engaged in the process.

Most hotels do subscribe to the inclusive philosophy where each employee is free to apply for development and is then considered based on their past performance. Urbanocova and Vnouckova (2015) stated that talent management programs will generally be formed based on how organizations define talent. Since the definitions identified do not mention specific skills it is therefore understandable that any employee should be included and developed to take on leadership roles or to develop skills that would advance the operation of the organization. The research by the CIPD (2015) also showed that more and more hotels are moving towards an inclusive program that would enhance the productivity of their entire workforce.

One of the reasons for including everyone and giving them the resources to develop is because of the high attrition rate in the hospitality industry. The literature and the findings identify that there is a great shortage of skills in the industry and engaging everyone gives hotels a chance at reducing this turnover. The main parallel that can be found in the literature is that by Christensen Hughes and Rog (2008) who state that the main cause of attrition is due to the misdirection of training and support. Those employees who feel that they are not supported are at greater risk of leaving the organization. Therefore, it makes sense that hotels should engage everyone in order to reduce the cost of turnover and attracting new talent. Swailes and Blackburn (2015) also stated that the creation of talent pools pushes people out of the organization if they are not included in the definition of talent and in the select few who are included in the development program. It reduces their motivation to perform and therefore reduces productivity. By giving everyone a chance for further development, hotels are engaging their employees and motivating them to develop further. Of course, there will be those that do not see a future in the industry and all participants acknowledged this. However, with so much competition from other

businesses that require the same talents it is important that hotels develop programs that would give them the greatest return on investment.

The third objective is to identify how much benefit have hotels gained by introducing a talent development program. It is not clear in the findings how much hotels have reduced their turnover as the participants have not shared their statistics. However, what is known is that they did develop programs for re skilling employees to fill skills gaps. They are also enthusiastic about those programs which points towards their relative effectiveness in mitigating attrition and filling roles that would otherwise be left empty. The practical implications of including everyone in the program gives hotels a chance to reduce turnover and in turn to reduce costs while retaining the key talents and attributes needed to operate the business as efficiently as possible.

6.1. Recommendations for further research

The research identified that hotels in Ireland do implement some form of talent development programs and that those programs are mostly inclusive of all employees. The research also showed that hotels have found some success in re skilling their employees to fill the skills gaps experienced across the industry. What this research did not find and did not ask was whether there was a shift from an exclusive talent development program to an inclusive one? Have hotels within the industry made a shift as a result of poor results of an exclusive approach? Also, if there was no change in the implementation strategy, would a change yield better results? Since the industry is experiencing a great skills shortage, retaining talented employees is extremely important and further research in the methods to achieve this is needed.

Chapter 7 "Conclusion"

This research looked at the field of talent management specifically in the hospitality industry in Ireland. The industry is characterised by high turnover and currently with a great skills shortage. The research sought to identify how talent is defined within the industry and whether this definition influences the implementation of talent management practices within Irish hotels. The primary purpose of this question was to understand the effectiveness of talent management programs in Irish hotels and whether their implementation led to addressing the skills gap in the industry.

In addressing these questions the research found that hotels are actively trying to engage their employees through talent development programs and that they are finding ways to train all employees and develop their skills to be more productive and engaged in the organization. The problems that hotels are facing is that many do not see this industry as their first choice. As hotels face competition for key skills from other industries that offer better working conditions, hotels are finding it hard to retain key talent.

7.1 Recommendations

From what the research suggests, the main problem in the industry is that people are leaving due to working conditions and relatively low pay. It was identified that other industries are more attractive in both. However, due to the nature of hospitality it is difficult to make a case for increasing wages. Financially it would create a great burden on the organization, but it is not clear if it would have a desired effect. Another point that was identified is that there is a group of people who enjoy working in this environment and choose to make it a career. Therefore, hotels should focus their attention on these individuals. Since talent development programs are already in place, a shift to an exclusive approach could be a viable alternative as it would focus attention on those who are most likely to be ambassadors for the organization and the industry.

Another recommendation would be to focus more attention on graduates entering the industry. Visiting colleges and developing college leavers would have a greater impact than trying to develop those that are entering the industry out of necessity. The literature shows that there are many graduates who change jobs due to lack of engagement, but still

stay within the industry. Organizations that can provide focused support for graduates could reap the benefits of greater loyalty with minimum cost.

Personal learning statement

This research was extremely challenging, but very rewarding. The researcher learned a lot about the hospitality industry, talent management and the importance of developing people. While conducting the interviews the researcher had a chance to connect with key people working in the industry to get a better understanding of hospitality in Ireland. Even though the researcher worked in the industry previously, each country and each region have specific elements unique to them. It was fun exploring what those elements are and to see how people in the industry perceive their role. In the literature hospitality is described as a career with long unsociable working hours, low pay and generally not very appealing. However, while speaking with those that work in the industry the researcher has seen a different side. Hotels invest in those who see it as their career and eventually the skills that people gain by working in hotels can be used both in work and outside. The main takeaway from this research is that in any job and in any career, those that go the extra mile and show interest will be rewarded.

Along with gaining knowledge about the hospitality industry in Ireland, the researcher also gained knowledge and skills in conducting research and asking questions. Firstly, conducting research develops critical thinking skills and the ability to filter and sort information. There is a lot of information available on any subject whether it is in books, articles, online journals, videos, etc. Some of the information is good, accurate and valid while a vast majority is not. It is important to be able to see the difference and to accept disagreeing points of view. If there are two ideas that are direct opposites, it does not mean that one is right and the other is wrong. They can both be right and they can both be wrong, but understanding how both came to exist is more important than whether they are right or wrong. This skill is not only important in conducting academic research, but in life in general.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Questions

1. Can you describe how you define talent in your organization?
2. Can you describe the process that you go through to identify talent in your organization?
3. Can you describe the type of talent that you want to attract in this organization?
4. Can you tell me how closely does the actual talent in your organization meet the ideal needs of the organization?
5. How often do you recruit new employees?
6. What are the qualities that you look for when interviewing potential hires?
7. Do you have a central strategy to develop talent within the organization?
8. Do you delegate training and talent identification to line managers?
9. How would you describe your performance measurement system?
10. What would you say is the main motivating factor for your employees to do well in their job?
11. When looking at all the employees within your organization, would you say that their talents are fully utilized?
12. How do you reward talented employees?
13. How do you motivate employees that are not identified as "talent"? (if they subscribe to the exclusive approach)
14. Do you engage in succession planning for managerial roles?
15. Do you encourage internal promotion or do you promote bringing skills in from the outside?
16. What are some of the hardest roles to fill at your organization and why do you think that is?
17. Do you have a cross-training program at your hotel?
    a. If yes, what has been its impact on the business?
18. What would be some of the main difficulties in attracting talent?
19. In your own words, how do you think people view the hospitality industry in Ireland?
20. What is your opinion on the outlook of the war for talent in the hospitality in Ireland in the near future?
21. What area of talent do you most focus on? Attracting talented individuals, training current staff, retaining talented employees or all equally?
22. Do you have a developed talent management strategy?
23. What is the ratio of part time workers to full time workers at your organization?
24. Do you focus on employees that have displayed talent or do you try to develop talent (skills) in each employee?
25. When interviewing employees, do you focus more on skill or cultural fit?

Appendix B – Letter to participants

<u>**Interview Consent Form**</u>

<u>Title of Research Project:</u>

The effects of talent management practices on employee recruitment, engagement and retention in four and five star Dublin hotels

<u>Name and Position of Researcher:</u> Borna Forsek

Master of Arts in Human Resource Management

National College of Ireland

- ☐ I confirm that I have read an understood the information sheet for the above study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason
- ☐ I give my permission to record my interview through audio recording measures
- ☐ I give my permission to the researcher to use direct and indirect quotes in their project
- ☐ I agree to take part in this interview for this research project and I understand that it is completely confidential and anonymous

Participant   **Researcher**

Name: _____   Name: Borna Forsek

Date: _____   Date: 17 July 2017

Signature: _____   Signature:

Appendix C – Interview Information sheet

TITLE OF THE STUDY

The effects of talent management practices on employee recruitment, engagement and retention in four and five star Dublin hotels

WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT

My name is Borna Forsek and as part of my Master of Art in Human Resources Management degree I am conducting research on the effects of talent management in Dublin hotels. The primary motivation behind this research is to define the term talent management as it is used in Irish hotels and to examine how it is used and to what effect in recruiting, engagement and employee retention.

This is an exploratory study and as such I do not have any hypothesis on the nature of talent management, its use and effectiveness in hotels in Ireland.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?

If you agree to take part in this research, this would involve a semi-structure interview either in person or over the phone at your convenience.

The main question topics include:

• How is talent defined in your organization?

• What talent management practices are used in your organization to attract and retain talent?

• What is the impact of these practices?

The interviews will be recorded using an audio recording device. I will also be taking notes during the interview to highlight key points. These recordings and notes will only be available to myself and my supervisor at the National College of Ireland for the purpose of grading my Masters thesis. Once the thesis is submitted and graded, all recordings and notes will be deleted and destroyed.

Participation is completely anonymous and strictly confidential. Your organization, management and colleagues will not see any of your information.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may decide at any time to withdraw from participating. You will also be able to request any notes or recording of our interview.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?

This research deals with talent management practices in Dublin hotels. As an active Human Resources practitioner in a hotel in Dublin, you deal directly with talent management and hotel policy. Your insight and ideas would be very valuable to this research.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you have the right to refuse participation, refuse to answer any question and withdraw at any time without any consequences.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

By taking part in this research you will contribute to defining what is talent and how talent management practices are used in hotels in Dublin.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?

Taking part in this research is completely anonymous and confidential. The only persons with access to either the notes or recordings of the interview will be myself and my supervisor at the National College of Ireland.

The interview will be recorded using an audio recording device and the electronic audio files will be kept on a password protected computer only accessible by me. The audio recording will be transcribed for the purpose of discovering themes. Once the research has been submitted for review at the National College of Ireland, the review board might make a request to hear the recording or view the transcript. In that case, all names and identifiable information (position, organization, etc.) would be redacted to protect the anonymity of the interviewee. As soon as the research has been reviewed and graded, all notes, transcripts and audio recordings will be deleted and destroyed.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

Once the study has been reviewed and accepted it will be available at the library at the National College of Ireland and online in the library master thesis repository. No identifiable information will be included in the text of the thesis and there will be no reference to specific persons or organizations.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

If you require further information on this research you may contact me at any time. You can do so by email, ███████████ or x15007073@student.ncirl.ie or by phone ████████.

Thank you for your consideration in participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Borna Forsek