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Talent Management and Sustainable Enterprise Resilience among Travel Agencies in Port Harcourt

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Abstract:

This paper examines the association between talent management and enterprise resilience within the context of sustainable development in tourism based firms. It adopts a cross-sectional survey and generated research data from 30 travel agencies operating in Port Harcourt. The formulated research hypotheses were tested using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient by aid of the statistical package for social science (SPSS). From the test results, the paper found that travel agencies' resilient capacity is largely associated with their talent management practices. Based on this, the paper concludes that talent management is crucial for firms' resilience, to be sustainable in their development. The paper recommends that the research and development functions of firms should institute specific talent management programmes whereby firms desired strategic skills and employee specific talents can be identified, developed and utilized to achieve high resilient capacity for sustainable development.

Keywords: *talent management, enterprise resilience, situation awareness and adaptive capacity, travel agencies.*

1. Introduction

Sustainable development has not only become a global interest, but also a very serious challenge. The sustainable development crusade is anchored on the ideology that advancement in all spheres of human life be founded on a focus on posterity and the wellbeing of tomorrow (Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2008 and Kporna, 2011). This appears necessary considering the obvious threat on resources resulting from depletion, depreciation, abuse, exhaustion, exploitation and use that may lead to critical conditions that are adversaries to future generations. Simply put therefore, sustainable development implies living today with improvement for tomorrow (Folke et al, 2002). This means that the continuous existence of mankind depends on the efficiency, effectiveness and caution in the use of the resources at their disposal.

This argument presupposes sound human competencies management in terms of skills, knowledge, talents, and attitudes to harness resources management for sustainable development. Unfortunately, among all productive organizational resources, occupational psychologists have argued that the human resource is the most untapped and undermanaged (Robins & Sanghi, 2006; Armstrong, 2009; Robins, Judge & Vohra 2013). They argue that the human productive potentials are largely untapped in all respects, raising the question on the economic paradox of scarcity. The human talents are largely buried, often because of distraction, disincensive, discouragement, and excessive pressure to the extent that self discovery of talents is merely incidental, negating the economic philosophy of human capitalism. For instance, employee engagement and responsibility assignment are largely determined by certification, which often shield off necessary potentials as talents.

However, there appears to be an inseparable nexus among talent management, enterprise resilience and sustainable development. For instance, the unprecedented incidences of enterprise mortality imply huge loses of resources, which demands talent hunt, talent retention, talent development and talent utilization, with a positive hope for sustainable development tomorrow.

Nevertheless, the research in this area appears fragmented, lacking in any empirical knowledge on how talent management associates with enterprise resilience within the context of sustainable development. For instance, most studies on talent management are focused on the individual proximal and ultimate outcomes. Those on enterprise resilience largely seek for antecedents other than the human competencies. Also, studies on sustainable development are dominantly focused on non-human resources, perhaps because sustainable development is historically focused on material and environmental resources endowment management (Dovers et al, 1992). Yet, talent based capabilities and abilities of the human factor appear to be crucial determinants of sustainable resilience and development outcomes. Thus, this paper has empirically examined the correlation between talent management and enterprise resilience within the province of sustainable development among travel agencies in Port Harcourt metropolis. This is considered necessary to galvanize the resilient capacity of firms in the tourism industry to face the challenges of tourism development in Nigeria.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. The Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has become a buzzword in modern day management. With the implications of the social-organizational baseline theories, business organizations have adopted the concept in the pursuit their objective, particularly their long-run survival within the context of limited resource and almost threat ridden environment (Kazmi, 2008; Eketu, 2012). Sustainable development represents the process which emerges from the ideology that continual survival of individuals and organizations depend on the conscious harmony between the resources embedded environment and the business, with the tendency to renew or replace resources. Like many concepts, sustainable development is not lacking in conceptual definitions. However, the key idea common to all definitions concerns resource exploitation at a rate that would not prove detrimental to future generations (ibgeog.wikispaces.com, 2012). For instance, there is a strong contention that sustainable development means development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising future generations to meet their own needs. Similarly, ibgeog.wikispaces.com (2012) also quoted the direct government website UK, as defining the concept as, “sustainable development means a better quality of life now and for generations to come.” Therefore, the whole idea of sustainable development rests on the philosophy of protection, replenishment, safety, and precautionary principles in man’s economic, social and environmental goals. This is pursued with the consciousness of environmental, economic and social well-being for today and tomorrow.

2.2. Concept of Talent Management

Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axeirod cited in Stockley (2005) define talent as the sum of a person’s abilities, including intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, intelligence, attitude, drive and the ability to learn. Drawing from this, Boudreau & Ramstad’s (2007) defines talent management as a resource process that includes the potential and realized capacities of individuals and groups and how they are organised, including those within the organization and those who might join the organization. Also, Stockley (2005) defines talent management as a collection of innovative actions and solutions that allows an organization to maximize the effectiveness of the talent it employs. Drawing from the above, the talent management construct implies a conscious, deliberate approach undertaken to attract, develop and retain people with the aptitude and abilities to meet current and future organizational needs (Stockley, 2005). Thus talent management requires both systems and an organizational commitment to attract, acquire, manage, and measure the talent needed to achieve a company’s business objectives.

Talent management is also the result of the development in the field of human resources management and management philosophy. Human resources management has gone from welfare work to strategic human resource management, where organizations are becoming less bureaucratically managed in favor of a management based on core corporate values and culture. In the knowledge economy, human capital has replaced physical capital as the most important source of competitiveness. Companies also try to increase their competitiveness in their service or commodity markets as well as in the labor market. This has led to new needs for organizations to manage their human resources, arising from the emergence of the consciousness of a new economic philosophy of human capitalism.

2.3. Talent Identification

Talent identification refers to the process of recognizing current participants with the potentials to become elite managers or high flyer performers. It entails predicting performance over various periods of time by measuring physical, physiological, psychological and sociological attributes as well as technical abilities either alone or in combination, which are necessary to perform expected tasks (Régnier, Salmela and Russell, 1993). However, Davidson and Sloboda (1998) argued that talent has several properties. First, they suggested that talent may be characterized by properties that are genetically transmitted and partly innate. This may not be evident at an early age and may be betrayed by some indicators about its presence. These early indicators of talent may provide a basis for predicting those individuals who are more or less likely to succeed at some later stage. Most often, very few individuals are talented in any single domain. For instance, if all children were talented, there would be no way to discriminate or explain differential success. Thus, talent is specific to particular domains. Régnier, Salmela and Russell (1993) argued that the development of generic skills before the process of identifying potentials and the occurrences of early and later life, make it necessarily important for combining the process of talent identification and development. More so, the key determinants of potentials are largely psychological. These psychological determinants are not always innate, but can be developed through appropriate experiences. However, the possession of psychological attributes that predispose individuals to acquire skills may not lead automatically to excellence since key environmental factors are also necessary. Consequently, Régnier, Salmela and Russell, (1993) argue that talent identification and development procedures be considered within developmental framework of workforce capabilities.

2.4. Talent Development

Talent Development is viewed as the process of improving the innate abilities endowed in organization employees and all stakeholders, using planned and unplanned learning, in order to achieve and maintain competitiveness for the organization (Rothwell and Kazanas, 2004). As businesses continually apply new technologies, new business growth models, and new market strategies, the development of their workforce capabilities becomes continuous necessary (Gunderson, 2000).

According to Garavan, Carbery and Rock (2012), talent development is a “significantly under-developed and under-researched concept”. However, many seem to agree that it is better to develop talents in-house rather than trying to acquire them from outside the

organization, since the talent or high potentials in one organization may not be talent/high potentials in another organization (Burkus & Osula, 2011; Stuart-Kotze & Dunn, 2008; Groysberg, Sant, & Abrahams, 2008). Burkus & Osula (2011) contend that organizations should create deliberate practical opportunities, and that training programs should be open to all employees. Garavan, Carbery, & Rock (2012) present four future important areas in the field of talent development as: integrating strategic talent development processes with business strategy; differentiation of talent development for best practices; shifting the responsibility and control over talent development from the organization to the individual for self-management and development and more value on communities of practice as a way of developing individuals in group contexts; and a just-in-time talent development process to meet the continuous demand for talent development. Investment in search increases with development, acting as another source of amplification by increasing the extent to which talents are being utilized.

2.5. Talent Retention

Talent retention becomes logically necessary after talent development. It is aimed to encourage employees to remain in the organization for the period of time. Talent turnover is harmful to a company's productivity because costs of attraction are high. Direct cost refers to turnover costs, replacement costs and transitions costs, and indirect costs relate to loss of production, reduced performance levels, unnecessary overtime and low morale (Echols, 2007).

Vaiman et al (2012) identifies two classifications of retention tool to meet employee's expectation: extrinsic and intrinsic incentives. Extrinsic incentives includes different sorts of monetary rewards which can satisfy employees' physiological needs, while intrinsic incentives refer to non-monetary rewards that can fulfill employees' psychological needs. The monetary reward is admitted as an essential tool to retaining talent (Vaiman et al, 2012). Stockley (2005) further contended that a company needs to invest in employee retention in order to be successful. This can be achieved through attractive compensation package as internal equity, resting on how an employee perceives his pay to be fair in comparison to another employee who is in a similar position within the same organization (Lockwood et al, 2006) and external equity, which Gomez-Mejia et al (2006) argued that it is the perceived fairness of the remuneration in comparison to how much other employees in the same kind of work are receiving in the same industry. Thus to achieve competitive advantage, organizations must find a way to create and then sustain the level of energy and passion that people bring to work (Macey, Schneider, Barbera & Young, 2009).

2.6. Talent Utilization

The utilization of talent is the activity in the talent management process which involves the practical application of developed talent into work to achieved desired results. McShane and Von Glinow (2000) argue that talent utilization consists of sense-making, talent awareness, and empowerment. They argue that "acquiring and developing talent are wasted exercises unless talent is effectively put to use." Putting talent to use involves making sense the information received and ones innate capabilities. However, the literature on talent utilization provides three conditions necessary for effective talent utilization. These are: ones realization or awareness of the possession of talent potentials; the ability to make sense of the endowed talent potentials; and the freedom to use the talent potentials (Echos, 2007; Vainman et al, 2012; Macey et al, 2009). Thus, it is held that talent utilization requires empowerment.

2.7. The Concept of Organizational Resilience

The word resilience is derived from the Latin words *resiliens*, and resilience was first recorded in 1626 - meaning 'to rebound'. Thus, originally, resilience is viewed as the qualities that enable the individual, community or organization to cope with, adapt to and recover from a disastrous event (Horne, 1997; Mallak, 1998; Pelling and Uitto, 2001; Riolli and Savicki, 2003). Thus, Holling in 1973 provide stern view on the term resilience and associated with the stability of ecological systems. In the ecological literature there is a distinction between engineering resilience and ecological resilience, each representing different attributes of a system's stability (Gunderson & Pritchard, 2002).

Evolution of the original concept of resilience has occurred through its application in numerous scientific disciplines. Resilience has been discussed in relation to; climate change and linked to vulnerability (Timmerman, 1981); in terms of proactive and reactive resilience of society as a whole (Dovers and Handmer, 1992); as it relates to both ecological and social systems (Adger, 2000); and natural hazards (Blaikie et al, 1994) to name but a few. Several excellent reviews of the literature are available by Klein et al (2003), Folke, (2006) and Hoilnagel et al (2006) and the reader is directed towards these for a detailed discussion. However, as pointed out by Klein et al (2003), resilience remains a theoretical concept and methods for achieving improved resilience at an operational level still challenge both the academic and the practitioner. Resilience applies not only to a systems ability to change or remain stable within a given context. Resilience, critically, also relates to the appropriateness of that change or stability for the given situation and potential future contexts (McDonald, 2006). In McDonald's (2006) view, organizations that have prospered over long period of time, display a remarkable resilience that is the ability to bounce back from adversity, sometimes even stronger than before, and keep on going.

Resilience is about ensuring that an organization is still able to achieve its core objectives in the face of adversity this means not only reducing the size and frequency of crises (vulnerability), but also improve the ability and speed of the organization to manage crises effectively (adaptive capacity). Awareness is a recent addition to this definition and reflects a growing appreciation of the need to manage strategic risk as a process and not an event. This means the ability of an organization to seek out new opportunities even in times of crises. In highly dynamic environment, such as the business world, an organization is never a static entity. Some sectors may be more stable than other, but nevertheless, an organization that remains exactly the same over time may eventually erode its

potentials. This means that to be truly resilient, an organization should not seek to just recover back to exactly where it was before the crises, but have the capacity to continue handle or accommodate emerging threats and opportunities on the horizon.

2.8. Adaptive Capacity as a Measure of Enterprise Resilience

In this study, adaptive capacity is adopted as the measure of enterprise resilience.

The concept of adaptive capacity is at the core of studies on resilience. Adaptive capacity represents the ability of an enterprise to alter its 'strategy, operations, management systems, governance structure and decision-support capabilities' to withstand perturbations and disruptions (Starr et al, 2004). Also, adaptive capacity refers to the ability of a system (social or ecological) to adapt to change and respond to disturbances, although a number of authors have expanded on this basic concept. For example, Walker et al (2002) defined adaptive capacity as an aspect of capability that reflects learning, flexibility to experiment and adopt novel solutions, and development of generalized responses to broad classes of challenges.

Adger (2003, p. 32) contended that adaptive capacity is the "...ability of a system to evolve in order to accommodate perturbations or to expand the range of variability within which it can cope". Adaptive capacity is view as involving: (1) learning to live with uncertainty and change by allowing and/or encouraging small scale disturbance events before there is a build-up of pressures leading, inevitably, to some sort of collapse; (2) supporting and promoting diversity and highlighting the positive connection between diversity and redundancy (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998); (3) combining different types of knowledge; and (4) maintaining opportunities for self-organization in the direction of sustainability. Organizations that focus on their resilience in the face of disruption generally adopt adaptive qualities and proactive responses, as disruptions are being viewed as opportunities for advancement (Mallak, 1998; Folke et al, 2002). Thus, the study of adaptive capacity in relation to organizational systems has resulted in considerable advances, particularly regarding the cultural capital of organizations and the effects this may have on the ability to withstand crises.

3. Methodology of the Study

The study adopted objectivism as its philosophical paradigm of inquiry, implying: ontological realism, epistemological positivism, human nature determinism and *nomothetic* methodology. The purpose of this study was to examine the association between workers talent management and enterprise resilience as a prerequisite for sustainable development among travel agencies in Port Harcourt. The basic research question we sought to answer was: To what extent does talent management associate with enterprise resilience within the province of enterprise development? The following research hypotheses were formulated to guide the researcher to provide explanation to the research question: *HO₁: Talent identification does not significantly associate with enterprise adaptive capacity of travel agencies. HO₂: Talent development does not significantly associated with enterprise adaptive capacity in travel agencies. HO₃: Talent retention does not significantly associate with enterprise adaptive capacity of travel agencies. HO₄: Talent utilization does not significantly associate with enterprise adaptive capacity of travel agencies.* The study was conducted at the macro-level of analysis, involving organization as unit of analysis. The study content scope covers theories of human competence management, particularly, talent management, while the geographical survey scope covers Port Harcourt metropolis. The cross-sectional survey research design was adopted to enable the collection of research data from a wide range of study subjects, to permit the generalization of our conclusion. The population of the study consists of 47 travel agencies operating in Port Harcourt. The study adopted a census, involving all the firms that constitute the population, and relied on primary data collected through questionnaire. The dimensions of talent management considered were talent identification, talent development, and talent utilization. The measure of enterprise resilience is adaptive capacity.

The instrument reliability was tested using the Cronbach Alpha test, with the measure and dimensions scoring coefficients that were quite above Nunnaly (1978) benchmark of 0.7. The instrument validity was handled by aid of researchers' surrogate. The research data was analyzed using mean scores evaluation for the univariate analysis and Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient for the Bivariate analysis.

4. Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings

Descriptors	Talent management				Ent. Resilience
	Identification	Development	Retention	Utilization	Adaptive capacity
N	30	30	30	30	30
	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	4.8105	4.7124	4.7004	4.5120	4.0103
Std. deviation	.2028	.27503	.26503	.29829	.38429
Minimum	4.33	4.33	4.33	4.00	4.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Table 1: Mean score evaluation on study variables

Source: Research Data (2015)

S/N	Predictor dimensions	Criterion measure Enterprise adaptive capacity	Decision
HO ₁	Talent identification	r 0.225 p 0.409 r ² 0.050	Rejected
HO ₂	Talent development	r 0.398 p 0.006 r ² 0.150	Rejected
HO ₃	Talent retention	r 0.500 p 0.004 r ² 0.279	Rejected
HO ₄	Talent utilization	r 0.528 p 0.004 r ² 0.279	Rejected

Table 2: Results on test of hypotheses
Source: Research Data (2015)

The response rate to our instrument in this study was 83 per cent which 39 copies of the 47 copies of the instrument administered. All 30 copies were found usable for the analysis. The univariate analysis was done on the respondents' demographics and the study variables. The relevant demographic issues considered were firms age and number of branches in operations. On the firms' age, 80% of the travel agencies have been in operation in Nigeria for over 5 years. The analysis on number of branches shows that 68% have branches in at least 5 major cities in Nigeria, while 32% have branches in less than 5 cities. On the respondents' assertion about the study phenomena, talent identification had a mean score of 4.81; talent development had 4.71; talent retention had a mean of 4.70; talent utilization had 4.51; and enterprise adaptive capacity had 4.01. These results imply the existence of talent management among the respondents, considering the maximum mean of 5.00. This trend is the same with enterprise adaptive capacity.

The research hypotheses were tested using spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient by aid of SPSS. The results in Table 2 indicate talent identification has a positive but weak association with enterprise resilience as indicated in the coefficients in Ho₁, ($r = .225$; $p = .409$).

However, the association between talent development and enterprise adaptive capacity in Ho₂ ($r = .398$; $p = .006$); talent retention and enterprise adaptive capacity in Ho₃ ($r = .500$; $p = .004$) and the association between talent utilization and enterprise resilience show high level of significance in Ho₃ ($r = .528$; $p = .004$). The three null hypotheses were rejected going by Guilford (1956), Kerlinger and Lee (2000) and Irving (2005) guideline, adopted in Asawo (2009) and Ahiauzu and Asawo (2010), for the acceptance or rejected of null hypotheses, that: (a) r value of $<.20$ is the benchmark for accepting a null hypothesis and (b) r value of $\geq .20$ is the benchmark for rejecting a null hypothesis. Also, in providing a consistent means as criteria for interpreting statistical correlations, the Guilford (1956) scale given in Irving (2005) has the following: a) $<.20$ = slight correlation, almost negligible; b) $.20$ to $.40$ = low correlation, definite but small relationship; c) $.40$ to $.70$ = moderate correlation, substantial relationship; d) $.70$ to $.90$ = high correlation, marked relationship; e) $>.90$ = very high correlation, very dependable relationship.

However, the rejection of Ho₁ is with serious caution because of the almost insignificant but positive correlation between talent identification and enterprise resilience. The positive but weak association between talent identification and enterprise adaptive capacity implies the importance of talent identification, but its insufficient bring about the expected adaptive capacity. This agrees with the argument of Luthans (2002); McShane & Von Glinow (2006) skills, knowledge and talent have no market value until they are put into use. This means that enterprise resilience cannot be achieve by mere talent identification. Specifically, Bipin Junnarkar, director of knowledge management at Monsanto is quoted in Galagan (1997) as saying "we're not considered by information; we are not constrained by sense making"; we are not constrained by ideas but by what to do with them". Thus, the ultimate effect of talent is in the doing, not just identifying it. This result was recorded in spite the evidence of considerable talent identification shown in its mean score on Table 2. Nonetheless, talent development/retention and talent utilization with almost equal mean scores turned to have significantly higher coefficient when correlated with enterprise adaptive capacity. Firms in the travel agencies grapple with the dynamics of their environment to continuously survive by consciously managing their human resources capabilities and competence defined in employee talents. The implication is that the entropic tendencies of threats in the firms' environment naturally trigger negative entropy behavior among environmentally conscious firms, through talent management. Drawing from the foregoing, the study found that talent identification is necessary but has premature and rather inadequate impact to produce sustainable enterprise resilience for continuous survival. The study also found that talent development and retention utilization as the logical stages of the talent management process after identification, offers the ultimately needed enterprise resilience for firms' sustainable survival. This is corroborates McShane and Von Glinow (2000) argument that, talent utilization consists of sense-making, talent awareness, and empowerment. They argued that "identifying and developing talent are wasted exercises unless talent is effectively put to use." Thus, the study found that talent development, retention and talent utilization demonstrate close association with enterprise adaptive capacity. Gunderson (2000) has linked firms' adaptive capacity to trends that manifest in innovation, competitive strength and survival as firms strive to exist in population ecology. This also fits in to the views of Armstrong (2009); Burhus & Osula (2011) that resilience through adaptive capacity is a fit contributed to organizations by only human elements (skills, talent and knowledge). This

further respects the fundamental fact in our findings that the utilization of the human talent elements is the real determinant of sustainable survival by adaptive existence in a wild, complex, unpredictable, dynamic and often predatory business universe.

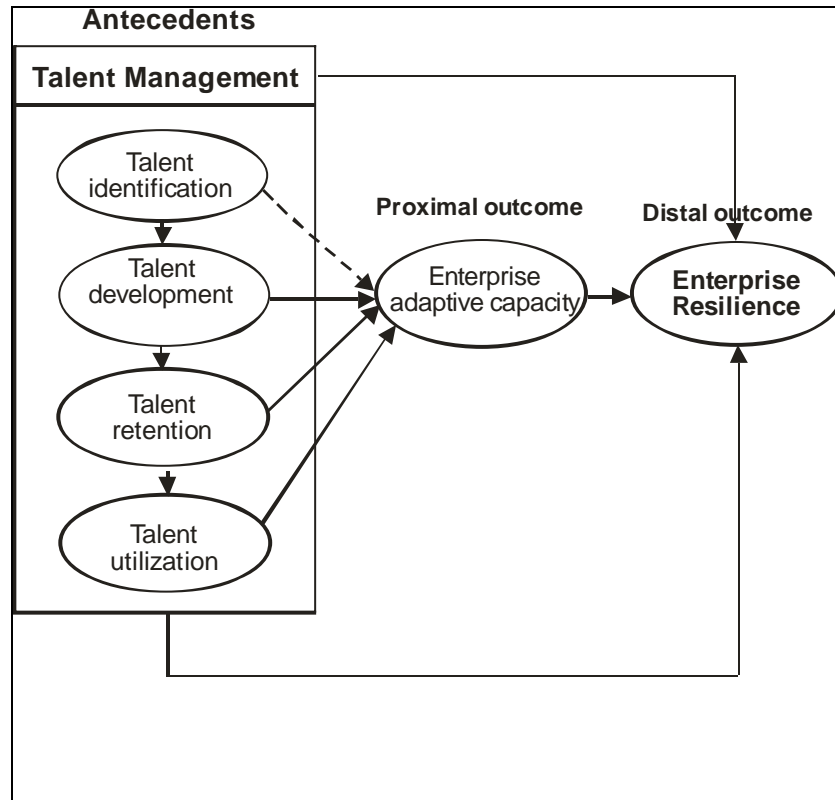


Figure 1: A heuristic model on the association between talent management and enterprise resilience.

5. Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

Based on our findings, the paper concludes that firms' resilience behavior is an outcome expressed in adaptive capacity strengthened by effective talent management, as sustainable resilience is predicated upon a sequential and complete talent management process. The implication of this conclusion is that, firms that harness employee talent tend to improve on their adaptive fitness to survive business related threats (Kazmi (2008); Hamel & Valikangas, 2003). This found anchor on the argument that employee talent in most cases are largely untapped, yet break through and innovation in firms depend on effective talent handling (Smit & Wandel, 2006).

This has direct agreement with the Darwinian thesis on fitness addictiveness and survival of species. Thus, the ultimate implication of our conclusion is that a complete talent management process is necessary to generate adequate adaptive capacity for enterprise resilience. Thus, managers who identify, hunt, develop, retain and utilize employee talent beyond certificated capabilities are more likely to drive their organizations to sustainable resilience. This calls for a managerial paradigm shift in human resources management disposition.

Based on the conclusion, the study recommends thus: a) Travel agencies should draw specific talent identification programmes that are directed to specific strategic resilient challenges facing firms in the industry; b) Travel agencies should identify hidden strategic talents through diversified-role engagement where work functions may most times be outside certificated skills; c) Talent development should be based on talent and interest identified in an employee, not necessarily on educational certification. Such development can be through intensive training, community of practice and delegation of responsibility or job enrichment; d) Strategic talents that are developed should be retained through internal and external equity management, and regarded as the most valuable assets in firms operations; e) Talent utilization should not be handled as an isolated activity, rather as the ultimate logical component of talent management preceding identification and development/retention, achieved through appropriate employee engagement and empowerment to apply talent, skills, and knowledge.

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