



Talent management and talented employees' attitudes: mediating role of perceived organisational support

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International Review of
Administrative Sciences

2019, Vol. 85(3) 527–543

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DOI: 10.1177/0020852319844318

journals.sagepub.com/home/ras



Abstract

This study responds to calls to examine the mechanism through which talent management affects talented employees' attitudes. Anchored on exchange theories, this study examines a salient mechanism, perceived organisational support, through which talent management practices might affect talented employees' attitudes. Data were obtained from a cross-sectional survey of 242 talented employees in the Ghanaian banking sector and analysed with the use of the structural equation modelling analytical technique. Our findings show that talent management has not only a direct effect, but also an indirect effect, on talented employees' attitudes of affective commitment and quit intention through perceived organisational support. The study has implications for the management of talented employees.

Points for practitioners

The effectiveness of organisational support systems exists not only in the practices themselves, but also in the perceptions that employees have of those practices. For organisations to benefit fully from the implementation of talent management, managers must inform talent pool members of their status and constantly communicate talent management practices. While directly impacting affective commitment and intention to quit, talent management also operates through a path connecting perceived organisational support to these attitudes.

Keywords

banking sector, commitment, perceived organisational support, quit intention, satisfaction, talent management

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Introduction

Despite much scholarly research claiming a relationship between talent management (TM) and talented employees' attitudes, there has been little work examining the mechanisms responsible for this relationship. Previous findings provide a rational interpretation of the TM process: talents are recruited and developed with a broad variety of TM practices and, as a result, lead to positive attitudes. In doing so, the TM process is disconnected from other influences in the external and internal organisational context. Thus, while TM researchers and scholars acknowledge that positive employee attitudes and superior organisational performance may be achieved through TM practices, the mechanisms by which TM practices affect employees' attitudes remain poorly understood (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Swales and Blackburn, 2016; Thunnissen, 2016). Consequently, improving our understanding of the mechanisms responsible for the relationship between TM and employee attitudes is of importance to both researchers and practitioners alike (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). We examine a salient mechanism through which TM might affect talented employees' attitudes, namely, perceived organisational support (POS).

Eisenberger et al. (1986: 501) defined POS as 'beliefs concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being'. Scholars have identified antecedents (Wayne et al., 1997) along with the consequences of POS (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). This study however, combined the two streams of research – TM and employee attitudes – to consider the mediating role of POS in this relationship. Using POS as a mediator variable between TM and employee attitudes is important in that the effectiveness of organisational support systems does not exist in the practices themselves, but rather in the perceptions that employees have of those practices. Based on their perceptions, employees will react in various ways. We anticipate that from a social exchange theory (SET) perspective, POS may partially mediate the relationship between TM and employee attitudes, specifically, affective commitment and quit intention.

The general idea of exchange can be traced to Barnard (1938) in the 1930s and later to March and Simon (1958) in the 1950s, who proposed that exchanges are based on organisational inducements invoking corresponding employee contributions. In this study, an organisation's investments in TM practices are considered the 'inducements' thereby creating POS, which will eventually lead to employee attitudes of affective commitment and less intention to quit.

Furthermore, although it is accepted that TM is positively related to employee attitudes, there is a great need for additional evidence to support the TM–employee attitudes relationship from different contexts (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen et al., 2013; Vaiman et al., 2012). Explicitly, while a few studies have been initiated in other parts of the world, the literature highlights that most TM studies have been conducted in Western contexts (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen et al., 2013). To fill this gap, it is important to conduct analysis in non-Western contexts. This article

investigates the mediating role of POS in the relationship between TM and employees' attitudes in the Ghanaian banking context. Situated in the west of Africa, not only does Ghana provide an interesting context in which to study TM, but the Ghanaian banking sector is also experiencing the talent shortage 'mantra', which has led to the implementation of TM practices (Mensah and Bawole, 2018; Mensah et al., 2016).

Our choice of the employee attitudes of affective commitment and less intention to quit is based on the following reasoning. First, these employee attitudes are central and prominent responses to positive social exchange relationships (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Second, affective commitment has been linked with enhanced organisational performance and thus has implications that extend beyond the individual (Messersmith et al., 2011). Third, whereas the turnover of poor performers can benefit organisations, that of talented employees is more likely to be dysfunctional for the organisation (Trevor et al., 1997), to the extent that the turnover of top talented employees results in greater performance losses and the loss of future leaders of the organisation (Sturman et al., 2003). Admittedly, the high turnover costs concerning difficulties in attracting and replacing talented employees make a study of the underlying mechanisms that reduce talented employees' intention to quit even more significant.

The article contributes to the extant literature by testing the mediating role of POS in the relationship between TM and talented employees' attitudes in a non-Western context (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen et al., 2013), increasing the international breadth of the empirical link between TM and talented employees' attitudes. The article proceeds as follows. The next section discusses the theoretical background and hypotheses while the second section provides an overview of the methods and data used in the study. The third section presents the model estimation and results. The discussion of the findings is presented in the fourth section and conclusions are presented in the final section.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

The success of organisations is partially dependent on the challenges faced in the effective identification, attraction, management and retention of talent, as well as adapting to these challenges as they evolve and develop. This requires the management of talented employees. Indeed, TM has gained much attention not only in the private and multinational sectors (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015; Thunnissen et al., 2013), but also in the field of public administration (Glenn, 2012; Kock and Burke, 2008; Mensah and Bawole, 2018). Broadly, TM focuses on the activities and processes that are used to identify key positions, develop a pool of talented and high-performing employees to fill these roles, and continually manage such employees with differentiated human resource architecture in order to ensure their continued commitment to the organisation (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Gelens et al., 2013; Mensah and Bawole, 2018). Generally, there have been two main approaches: exclusive and inclusive to TM (Iles et al., 2010). The exclusive

perspective is based on the notion of workforce segmentation and understands talented employees as an elite subset of the organisation's population (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Minbaeva and Collings, 2013). On the contrary, the inclusive perspective is of the view that everyone in the organisation potentially has 'talent' (Iles et al., 2010). In this study, we adopted an exclusive approach and concentrated on employees who are perceived as talented and of high potential singled out for special treatment.

While different views of social exchange have emerged, theorists agree that social exchange involves a series of interactions that generate obligations (Emerson, 1976). Within SET, these interactions are interdependent and contingent on the actions of another person (Blau, 1964). Social exchange requires a bidirectional transaction – something must be given, and something returned. This interdependence is based on 'normative rules' of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), which are the 'defining characteristic' of social exchange relationships (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005: 876). Successful social exchange relationships are characterised by high degrees of loyalty and trust between the interdependent parties because of the temporal gap between what is given and what is returned (Gould-Williams, 2007). Previous research has established a link between perceived organisational inducements and employee obligations (e.g. Shaw et al., 2009), such that individuals perceiving support from their organisation reciprocate the support with positive attitudes (e.g. Cole et al., 2002; Kuvaas and Dysvik, 2010).

SET has been used to a lesser extent by TM scholars (e.g. Chami-Malaeb and Garavan, 2013; Mensah et al., 2016) to explain the relationship between TM and employee attitudes. Building on the social exchange perspective, we argue that TM is likely to be seen by employees as an investment and valuable support on the part of the organisation, and that this will create reciprocity so that employees pay back the organisation with positive attitudes (Mensah et al., 2016). Essential ways to reciprocate the organisation's favourable treatment may include continued participation (e.g. Chami-Malaeb and Garavan, 2013) and affective commitment (Luna-Arocas and Morley, 2015; Mensah et al., 2016).

Direct effect of TM on employee attitudes

From the SET perspective, talented employees may respond to the implementation of TM practices with positive attitudes – affective commitment and decreased turnover intentions – as indicated in previous studies (Chami-Malaeb and Garavan, 2013; Luna-Arocas and Morley, 2015; Mensah et al., 2016). Affective commitment represents one of Allen and Meyer's (1990) three dimensions of organisational commitment. It is referred to as an employee's emotional attachment to the organisation to the extent that employees with affective commitment stay with their organisation because they want to, not because they have to (continuance) or feel they ought to (normative) (Meyer and Allen, 1991).

Meyer and Allen (1997: 67) maintain that affective commitment is ‘the most desirable form of commitment and the one that organisations are most likely to want to instil in their employees’. This is because employees with strong affective commitment are believed to have a strong sense of belonging and identification that increases their involvement in the activities of the organisation, their willingness to achieve its goals and their desire to remain with it (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Indeed, employees with high affective commitment have ‘a sense of pride at being part of the organisation’ (Kehoe and Wright, 2013: 371). Empirical evidence has provided a supporting link between TM and affective commitment (e.g. Chami-Malaeb and Garavan, 2013; Mensah et al., 2016).

Intention to quit – also referred to as intent to leave or turnover intention – is the extent to which an employee wants to leave the organisation (Chang et al., 2013). Intention to quit is considered as one of the best predictors of turnover (Barrick and Zimmerman, 2005), and is often used in management research (Lambert and Hogan, 2009) because it is easier to measure than actual turnover (Firth et al., 2004), as well as due to difficulties in gaining access to individuals who have already quit. Intention to quit has a negative effect on organisational effectiveness because workers with unrealised intention to quit are likely to resort to other forms of withdrawal behaviour (Chang et al., 2013), such as absenteeism, tardiness, playing on the computer and taking frequent breaks (Hanisch, 2002). TM scholars have found evidence of the relationship between TM and employees’ intention to stay with their organisation (e.g. Björkman et al., 2013; Chami-Malaeb and Garavan, 2013). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between TM and (a) affective commitment, but a negatively association with (b) quit intention.

Employees generally develop views on how their organisations value their contributions and care about their well-being, and this is generally referred to as POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Therefore, POS is developed by the favourable treatment that an employee has received from the organisation (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). However, not all favourable treatment necessarily translates into high POS as employees understand that benefits received from the organisation can arise from a variety of motives, not all of which are concerned with their welfare (Eisenberger et al., 1997). It is only when favourable treatment is associated with organisational free will that POS will be evident. TM practices can trigger POS because they are adopted as a result of deliberate attempts to attract, select, develop and retain the best employees in the most strategic roles (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). Therefore, TM constitutes supportive human resources (HR) practices that may influence employees’ perceptions of their organisational support (Mensah, 2015). In a comparative study, Gelens et al. (2015) concluded that employees designated as high potential felt more POS than those not designated

as having high potential. Based on this, we argue that the favourable perception of TM practices will lead to POS. Hence, we hypothesise as follows:

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between TM and POS.

SET posits that both employees and employers enter reciprocal relationships with each other to maximise their benefits (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). Employees who perceive greater support from the organisation are likely to feel obligated to repay the organisation by demonstrating work attitudes desirable and valuable to the organisation. Empirical research evidence suggest that a high degree of POS brings positive changes in employees' work attitudes, such as increased affective commitment (e.g. Celep and Yilmazturk, 2012) and reduced turnover intention (e.g. Avanzi et al., 2014). Therefore, SET suggest that POS becomes the catalyst for positive employee attitudes, which is backed by the norm of reciprocity binding the recipient to return the benefit, support and care offered by the other party (Gouldner, 1960). We propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between POS and (a) affective commitment, but a negative relationship with (b) quit intention.

POS: the mediating mechanism linking TM to talented employees' attitudes

Although scholars have implicitly assumed that TM leads to employee attitudes in the discussion thus far, such a one-sided way of causation may be unsatisfactory (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Swailes and Blackburn, 2016; Thunnissen, 2016). In recent years, some empirical evidence suggests that the adoption of TM practices may not have a direct link with employee attitudes; rather, they produce their effect through some mediating mechanism (e.g. Luna-Arocas and Morley, 2015; Mensah et al., 2016). Anchored in SET (Blau, 1964), this study proposes that POS will mediate the relationship between TM and employee attitudes.

Indeed, it has been argued that POS may be a mediating variable in the TM–employee attitudes relationship (e.g. Mensah, 2015; Mensah et al., 2016). Thus, whereas the implementation of TM practices can lead to both POS and employee attitudes, POS also has the tendency to mediate the relationship between TM and employee attitudes (Mensah, 2015), which previous literature has provided convincing evidence for (e.g. Avanzi et al., 2014). Therefore, we argue that POS will partially mediate the relationship between TM and employee attitudes. Hence, we hypothesise as follows:

Hypothesis 4: POS will partially mediate the relationship with (a) affective commitment, but have a negative relationship with (b) quit intention.

Method

Research context and sample characteristics

The Ghanaian banking sector has gone through a series of reforms since the 1980s. This has resulted in the Ghanaian banking sector becoming more responsive and competitive and one of the most vibrant financial sectors within the West African sub-region. The sector was considered important for this study because it has become one of the most innovative, resilient and competitive sectors in the country (Baba, 2012; Narteh, 2015; Sanda and Kuada, 2016). The Ghanaian banking sector is competing for the limited pool of skilled and experienced talent with other sectors, but more particularly with multinational corporations. The sector is responding to this challenge with the implementation of TM strategies through the attraction, development and retention of talented employees (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2014). These banks usually use an early career development strategy that follows a highly selective recruitment of talented employees with the perceived potential to reach very senior leadership levels over their career.

Data for this study were collected by means of a survey questionnaire administered to employees in the talent pool of commercial banks in Ghana. To ensure that all respondents meet a preset criterion of being labelled talented employees, the lists of talent pool members were obtained from the HR managers of the selected banks. We randomly selected 400 employees and the questionnaires were given to HR managers to administer to the sampled talent pool members. This is because we had no direct access to the employees and it was therefore imperative to use the HR managers to facilitate the proper administration of the survey. All completed questionnaires were returned to the HR managers who subsequently handed them over to the researchers. Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 242 usable questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 60.5%. The majority of the respondents were male (75.5%), with an average age of 36.5 years, while 75.1% had a master's degree, with an average length of service of 8.4 years.

Measures

All the indicators in this study allowed respondents to answer on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) except the TM scale.

TM practices. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2006) has developed a list of 16 practices that are commonly used by organisations and could serve as a first reference to operationalising TM in empirical studies. To ensure uniformity in the measure of TM, interactions were held with the HR managers of the studied banks in which it was revealed that 10 of the items from the CIPD measures are used by all of them. Respondents were asked whether they perceived their employer as offering them the opportunity to make use of those 10 TM practices items. The

number of TM practices was operationalised by summing for each employee the number of perceived TM practices. As this concerns perceived practices, the total can vary between employees in the same organisation (Sonnenberg et al., 2014).

POS. POS was measured using six items of the highest loading of the survey of POS in the study by Eisenberger et al. (1986).

Affective commitment. Affective commitment was measured using the six-item scale developed by Meyer et al. (1993).

Intention to quit. We used intention to quit because: (1) we could not gain access to administrative records; (2) it was difficult to gain access to individuals who had quit; (3) administrative records may be inaccurate or incomplete as actual turnover is influenced by extraneous factors, such as the availability of alternative jobs (Khatri et al., 2001), and so actual turnover may be low even though employee quit intentions are high; and (4) turnover intentions are more important from the employer's viewpoint than actual turnover behaviour (Lambert and Hogan, 2009). We measured intention to quit with four items developed by O'Reilly et al. (1991).

Control variables. We controlled for gender, education and experience because these have been shown to influence employee perceptions and behaviours. However, there was no significant difference among the respondents in terms of gender, education and experience.

Data analysis

A test for normality shows that all variables fall within the acceptable statistical limits (Hair et al., 2010; Meyers et al., 2013). We tested the proposed framework with the methodology of structural equation modelling (SEM) via Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS 20), and the maximum likelihood estimation (MLE). It has been stated that SEM is effective for testing models that are path analytic with mediating variables (Byrne, 2009). In assessing the model, we followed the recommended two-step analysis procedure (Byrne, 2009; Hair et al., 2010; Meyers et al., 2013) by first estimating the measurement model and then estimating the structural model. Multiple indices were used to assess the model fit as it is possible for a model to be adequate on one fit index but inadequate on many others (Hair et al., 2010; Meyers et al., 2013). Hence, χ^2 test ($p > 0.05$), the GFI, CFI, TLI and IFI (not lower than 0.90), as well as the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) (not more than 0.08), were used (Byrne, 2009; Hair et al., 2010).

Measurement and structural model evaluation. The result of the measurement model is given as: $\chi^2 [113] = 219.891$, $p = 0.000$, GFI = 0.922, CFI = 0.967, IFI = 0.968, TLI = 0.959 and RMSEA = 0.045. All the loadings are high (0.65–0.91) and fall within the accepted range while all the path estimates are significant. The average

Table 1. Mean, SD, reliability measures and intercorrelation for all the variables.

Construct	AVE	CR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. TM	0.81	0.92	[0.90]							
2. POS	0.78	0.91	0.55	[0.88]						
3. Commitment	0.68	0.89	0.68	0.54	[0.83]					
4. Quit	0.71	0.84	-0.48	-0.49	-0.44	-0.63	[0.76]			
5. Experience	0.67	0.86	0.18	0.16	0.11	0.14	-0.19	-		
6. Education	0.68	0.86	0.17	0.30	0.12	0.31	-0.25	0.33	-	
7. Gender	-	-	0.04	0.09	0.07	0.11	-0.08	0.12	0.06	-
Mean	-	-	3.73	3.82	3.51	3.67	-3.41	5.53	2.04	-
SD	-	-	1.22	1.61	1.55	1.73	-1.81	1.32	1.01	-

Notes: All intercorrelation coefficients are significant at $p < 0.001$. Diagonal figures in brackets represent the square root of AVE; sub-diagonal entries are the latent construct intercorrelations. SD = standard deviation; CR = composite reliability.

variance extracted (AVE) values are higher than 50.0%, indicating an acceptable survey instrument, while the calculated composite reliability (CR) scores also indicate that the degree of construct reliability is acceptable (Hair et al., 2010). Discriminant validity was examined by comparing the square root of each factor's AVE with the correlation estimates between constructs.

Table 1 shows that the correlation coefficients are significantly different from unity, and are smaller than the square root of each factor's AVE, providing evidence for separate constructs. Again, the correlation coefficients among the constructs do not exceed 0.80, indicating that multicollinearity does not appear to be a problem (Hair et al., 2010). The result of the structural model is as follows: $\chi^2 [114] = 236.5$, $p = 0.000$, GFI = 0.914, CFI = 0.960, IFI = 0.960, TLI = 0.954 and RMSEA = 0.048, providing evidence of good fit. In our model, TM and POS account for 59% of the variance in affective commitment ($R^2 = 0.591$) and 39% of the variance in intention to quit ($R^2 = 0.392$). TM also accounted for 52% of the variance in POS ($R^2 = 0.522$).

Results

Hypothesis testing

The predictions of all the direct hypotheses were supported by the structural model. Thus, TM had a significant positive effect on affective commitment ($\beta = 0.346$, $p < 0.001$), but a negative effect on quit intention ($\beta = -0.324$, $p < 0.001$), confirming hypotheses 1a and 1b. Also, hypothesis 2 was supported as TM was found to have a significant positive relationship with POS ($\beta = 0.320$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, the results showed that POS had a significant positive effect on affective commitment ($\beta = 0.399$, $p < 0.001$), but a negative effect on quit intention ($\beta = -0.216$, $p < 0.001$), validating hypotheses 3a and 3b.

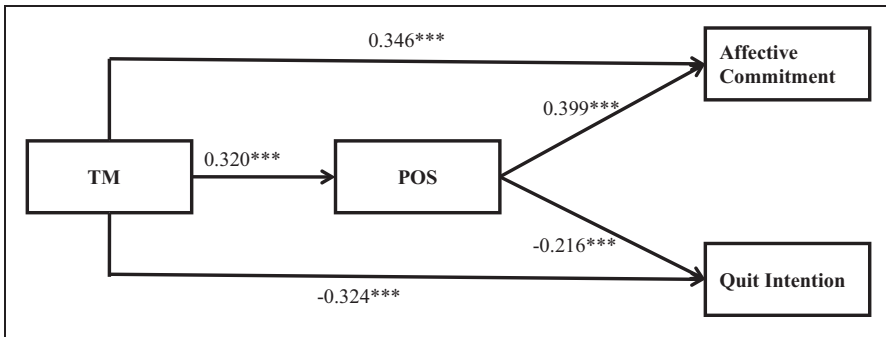


Figure 1. Conceptual model. *** = significant at $p < 0.001$.

Test of mediation effects

To test whether POS partially mediated the relationship between TM and employee attitudes, we compared the fit of two different models. The first model did not include a direct path between TM and employee attitudes, indicating a full mediation, while the second model included a direct path suggesting partial mediation. The results for the full mediation model demonstrated a poor fit ($\chi^2 [125] = 236.5$, $p = 0.000$, $GFI = 0.894$, $CFI = 0.884$, $IFI = 0.960$, $TLI = 0.896$ and $RMSEA = 0.058$), while the partial mediation model demonstrated a good model fit and a significantly better fit than the full mediation model ($\chi^2 [114] = 236.5$, $p = 0.000$, $GFI = 0.914$, $CFI = 0.960$, $IFI = 0.960$, $TLI = 0.954$ and $RMSEA = 0.048$). Thus, our results support a partial mediation model. Consequently, hypotheses 4a and 4b are supported. We used the Sobel test with bootstrap standard errors to examine the significance of the mediation effect (Preacher and Hayes, 2004). Using the Sobel online calculator, the results showed that POS mediated the relationship between TM and affective commitment (Sobel test = 4.53, $p < 0.001$) and quit intentions (Sobel test = -2.45, $p < 0.001$).

Common method bias

All variables were collected from the same respondents at the same time; therefore, we tested for common method bias (CMB). Harman's single-factor test was conducted to determine the extent of CMB in this study. The simultaneous loading of all the items in a principal component factor analysis (CFA) produce a variance of 10.1% on the first factor, which is below the 50% acceptable maximum threshold of total variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Nonetheless, because of the insensitivity of this test (Podsakoff et al., 2003), additional CFAs were performed where all the 26 indicators in this study were loaded onto a single factor. The results indicated that the single-factor CFA model had an exceedingly poor fit ($\chi^2 [125] = 257.3$, $p < 0.05$, $GFI = 0.48$, $CFI = 0.510$, $IFI = 0.514$, $TLI = 0.488$ and $RMSEA = 0.112$). Even though the results from the preceding analyses do not exclude the possibility

of CMB, they do however submit that it is improbable that CMB muddles the interpretation of the results.

Discussion

Theoretical implications

Consistent with the POS theory, our study suggests that TM will impact on the perceptions of talented employees and that this perception will impact on their behaviour. Therefore, while directly impacting affective commitment and reducing intention to quit, TM also operates through a path connecting POS to these attitudes. Our findings advance the underlying mechanism through which TM practices lead to employees' attitudes. In particular, we shed light on how TM practices can lead to both POS and employees' attitudes. In this way, we may have helped to explain how TM works in practice. From a TM perspective, the findings are encouraging as they provide not only further support for the positive association between TM and employee attitudes, but also evidence of enhanced POS. Previous studies (Al Ariss et al., 2014; Nijs et al., 2013) have concluded that the academic field of TM is characterised by a lack of theoretical frameworks. Our contribution to the TM literature lies in using exchange theories and POS to develop, test and empirically explain the mediating mechanism through which TM leads to employee attitudes. Thus, this research further proves the utility and highlights the importance of POS for the enhancement of employees' commitment and reduced intention to quit.

Although empirical research is beginning to emerge from other countries, the current assumptions and scholarly research on TM are strongly embedded in Anglo-Saxon regions (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen et al., 2013). Our study makes a contribution to the TM literature in a non-Western context. Therefore, we address calls to examine TM in different contexts (Thunnissen et al., 2013; Vaiman et al., 2012). Ghana provides an interesting cultural context in which to study the impact of TM as it has a moderately collectivist culture (Hofstede, 1980) and the Ghanaian banking sector is experiencing the talent shortage 'mantra'. While the context of this study differs from previous studies, the results are similar because the Ghanaian banking sector is adopting international HR management practices to keep up with the competition and the banking culture is therefore likely to be more dynamic and move with the international standard than the general business culture in Ghana. Thus, it has been revealed that high-growth businesses are likely to devise new methods of solving problems or seek and accept ideas and management styles that may not be consistent with some aspects of the national culture (Harrison and Carroll, 1991; Sanda and Kuada, 2016).

The findings are useful for, and may be applicable to, other African countries because of the similarities in characteristics and experiences that Ghana shares with them (Nyuur and Debrah, 2014). Finally, whereas talented employees are central

subjects in TM, there has been little interest in and research into their experiences and opinions about TM systems (Thunnissen, 2016). We contribute by collecting data directly from talented employees. This appears to give more accurate results than data collected from managerial directors, which has dominated the literature (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016).

Practical implications

The findings of our study have implications for practice. First, managers must be aware that POS partially mediated the relationship between TM and employee attitudes. Thus, TM serves as a signal to employees about the extent to which their organisation values and cares about them, which will, in turn, partially contribute to employee attitudes. Thus, perception is essential if an organisation is to achieve important employee attitudes. This is because the effectiveness of organisational support systems exists not only in the practices themselves, but also in the perceptions that employees have of those practices. Based on their favourable perceptions, employees will react positively.

It is important for management to note that TM may not necessarily translate into higher POS unless employees' perception of their favourable treatment through TM is associated with organisational free choice. This is because employees know that benefits received from their organisation can arise from a variety of motives, not all of which are concerned with their welfare. Therefore, for organisations to benefit fully from the implementation of TM, managers must inform talent pool members of their status and constantly communicate TM practices to them. Doing this has a motivational effect in line with the predictions of SET and thus supports the broad-spectrum logic of TM (Björkman et al., 2013). However, management must note that informing talent pool members of their status is likely to lead to the possibility that such employees will know their value and that retention issues may arise should their expectations and needs not be met. Managers should therefore ensure that employees are provided with the necessary support and opportunities in order to keep them.

Whereas private and multinational organisations have dominated TM research, attracting and retaining 'high-potential' individuals is identified as a strategic imperative (Lutbush and Smith, 2007) by both private and public sector employers. From the administrative theory of the neoclassical approach to more contemporary approaches, the emphasis on the strategic use of employees remains undeniable (Denhardt, 2008). Therefore, public sector organisations need to think about the skills and talents that they require to deliver against their ambitions and improve the lives of the people they serve. Indeed, creating a better public sector requires a balance between remaining responsive to societal needs and reinforcing employer branding to attract, develop and retain competent public servants (Van Dijk, 2009). Public sector organisations need to invest both time and effort in developing appropriate and relevant approaches to TM.

Limitations and further research

Our study used self-report questionnaires to collect data on all measures. This limits our ability to draw conclusions about the causal nature of the relationships. Indeed, our data came from a single source – self-report and subjective measures of all the variables. Subjective and self-report data have been criticised to have many systematic biases. However, Howard (1994) intimates that this may be less of a concern than is occasionally expressed in the literature. We also tested for CMB; therefore, our findings provide some confidence for the conclusion that the results obtained were due to substantive relationships between the study variables. Longitudinal data could be partially useful in addressing this limitation.

Second, our study measured TM practices as perceived by employees, not the banks' intention with TM. However, it has been argued that there might be large differences between intended and perceived practices (e.g. Sonnenberg et al., 2014). Therefore, it is recommended that future research include the effects of intended as well as perceived TM practices in empirical research. Lastly, our study only used a sample of talented employees. Therefore, the literature would benefit from comparing results from employees designated as talented and not talented in order to determine whether talent and TM are solely the cause of the relationships found in this study.

Conclusion

This study provides insight into the underlying mechanism through which TM leads to employee attitudes. Our study advances theoretical understanding of the linkages between TM and both POS and employee attitudes, as well as the mediating effect of POS. In conclusion, this study provides convergent evidence that POS plays an important role in the TM–employee attitudes relationship, helping explain how TM influences POS, and ultimately employee attitudes of affective commitment and intention to quit. It is important for organisations that want to fully benefit from TM to inform and communicate favourable practices to talent pool members as this will generate POS.

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