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Talent Management in the Public Sector

A Comparative Study of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates public sector talent management schemes in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. It offers a framework to make such comparisons, which allow for better understanding of the values and contextual factors related to talent management. The three countries are found to have comparable names of talent management schemes. They are such as scholarship schemes, training schemes for high-potential officers, and special pay scale for those identified as a talent. A close look at these schemes reveals that there are also many differences. We identify some key factors that can possibly explain the variations. They are such as: the differing definitions of talent; the structure and scope of authority of the responsible agencies; the level of flexibility of incentive systems; and the differing performance appraisal systems in each country. The three cases illustrate the need for policy-makers to be fully aware of the value they are hoping to enhance for the public service and the governance structures that they are operating in. At the end, the paper offers a spectrum of exclusive and inclusive approaches to talent management that governments can use as guidance.

KEYWORDS

Talent management, leadership training, civil service, war for talent

INTRODUCTION

Governments are constantly striving to recruit, retain, reward and develop its pool of public employees. They face fierce competition with the higher paying private sector. When governments cannot recruit and retain capable individuals it adds to the vicious cycle of weak governance. With the widespread practice of performance management in the public sector, the 'war for talent' is the top agenda for civil services around the world (Kim 2008; Van Dijk 2009).

For bureaucracies to be staffed by the best talented people, governments have intervened by establishing a variety of schemes[1]. These schemes are such as the United States' Senior Executive Service, the U.K.'s Fast Stream, South Korea's Senior Civil Service, Singapore's Administrative Services, Thailand's High Potential Performers, and Malaysia's Administrative and Diplomatic schemes. In this paper these policies are called talent management schemes. Such schemes have said to be successful in some contexts and less successful in others. Despite good intentions, such schemes have been perceived as inequitable and unfair. Also such schemes can distort civil servants behavior in different ways and can also change organizational culture.

Basic public sector human resource management textbooks (e.g. Berman et al. 2010; Pynes 2009) do not adequately discuss these schemes and surrounding issues. Textbooks on talent management in general (e.g. Berger and Beger 2011; Cappelli 2008) do not explicitly cover the public sector. To fill this gap in the literature, this paper initiates a systematic comparative research on public sector talent management schemes. The intention is to provide scholars and practitioners a framework of thinking so better talent management policies can be developed. It contributes to new knowledge not only on how the talent pool is managed in the public sector but also on factors that explain the variations in different countries. For the first time, factors pertaining to competing values in talent identification and the limitations of institutional context are explicitly studied.

[1] In this article the word 'scheme' is used in a neutral way. Similar words are 'strategy', 'plan' and 'program'.

This paper is organized as follows: The first section, after offering definitions, is the description of the schemes in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. The second section provides explanations on how the schemes compare across jurisdictions and what factors can explain the variations. Based on the analysis, the third section discusses implications for policy making in this area. The last section offers ideas for future research on this topic.

STUDIES OF TALENT MANAGEMENT

'The war for talent' in the private sector was exposed in 1997 when McKinsey published their now-famous report proclaiming that better talent is worth fighting for and that talent is the critical driver of corporate performance. McKinsey replaced 'the old reality' that people need companies to be 'the new reality', that companies need people (Beechler and Woodward 2009). Authors of the McKinsey report, Michaels *et al* (2001), insist that this challenge would continue for at least the next twenty years. This assertion is absolutely true for the public sector as well (Kim 2008; Van Dijk 2009). In many countries the public sector is no longer the most sought after employer. For example according to the Graduate Barometer surveys in 2011 National Health Service (NHS) was the most sought after employer of graduates in the U.K. but in 2012 the top position went to Google and NHS came in fourth (The Guardian 2012/13). Kim (2008) advocated for governments to realize that they are in this war for talent.

The word *talent* can be defined as 'the sum of a person's abilities… his or her intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, judgment, attitude, character and drive. It also includes his or her ability to learn and grow' (Michaels *et al*. 2001: xii). Ulrich takes a more holistic view to define *talent* as a combination of competence, commitment, and contribution (Ulrich 2006). 'Competence deals with the head (being able), commitment with the hands and feet (being there), contribution with the heart (simply being)' (Ulrich 2006: 32).

Talent management can be defined as 'the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention and deployment of those individuals with high potential who are of particular value to an organization' (CIPD 2006). Some examples of the frameworks used to study talent

management include the competency approach (Bhatta 2001); self-selection approach (Delfgaauw and Dur 2010); and the talent management approach (Frank and Taylor 2004; Lewis and Heckman 2006). Another strand of literature focuses on the prescription of how to manage talent (e.g. Berger and Berger 2010; Pilbeam and Corbridge 2010; Cappelli 2008; Makela, Bjorkman and Ehrnrooth 2010**). One most recent and comprehensive study of talent management in the private sector argues for strategies to overcome 'global talent management' challenges** (Tarique and Schuler 2010**;** Schullion and Collings 2011). **These works are of enormous value but a great gap of knowledge still exists for the public sector.**

This topic is also of great concern for the nonprofit sector but academics have given it little attention. Usually the nonprofit sector suffers from lower salary scales, lack of organizational infrastructure and potentially is less appealing to young people who are entering the work force. However, in many ways, nonprofits are tackling talent shortage problems the same way as the public sector, which includes strategic human resources management (Guo et al. 2011), creating good performance management processes, and recognizing talent in material and non-material ways (Accenture, 2011).

The existing studies on talent management in the public sector have been limited to surveys of what is done in practice. For example Pollitt and Geert (2004) studied how the top civil servants and 'highfliers' of seven European countries were trained. Most studies have focused on single-country cases. For example Duggett (2001) studied four decades of the British civil service training institute and their priorities and Bhatnagar (2007) studied talent management of an Indian public agency. And from their study of various public organizations in the U.K. Devine and Powell (2008) concluded that there were six strategic perspectives of talent management:

1) Competitive perspective – give what talented people want otherwise they will be poached;

2) Process perspective – managing talent is part of the everyday organizational life;

3) HR perspective – match right people with right job, strong ownership of HR team;

4) Developmental perspective – accelerated development paths for talented people;

5) Cultural perspective – talent management as a mindset;

6) Change management perspective – talent management is a driver of change.

Both private and public organizations struggle to identify who are the right 'talents' to be managed. In general there are two approaches. First is an 'exclusive' or 'elite high-potential' mode of talent management that is 'characterized by a concentration of those in the one or two segments (or talent 'pools') of the workforce who are either at the top or who are identified as having the potential to get to the top by demonstrating high levels of potential or performance' (CIPD 2006: 2). These top-level employees are the 'best and brightest'. Conversely, the second approach is an 'inclusive' or 'whole workforce' mode which 'recognizes that there are various key positions to fill in any organization as well as future pipeline for the appropriate skills to fill all these positions' (CPID 2006: 3). This definition takes talent as a synonym for the entire workforce. Michaels et al. (2001) found from their study of more than 120 companies that the better strategy is to invest in A players, develop B players, and act decisively on C players; in other words, a focus on the entire organization.

While it is difficult to define and manage talent, it is also very challenging to integrate talent management with organizational performance management. A limited number of studies explicitly link human resource management to performance management, usually under the rubrics of strategic human resource management (SHRM). The idea is that performance appraisal systems for human resources are part of the larger performance management system. And performance appraisal systems play a very important role in identifying, rewarding, and tracking development of talent in the organization.

Thus, it is an integral part of any talent management scheme (Durham and Bartol 2004; Hiltrop 1999; National Research Council 1991; Ingraham 1993; Marsden and French 1998).

Drawing from the aforementioned exiting literature, aside from describing the specific talent management schemes in the three country cases, this study seeks to explore factors that explain the variations among the schemes. The research questions are the following: 1) what kinds of schemes are in place; 2) how do these governments define talent – exclusive or inclusive; 3) why are the schemes different; 4) what can we learn from the comparative study. The authors took an inductive approach by first thoroughly cross-examining the three systems and allowing for possible explanatory factors to emerge from the cases. There are two groups of factors. The first group consists of the values that influence the intention and design of talent management schemes. It leads to differing definitions of talent that are used by governments, which in turn leads to differing target groups and training objectives. The second has to do with existing institutions including their structure, scope of authority, and salary structures, which has led to varying talent management approaches. The following section offers an explanation on how the study was conducted.

RESEARCH METHOD

The case study comparative approach is used. A comparative method is defined as the systematic analysis of a small number of cases (Lijphart 1971; Bryman 2008). Rigorous comparative case studies do offer rich understanding of certain phenomena (Heady 2001). For decades, public administration scholars have argued that the scientific method is unavoidably comparative in nature (Dahl 1947; Collier 1991; Jreisat 2012).

Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand were selected for comparative analysis. The countries are in close proximity to one another in the Southeast Asian region, each of them possesses distinct economic strengths, political systems and regimes, as well as human resource developments. Most importantly these

countries have been experimenting with a variety of talent management schemes for at least 10 years. The paper draws on data generated from different talent management schemes that are introduced and implemented for the past five years. Schemes in statutory boards, quasi-government organizations and uniform groups are not considered in the study. The three groups of schemes are 1) government sponsored scholarships; 2) special service schemes; and 3) high potential schemes.

The research output described in the following sections was derived from over 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews - each averaging 90 minutes - conducted from November 2010 to February 2012. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed in accordance to the topics. The respondents were public service officers from various relevant agencies. In Singapore, interviews were conducted with representatives from the Public Service Division (PSD) and the Civil Service College (CSC). In Malaysia the agencies were Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam or the Public Service Department of Malaysia (JPA), the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN), TalentCorp, the Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU), and Performance Management on Delivery Units (Permandu). And in Thailand the interviewees were from the Office of Civil Service Commission (OCSC) and the Office of the Public Sector Development Commission (OPDC). Secondary data from the official documentation, websites, press releases and other publicly available sources were also used to support the research findings. In addition secondary evaluation reports of the schemes were also drawn upon. This mix of data gathering allowed for results to be triangulated. The next section describes the schemes that are in place.

TALENT MANAGEMENT SCHEMES

Table 1 below shows the list of talent management schemes that were identified. The answers are grouped into three stages of talent management: recruitment, development, and retention. All three countries have bonded scholarship schemes to attract very young candidates at the highschool level. They all have schemes to develop high performers further and accelerate promotion processes. And they all use extra monetary incentives as a tool for

retention of top performers. A close look at these schemes reveals that there are stark variations on how these schemes are designed and implemented, leading to varying levels of effectiveness. The key schemes can be described as follows.

(Table 1)

Singapore

The Singapore public sector employs some 127,000 officers in 15 ministries and more than 50 independent government agencies with about 76,000 officers working in the ministries, which make up the civil service. The three agencies that oversee the talent management are the Public Service Commission (PSC), PSD, and CSC. There are four key talent management schemes in Singapore.

1. Pre-Service Scholarships

The Singapore Government believes that offering pre-service scholarships is the best way to attract the best and brightest young men and women to serve the government. Since 1962, about 60 scholarships administered by PSC are granted annually to ensure talents in the succession pipeline. PSC scholarships are targeted at recruitment for critical high-level public service functions (Neo and Chen 2007). There are a variety of scholarships with no stringent restrictions in the field of study designed to cater to candidates with different abilities and interests and no quota on the number of scholarships to be awarded.

Candidates are assessed primarily, based on their high school academic results; leadership potential and the desire to serve the public are of secondary criteria. The candidates go through a few rounds of interviews and psychometric tests administered mainly by PSC. Scholars have to serve a 5 to 7 year bond to the government upon return and will be deployed throughout the Service through a 4-year Management Associate scheme before they are considered for the Administrative Service. Aside from the above, the Singapore government also binds those who receive scholarships from outside to work for the Singapore government. So for example those on the Japanese Monbusho scholarship are also obliged to serve the Singapore public sector upon their return.

2. Management Associate Program (MAP)

MAP is a career development program for scholars from 2002, which would give scholars a management track career in the Civil Service upon their graduation. The higher-tier PSC administered scholarship holders will automatically join the MAP and in-service officers, with less than two years of experience, could also be nominated for the program. There are also open recruitments to attract mid-career individuals to join the scheme.

The Management Officer (MA) typically spends the first two years in a parent Ministry to gain professional experience. This is followed by an external posting with a different Ministry to an Administrative Service-type job for two years. During this period, MAs will be given opportunities to participate in a wide range of training and development programsto broaden their perspectives on public sector issues and deepen their managerial and leadership capabilities. It also includes a three-month Foundation Course, which covers visits to ASEAN countries, cross-ministry project teams, policy forums, overseas conferences and study visits.

3. Administrative Service (AS)

This scheme marks the crème' of the crop of Singapore's civil servants. PSC appoints these Administrative Officers (AOs) while PSD manages their deployment designations and career paths. Although scholars only account for 10 percent to 15 percent of all division one officers, the majority of officers in the AS are scholars. At the end of the 4-year MAP, the MAs would be interviewed for entry into the Administrative Service.

AOs are responsible for developing and implementing national policies in consultation with the political leadership. Apart from formal training, AOs are also exposed to a wide variety of jobs to maximize their experience and expertise, including working in private sector companies. Milestone programs are planned for AOs at every stage of their careers and are pushed to take leadership roles very early. Thus, directors of departments in Singapore are relatively young at the age of mid 30s when compared to Malaysia and Thailand. The top performing AOs would take up permanent secretary positions

in the end. By their mid-30s if the AOs estimated potential is of less than deputy secretary of the ministry, he or she would usually be asked to leave the service (Neo & Chen, 2007).

AOs are paid on a much higher pay scale than normal civil servants. The annual salary of an Administrative Officer in the entry Superscale grade is pegged to the annual salary of the 15th top earner aged 32 years belonging to the top six professions. In 2008, this was $398,000 per year SGD (Public Service Division, 2007). Currently there are about 200 AOs in the service.

4. High Potential Program (HiPo)

The High Potential (HiPo) Program is for in-service officers.. The objective is to develop broader leadership capabilities across the civil service. As part of the Program, the officers will have opportunities to attend milestone-training programs, participate in inter-agency project teams, be posted to an external ministry or organization, attend forums on leadership and governance, and undertake challenging assignments. Typically, officers would need to have at least 2 years of service before they are nominated for the program. There are no clear criteria that can be found in the public domain. Based on interviews, they also undergo stringent assessment and selection processes.

Malaysia

In Malaysia there are 1,253,026 public servants serving in 722 government agencies (including local authorities) as at 2009. The civil service is broadly grouped into the common-user and non-common-user groups under 276 schemes of services. There are about 70,000 officers under the common-user group as at 2011 (including the Administrative and Diplomatic Services). JPA is responsible for the management of recruitment, placement, transfer and training of the common-user group. Suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Awam (SPA) or Public Service Commission oversees the policies of appointment, confirmation of service, conferment into pension status, promotion, transfer and exercise of disciplinary control. There are three talent management schemes in Malaysia.

1. Pre-Service Scholarships

Like Singapore, the Malaysian government also offers pre-service scholarships. The JPA scholarship is one of the most sought after public scholarships in Malaysia for students to pursue tertiary education abroad. Successful recipients undergo a pre-university program or prepare for pre-university examination such as A-levels[2] at a local college. Upon completion he/she will then apply individually to a university, taken from a list of universities in the country agreed upon in the scholarship agreement. High concentration of scholarships offered is for medical subjects.

As shown in table 2 the JPA overseas scholarships are allocated based on four categories namely Academic Excellence, Ethnic Population, Bumiputra policy (i.e. the indigenous) and Socially Disadvantaged, each with a different evaluation weighting:

(Table 2)

JPA overseas scholarship is career-specific as the scholarship is tied to the field of study and it is also student-specific, merit-based and need-based. At the end of the course, the scholar is bonded to serve the government for a period ranging from 6 to 10 years. The Talent Acceleration in Public Service (TAPS) program led by JPA with the Razak School of Government (RSOG) and TalentCorp aim to channel and prepare the best and brightest from among the JPA scholars into the public service. Under this program, top scholars would be selected to work on high priority public policy issues and assigned to senior officers who act as mentors. The selected scholars will be offered a two-year contract and high performers fast-tracked into the civil service.

However the availability of job position in the government is not guaranteed, if the scholar is not able to secure a job within a year upon return, she is allowed to apply for employment in the private sector. Therefore JPA has recently

[2] A-levels is a British model that refers to the last 2 years of secondary education prior to university. Countries that adopt the British system would have A-level examinations administered across the country on annual bases.

initiated the Scholarship Talent Attraction and Retention (STAR) program, which is a joint initiative between JPA with TalentCorp. STAR enables scholars who are interested to work in the private sector to service their bonds by working in leading companies (mostly government linked companies). These companies are pre-identified by the government to be in the key sectors to drive economic growth. Therefore the country as a whole optimizes on this group of talent by ensuring that they are retained and nurtured to contribute to the priority areas of the Malaysian economy.

2. Administrative and Diplomatic Scheme (PTD)

The PTD scheme is the earliest 'premier' public service track since 1904. There are currently about 9,000 to 10,000 PTD officers. The job scope is very wide and applied to the various levels and departments. Officers are located in the ministries, federal departments, local governments and statutory bodies and assume main leadership roles (Chin, 2011). They also have opportunities to be transferred to different organizations as well as seconded to private organizations.

Unlike Singapore, application to the scheme is open to all and candidates have to go through numerous exams and assessments. A centralized e-recruitment method was implemented by PCS to screen the candidates. Candidates need to undergo 4 processes: early screening; PTD's IQ examination; competency assessment; and lastly interview. After being appointed, the recruit will go through a 10-day foundation course (Manaf, 2011). Upon completion, they will be informed of their job assignments and agencies to be attached to. After undergoing a 6-month on-the-job training and another 6-month diploma course in Public Administration at INTAN, they will be officially appointed as PTD officers.

3. High Performing Officer Scheme

High performing in-service officers who have the capacity to assume higher leadership roles are also identified based on the annual performance appraisal process. Identified officers are given more challenging projects, assignments or send for prime postings. They can also be offered study sponsorships for

higher education at the master or doctoral level. However there is no explicit roadmap for this group of officers and they are not guaranteed for higher positions upon completion of their studies or assignments.

Thailand

Thailand's civilian civil service workforce consists of about 2 million personnel, working in 19 ministries and 147 departments (Sivaraks 2011). Of this number, about 365,000 are ordinary civil servants under the jurisdiction of OCSC. OCSC is responsible to oversee and develop competency of civil service officials. Its specific mandate is to provide proposals to the cabinet on HR issues; supervising and monitoring HR management by ministries; and managing government scholarships. It is directly accountable to the Prime Minister. Another agency is OPDC, which is mainly responsible for performance management systems and some human resource development. Currently there are four talent management schemes in the Thai civil service.

1. Pre-Service Scholarship

There are several types of government scholarships available to high school students and bachelor degree holders. The two main types are: the specific ministry bonded scholarship; and the non-specific ministry scholarship. For the former, scholars know exactly where they are bonded to upon graduation, while the latter the scholar chooses where they wish to serve after they return from their studies. Provided that there are openings, their wish is often granted. There are cases where scholars return without a proper agency to land causing frustration among scholars due to the mismatch of acquired skills and agency's needs. About 300 scholars are selected each year (Sivaraks 2011).

Contrary to the Singapore scholarship scheme, these scholars are not put on a special track nor are they provided different incentive structures to excel in the system but they are bonded. To serve the time, the scholars must serve twice the amount of time taken to study. OCSC is also experimenting with new types of scholarships such the Public Sector Innovation Scholarship introduced in 2007. It aims to attract oversea Thai students who are working innovations. These scholars are eligible for performance-based pay upon signing a contract

with OCSC. Another scholarship, started just in 2010, is aimed at first class honors of university students.

2. Public Sector Executive Development Program (PSED)

The PSED is led by OPDC. It aims to attract excellent individuals to join the public sector at mid-level entry point. There are approximately 40-60 participants in each cohort. The participants go through not only intensive theory or classroom-based training on public management and leadership, but they are also trained in practice by being seconded to three groups of public-sector leaders and one private-sector leader for about two years. The program offers a mentorship system exposing participants to mentors, coaches and advisors, whom all play different roles in the training program. The objectives of the scheme are: to develop highly effective change agents who have the abilities to be visionary thinker, developer, planner and operator; to deploy change agents to the strategic units and drive their strategic plans into action.

3. High Potential Performance System (HiPPS)

Led by OCSC, the HiPPS scheme has three objectives: 1) attract, maintain and motivate high potential individuals within the civil service; 2) continuously and systematically develop them; 3) prepare a sufficient number of highly qualified, experienced and well-rounded leaders for senior levels. Initially since 2003, the program focused primarily on improving and implementing a system for selecting high potentials and for creating the Experience Accumulation Framework (EAF) which is a roadmap of cross-functional work assignments and mile-stones to support career growth and acceleration. The supervisors in the bureaus and agencies have to identify high performing individuals to take part in the program.

In 2006, the HiPPS program was extended to all civil service departments, which included training for developing key leadership skills as well as coaching skills for the mentors assigned to each HiPPS individuals. Out of the total 150 bureaus, 100 bureaus have opted to participate and they sign an MOU with the OCSC and develop a clear EAF for the candidate. Candidates must perform outstanding throughout to receive higher pay by about 1 percent of his/her usual

monthly income. Candidates from PSED can enter the public sector and become HiPPS. In the first few years, this was automatic; however from 2011 onwards they need to pass the English exam, making it more difficult for PSED graduates to be identified as high performers from the start of their public office careers.

4. New Wave Leadership Development Program

The New Wave Leadership Development Program is a one-month training program for mid-level bureaucrats. Based on interviews, the intent is to replicate the MAP scheme in Singapore. The stated objective is to promote a network of high-potential officials in various departments (Sivaraks 2011: 128).

(Table 3)

Using the typology by Devine and Powell (2008) table 3 above compares the differing perspectives that each of the three governments has taken to manage their talent pool. Singapore takes a more competitive perspective by highly remunerating and creating fast track career paths for their top talents in the civil service. It also takes a more exclusive approach than the other two countries by targeting academically successful individuals and giving them priorities in tasks and training. In Singapore the scholarship system is tightly connected to grooming individuals to become part of the elite civil service that work between politicians and mainstream civil servants (as noted that majority of AOs are made up of scholars). Compared to the other two countries Singapore has produced an elite class of about 200 Administrative officers. While in Thailand and more so in Malaysia the goal is broader: to attract academically strong individuals to the public sector but not necessarily grooming them to be the elites of the bureaucracy.

Malaysia takes a process perspective and more inclusive approach than Singapore. Its scholarships are distributed based on other factors aside from academic achievements such as ethnicity and economic status. There is no concentration of power among a small group of elite civil servants because the number of PTD is very large at about 9,000 at any one time and they are not

paid extraordinarily higher than normal civil servants. In Singapore upon completion of studies, the scholars are guaranteed a position in the service while in Malaysia and Thailand, scholars might not necessarily be offered a position right away, contributing to difficulties in finding a suitable position. Recognizing this limitation, Malaysia has accepted the goal of using government scholarships to build human capital for the private sector and so allow scholars to serve their bonds in designated private companies.

Among the three countries, Thailand takes the least exclusive approach. Its schemes are concentrated in the hands of only two agencies that actually have less power than before as human resources management has been gradually decentralized to the line ministries. It does not have special tracks and training for scholars. The HiPPS scheme, which aims to retain in-service talent, has very few uptakes of less than 400 people, whereas the aim is over 5,000 people. The PSED scheme, which aims to train new talent, also does not provide a clear career track for the graduates. Thus, compared to Singapore and Malaysia, Thailand follows the HR and some developmental perspective and definitely not the competitive perspective.

COMPETING VALUES

The three Asian cases show that the definition of talent and the approach to talent management are influenced by three sets of competing managerial values: a) education vs. equity based merit selection processes; b) exclusive vs. inclusive approaches; and c) competency vs. performance based appraisals.

Education vs. Equity Based Merit

Most countries use merit as the foundation of staffing in the public service. One important element in the recruitment and selection process that result in merit-based appointments is that the process must be transparent and fair, incorporates the principles of equity (equal opportunity) to ensure that the most capable person is selected as well as the right of every individual to be given fair consideration for any job for which they are skilled and qualified. The three countries clearly have systematic and transparent selection process, i.e.

Singapore's stringent scrutiny of candidates' educational background and psychometric assessments, Malaysia and Thailand's stringent entry tests and examinations, and the final decision is determined by panel interviews. Although the procedures are similar, the three countries put different weighting on education and equity considerations.

The three principles that Singapore uses in the talent management strategy are: get the best people in; give them challenging work and pay them well (Neo and Chen 2007: 322). As we have described earlier, Singapore is focused on getting the best and brightest (based on academic results) into the service by offering them full-fledged pre-service scholarships and promising future career prospects in the public service, even ultimately grooming them into future leaders. The meritocratic approach of recruiting the best and brightest scholars is not so much based on the equity principle as one respondent pointed out, 'The government uses a mass network approach whereby they will approach specific junior colleges for the name lists of top maybe 20 percent students and administer a test.'

Potential candidates are pre-identified based on the scores and are invited to sit for a special test which includes psychological and IQ assessments. These students will subsequently apply for the scholarships based on their preliminary A-level examination results. Candidates are therefore assessed firstly, based on their high school academic results, leadership potential and the desire to serve the public are of secondary criterions.

In Malaysia, besides the educational background of the candidate, other factors, such as ethnicity and income level, are also considered, forming 80 percent of the evaluation weighting. Although the intention is noble as it seeks to achieve representativeness in the population of the community, it also invites criticism of race favoritism. The majority of scholarship recipients are Malays. It is precisely because of the disagreement on these affirmative action policies that Singapore, when separated from Malaysia in 1965, decided to use meritocracy based on education as the basis for its public sector.

Compared to Singapore and Malaysia, Thailand follows merit principles that include neutrality, equality, fairness, and competence (Sivaraks 2011). Scholarships are open to all and as there is no standard national examination, candidates are required to sit for standard entry examinations, therefore providing fair opportunities for all who are interested and qualified, disregarding past academic achievements and ethnicity. The downside is that the entry exams are not effective tools to attract highly talented people (Interview with OCSC official, February 2012).

Emphasizing too much on education and too much on equity (or affirmative action) can weaken the merit-based principle. Whilst emphasizing only on equality without a target group, like in Thailand, is also not an effective approach to attract talent. These are differing trade-offs between values that governments must choose and balance.

Exclusive vs. Inclusive Approaches to Talent Identification

The three cases illustrate varying degrees of the exclusive strategy, whereby milestone development opportunities, exposure to high profile projects or mentorships are being offered to a selected group of employees. Singapore is the most exclusive and Thailand is the least. In Singapore, talent development schemes are usually reserved for scholars upon their return. On one hand, one can say that Singapore's strategy is highly focused, but we can also say that Singapore defines talent more narrowly than Thailand and Malaysia, by focusing on the best talent and not really on potential talent and late bloomers. Scholars in Malaysia and Thailand are not specifically identified as talents when they enter the service; they usually end up blending with the rest of the work force. In fact, in Malaysia, returning scholars are not guaranteed jobs and some would even end up working in the private sector. In addition, the recruitment of other pre-service talent management schemes in Malaysia and Thailand are based on self-application process. In Malaysia, the talent management strategy encompasses 'beneficial to the country' approach and thus scholars are placed in priority areas in the private sector as well as public sector.

An exclusive approach is a double-edged sword; it can de-motivate people not identified as talent and can breed cynicism about the mechanisms for identifying those who are talented. Through the reverse Pygmalion effect, employees who perceive themselves as being in an inequitable scenario will attempt to reduce the inequity either by distorting inputs and or outcomes psychologically, directly altering inputs and or outputs or by quitting the organization. On the other hand, an inclusive approach might diffuse the value of talent management when efforts are made to manage human resources at all levels such as the case of Thailand. Governments need to have a strategic logic for talent management and it should not only be about filling skill shortages (Van Dijk 2009). In short, these two values require balancing by governments.

According to Cappelli (2008), talent can be made or hired. Besides development for these new recruits, a small group of selected in-service officers in the three countries are also recommended for similar fast track programs. In Singapore and Malaysia, the selection criteria of High Potential officers is not as transparent and clear, their career progression is not as well-developed as their scholar peers. The scheme is implicit and as respondents in both countries pointed out **'**They don't even know they have been identified as High Potentials until they were asked to attend certain courses' (Interview with a Malaysian official, February 2012).

In Thailand, the HiPPS scheme catered for the high potential in-service officers has a clearer roadmap which included training for developing key leadership skills as well as coaching skills for the mentors assigned to each HiPPS individuals. The scheme currently falls short of the original target because officers do not see the benefit and in some cases fear that they will be burdened by more and harder tasks (Sadangharn 2010). This is also true of the implicit high potential scheme in Singapore. Officers fear of added responsibilities with no apparent promise of career prospects.

Competency vs. Performance Based Appraisal

All employees desire to be treated fairly as determined by the rewards they receive compared to others in the organization and by how the organization

come to the decision concerning the reward. From an employee's perspective, fair procedures may be in place but it is the practice of fairness by supervisors that demonstrates whether justice actually occurs or not. There are two approaches to ensure fairness, one is to judge a person by their competencies and the other is to look at their actual performance.

As it is focused on an exclusive approach to talent management, Singapore has chosen to reward its talent highly based on both competency and performance. It has implemented performance bonuses for all public sector employees since the year 2000 and continues to fine-tune the remuneration scale to stay competitive with the private sector. The public service in Malaysia has also moved away from the seniority-based system and is currently operating on a performance-based system which applies throughout the service. The fixed pay increment structure is determined by officers' performance. The maximum pay increment is 3 percent of the vertical salary movement and two percent for diagonal progression (Manaf 2011). Although there is no performance-based bonus payout, promotion is determined by the officer's performance. Thailand has also begun to differentiate pay for certain groups of people such as those in the HiPPS scheme, who can receive 1 percent higher pay than their peers. But the impact is very minimal at the moment.

Of the three countries, Singapore has the clearest performance appraisal system. Their system runs on a quota-based bell curve. Top performers make up about 15 percent of the distribution curve, 80 percent will be rated as developing contributor or average, and the rest of the 5 percent will be the poor performers. There are two components, the reporting system and the ranking system. The main assessment criteria for the reporting system are personal performance targets and trait-based criteria or competencies. The ranking system also has two components: performance ranking and potential ranking. The potential ranking component is largely determined by individual's Currently Estimated Potential (CEP) score, which is based on competencies such as educational merits, intellectual and leadership qualities. Hence AOs are usually rated with higher CEP scores and will be exposed to high profile projects.

The caveat for using both approaches is that AOs will perform better and be promoted faster than the rest of the officers. This implies that AOs will become top leaders at relatively young age while experienced non-AOs are lagging behind. This case illustrates that competencies determine the tasks given and thus provides opportunities to achieve higher performance. Therefore it is misleading to divide the two approaches. They are interconnected in practice and they should be. But there should also be similar opportunities for other employees who are non-scholars too. This would be the case if the government takes the inclusive approach.

At one time Malaysia accelerated promotion to fill up position gaps. PTD officers were promoted too quickly to assume leadership positions without the required experience. To prevent the same mistake, JPA is currently looking into designing a development roadmap for the PTD officers. At the end of the day, compared to Singapore and Malaysia, Thailand still values seniority and experience when it comes to choosing its leaders. Among the three cases, Thailand has a comparatively weak performance system. This impedes the ability to reward talents fairly. Using seniority as criteria are objective but it surely will not help to retain talent. But it is better than using very subjective performance information to determine special rewards.

Without proper performance appraisal systems the special treatment for talent can actually jeopardize morale of employees and organizational performance. Talent management has to be an integral part of the performance management system and the criteria for assessment must be transparent and accepted by employees.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Aside from the above competing managerial values, the structure of the government is another explanation of the talent management perspective that each government has taken. It was observed that the structure of authority of responsible agencies is an important factor to explain the scope of talent development that each government draws. Thailand's OCSC and OPDC only oversee civil servants in the main line ministries and not government-linked

corporations, and independent agencies. Due to the limited rotation possibilities, whether officers are on the HiPPS scheme or PSED they normally do not have the opportunity to cross-train once in the service. This is very different in Singapore, where PSC and PSD, through the whole-of-government approach, can provide rotation to many types of public organizations, giving AOs ample exposure to difficult tasks including seconment to government-linked companies.

Another observation is the differing roles of the public training institutions. Singapore's Civil Service College and Malaysia's INTAN play an integrated role to execute training programs. However, this was not witnessed in the case of Thailand, where the training for HiPPS and PSED is fragmented between OCSC and OPDC. Obviously the mandate of responsible agencies limits what they can or cannot do and in turn limits the kind of talent they can train.

Furthermore, another explanation for the lack of opportunities to rotate jobs and cross-train is the difference in pay structure between different types of organizations. Singapore has solved this problem by setting up a different pay scale for AOs that is not tied to where they are posted. For the time being, Thailand and Malaysia do not practice this. This creates an obstacle for high potential officers on either HiPPS or PTD to be exposed to complex tasks. Their salary scales cannot be carried across organizations. Yet, at the same time, it has not created an elite super class of civil servants as in the case of Singapore. However, looking at the positive side, because of job rotation and good exposure of AOs and MAs, Singapore has created a close-knit network of high-ranking talented civil servants that enables better inter-agency coordination. This is something that is lacking in Malaysia and especially Thailand.

The other aspect about salary structure is the linkage with performance management system. Singapore has created a system of flexible compensation that is linked to performance. This allows for a variety of pay scales for the civil service, including those identified as talents. This is not the case in Thailand and Malaysia. However, both countries are moving slowly to change the compensation rate for civil servants hoping to be comparable to the private

sector. This idea has both pros and cons. For those not on the talent scheme this separate pay structure might be a demotivating factor. The structure might divide the civil service into higher and lower classes. On the other hand, for those on the talent scheme, if there is no separate pay structure, they will feel unmotivated to take on more difficult tasks (Sadangharn 2010).

Through the interviews of scholars and non-scholars it was confirmed that salary is not the only factor for them to stay or leave. This depends on the economy; usually in good times people will have more choices. As one interviewee said, 'Because the opportunities in the private sector is not so good, so you will actually find good people joining the government during downturns, that's when recruitment gets easier, across the board' and as another stated, 'When the economy in the country picks up, officers leave the service'.

Some stay because of their high level of public service motivation, as one person said, 'My genuine interest is in public policy and for bigger issues, no other private organizations can offer me. Since the offer is good and there is also no push factor to leave'. Research findings by Putnam (1993) has indicated that the level of civic mindedness an individual has correlates to his or her performance as a public servant. The key challenge is how to sustain that motivation among the identified talents. And to ensure that extra monetary incentives do not distort the self-selection pool of talented people who wish to join the civil service.

In sum, contextual factors, especially pertaining to how the authority on talent management is distributed, the role of training institutions, the salary structures, the economy and personal preferences influence the limitations on what governments can or cannot do in terms of the design and implementation of talent management schemes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Clearly, the tackling talent crisis in succession of senior leadership roles is at the top agenda of these three countries' talent management policies. Although these three countries are within close proximity and have very similar schemes,

they fulfill different needs and objectives. Among these three countries, Singapore has already a very clear career development roadmap for these talents and they were selected right at the beginning even before they enter the service. While Malaysia has a stringent assessment system in place, the development path of these talents is still being reviewed. Both Malaysia and Thailand also recognize that they are unable to pay as well as the private sector and so might not attract the best into the service. However, both countries are catching up and are reviewing schemes to upgrade the pay as well as improve competence of officers currently in-service.

This study has brought up several issues that governments should consider when pursuing and developing a talented workforce. Building on existing works on exclusiveness and inclusiveness (CPID 2006), in general there are two spectrums of approaches. Drawing from the three cases, the authors have added features of schemes that would fit into the spectrums. This table is not meant to suggest which is more desirable. As discussed through the three country cases there are pros and cons to all the approaches. The table is to help policy-makers compare various values and approaches and choose the most appropriate sets of approaches that best fits their contexts (See table 4). Most governments would have a mix set of approaches but the authors suggest that it is always better to be clear and conscious of the strategy that one is using. Other actions that are common between the two approaches include special training, career roadmaps, and performance-based appraisals. These are hardly new for any good human resource management strategy.

(Table 4)

Based on the discussion of context, governments should pay attention to certain factors when they design new talent schemes. They include the need to:

1. Give the right level of authority to agencies in charge of the schemes;
2. Link across public agencies to develop talent;
3. Link with the private sector to develop talent;
4. Overcome fix pay structures of the bureaucracy;

5. Forecast economic cycles to determine demand and supply of human capital;
6. Focus on both monetary and non-monetary incentives;
7. Develop a functioning performance management system.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research on the issues raised in this article would add value to the debate on how to best design talent management schemes for the public sector. This study is limited to three countries in Asia and uses only qualitative methods. For a rigorous comparative analysis, future studies should operationalize the suggested competing list of values in talent management and compare across many countries. This should be followed by a thorough analysis of key variables that can explain the choice of programs, the implementation challenges and the set of factors that help lead to success. This can be done using quantitative methods. In addition, the non-profit sector also suffers from high turnover rate due to the lack of clear career paths and competition with the private sector. There can also be more systemic study to capture good practices in the non-profit sector and compare their strategies with the public sector. Perhaps there is a general trend to move from an inclusive to exclusive approach as the war for talent intensifies. More research is needed to understand this trend and its impact on the workforce.

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Table 1: Overview of the talent management schemes

	Singapore	Malaysia	Thailand
Talent Recruitment	• Open Recruitments (fresh-graduates and mid-career entrants) • Pre-Service bonded Scholarships • Green harvesting • Scouting/ head-hunting	• Open Recruitments (fresh-graduates and mid-career entrants) • Pre-Service bonded Scholarships • Scouting/ head-hunting • Recruitments for Administrative and Diplomatic Service	• Open Recruitments (fresh-graduates) • Pre-Service bonded Scholarships • Public Sector Innovation Scholarship • Public Service Executive Development Program
Talent Development	• Allocated training hours • Roadmaps for special schemes i.e. Management Associates Scheme and Administrative Service Scheme (AS) • High Potential Scheme	• Allocated training hours • Administrative and Diplomatic Scheme (PTD) • High Performing Officer Scheme	• Allocated training hours • High Potential Performance System (HiPPS) scheme • New Wave Leadership Development
Talent Retention	• Competitive pegged to market pay structure • Performance-based bonus payouts • Performance-based promotions • High pay structure for administrative officers	• Base pay coupled with types of allowances • Performance-based promotions • Opportunities for post-graduate studies • Fixed pay increment structure	• Fast Stream Track • Performance-based system • Higher pay (about 1% higher for High Potential officers) • Perks in health care and pension schemes.

Table 2: Allocation of 1500 JPA scholarships offered in 2010

	Academic Excellence	By Ethnic Population	For "Bumiputra"	Socially Disadvantaged
Percentage	20%	60%	10%	10%
Number of Scholarships	300	900	150	150

Source: Public Service Department, Malaysia, 2010

Table 3: Comparisons between key schemes

	Singapore	Malaysia	Thailand
Bonded Scholarships (new recruits)	Competitive perspective: strategically targeting top high school students, giving them proper positions upon return. Direct links with development and retention strategies: special training, fast tracks and higher salary.	Process perspective: quotas for students of different backgrounds, positioning them in key industries whether public or private sector. Some links with development and retention: special training and special tracks.	HR perspective: public sector driven scholarships based on organizational needs, no specific strategy and target group. No links with development and retention: no special training, no fast tracks, and no special salary.
Administrative Service (the best and brightest)	Competitive & Development perspective: AOs have special salary scale, fast promotion track and clear career path. Special administration for these elite bureaucrats.	Process perspective: PTD officers are large in numbers, special salary; leaders slowly climb up the bureaucracy. Lose administration for this large group of talent.	HR perspective: Administrative service scheme does not exist. Most leaders simply climb from the bottom of the bureaucracy. No centralized administration of the talented.
High Performers (in-service employees)	Process perspective: Nominations into MAP and HiPo schemes are part of the general identification of well performers to develop them further through extra training.	Process perspective: well performers are identified annually and put on the High Performers Officers scheme and given challenging tasks for continuous development.	Development perspective: well performers are identified and put on the HiPPS scheme, which aims to fast track talented individuals through challenging tasks and extra training.

Table 4: Two approaches to talent management

Exclusive Approach	Inclusive Approach
Competitive	Developmental
External market	In-service employees
Separate fast track	Accelerated promotion
Separate salary scale	Some special pay
Aggressive targeting	Passive targeting
Concentrated elite class	Diffused talented cohort
Leadership training	Management training
HR as capital to invest in	HR as vehicle to enhance equity