

Developing Talent and Enhancing Performance in the Public Sector: Strengthening Government Workforce Capacity for Malaysia's National Development

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ABSTRACT

The Twelfth Malaysia Plan (12MP) seeks to revitalize the national economy, enhance societal well-being, and strengthen long-term economic growth. Aligned with this agenda, the present study examines the relationship between talent management and the performance of state government employees in Malaysia. Motivated, skilled, and engaged employees are better positioned to contribute effectively to organizational objectives, thereby improving overall performance. Accordingly, this study assesses the impact of talent management—specifically recruitment and retention practices—on employee performance within the state government. Data were collected using adapted survey instruments from prior research, and responses from 385 state government employees were analysed using SPSS Version 22. The findings indicate that talent management, recruitment, and retention exert significant positive effects on organizational performance. These results offer valuable insights for human resource practitioners in developing strategies that support employee growth and enhance performance outcomes.

Keywords: Employee performance, state government, talent management, talent acquisition, talent development, talent retention.

INTRODUCTION

Human capital is widely acknowledged as a key driver of economic advancement, with the development of competent talent forming the foundation of a resilient and dynamic economy. In alignment with the 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP) (2021–2025), talent management has emerged as a national priority to support inclusive and sustainable growth. Strengthening talent development strategies is therefore essential for enhancing the performance of state government employees in Malaysia.

To remain competitive across industries, individuals must possess relevant skills and demonstrate high adaptability. Prior research demonstrates a positive relationship between reciprocity norms, trust, and the skills and commitment of young individuals (Nor, Alias, & Musa, 2018). Transitioning toward a productivity-driven economy requires highly skilled youth and quality human capital capable of enhancing overall product and service performance. Thus, individual commitment is crucial in realising the objectives outlined in the 12MP.

The presentation of the 12MP on 27 September 2021 was timely, coinciding with Malaysia's recovery from the COVID-19 crisis (PwC, 2021). The pandemic also underscored the significance of decentralisation as part of public-sector reform (Seo, 2022). The 12MP charts Malaysia's strategic direction from 2021 to 2025 and centres on three core pillars: (a) revitalising the economy, (b) enhancing security, well-being, and inclusiveness, and (c)

advancing sustainability. In this context, state government organisations are at a pivotal point as they contribute directly to the nation's aspirations for sustainable development.

Recent economic indicators reflect persistent challenges in labour productivity. Measured as value added per hour worked, Malaysia's labour productivity declined by 0.6% in the third quarter of 2021 (2Q 2021: -12.9%). Although total hours worked decreased by 3.9% (2Q 2021: 33.3%), the overall economy contracted by 4.5%, reversing the 16.1% growth recorded in the previous quarter (DOSM, 2021). This decline highlights the urgent need for a highly skilled workforce capable of supporting economic diversification and long-term competitiveness.

The Director General of the Malaysian Productivity Corporation (MPC) further reported that national productivity in 2020 recorded its sharpest decline in a decade (MPC, 2021). To meet public expectations and enhance national resilience, Malaysia must undertake fundamental reforms to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the public sector.

The 12MP emphasises strengthening leadership within the civil service, upholding strong values and ethics, developing future leaders, and enhancing talent acquisition and retention strategies. Despite growing global interest in talent management across academic fields, the public sector particularly Malaysian state government agencies have received comparatively less attention in scholarly research (McDonnell et al., 2017). Talent retention also remains a critical issue in Malaysia (Alias, Noor, & Hassan, 2014). Consequently, this article examines how talent management practices influence employee performance within Malaysian state government organisations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the extent to which individuals meet work-related objectives over a defined period, based on established standards and criteria (Karoso et al., 2022). Coaching interventions have been shown to enhance performance across all career stages (Pousa et al., 2017). Previous research consistently reports a positive link between talent management practices and employee performance (Krishnan et al., 2020; Wadhwa & Tripathi, 2018). Other studies also confirm a strong correlation between talent management and employee performance (Sopiah et al., 2020; Damarasri & Ahman, 2020; Kaleem, 2019).

Talent Management

Talent management encompasses a set of HR practices—including recruitment, training, and succession planning—focused on securing and developing human capital (Mercer, 2005). Its importance has increased due to evolving labour market demands, skill shortages, demographic shifts, and the need for future leadership development (Noe & Kodwani, 2018). Sanjeev and Singh (2017) argue that talent management involves attracting, developing, and retaining skilled employees. The overall aim is to build high-performing organizations capable of achieving strategic goals (Massie, 2015).

Talent Acquisition

The demand for highly skilled and mobile talent continues to exceed supply, intensifying competition among employers (Ewing et al., 2002; Ployhart, 2006). Skilled professionals benefit from limited opportunities in technical, professional, and service fields (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2008). Consequently, job applicants prioritise selecting organizations and roles that best meet their preferences (Rynes & Cable, 2003). This has led firms to improve their attractiveness to potential hires (Highhouse et al., 1999). A key challenge in recruitment is identifying candidates with the appropriate mix of competencies and cultural fits (Rynes, 1991).

H1: Talent acquisition has a positive relationship with employee performance.

Talent Development

Talent development involves planning and implementing strategies to ensure the organization possesses both current and future capabilities (Garavan et al., 2012). This requires aligning employee development with wider organizational objectives. According to Hedayati Mehdiabadi and Li (2016), employees must possess specialized skills and the adaptability needed to navigate rapidly changing environments. Organizations thus require flexible employees capable of continuous learning.

H2: Talent development has a positive relationship with employee performance.

Talent Retention

Talent retention is a critical dimension of talent management that influences employee performance (Iles et al., 2010; Lynn, 2003). Effective retention practices prevent the loss of highly skilled employees and promote job satisfaction and well-being (Bhattacharyya, 2015; Qureshi, 2019). Organizations with strong employer brands demonstrate higher retention levels, lowering hiring costs and supporting long-term performance (Qureshi et al., 2019). A diverse range of retention strategies is required to sustain key talent (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

H3: Talent retention has a positive relationship with employee performance.

Talent Management and Employee Performance

Talent management is considered a strategic and integrated approach to improving organizational effectiveness (Ashton & Morton, 2005). Research shows that talent management enhances employee performance and job satisfaction (Dixit & Amit-Arrowatia, 2018). Luna-Arocas and Lara (2020) also found that talent development practices improve performance outcomes. Similarly, Bibi (2019) concluded that talent management fosters employee performance while enabling firms to maintain competitiveness.

H4: Talent management has a positive relationship with employee performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey. The questionnaire, adapted with minor modifications from Kaleem (2019), was converted into an online survey using Google Forms. Kaleem (2019) examined the influence of talent management practices on employee performance in selected UAE public-sector organizations. By adopting a self-assessment survey approach in Malaysia, the previously validated instrument became more adaptable and diverse.

The survey consisted of 15 items measuring employees' awareness of state government talent management practices and 4 items assessing self-reported employee performance. The components of talent management and their relationships with employee performance were identified from the literature and operationalized into items covering talent acquisition, talent development, talent retention (four items), talent management, and employee performance.

To evaluate internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was used. Cronbach's alpha is widely applied to assess the reliability of questionnaire scales, specifically item interrelatedness (Cronbach, 1951). Values above 0.70 are considered acceptable (Alias et al., 2023; Nunnally, 1978). All variables in this study demonstrated alpha coefficients above this threshold: employee performance (0.849), talent acquisition (0.810), talent development (0.901), talent retention (0.830), and talent management (0.866), indicating satisfactory reliability.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the research model and test the hypotheses. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was subsequently used to calculate the generalizability coefficient and to assess the extent to which measurement error contributed to the dataset. ANOVA is appropriate for studies requiring multiple comparisons and assessing overall reliability (Brennan, 1992; Connelly, 2021).

After receiving initial responses from state government personnel, it was decided to administer the survey in Malay. Each item used a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). Compared to a 10-point scale, a 7-point scale tends to produce slightly higher mean values (Dawes, 2008).

An executive officer from the Kelantan State Economic Planning Unit (UPEN) reported that the total number of Kelantan state government employees is approximately 4,120 (Wan Zulfadhli Syahman, WhatsApp communication, Sept 28, 2021). A sample of 385 employees was selected, exceeding the minimum recommended sample of 274 based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970). A sample size between 30 and 500 is considered adequate for most research studies (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019; Roscoe, 1975).

This study utilised non-probability convenience sampling, a common practice in online survey research due to its accessibility, affordability, and efficiency (Lehdonvirta et al., 2021). The survey link was distributed to Kelantan state government employees through WhatsApp. The main limitation of convenience sampling is the potential for bias, which restricts generalizability. As highlighted by Ibrahim et al. (2023) and Emerson (2021), convenience sampling lies between single-subject approaches and randomized control group methods. However, the use of a large sample size in this study enhances the potential for limited generalization. A total of 385 complete responses were received, yielding a 69% response rate. According to Mugenda & Mugenda (2003), a response rate of 50% is adequate, 60% is good, and 70% or above is very good.

Descriptive and Inferential Analysis

The sample consisted of 41% female and 59% male respondents. Research by Khoreva, Vaiman, and Van Zalk (2017) indicates that female high-potential employees tend to be more dedicated to developing leadership capabilities, whereas Tatli et al. (2013) argue that women are generally less inclined than men to compete for higher-status roles. Given the small gender gap (8%) in this sample, the findings suggest that Kelantan state government agencies should optimize available talent by promoting the value of talent management practices equally to both male and female employees and empowering them to engage in developmental activities. Employers must support high-potential employees of all genders (Khoreva, Vaiman & Van Zalk, 2017).

In terms of age, 61% of respondents were between 20–40 years old, 33.2% were 41–50, and 5.8% were 51–60. Future competence development relies heavily on retaining younger employees in the workforce. Thus, understanding how talent management practices are applied across age groups is essential, particularly as technology influences competency needs. Employers may prefer younger employees due to their longer potential contribution and developmental capacity (Urwin, 2006). However, Wilson, Parker, and Kan (2007) assert that recruitment should focus on skills rather than age.

Regarding education, 86.5% of respondents possessed a diploma or higher qualification, indicating a high level of talent and suggesting that many employees have the skills necessary for managerial roles. Work performance is significantly influenced by work experience (Fajriah et al., 2021). In this sample, 72.2% of employees had more than three years of experience, and 36.6% had more than nine years. Performance levels were generally high: 41% good, 20.5% perfect, and 16.9% excellent. These findings reflect a workforce with substantial experience and competency, supporting the development of skilled and talented employees.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The correlation coefficient was used to determine how significantly the dependent and independent variables were related.

Table 1: Correlations among the Variables

Hypotheses	Coefficient
H1: There is a positive relationship between talent acquisition and employee performance.	.560**

H2: There is a positive relationship between talent development and employee performance.	.621 ^{**}
H3: There is a positive relationship between talent retention and employee performance.	.716 ^{**}
H4: There is a positive relationship between talent management and employee performance.	.574 ^{**}

A more significant correlation between the two variables is indicated by values closer to +1.00 or -1.00, whilst a lesser correlation is indicated by values closer to 0.00 (Pallant, 2013). Table 1 shows correlation results among the variables.

The findings showed that every variable was significant and positive, and all correlation values were classified as large (Cohen, 1988). The two variables most strongly correlated were talent development and retention ($r=0.810$, $p=0.01$) and talent acquisition and talent development ($r=0.783$, $p=0.01$). The largest associations between talent retention and employee performance were found in the correlation study between independent variables and dependent variables ($r=0.716$, $p=0.01$). The weakest link was between talent acquisition and employee performance ($r=0.560$, $p=0.01$). Further, a one-way ANOVA, also known as an F test, was exercised to determine whether there was a difference between the variables (for example, different dosages of an intervention or different timeframes) (Connelly, 2021). Accordingly, the result exhibits a significant difference in mean [$F(4, 378) = 119.86$, $p=0.00$] between the variables. Then, the association between talent management elements and worker performance was examined using multiple regression analysis. The outcomes in Table 2 uncover talent acquisition ($\beta = 0.330$, $t = 5.770$), talent retention ($\beta = 0.712$, $t = 11.700$), and talent management ($\beta = -0.163$, $t = -2.900$) significantly influenced employee performance. Both t-values are equivalent to p-values that are less than 0.05, making them statistically significant. As a result, talent acquisition and retention are beneficial in predicting employee performance. Whereas talent development ($\beta = -0.089$, $t = -1.103$) does not since its p-value is 0.271, i.e., >0.05 .

Table 2: Multiple Regression Results for Business Performance

	Model	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		Beta		
1	(Constant)		11.285	.000
	Talent Acquisition	.330	5.770	.000
	Talent Development	-.089	-1.103	.271
	Talent Retention	.712	11.700	.000
	Talent Management	-.163	-2.900	.004

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

This study's result resembles that of Mensah (2015), who indicates that implementing a talent management system improves employee performance. Additionally, Sariwulan et al. (2021) assert that talent management affects employee work performance. Dalal & Akdere (2021) also discovered a strong and advantageous association between talent management and employee job-related results. However, due to the insignificant finding, it can be said that talent development is not individually reliable for predicting Kelantan state government employees' performance. Hence, state government's human resource management (HRM) personnel must pay more attention to developing employee talents. These measures for talent development are crucial for fostering learning, employee engagement, talent management, and staff development, which in turn improves organisational performance, productivity, and results (Galagan, Hirt & Vital, 2020). For example, a supportive learning environment is usually prioritized by employees so that their learning process is not disrupted by global health crises such as COVID-19 (Nik Md Salleh et al., 2022). In addition, to be more successful in

promoting innovation in the firm, it is necessary, according to Datta et al. (2021), to broaden the scope of HRM practice and supervisory support.

Implications

Existing research on organizational talent management offers limited applicability to state-level public sector contexts. This study addresses that gap by examining the relationship between talent management practices and the performance of Malaysian state government employees. The findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of talent management within the public sector, an area that has received comparatively little attention in Malaysia. The empirical evidence generated from the Kelantan state government context provides a reference model that other state administrations may use to assess employee performance across key talent management dimensions. This enables state governments to evaluate how effectively they leverage human capital to enhance organizational productivity and performance.

From a practical standpoint, the study highlights that successful implementation of talent management depends not only on organizational philosophy but also on the personal orientations of those responsible for executing related initiatives—particularly senior officers in government departments and agencies. Effective communication of the organization's talent philosophy from senior to junior officers is essential for fostering a shared talent mindset. Such alignment ensures consistent guidance and enhances employees' perceptions, which play a pivotal role in shaping talent management outcomes.

Despite its contributions, the study is constrained by the use of a theoretical model comprising only three factors. Future research should consider incorporating additional variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of talent management and its impact on employee performance in the public sector.

CONCLUSION

The Twelfth Malaysia Plan reflects the government's strong commitment to proactively anticipating future challenges and formulating strategic responses. In the contemporary landscape of intense talent competition, organisations face significant difficulties in attracting, assessing, developing, and retaining skilled employees. Human resources remain the primary differentiating factor among organisations, contributing not only to sustained growth but also to the development of a competitive advantage.

The global shortage of qualified talent poses critical challenges across industries, as many positions remain difficult to fill due to the scarcity of candidates with the requisite competencies. In this context, the present study offers an important contribution by examining state government talent management practices and their influence on employee performance. The findings underscore that for human resource professionals to manage talent effectively and efficiently, talent management must be clearly defined, holistically understood, and strategically aligned with organisational objectives.

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