

# **MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES ON A TALENT VALUE PROPOSITION FOR ACADEMIC STAFF IN A SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION**

By

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY**

In the

**SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES**

**FACULTY OF COMMERCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

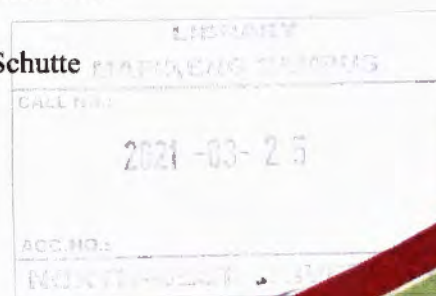
at the

**NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY (MAFIKENG CAMPUS)**

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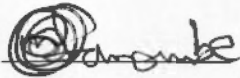
November 2016



## DECLARATION

I, **Musawenkosi Donia Saurombe**, hereby declare that the submission of this thesis entitled "Management perspectives on a talent value proposition for academic staff in a South African Higher Education Institution", in the form of four(4) research articles, for the doctoral degree in industrial psychology in the Department of Industrial Psychology, School of Management Sciences, Faculty of Commerce and Administration, at the North-West University (Mafikeng Campus), has not been submitted neither by me nor by anyone else for the degree at this or any other university before, that this is my own work, and the materials consulted have been appropriately acknowledged.

SIGNATURE



STUDENT NO 22625453

DATE 24 APRIL 2017



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt gratitude goes to all of the following wonderful individuals who have stayed the course with me throughout this journey in pursuit of my doctoral degree:

- My promoter, Professor Nicolene Barkhuizen, who has done a masterful job at supervising my research. She has been a constant source of inspiration, encouragement and strength for me. I am grateful for her diligent efforts in every facet of my study.
- My co-promoter, Professor Nico Schutte, who has contributed imperative insights towards my study and helped bring the bigger picture into perspective.
- All the participants, who took the time, despite their busy schedules, to participate in the qualitative inquiry requirement of my study; I am grateful for their efforts and authentic responses.
- My Higher Education Institution, North-West University for providing additional funding for me to be able to conduct and conclude this study.
- My parents, who wholeheartedly support the path I've chosen and always put me first regardless of the many responsibilities they themselves are faced with.
- Over and above everything, I thank God for the opportunity and ability to study and comprehend, and for all that He imminently has in store for me. I am nothing without God.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to God who has given me the ability to harness my talents in a manner that creates purpose, not only in my life, but also in the lives of others within my sphere of influence.

### A POEM BY: GEORGE SAUROMBE

Surely God gives one and all, talents, one, two, three and more.

Work that talent, big or small, and eat the treasures of its store.

Though the prudent and the wise, may boast of more in their store,  
your scanty store you must prize, and dare to toil to make it more.

Tis in use that we choose, hidden treasures to declare,  
what's not used we will lose, even our treasured talents rare.

Tis the little that God gives, that defines our value true,  
the sweetest evidence that He lives, is the priceless gift called you!

All talents are a treasure, found in you and in me,  
God gives without measure, both to the bond and to the free.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

|            |                                 |
|------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>CSR</b> | Corporate Social Responsibility |
| <b>EB</b>  | Employment/Employer Branding    |
| <b>EVP</b> | Employee Value Proposition      |
| <b>HE</b>  | Higher Education                |
| <b>HEI</b> | Higher Education Institution    |
| <b>HR</b>  | Human Resources                 |
| <b>OB</b>  | Organisational Branding         |
| <b>TLC</b> | Talent Life Cycle               |
| <b>TVP</b> | Talent Value Proposition        |



## ABSTRACT

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), like other organisations globally, are presently confronted with intricate and evolving operating markets in which they need to stay competitive in order to survive. This implies that because talent has since been acknowledged to be critical to the success of any organisation, HEIs should; therefore, find ways to best appeal to their main source of competitive advantage – highly effective academic staff members. Despite this knowledge, institutions of higher learning continue to lag behind in acquiring and keeping the best talent and minimal research exists on the subject. The few studies that exist do not offer much insight on the importance of a Talent Value Proposition (TVP) for gaining and retaining top academics.

The main objective of this research was to explore management perspectives on a talent value proposition for academic staff in a South African Higher Education Institution. The management of the merged South African HEI were selected as the unit of analysis owing to the fact that they are the custodians of the institution's TVP. It was; therefore, pertinent to obtain their opinions on the subject. This research applied purposive convenience sampling; participants were selected on the basis of their willingness and relevancy in being able to provide the information sought after. This research had a sample size of 12 participants –  $N=12$ . Data analysis was performed through content and thematic analysis, from which emerged various themes and sub-themes.

The findings suggest that the current perceived organisational brand of the merged South African HEI is constituted by the reputation and image, the culture and identity, the strategic vision, the corporate social responsibility, the work and surrounding environment of the institution and lastly, the merger implications that exist within the institution. The most frequent sub-themes were organisational branding, work and surrounding environment, reputation and image, and organisational culture and identity.

The qualitative inquiry in this research implied that the current perceived employment brand of the merged South African HEI is made up of the fringe benefits/incentives and remuneration; the leadership and managerial support; the work/life balance and flexibility; and job security offered within the institution; the occupational health and safety; and performance management and development in the institution; as well as the fulfilment and



purpose gained through working for the institution. The following sub-themes occurred the most in descending order: employment branding, fringe benefits/incentives and remuneration, leadership and managerial support, and occupational health and safety.

The findings further suggest that the elements: talent mind-set; talent preparation and acquisition; talent development; talent performance and recognition; as well as talent retention are pertinent to the application of a Talent Life Cycle (TLC) with regard to the academics of the merged South African HEI. Out of the sub-themes that emerged from TLC, talent development, talent retention, and talent performance and recognition were the highest recurring.

Finally, the findings showed that the main determinants of a TVP for academic staff members in a merged South African HEI are the organisational brand of the institution; the employment brand of the institution and the talent life cycle within the institution. Apart from the previously mentioned themes, another theme of TVP occurred, which generated the sub-themes: importance of TVPs; mutual expectations; and implementation challenges of TVPs.

This study offers crucial acumens to the theoretical, methodological and practical body of existing knowledge. Theoretically, the most feasible TVP for academic staff in a merged South African HEI was examined – a phenomenon which had not previously been investigated. Methodologically, this study gave rise to a new TVP model for academic staff members in a merged South African HEI through a qualitative inquiry. A practical offering is that the developed model can now be implemented by the merged South African HEI at will. Recommendations for implementation and for further research are also provided in this study.

**Keywords:** Academic staff, Employment Branding, Higher Education Institution, Organisational Branding, Talent Management, Talent Life Cycle, Talent Value Proposition

## **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES ON A TALENT VALUE PROPOSITION FOR ACADEMIC STAFF IN A SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study aimed to explore the main components of a successful TVP. For the purpose of this study, these components were identified as Organisational Branding, Employment/employer Branding, and finally, Talent Life Cycle. The researcher made use of articles in order to articulate the facets of each of these previously mentioned concepts, which was done in the first three (3) articles of this study. The fourth (4th) and final article integrated the three main concepts explored in the first three articles of this study in order to develop and recommend an ideal model which the merged South African HEI can implement as its TVP. Qualitative data were gathered from the management of the South African HEI to ensure that the suggested model is as specifically suited as possible to the needs of the institution that was investigated.

#### **1.2 BACKGROUND OF TALENT MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century higher educational landscape became known for its war on academic talent. This 'war for academic talent' can be attributed to various factors such as globalisation and increasing competitiveness across markets, the aging work force, a decline in younger workers entering, a lack of adequate state and research funding, uncompetitive remuneration packages and research incentives and employment equity initiatives (Callaghan, 2015; Schulze, 2015; Singh, 2015). Without well qualified and committed academic staff, no academic institution can ensure sustainability and quality over the long term (Pienaar & Bester, 2008). Higher education management therefore needs to understand what core talent means, and how to leverage the talent in a manner that allows the higher education sector to



act decisively to attract, retain, and develop academic talent and hence secure its future success (Theron, Barkhuizen & Du Plessis, 2014).

The researcher found it incumbent for the merged South African HEI to have a sound TVP in place due to the challenges associated with attracting, magnetising or recruiting as well as retaining talent. This initiative was intended to positively reinforce the psychological contract between the institution and its employees, thus resulting in greater commitment, less turnover as well as a higher calibre of potential employees that are attracted.

### **1.2.1 Brief Historical Background of Talent Value Proposition**

TVP) – popularly known as Employee Value Proposition (EVP) – is a term used to describe the equilibrium between the TLC that are gained by employees in compensation for their input or performance in the workplace (Smith, 2012). Minchington (2006) also describes a TVP as a classification of associations and offerings made available by organisations in compensation for the abilities, competencies and experiences that employees offer to these organisations. It would; therefore, be safe to conclude that TVP is the degree or extent of restitutions and gains that are enjoyed by staff members in return for their effort at their workplace (Castaneda, 2014).

The TVP is a prevailing instrument and exercise that has been used throughout the previous decade to increase the attractiveness of organisations to their employees. A properly assembled and delivered TVP provides an orderly system through which talent, internal brand, engagement, work, leadership, recognition, rewards and behaviours are interweaved together with other components in order to attract, retain and engage employees (Zinger, 2013). Finney (2008) is of the opinion that organisations cannot realistically carry on providing the value proposition that they may have been executing efficaciously over the past decade. This owing to the fact that changes in the industry, competitive environments as well as corporate structures corner numerous companies into experiencing significant variations in the deal that they are able to offer employees. Human capital is the critical element of any prosperous business and in the midst of every grand business plan, and people are present who will incorporate the measures required to guarantee the ultimate success or failure of

these plans (Fitz-enz, 2010). Consequently, it has been discovered and concluded that what is pivotal within organisations, is the complete understanding of the TVP (Fitz-enz, 2010).

Manohar and Stehli (2013) state that from the 1920s through to the 1980s the book value of companies was founded on perceptible assets. Over the previous 40 years, immaterial assets like brand, culture, leadership and innovativeness have become of superior prominence with regard to the competitive advantage of companies, and now contribute three times more than perceptible assets in the book value of companies (Manohar & Stehli, 2013). The major executor or facilitator of intangible assets is people; therefore, eliminating employees from immaterial assets will drop the value of companies to zero. Since competitive significance has moved from perceptible assets that companies own to immaterial assets that are put into motion by employees (which companies do not possess), the control has thus been redirected from employers to employees (Manohar & Stehli, 2013).

According to Paradine (as cited in Frauenheim, 2012), companies previously concentrated on capitalising on the enactment of workers. In recent times, it has become more of a reciprocal arrangement whereby employees, particularly younger ones, anticipate guidance and acknowledgment in correspondence for their labours. The supposed social contract encompassing work, sometimes referred to as the employment deal or the employee value proposition, continues to vary. The epoch of lifetime employment for loyalty that dominated the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s has been succeeded by a less patriarchal, increasingly profit-focused corporate mentality and curtailed worker allegiance in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. More recent signs; however, indicate a possible middle ground, as specialists express that an age has now come upon us that is more defined by mutual benefit (Frauenheim, 2012). As organisations bring the employment deal up to date with the 21st century, they are not guaranteeing enduring employment as has been the case in previous decades, but are rather proposing a different approach to employment stability, which entails a solid commitment to training and career development (Frauenheim, 2012).

This research aimed to offer scholarly insight into the value attached to academic employees pertaining to the concepts of organisational branding, employment/employer branding, talent



life cycle, and a TVP for academic employees in a merged South African HEI. The integrated TVP model that was developed in this study is meant to improve the value of the HEI's academics, also in terms of the way these academics are managed.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Today's employees may often feel as though they are not compensated or recognised enough for all their efforts. Consequently, it has become increasingly necessary to have systems in place that ensure that those who put maximum effort in will receive the maximum benefits. Moreover, such systems should be implemented in a way to boost the work ethic and morale of those who are not intrinsically driven and should also improve the quality of the employees who are attracted and recruited.

When employees are disappointed with the methods of their employers or when lack of commitment is displayed on the part of employers, such employees are more likely to be reluctant to perform their work to full capacity and thus the achievement of organisations' vision and mission are hindered (Kusluvan, 2003). Because the mission of the merged South African HEI is to become a balanced teaching-learning and research university and to implement its expertise in an innovative way by living its values, striving for sound management and pursuing transformation, while being locally engaged, nationally relevant and internationally recognised, as stated by Van der Merwe (2013), this mission has instigated a desire within the researcher to recommend a TVP model.

The TVP will allow the institution to express what they would like best to be associated with as an employer and to express the intricacies of the employment deal (the value that employees are anticipated to contribute and the reciprocal benefits that they can anticipate in return). In this way, the institution will attract the most suitable candidates to employ who will drive the organisation towards achieving their mission. The TVP should be specifically tailored to cater for the distinct needs of academic employees in order to ensure that the right talent is attracted, passive candidates are positively influenced, and current employees are re-inspired.



This research generally addressed the viability and advantageousness of having a TVP established in a merged South African HEI. This study further explored four specific research issues namely, organisational branding, employment branding, a TLC and a TVP model as well as the discrepancies that would likely arise in the absence of a sound TVP. In the subsequent section, an introduction of the concept of a TVP is provided as well as the four research issues under investigation are discussed.

### **1.3.1 Talent Value Proposition**

A TVP can be interpreted as affirmation that organisations have confidence in their employees. It is one thing to verbally express to employees that they are valued; however, it is another thing to put this into action, as people tend to believe what they observe, as opposed to what they are told. Employers who only verbally express how valuable their employees are to them, yet who are unwilling to invest financially in combination with other resources in the development and positive reinforcement of their employees' special abilities, awakens a sense of doubt within the mind of the employees as to how valuable they actually are – thus crippling their capacity to perform to their fullest ability. A TVP, as opposed to other quick fixes such as fleeting incentive plans or schemes, promotes in employees a greater extent of trust and appreciation towards their employers because they see a more long-term commitment on the part of their employers.

Organisations are being compelled to acclimatise their TVP strategies to improve the process of attracting and retaining employees. The Corporate Executive Board Company (2013) states that employers consider their TVPs to be unproductive or challenging to maintain for the following reasons:

- They are made up of the wrong elements; organisations invest too vastly in trivial aspects and invest too little in more serious attributes.
- They are not set apart from that of competitors; the labour market observes nominal disparity in the TVPs of organisations with comparable offerings.



- They do not successfully convey their TVPs; the outcome of this being a substantial drop in employee commitment.

It has been argued that HR professionals and their stakeholders have too frequently operated in separate worlds; however, in order to create value, one should be aware of what value is. Value is characterised more by the one who receives it, as opposed to the one who gives it (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; Storey, Wright, & Ulrich, 2009). This depicts how employers are often misled into attempting to establish TVPs which do not truly reflect value as perceived by their employees, but rather reflects value as they, the employers, perceive it. Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) go on to explain that HR professionals should develop a culture of aiding their stakeholders to deliberate on the issues that are of greatest importance to them. Moreover, they should comprehend the essential external business authenticities that influence industries and companies. Employers are often restricted or shallow minded in their approach towards creating a TVP because they are somewhat oblivious of the organisational activities that are prevalent in their industry and how such activities could increase their competitive advantage.

Because a TVP is a key principle in the war for talent (Sparrow & Cooper, 2011), it has become increasingly essential for organisations to make it a priority in their management policies. Martin, Burke and Cooper (2011) are of the opinion that people management apprehensions are ill-hypothesised in the majority of accounts with regard to corporate reputation and branding, which usually embrace a very unitarist outlook of organisational life. In terms of TVPs, analysts normally evade addressing predicaments related with the need to retain control and pursue commitment from workers, and more skilled and pragmatic methods are required to handle these difficulties at the workplace (Francis, 2006).

Silzer and Dowell (2010) describe sustaining TVPs as a process that has sometimes proven to be quite challenging, as unsteady economic conditions or a vastly competitive setting could place critical components of these propositions at risk because companies may be more interested in controlling costs and maximising the use of capital. The sustainability of TVPs are; however, of crucial importance. These risks; therefore, poses a serious challenge to many



organisations because talented employees, especially cream-of-the-crop talented employees, anticipate that their employers will honour any assurances made to them and failure to do so on the part of employers will sooner or later drive top-talent out of any organisation (Silzer & Dowell, 2010). Owing to the challenge that TVPs tend to be intricate and elaborate, organisations have recently discovered it more pervasive to filter their TVPs into more concise and stimulating employment brands, which naturally attracts the best recruitment candidates (Silzer & Dowell, 2010).

#### **1.3.1.1 Research Problem 1: Organisational branding**

The concept of organisational branding has to do with the visual, verbal and interactive expression of distinctive business models of organisations (Knox & Bickerton, 2003). Unlike product brands, which mainly petition to customers, organisational brands communicate with varied audiences, comprising customers, employees, shareholders, the financial community, media as well as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Vallaster, Lindgreen, & Maon, 2012). Good organisational brands of organisations incorporate the vision that motivates the formation of products and services encompassed by that name. The vision of companies, together with the core belief of their brands as well as their core values – is referred to as identity (Kapferer, 2008). Organisational branding, which applies a solitary brand through the whole company, must appeal concurrently to different stakeholder groups (Vallaster, Lindgreen, & Maon, 2012). The centre of organisational branding should symbolise an unequivocal agreement between organisations and their main stakeholder groups (Balmer & Greyser, 2003).

Hardly any assets are as imperative to the success of organisations as the image they portray to customers, shareholders, media, and the overall public (Flake, 2015). There has not been much exploration of the impetuses of managers to involve themselves in organisational branding initiatives. Regardless of developing literature concerning organisational branding, there has been a minimal number of studies that consider what kind of management techniques of organisational branding managers of companies are driven to embrace. It is unlikely that the managers of companies could be inspired to be involved in organisational branding practices in order to paint a good image of their organisations to stakeholders in an



unambiguous and comprehensive manner (Aspara & Tikkanen, 2008). Rather, it is expected that managers are driven to embrace particular management approaches of organisational branding for the reason that these approaches are thought to assist precise management goals, associated with particular stakeholders (Aspara & Tikkanen, 2008). This study; therefore, aimed to bridge that gap by devising a model with an organisational brand that both accommodates the expectations of the stakeholders, and assists management goals.

In the present hypercompetitive business setting in which companies usually experience difficulty in standing out from the competition, a positive and well-articulated image can demarcate success from failure (Flake, 2015). Corporate reputation and branding is one of the paramount inconsistencies of the present business ecosphere. The essence of corporate image-building or organisational branding should not solely be the safeguarding and sustaining of individual brands integrated into the portfolio of companies, or maintaining good relations with selected groups of stakeholders, but to rather display to those who may be concerned that companies are generating common values and fulfilling their corporate social responsibilities (Figiel & Szromnik, 2012).

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It is one thing for organisations to classify themselves, or to be recognised, as organisational brands, and it is yet totally another to incorporate the notion of organisational branding and embrace its normative prominence on stability and control (Wæraas, 2008). Owing to the fact that the most resilient organisational brands are thought to be unswerving when it comes to their values, identities and self-exhibitions, organisational branding involves tallying the diverse components and styles of communication of organisations into one identity expression – as if it were one body (Wæraas, 2008). Many organisations struggle to attract and recruit top talent, due to their unpopular or inconspicuous organisational brand and image. Led by the work of Turban and Cable (2003), this sub-research stream scrutinises whether organisational reputation has an impact on the quality and quantity of applicants. The results of the above-mentioned authors depict that companies with healthier reputations entice more and greater quality applicants.



Present literature points out that branding in HE is still underdeveloped (Idris & Whitfield, 2014). In spite of dynamic corporate and commercial acceptance of branding practices, not-for-profit and service organisations continue to be unforthcoming (Idris & Whitfield, 2014). In the midst of a progressively more competitive landscape, HEIs are becoming more interested in marketing and promoting themselves. Brand structuring is becoming a premeditated administrative goal, nonetheless suitable brand management models are wanting. Compelling reasons for HEI branding comprise reversing declining enrolments; counteracting reduced retention and general competition; improving image and status; accumulating financial resources; honouring benevolent donors; mission alignment; or indicating a merger between institutions (Cobb, 2001; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Sevier, 2002; Toma et al., 2005; Williams, 2012; Williams, Osei, & Omar, 2012). The functioning and effectiveness of HEIs in actuality are mostly associated with the quest for esteem or status (Williams & Omar, 2014).

Balmer and Liao (2007) are of the notion that HEI branding offers graduates a form of identification and a way to express themselves, not simply as customers but as life-long organisation affiliates of organisational branding communities. In the instance of HEIs, this control may be affirmed by alumni, staff members and/or students, and could stir up problems when/if the name is altered (Williams & Omar, 2014). Directed at several stakeholders, the HEI brand is outwardly fixated on positioning and promoting, and inwardly fixated on the organisation and promotion of values, culture and vision.

Naturally, the acceptance of any business model, including branding, is faced with opposition within HEIs owing to the fact that such activities seem foreign to liberal educational values (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Branding within HEIs is daunting due to intricate issues like varied stakeholders; internal structures; opposition to change; wide-ranging majors and programmes; sub-branding by schools, amenities; discrepancies in terms of what influences student choices and what institutions say in publications; institutional leadership backing; and lastly, proper communication setups (Williams & Omar, 2014). Moreover, the HE industry does not have sufficient theoretical models of HE marketing (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). The question is; therefore, whether HEIs are offering what their customers desire and



require and are they positioning and marketing themselves appropriately. If so, their brand will be boosted, but if not, brand management is necessary to realise their marketing efforts.

Despite the fact that branding is growing more dominant within universities, (Jevons, 2006; Temple, 2006) research into the associations between branding and leadership is still insufficient. As Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007) advocate, empirical research is uncommon and broadly focuses on how brand characteristics stimulate students to select a specific university. Besides Waeraas and Solbakk (2009), Naidoo, Gosling, Bolden, O'Brien, and Hawkins (2014), and Forbes (2012), there is not much research available on in-house branding and even less on how different stakeholder clusters interrelate with regard to branding efforts. This study will add to this literature through an examination of how branding practices – embraced from the business sector – are restructured within HE and by addressing the inferences these practices have on academics as well as alumni/students.

Williams and Omar (2014) elucidate that after a brand management choice is made by revitalising, repositioning or renaming, it is vital that organisations emphasise changes and maintain their brand. Continuous mindful manipulation of calculated goals in all stages of the renaming is important. This maintenance involves an unremitting and deliberate realignment and a brand audit process to sustain brand significance. This process is pertinent to this study, considering that the South African HEI under investigation underwent a merge. Williams and Omar (2014) further point out how Arcadia University encouraged their history and the advantages resulting from the renaming of the institution for more than ten years after the renaming. Arcadia University integrated the 150-year legacy story of Beaver College, and the changeover process to Arcadia University was made possible by highlighting the position and brand of the university subsequent to the renaming.

According to De Roeck, Maon and Lejeune (2013), an organisational branding framework comprises the following facets:

- *Reputation* – Mental inferences concerning the organisation believed by others external to the organisation.



- *Organisational culture* – Internal values, dogmata and simple suppositions that symbolise the heritage of the organisation and puts its meanings across to its members.
- *Strategic vision* – Top management's targets for what the organisation will accomplish in the future.
- *Organisational identity* – Mental inferences embraced by organisational members concerning the organisation.
- *Intended image(s)* – Mental inferences concerning the organisation that the leaders of the organisation want significant (internal and external) audiences to embrace.
- *Construed image* – Mental inferences that organisational members and leaders think others external to the organisation hold concerning the organisation.

Several organisational branding models have been suggested over the years. These models; however, may not be best suited to any organisation other than the one for which it was intricately developed. One of the objectives of this study was to determine the kind of organisational brand that would maximise performance towards the achievement of the South African HEI's vision, mission and core corporate values in a way that will benefit all the stakeholders concerned, particularly its academic employees.

#### **1.3.1.2 Research Problem 2: Employment branding**

Employer branding, also frequently referred to as employment branding, is defined by Martin, Gollan and Grigg (2011) as a general respect for being identified among crucial stakeholders for offering a high quality employment experience, and a unique organisational identity which employees appreciate, are involved with and feel assertive and pleased to promote to others. The terms Employment branding and Employer branding are used interchangeably in this study to describe the same concept, as these two terms fundamentally mean the same thing. Employer branding denotes the process through which branding perceptions and marketing, communications and human resource procedures are used to construct an employer brand. Up until fairly recently, most practitioner-focused work has concentrated on the attraction of new talent, mainly due to the "talent wars" that supposedly characterised the bulk of the 1990s and millennium until the commencement of the global financial crisis in 2007-2008 (Martin, Gollan, & Grigg, 2011).



Employer branding is a productive way for organisations to establish the value they provide to employees and to distinguish themselves from rival firms (Torress-Coronas, 2008). Difficulties in effectively upholding attractive images in the midst of emerging technological communication media will continue; nonetheless, organisations that fruitfully develop, market, and uphold attractive employer brands will stand a better chance of winning the talent war (Torress-Coronas, 2008).

From roughly a decade back, employer branding is debated to have become an essential addition to the toolkit of HR practitioners (Barrow, 2007; Walker, 2007; Martin, 2008). As there are several features that comprise persons' experience at work, constructing the basis of organisations' employment experience for the first time may not be so simple and so employment experience encompasses a complex range of features (Edwards, 2010). Organisations require very loyal employees if they are to fulfil the requirements of their stakeholders and be successful.

By accentuating the advantages of working in a particular organisation, employer branding exhibits a specific organisation as an employer of choice among prospective employees. Nonetheless, in an attempt to appeal to employees, employer branding usually evokes a whirlwind of anticipations from the organisation as a workplace (Eshøj, 2012). That being the whole purpose and importance of employer branding, it is vital for organisations to recognise that this sort of managed communication can result in repercussions. In the keenness of crafting an inimitable employer brand that looks appealing to the desirable talents, organisations risk building unrealistic expectations which they will have difficulty fulfilling once these talents join the organisations – a risk magnified by the fact that undelivered expectations normally lead to employees intending to quit organisations, and organisational performance is thus jeopardised (Eshøj, 2012). This study; therefore, examines employer branding from alternate angles in order to build a holistic understanding of employer branding.



Some objectives of employer branding are to persuade employees that their organisations are good environments to work in, to keep employees within their organisations and to make certain that their awareness of the organisations' goals and commitment is in harmony with the organisations' vision and mission (Sehgal & Malati, 2013). There is a probability that, in imminent times, rivalry for the best talent will be as aggressive as rivalry for customers (Sehgal & Malati, 2013). Hence, it is tremendously essential that organisations start to take the notion of employment branding more seriously in order to endure the fast growing battle for talent. In the instance that organisations are not aware what their employment brand is, or their brand has not been updated lately, organisations should start by cross-examining and surveying their current employees, because employment branding that does not deliver what it claims to deliver can be detrimental to organisations when newly hired employees report for work (Bersin 2013).

A Hudson survey exposed a noteworthy discrepancy between the manner in which employers and employees viewed the organisation they worked for. More than 70% of hiring managers were under the impression that existing and potential employees were clear about what made their organisation a desirable environment to work in (Clarke, 2007). On the contrary, a massive 63% of job hunters felt that their present employer had not fulfilled the "employment experience" that was assured to them when they were recruited. As a result, staff attraction and retention matters are featuring more and more on the agenda of marketing departments (Clarke, 2007) – two aspects in which organisations cannot afford to go wrong considering the cost implications these aspects could generate. Upadhye (2015) states that, in the current hiring circumstances it can be tedious to recruit and retain employees if organisations do not possess a dependable employer brand.

“The ability to attract and retain top talent is rapidly becoming a key issue for human resource management at universities” (Van den Brink, Fruytier, & Thunnissen, 2013, p. 180). Similar to several service-oriented organisations, universities are confronted with a progressively competitive setting in which they must discover ways to distinguish their institution and express what their vision and mission are (Judson, Aurand, Gorchels, & Gordon, 2008). Amidst the environment of growing competition in HE (Dyckhoff, Clermont, Dirksen, & Mbock, 2013; Fiedler & Welpe, 2008; Ringelhan, Wollersheim, Welpe, Fiedler,



& Sporrle, 2013), universities should further understand in what way they can attract and keep top talents (Baruch, 2013). In reaction to this challenge, universities are recommended to imitate private companies, which progressively indicate their value to applicants (Backes-Gellner & Tuor, 2010) and devote themselves towards building enticing employer brands.

Within the developing field of employer branding, research as presented by the likes of Wilden, Gudergan and Lings (2010), proved that the degree to which organisations communicate their employer brand when it comes to clarity, credibility and consistency equally stimulates desirability. These findings do not merely aid organisations to attract talent but also to keep talent, since employer branding has been proven to magnify satisfaction and the way existing employees identify with the organisation (Schlager, Bodderas, Maas & Cachelin, 2011). Accordingly, employer branding is anticipated to diminish turnover rates (Edwards, 2010). Regardless of the evidence that employer branding is advantageous and imperative for private sector organisations (Ewing et al., 2002), research has been disregarding the subject in terms of universities.

The existing lack of employer branding methods for universities can be explained by the fact that academic labour markets are typically categorised as buyers' markets – in other words the supply of faculty surpasses its demand (Hargens, 2012). For universities, this implies that they do not compete with other universities and with organisations outside academia (Brosi & Welp, 2014). Additionally, assuming that employer branding is less significant in buyers' markets, Employer Branding improves both the quantity and quality of the applicants' pool including the satisfaction and identification of current employees (Edwards 2010), which are positively related to organisational performance (Messersmith, Patel, Lepak, & Gould-Williams, 2011). Finally, academic labour markets are anticipated to be dynamic (Baruch 2013) and to turn into suppliers' markets (Melo et al. 2010). As a result, universities can be expected to compete more with both universities (Ringelhan et al. 2013) and organisations external to academia (Lee et al. 2008). Under these labour market conditions, overlooking employer branding methods means forfeiting opportunities to enhance performance and to attract new employees. Universities are appropriately recommended to involve themselves in employer branding independently from labour market settings (Brosi & Welp, 2014). In order to address the research gap of employer branding in HE, this study examines the



practices and features pertaining to employment branding that solicit top academics to apply for a position at a HEI.

There have been numerous academic studies where employer brand attractiveness is concerned (e.g., Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) and best employer studies are frequently published in the business press. Based on the outcomes of these studies, several organisations are now endeavouring to adapt to a so-called ideal blueprint of employment (Mosley, 2007) by benchmarking their own practices against those of companies that have already achieved recognition as best employers. In fact, Martin, Beaumont, Doi and Pate (2005) debate that benchmarking is now viewed as a central HR and business imperative. However, this strategy is tricky for two reasons. Firstly, employer branding that imitates a supposed ideal blueprint cannot reveal the unique identity of specific organisations. Consequently, no clear foundation is offered for harmonising the behaviour of employees with the values of the organisational brand. Secondly, the research on which this blueprint is founded has focused almost entirely on the qualities sought by prospective employees.

Since the objectives of organisational branding can only be achieved through the behaviour of existing employees, marketers should also consider what makes employer branding appealing to people in this category, but this question is disregarded continually (Berthon et al., 2005). It is; therefore, one of the most imperative objectives of this study to develop a TVP model with an embedded employment brand that aligns the behaviour of the merged South African HEI's academic staff members with the values of the merged South African HEI's organisational brand by collecting data from the HEI's current staff members in order to ascertain a true depiction of the HEI's unique needs.

Muncherji, Gopalakrishnan and Dhar (2009) advise that employment branding has become more of a requirement than a benefit due to the increasingly competitive world we live in and as such, organisations can disregard it only to their own detriment. This study further seeks to develop a TVP model that comprises a sustainable employment brand for the merged South African HEI, which exhibits honesty by delivering what it promises to deliver to current



employees, and presenting the employment brand unambiguously to potential employees, thus making the institution more competitive within its market.

According to Parmar (2014), the factors that influence employer branding are:

- *Leadership and management* – Top management officials are to provide and exhibit a strong support system and organisational culture which all other employees within the organisation can emulate.
- *Performance management and development* – Employees are becoming increasingly concerned with their self-development; therefore, employers should also concern themselves with assisting to fulfil these self-empowerment desires.
- *Salary and benefits* – Employees anticipate to be compensated for services rendered. Furthermore, those that perform extraordinarily also expect eminent recognition.
- *Work/life balance* – In most cases, the personal lives of individuals tend to affect their work to a certain extent and vice versa. Employers who have come to terms with this phenomenon are now becoming more concerned with fostering a harmonious relationship between employees' work and personal lives, so as to elicit the best on-the-job performance from employees.

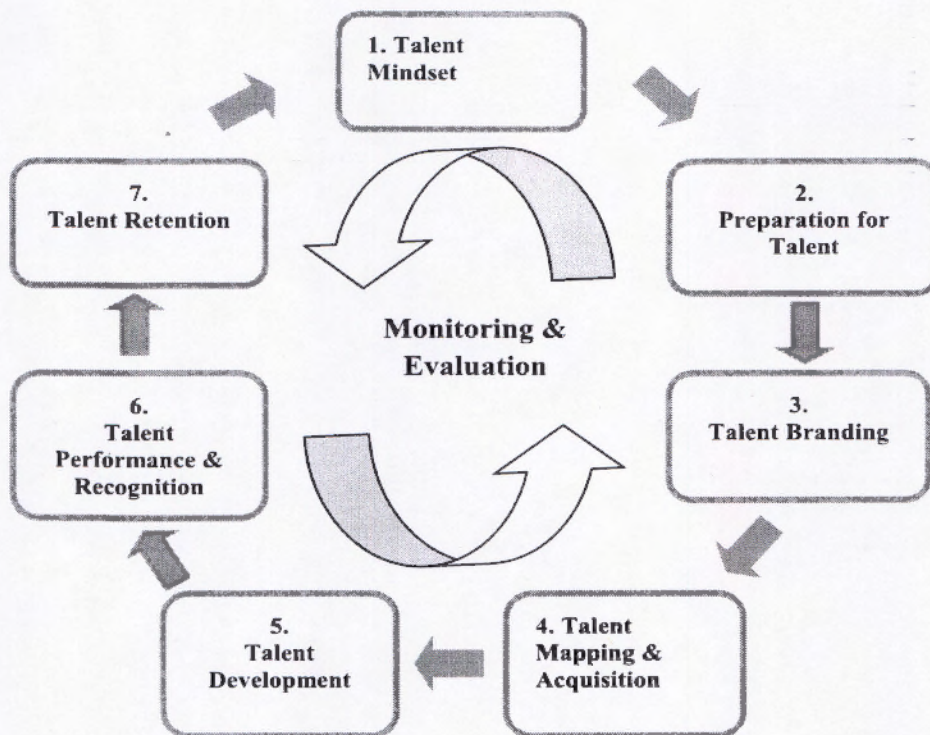
Several employer branding models exist. However, they may not always be applicable in every organisational situation. One of the objectives of this study was to establish what kind of an employer brand would best appeal to the academic staff members of the South African HEI in order to deliver the most attractive TVP to the HEI's academic employees.

#### **1.3.1.3 Research Problem 3: Talent Life Cycle**

Kirwan (2009) argues that organisations that earnestly embrace TLC management should start the life cycle at the recruitment phase. The previously mentioned author furthermore states that prior to hiring candidates, successful organisations devote up-front dollars to warrant that they are shortlisting competent and experienced candidates – including corresponding behaviour. Companies that continually fulfil their core values are usually



concerned about matching candidates successfully. Fruitful TLC management addresses associate acquisition, retention as well as contribution earnestly. Companies where talent management is applied, scrutinised and managed are the ones that lead by example and usually have several alternatives for replacement when associate attrition takes place (Kirwan, 2009). Schutte and Barkhuizen (2015) develop a seven-step talent life cycle model as displayed in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1 A Talent Life Cycle (Source: Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2015).**

### *1. Talent Mind-set*

Cheese, Thomas and Craig (2008) state that when organisations possess a talent mind-set, the goal of proliferating talent ties the individual and joint efforts of all their people, and guide their practices, culture and drive. The previously mentioned authors also opine that this talent mind-set is founded on two common beliefs: Firstly, people acknowledge that talent is crucial to the current and imminent needs of organisations as well as their own, and that talent distinguishes them and their organisation from others; secondly, people acknowledge that



they can contribute personally to growing the talent accessible to their organisation. With regards to these common beliefs, organisations with a talent mind-set create and accomplish a common vision, incline it to customers and various stakeholders, and persistently raise their performance and value (Cheese, Thomas, & Craig, 2008).

## *2. Preparation for Talent*

Maxwell (2007, p. 96) states that: "If you want to take advantage of opportunities to use your talent, then you must be prepared when the opportunities arise." HE disciplines could be struck by an inability to innovate if they fail to get the most out of talent (Nkuna, 2010). When these disciplines fall short of talent, they fall short of growth, seeing as though real growth hinges on innovation. If South African HEIs disregard talent, they inevitably disregard innovation, development and culture change (Nkuna, 2010).

## *3. Talent Branding*

According to Stringer and Rueff (2006), talent branding is concerned with service, positive communication and shared respect, while it is also concerned with livelihoods, hopes and ambitions. Furthermore, talent branding may hold influential supremacy that companies may not even be aware of due to the fact that the largest single impact on opinion has always been the spoken word. If individuals have a noteworthy or a dreadful encounter working for a company, then all their friends will be informed about it and those friends will pass on the same encounters they have heard about (Stringer & Rueff, 2006). Talent branding images thus possess the power to appeal to your target candidates while deterring those who might not be as good a fit.

## *4. Talent Mapping and Acquisition*

Talent mapping is a dignified process of connecting available talent to the talent that will be required to support development in order to measure shortages or discrepancies (Shalini, 2015). As companies are seeking better alignment between talent management and calculated planning, they start to perceive more superior significance in talent mapping (Shalini, 2015). Flamholtz (2012) describes talent acquisition as a calculated approach to recruit, select and



hire individuals to cater for organisations' current and forthcoming workforce requirements. Once the process of talent mapping has run its course, the appropriate placement of available talent as well as externally identified talent that has been linked to the talent needed should take place through talent acquisition.

### *5. Talent Development*

Talent development or, as it is sometimes called, human resource development, entails all undertakings concerning the training and improvement of staff (Needle, 2010). Morgan and Jay (2011) further allude that when organisations are dedicated towards improving talent, they convey a potent message: We consider our employees important, we want to improve them, we are cognisant of their critical role in our success, we want them to participate and to flourish, and we recognise that when they do, our organisation will be strong and boom.

### *6. Talent Performance and Recognition*

Recognition enhances both talent satisfaction and retention (Phillips & Edwards, 2009). In other words, when incentives and appreciation are offered to employees for their performance and when their input towards organisational performance is recognised (Rothwell, Zaballero, & Par, 2014). If employees consider their performance overlooked, or not valued, or that others in the organisation receive incentives for the wrong reasons, incentive programmes will be discouraging to employees and end in a higher turnover (Phillips & Edwards, 2009).

### *7. Talent Retention*

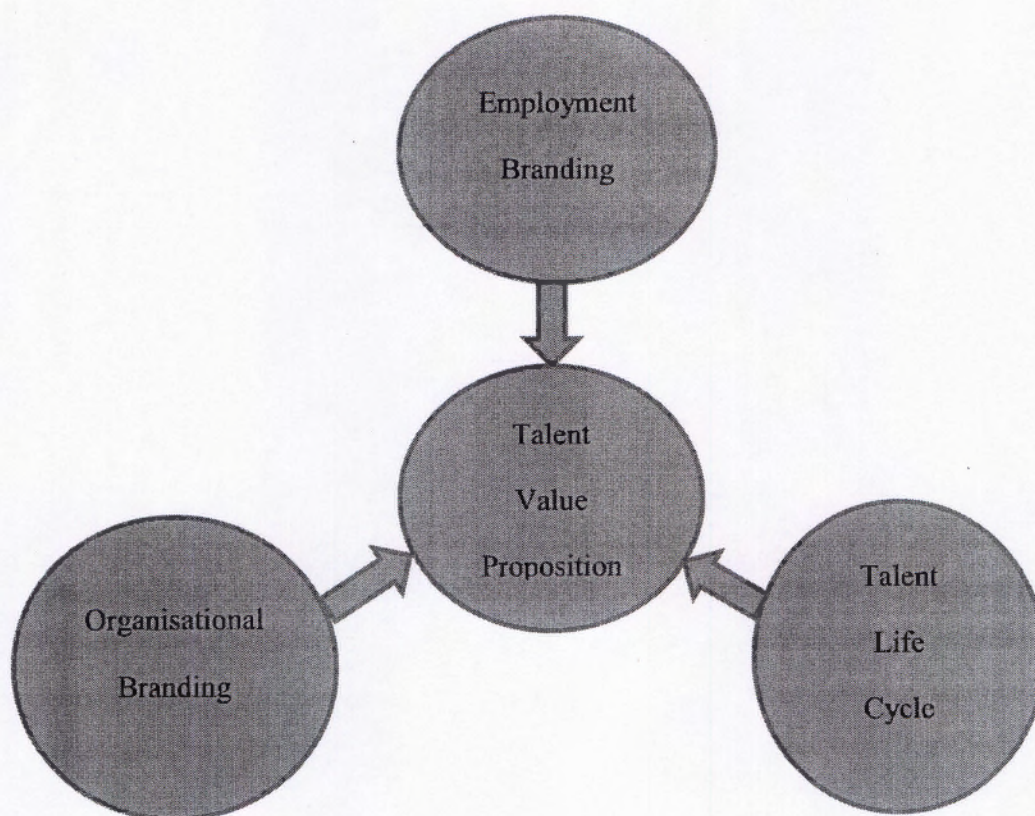
Retaining employees is more crucial than hiring, thus it is important for organisations to design and implement operative retention management practices (Yamamoto, 2011; Ratna & Chawla, 2012). Talent is no good to organisations that cannot retain it.

#### **1.3.1.4 Research Problem 4: Towards a TVP Framework**

Several models have been developed on organisational branding, employment branding as well as TLCs (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2015; De Roeck, Maon, & Lejeune, 2013; Parmer,



2014). These above-mentioned concepts were identified by the researcher as the main concepts that constitute a sound EVP, referred to as a TVP for the purpose of this study. This research; therefore, sought to develop an all-inclusive model that would integrate all of the above-mentioned concepts in order to develop a TVP model that would fit the merged South African HEI referred to in this study.



**Figure 1.2 Conceptual Model for the study (Source: Author's own).**

Figure 1.2 is a depiction of the model that has been suggested for the merged South African HEI in this study as a TVP. This model stipulates that in order to successfully forge an efficacious psychological contract with its academic staff members, the South African HEI should appropriately deliver the integrated concepts of organisational branding, employment branding, and a TLC to its current and prospective academic employees.



## **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The main question concerning this research was: What are management perspectives on a talent value proposition for academic staff in a South African Higher Education Institution

The specific research questions were:

- What are management perspectives on the building blocks of the organisational brand of a higher education institution for academic talent management?
- What are management perspectives on the factors affecting the employment brand for academic talent management in a South African higher education institution?
- What are the components of a talent life cycle framework for academic staff in a South African higher education institution?
- What are the components of a talent value proposition framework for academic staff in a South African Higher Education Institution?

## **1.5 EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

This study aimed to make a theoretical, a methodological as well as a practical contribution to the pool of knowledge on talent/employee value propositions.

### **1.5.1 Theoretical Contribution**

Bergh and Ketchen (2009) highlight that by acquiring more insight into what a theoretical contribution in TVPs entail and the explicit role of research papers therein, we state that academic theses are a dominant tool to advance theory in this research arena. Myers (2013) states that, the theoretical contribution a study makes is essential because it is a prerequisite of the majority of top journals for research articles to contribute substantially to theory. Similarly, it is essential for the researcher in this study to specify the contribution that this study makes to the academic pool of knowledge that is already available on the subject of TVPs. Mick, Pettigrew, Pechmann and Ozanne (2012) argue that a likely concern about accentuating theoretical contributions is that the practical contributions will inescapably be deprioritised, making it increasingly challenging for the broader community to appreciate and



make use of research outcomes. Nevertheless, in Mick, Pettigrew, Pechmann and Ozanne's (2012) experience, practitioners, consumers and policy makers will more often than not understand the practical acumens in research studies, which will not be diminished by theoretical contributions.

This study explored the feasibility of establishing and implementing a customised TVP for academic staff members in a merged South African HEI, a subject which has not been previously examined. Accordingly, the study makes a substantial input to the body of knowledge on TVPs in South Africa. In addition, the study emphasises the benefits for HEI of having and using a TVP in their organisation by exploring the various experiences of other organisations that have already adopted and successfully implemented this strategy – thus also testing theory and determining its practicality.

### **1.5.2 Methodological Contribution**

This research embraced a qualitative research approach, which is a credible and popular way of conducting research in the social and management sciences. The qualitative approach in this study contributed significantly by giving rise to a theory based on the new phenomena discovered during the investigation. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on how to most appropriately use the qualitative research method in a South African setting, and more particularly in HEIs.

### **1.5.3 Practical Contribution**

TVP is a concept that has become an increasingly burning issue in organisations globally, especially to the newer generation. Even so, TVPs still generates confusion and face resistance and undermining in many organisations around the world. This research identified the components of a most effective TVP, namely organisational branding, employment branding as well as TLCs that best satisfy the needs of academic staff members in a merged South African HEI. Additionally, a model for the implementation of an effective TVP was developed in this study.



## **1.6 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this research were divided into two parts, namely the general research objective and specific research objectives.

### **1.6.1 Research Aim**

To explore management perspectives on a talent value proposition for academic staff in a South African Higher Education Institution.

### **1.6.2 Specific Objectives**

- To explore management perspectives on the building blocks of the organisational brand of a higher education institution for academic talent management.
- To explore management perspectives on the factors affecting the employment brand for academic talent management in a South African higher education institution.
- To develop a talent life cycle framework for academic staff in a South African higher education institution.
- To develop a talent value proposition framework for academic staff in a South African higher education institution.

## **1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN**

A research design is a basic tool that assists researchers to survey specific research questions. There are numerous research designs available – each with different functions. It would be inappropriate to vaguely assume that there is one preeminent type of research design for each study. As a result, it is appropriate to contemplate what knowledge has been identified previously in a certain research area, and what type of research question is being surveyed, before one can in fact decide on a research design. Consequently, the research maintained that the most prominent question was: “What is the best research design for this particular problem at this time?” (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, Jr, 2008: p. 67). Many areas of literature may need to be examined in a research design in order to construct the basis and



substantiation for conducting research, and to select theory, research strategies as well as methods (Blaikie, 2010).

### **1.7.1 Research Approach**

This study followed a qualitative research approach. The researcher chose to use this approach because of the small population of managerial staff within the merged South African HEI. Using the qualitative research approach; therefore, allowed the researcher to make a substantial contribution in terms of the knowledge that already exists on TVPs globally. The qualitative research approach also allowed the researcher to gain new insights and a broader comprehension of the phenomena involved in this study. Qualitative research basically refers to the manner through which a researcher collects, classifies and deduces data acquired from human beings through the researcher's eyes and ears as filters, usually entailing intensive interviews as well as/or physical, virtual or social observations of human beings (Lichtman, 2013). Furthermore, in contrast to qualitative research, quantitative research depends immensely on the examining of a hypothesis, cause and effect as well as a statistical evaluation (Lichtman, 2013).

The researcher chose to use the article format to write up this thesis with the intention of ultimate publication and; therefore, investigated the expectation for writing qualitative research articles. Streubert and Carpenter (2011) allude that turning interview transcripts into a manuscript suitable for publication necessitates a meticulous and focused approach and also intense synthesis with regard to writing and organising competencies. The previously mentioned authors also mention that the most imperative issue for a qualitative researcher to remember when starting the writing process is to be unambiguous – owing to the fact that qualitative research produces an immense volume of raw data that is thought-provoking but not in a suitable research reporting form. Qualitative investigators; therefore, need to compress, interpret and synthesise the significance of the investigation for readers without diminishing the profoundness of the results or findings. In accordance with what Streubert and Carpenter (2011) suggest, the researcher broke this research into parts in a manner that made it appropriate for publication in a journal by generating more than one manuscript, specifically four (4), from the qualitative study.



As outlined by Rubin and Babbie (2016), one of the advantages of qualitative research methods is that these methods have a higher probability of uncovering more profound meanings where specific human behaviours are concerned and can more easily produce observations that have more theoretical depth that cannot merely be condensed to numbers. Another advantage is that qualitative research is more open-minded than quantitative research. Since the choice of a research method or approach is generally dictated by the nature and aim of the research inquiry – in line with what Rubin and Babbie (2016) advise – the researcher chose qualitative research as the medium of investigation because this study entails the examination of a relatively new phenomenon within the merged South African HEI about which very little is known and furthermore, the researcher sought to acquire insight into specific intricate phenomena in order to enhance understanding of them and construct a theory that will be testable in studies that will be conducted in future; this study thus being able to map the way for quantitative research of the same topic.

This study used a cross-sectional survey design. Cross-sectional surveys are labelled as snapshots of the populations they collect data from. Vogt, Gardner and Haeffele (2012) state that the enormous advantage of a cross-sectional study is that one only needs to gather data once. One of the first stages in carrying out a cross-sectional study is to determine the target population. This study targeted a mere snapshot of a larger population in the HE academic field of a HEI.

#### **1.7.1.1 Research strategy**

This research followed a case study strategy as it was considered to be best suited to the researcher's goal to examine a current phenomenon in reality (Creswell, 2015). Furthermore, this study applied a case study design that analysed several cases at the same time. In this instance it was three different management tiers of the merged HEI (Yin, 2012). The themes were extracted from the partly-structured interviews and validated in a global perspective against available literature. Qualitative case study approach in this research falls within the interpretive/ constructivist paradigm (Yin, 2012). In this instance, the ontological belief is that reality is local and specifically constructed.



#### **1.7.1.2 Research setting**

The research setting in this study entailed a sample comprising 12 managerial staff members of the merged South African HEI. These participants were situated across the geographic areas of the three different campuses of the institution. The participants were interviewed physically and in cases where the researcher could not travel to areas outside reasonable close proximity, the researcher took advantage of virtual interviewing methods, such as the telephone and Skype, with the approval of the participants, for greater convenience.

#### **1.7.2 Research Method**

The research method refers to the method that the researcher used in executing research operations. The researcher studied several steps that are generally adopted in addressing the research problem at hand, together with the logic behind them, in order to select the most appropriate research method for this study.

##### **1.7.2.1 Literature review**

The literature review for this study focuses on TVPs; mainly deliberating on the concepts of organisational branding, employment branding, TLCs as well as a TVP model. The literature in this study sought to build theory from the knowledge that already exists as well as explore how this information can be improved so that it becomes more applicable to the present day setting – particularly in South African HEIs. This study used primary and secondary sources of research to put together pertinent findings and to make available credible recommendations. Primary research data were obtained through interviews, while the secondary research data for this study were obtained from previous studies and information that already exists on the subject – although limited – from books, journals and the internet.

##### **1.7.2.2 Sample**

The target population that was selected for this study is the management of the three campuses of a merged South African HEI. The target population comprised of all genders, all ages, all races, all cultures and all walks of life. The HEI in question was requested for



permission to conduct the research. A random sample was used to gather information for this study within the institution. Sampling can be explained as a process used in statistical analysis through which a fixed number of observations are taken from a larger population. The sample selected should represent the overall population.

### **1.7.3 Data collection**

#### **1.7.3.1 Qualitative Data Collection**

The qualitative data collection took place by means of interviews of the targeted population. The purpose of the interviews was to unveil more profound results, which quantitative data may not have revealed. The interview sessions were specifically able to unearth the perceptions that management have concerning TVPs encompassing the concepts of organisational branding, employment branding and TLCs within the merged South African HEI. The data collected were ultimately organised in a way that allowed for a TVP model to be created. This TVP model can now be implemented at will by the merged South African HEI.

#### **1.7.3.2 Research procedure**

Permission to carry out this research was sought from the relevant authorities of the institution by means of a letter of request which was given to the institution. Written consent by the institution was granted to the researcher before the data collection process could take place. Interviews targeting management were carried out by the researcher. The participants involved in this study were required to give their consent before answering any of the interviewer's questions. Anonymity was upheld and all the information provided remained confidential, according to the code of ethics. For the participants who were not within the researcher's proximity, telephonic or Skype interviews – depending on the participants' preference – were requested and granted.

#### **1.7.3.3 Recording of data**

The qualitative data in this study derived from interviews were recorded via audio and transcribed. The participants were provided with copies of the transcripts in order to give



them the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the data. All the data collected in this study are stored in a safe place and are to be retained for a minimum of ten years.

#### **1.7.3.4 Data analysis**

The main objective of this entire study was to ultimately answer each research objective. The data collected for this study were analysed using qualitative techniques. The analysis process can be enhanced in various ways by using a computer (Nestor & Schutt, 2014). A theme analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data acquired from interviews. The researcher analysed the data to ascertain themes and sub-themes. This process is a good way of crafting an initial framework to attach to an analysis of the research outcomes (Ramsey & Barkhuizen, 2010).

#### **1.7.3.5 Strategies employed to ensure quality and rigour of data**

Mertens (2010) explains that it is essential to define the methodological strategies that will be used to guarantee that high-quality data are gathered. To ensure data integrity, researchers should prudently attend to the measures for assembling data and maintain control over all facets of data gathering and also lessen sources of systematic bias that could impact study findings (Comer & Kendall, 2013). The researcher accordingly ensured that the necessary strategies were employed to ensure the quality and rigour of the data, as further elaborated later in this study.

#### **1.7.3.6 Reporting**

The findings of this research have been displayed in table format, showing the themes and various sub-themes that emerged from this study. The themes and sub-themes are substantiated by *verbatim* quotes obtained from the participants' responses during the interviews in this study. This was done in accordance with the contemporary qualitative research approach which entails the validation of knowledge with regard to the assumptions made in particular research settings (Bowen, 2009).



## 1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research study was planned with as much precision as possible in order to reduce any likelihood of obtaining misleading results. The study was also planned in such a way that it conformed to the ethical appropriateness that was expected of it. Any misgivings that may have come about regarding disputable ethical procedures or methods were to be rectified by means of peer review or by consulting suitable parties. Furthermore, steps were taken in order to safeguard and guarantee the dignity and welfare of all the participants, as well as those who could have been affected by the results of the research project.

As a result, all research conducted for the sake of this study was in accordance with state and federal laws and regulations. If the researcher noticed any of the data published to be erroneous, it was the researcher's obligation to rectify the error through retraction, an addendum or other befitting means. Additionally, as an ethical researcher, all secondary sources used were appropriately recognised through accurate referencing and citations.

According to Willig & Stainton-Rogers (2008), further ethical considerations to be observed in any study should entail:

- *Disclosure* – The participants should be completely informed about the nature and purpose of the research, the measures or interventions to be used and the anticipated benefits to the participants or society.
- *Informed consent* – Research should only be executed once the participants have given consent either verbally or in written form.
- *Voluntary participation* – The participant's consent to participate should not be compulsory, and must be free of any coercion.
- *Deception* – The participants should never be deliberately misled in order to obtain certain information.
- *Withdrawal from investigation* – From the beginning, the participants should be informed that they have the right to pull out from the research at any time regardless of whether payment of incentives have been granted.



- *Protection of the participants:* – The participants should be safeguarded against physical and mental harm during the duration of the research. For instance; research should not unreasonably take up the time of the participants or make them incur unnecessary loss of resources and income.
- *Confidentiality* – The participants should be guaranteed that all information and records which they provide or which are obtained directly or indirectly concerning them are kept confidential.

## 1.9 CHAPTER DIVISION

The chapters presented in this thesis are as follows:

**Chapter 1:** Introduction

**Chapter 2:** Article 1: Management perspectives on the building blocks of the organisational brand of a higher education institution for academic talent management

**Chapter 3:** Article 2: A management perspective on factors affecting the employment brand for academic talent management.

**Chapter 4:** Article 3: Towards a talent life cycle framework for academic staff in a higher education institution.

**Chapter 5:** Article 4: A talent value proposition framework for academic staff in a South African higher education institution.

**Chapter 6:** Conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

## 1.10 CONCLUSION

From the current literature, the researcher was able to conclude that a TVP would indeed be beneficial to the merged South African HEI. Implementing such a structure would aid the HEI in better attracting, managing and retaining the best academic talent in a way that would allow the institution to remain competitive and relevant within the HE sector. In light of this knowledge, the development of a TVP that emanates from the core or fibre of the institution will; therefore, unfold in the subsequent chapters of this study.



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## **Chapter 2:**

### **ARTICLE 1**



# MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE ORGANISATIONAL BRAND OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION FOR ACADEMIC TALENT MANAGEMENT

## ABSTRACT

**Orientation:** Academic staff members have an extremely crucial role in the success of HEIs. It is therefore, imperative to cultivate an organisational brand that will appeal to them in the best way possible.

**Research purpose:** The main objective of this study was to explore management perspectives on the building blocks of the organisational brand of a higher education institution for academic talent management.

**Motivation for the study:** Although a substantial amount of research has been conducted organisational branding, not much has emphasised the higher educational sector.

**Research approach, design, and method:** A qualitative research approach was adopted, using semi-interviews to collect data from management (N=12) of a merged South African higher education institution.

**Main findings:** The findings revealed six themes that are important building blocks of the organisational brand for a higher education institution: Reputation and image, organisational culture and identity, strategic vision, corporate social responsibility, work and surrounding environment and merger implications.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Management should also have the strategic foresight to create a work environment that will contribute to the competitiveness and sustainability of higher education institutions through its talented academic staff members.

**Contribution/Value-add:** This research identified the key elements that should form part of an appealing higher education brand that will attract and retain current and future talent.

**Key words:** Academic staff, higher education institutions, organisational branding, reputation and image, organisational culture and identity



## INTRODUCTION

More recently, diminishing global boundaries and technological modifications have deepened the importance of branding Higher Education (Harsha & Shah, 2011). Branding of higher education institutions originates from the transference of noble practises from the private business arena into the arena of academia (Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). Harsha and Shah (2011) postulate that the supremacy of a HE brand is signified by the judgements, outlooks, opinions, images and experiences associated with the brand in the minds of citizens or audiences, and what these consumers have learnt, felt, observed and heard concerning HEIs over time. The internationalisation of HE has further contributed towards the advent of global university rankings (Stolz, Hendel, & Horn, 2010) which are reflective of institutional brand reputation and performance (Williams and Van Dyke, 2008).

Branding institutions in HE empower prospective students of institutions and the broader community to ascertain and extricate a specific or preferred institution from other institutions (Lambooy, 2011). Solid brand values from the top chain of command of HEIs encourage optimistic emotion throughout these institutions in order to ensure a sense of collaboration (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). Hence, it has become increasingly imperative for top management of HEIs to divulge the vision, mission, strategy and reason for existence of institutions to the rest of the institutional operational levels in the most effective way possible (Balmer, 2012).

According to Biraghi and Gambetti (2013) organisational branding is a perpetual strategic process that mirror the efforts of top managers to capture the identity of organisations and express it in a dependable and attractive manner in order to promote the organisational identification and support of stakeholders. Moreover organisational branding epitomises one of the most treasured resources, which companies possess to successfully differentiate themselves within the competitive field (Biraghi & Gambetti, 2015). Consequently hardly any assets are as crucial to the accomplishment of organisations as the image they portray to the media, customers, shareholders as well as the general public (Flake, 2015). Regardless of the largely renowned significance of organisational branding as a way of gaining competitive advantage, organisational branding studies suffer from vastly disjointed standpoints that



makes it challenging to recognise the value of organisational branding in channel its practises (Biraghi & Gambetti, 2015).

The main objectives of this study was to explore management perspectives on the building blocks of the organisational brand of a higher education institution for academic talent management. This article deeply explores the concept of organisational branding by assessing its historical background and progression up to the present day as well as by breaking it down into six concise components, namely reputation, organisational culture, strategic vision, organisational identity, intended image(s) and construed image that each directly pertains to the overall concept of organisational branding.

The factors that affect organisational branding are discussed consecutively in the subsections that follow.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Factors affecting organisational branding**

For the purpose of this article, the elements that have been identified as those that affect organisational branding are reputation, organisational culture, strategic vision, organisational identity, intended image(s) as well as construed image. These elements are further dissected in the subheadings that follow.

### **Reputation**

According to the Institute of Directors in Africa (2010), the overall assessments of stakeholders, and thus collective opinions concerning companies, produce the establishment of organisational reputations. The Institute of Directors in Southern Africa (2010), additionally states that reputation is founded on how good companies perform in parallel with the authentic interests and anticipations of stakeholders. There is an increasing consciousness of how imperative the role of reputation is to the economic worth of companies (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2010).



Dowling and Moran (2012) express that in order to use reputation as a basis of competitive advantage, organisations have to display their competencies and actions in attempt to alter stakeholder viewpoints; this can be achieved by broadcasting statements of their vision, mission, ethics as well as values – several of which can be seen on organisational websites. These mirror the resolution of organisations to act in a particular way.

Organisational reputation is frequently considered as how decent, revered, appreciated and/or esteemed organisations are (Dowling & Moran, 2012). These traits result in organisations gaining trust, which consequently aids people to believe in the organisations' reliability, talents and strategies for the future (Covey & Merrill, 2006). In this manner, a good reputation becomes advantageous by enhancing the credibility of service providers and the trust of consumers, thus diminishing risk and related transaction charges (Dowling & Moran, 2012). Companies should therefore put more effort into reputation-growing activities directed at consumers and employees that focus more on nonmonetary facets of reputation, comprising the enhancement of product and service quality, the fostering of an attractive workplace environment, and participating in social responsibility activities (Raithel & Schwaiger, 2015). Noble organisational reputations do not only hold the likelihood for value formation, but they make it difficult for other organisations to imitate due to the impalpable nature of the reputation of organisations (Terblanche, 2015).

Undeniably, studies of academics depict that their mobility choices are mostly kindled by the reputation of host HEIs, the research resources at their disposal and the compatibility between the job post and their research preferences (Agarwal & Ohyama, 2013; De Grip, Fouarge, & Sauermann, 2010; Ivancheva & Gourova, 2011). Williams and Omar (2014) argue that the running and effectiveness of HEIs, in actuality, are vastly associated with the quest for prestige or reputation. Alessandri et al. (2006) highlight three scopes of the reputation of universities: the quality of academic enactment, the quality of external enactment and emotional engagement. Brewer and Zhao (2010) reference five essentials encompassing the summative reputation of universities, specifically: leadership, teaching, research, service and equity.



## Organisational Culture

Schein (2010) describes culture as a sequence of common basic assumptions embraced by a group in unravelling its challenges regarding external adaptation and internal assimilation, which has functioned satisfactorily to be seen as valid and, thus, to be imparted to new members as the right manner to observe, think, and feel in relation to those challenges. Organisational culture is an essential characteristic of the management of organisations formed by organisations' morals, customs, fundamental assumptions, outlooks, traditions, chronicles and cyphers – including dogmata and practises (Pauzuoliene & Mauriciene, 2012).

According to Kuh and Whitt (2000), university culture is a specific type of organisational culture, which is described as the co-operative and mutually influencing arrangements of customs, values, practises, dogmata and assumptions that govern the conduct of individuals and groups in HEIs and offer a frame of reference within which to construe the importance of proceedings and activities on and off campuses. For the purpose of this article, organisational culture is hypothesised as a system of interacting associations between fundamental assumptions, values, opinions, sacraments, the past, customs and symbols that are conveyed within all organisational management roles (Pauzuoliene & Mauriciene, 2012).

Organisational culture governs individual choices or actions common to a group of people; consequently, it can bear a compelling influence on the well-being and success of organisations (Pauzuoliene & Mauriciene, 2012). According to Cho, Kim, Park and Cho (2013), the functioning and outcomes of organisations can vary depending on the culture of organisations. Stanford (2011) declares that the ten characteristics that typically make up organisational culture are namely, a story or series of stories; a purpose and a set of principles; a strategy; an outlook towards people; a universal mentality; a relationship network; a digital presence; a reputation; a consumer proposition; and a possibility scanning capability. Organisations possess an individual organisational culture, and whether or not the organisational culture makes a noteworthy impact on the members of organisations, their principles and their conduct, is contingent upon the strength of the organisational culture (Kulvinskiene & Seimiene, 2009).



Mergers and acquisitions are thought to be the paramount disrupters of organisational culture-linked harmony (Paul, 2012). A study which concentrated on mergers in the micro-enterprise, average-enterprise and macro-enterprise sector has shown that a disparity in organisational cultures is the chief cause for intricate conflict after mergers took place (Holm, Norén, & Jonsson, 2005). Mergers in HEIs in South Africa appear to have displayed comparable post-merged struggles and impediments (Paul, 2012). High-performance organisations do not view organisational culture variation evoked by events, such as mergers, trivially; rather, they construct a resilient ability to change so as to maintain employee commitment which is measured as a crucial attribute (Paul, 2012).

In the realm of HE, institutions are experiencing fast social, technological as well as economic fluctuations (Zhu, 2015). This suggests that universities are now also expected to remain up to date with climatic variations within the markets in which they operate. In Chinese universities, the speedy change of science, economy and technology incites great challenges in embracing innovations (Ma, 2008). The outcomes of a study done by Zhu (2015) specify that there is a sturdy relationship between organisational culture facets and the viewpoints and application of innovation (Zhu, 2015).

A study piloted by Naidoo (2013) established that genuine and long lasting academic quality would most probably occur within universities when the enablement and transformation roles reinforce collegiate and revolutionary cultures. Numerous universities in South Africa are trying to create a new and common institutional culture (Bitzer, 2009). This may necessitate that institutional culture be disintegrated to give rise to the reconstruction of a fresh culture. One has to bear in mind that institutions comprise of several cultures and an assortment of institutional cultures. Consequently, the reconstruction of new culture(s) is evidently a major contest (Bitzer, 2009).

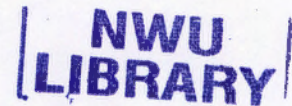
### **Strategic Vision**

The strategic vision of organisations, according to Balmer, Stuart and Greyser (2009), denotes the ideal strategic (future-focused) standing of organisations within a set period of time. This is determined after organisational aptitudes, possessions, other rival organisations



as well as variations in the political, economic, moral, social and technological atmosphere have been dissected and analysed (Balmer, Stuart, & Greyser, 2009). Özdem (2011) opines that a sound vision statement should accentuate an inimitable feature of organisations that distinguish them from others. Organisations should seriously ponder all forthcoming activities intended for the internal and external setting of organisations. Their vision should be comprehended and internalised by all parties with specific interest in organisations (Özdem, 2011).

According to Mayfield, Mayfield and Sharbrough III (2015), a remarkable strategic vision stimulates outsider stakeholders' confidence in the organisation, construed appreciation by the firm, and possible economic recompenses to stockholders by means of greater stock value and disbursements that are linked to shared higher internal stakeholder performance. Furthermore, Mayfield et al. (2015) agree that such a vision requires appropriate communication by top leadership. A strategic vision and associated moral messages depict benevolence and esteem for the parties involved and pursues the advancement of the well-being of these stakeholders (Mayfield et al., 2015).



Healthy schools, as part of best practice, monitor their policymaking via strategic plans (Walker, 2011). In certain institutions, these plans are the result of a continuous analytical process concerning what is most befitting for the schools, whereas others pursue strategic exercises at episodic intervals, usually during the course of changeovers in either board or school governance (Walker, 2011). Acknowledging the effect such plans have on the strategic guidelines of schools, Henry Mintzberg (as cited in Walker, 2011) cautions what must be at the heart of these plans: While undoubtedly not extinct, strategic planning fell from its platform a while ago, owing to the fact that planning frequently interrupts strategic thinking, triggering confusion in managers between the actual vision and the manipulation of figures. This confusion lies at the root of the issue; which is that the most efficacious strategies are in the form of visions, as opposed to plans.



## **Organisational Identity**

Jansen and Roodt (2014) express that organisational identity is frequently mistaken for other constructs associated with it, like organisational identification, organisational membership and organisational obligation. Lane and Scott (2007) describe organisational identity as the qualities or traits of an organisation that include comprise principles, aims and operations, as well as metaphors of the organisation or its affiliates. Whetten (2006, p. 221) reiterates Albert and Whetten's description of one of the components of organisational identity as the intricate viewpoints of members concerning the question "Who are we as an organisation?"

Martin et al. (2011a) express that some features of an organisation's identity are long-lasting, for instance its history, the products and services it provides, and the country from which it originated. However, whether for instance a company is viewed as honourable can vary in the opinion of its employees and other involved parties. Groenleer (2009) states that certain organisations are categorised in terms of an identity that distinguishes them from other parties, such as politicians, stakeholders, patrons, organised interests and various agencies. Their separate identity augments the sovereignty of these organisations with regard to their environments (Groenleer, 2009).

Numerous HEIs recognise their position as pertaining to their conventional twofold undertakings of teaching and research both at the undergraduate and the graduate stages, but seem not to fully understand their role as a supplier of enduring learning in an extensive dimension, with services targeted towards adult scholars (Huisman & Pausits, 2010). In addition, the market rivalry for continued education is mounting. This trend is compelling universities to reconsider their programmes, to carry out market assessments and determine strategic positioning and also to develop basic processes such as post-graduate curriculums or services for adult scholars (Huisman & Pausits, 2010).

## **Intended Image(s)**

Balmer, Stuart and Greyser (2009) state that the intended image of an organisation is the desirable, or aspirational future standing of the organisation. It exists within the hearts and minds of organisational governors: it is what they foresee the identity of the organisation to



be like in a specific period of time. Hugo-Burrows (1993) believes that management choices regulate the extent to which the desired organisational image is translated into strategies and policies that are directed at presenting the incorporated organisational image to the main stakeholder categories. Percy (2014) illuminates that when all of an organisation's communication concerning itself and its brands are synchronised and moving towards a dependable and feasible strategy, the awareness of the organisation, as well as its organisational image, will mirror that communication. People will be interpreting a reliable message, one exhibiting a precise image; consequently, effective interpretation of that message will prompt the sought after organisational image (Percy, 2014).

Podnar (2014) expresses that it is extremely challenging to construct an appropriate programme to convey the sought-after organisational image if the leadership does not comprehend who the organisation is, what the vision is and what its forthcoming intentions are. Furthermore, in order to realise the sought-after image, organisations must consistently generate their corporate messages. Even though various corporate messages may be broadcast to various publics, they should, generally, possess a shared identity. It is; therefore, important for organisations to be hands-on in reducing the discrepancy between the desired and the actual corporate image (Podnar, 2014).

Dolphin and Reed (2011) acknowledge that organisations long for a positive attitude from significant stakeholders in the same way that organisations desire an amplified opinion of their purpose and culture. These sought-after perceptions are concentrated on helping to secure a definite foundation for the commercial association between companies and their communities (Dolphin & Reed, 2011). A study piloted by Wood and Somerville (2008) discovered that when staff deliberated on a desired image for a University College, for instance, discussions leaned towards what they thought should be accomplished over the ensuing ten years and how a specific corporate positioning could result in success, as opposed to becoming caught up on favourite colours and preferred typeface. The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Business School had the vision to grow into the most desirable business school in South Africa, and encouraged the decision to acquaint itself with the image of hard work, honour and authenticity of the country's first black Head of State (Opoku, Abratt, & Pitt, 2006).



## Construed Image

According to Balmer, Stuart and Greyser (2009), the construed image of organisations relates to the images and reputations of the organisations adopted by customers and various stakeholder groups. Helm, Liehr-Gobbers and Storck (2011) describe the construed image of organisations as the impression organisations have about what others think of them. This concept of construed image can be noted in literature with different labels, like construed outside image (e.g., Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000); perceived outside prestige (e.g., Smidts, Pruyn, & Van Riel, 2001); perceived organisational prestige (e.g., Van Riel & Balmer, 1997); as well as mirrored stakeholder evaluation (e.g., Scott & Lane, 2000). The Higher Education Ranking Schemes (HERS) for example has created the notion of world university market which are extremely influential on all stakeholders within the knowledge service business (Tofallis, 2012).

Dolphin and Reed (2011) state that construed images are necessary because companies consider reputations not merely as treasured assets, but also as replications of themselves in the institutional mirror. Construed image is an essential component in the formation of identity, which is founded on identification and differentiation procedures (Cian & Cervai, 2014). The views held by members of organisation about what external parties think of their particular organisation can impact the perceptive identification of organisations, their sentiments, including their appraisals of their self-esteem (Cian & Cervai, 2014). Dolphin and Reed (2011) also agree that construed images could be a principal instrument through which companies foresee the shifting expectations in their institutional atmospheres.

In conclusion, literature seems to reveal that the extent to which members can relate to organisations is contingent upon how they think organisations are perceived by others (construed image), and indirectly by how others perceive organisations in reality (corporate image). Therefore, the perception of outside parties in reality, impacts how members believe organisations are viewed by others, which consequently impacts the identity of organisations. In light of this knowledge, the researcher interviewed the management employees of the merged South African HEI to determine what type of organisational brand they perceive is



reflected to the stakeholders of the institution, particularly the academic staff members of the institution.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

A research design refers to the tool used by researchers to structure a study and entails devising a strategy or procedure to guide them in carrying out the investigation. Various research designs offer various strengths and shortcomings, and each design diminishes some of the possible issues such as prejudice, misrepresentation or miscalculation (Heppner, Wampold, Owen, Thompson, & Wang, 2016).

### **Research approach**

A research approach describes the strategies and the processes followed for research from the stage of wide suppositions to meticulous techniques of data gathering, analysis and interpretation. The choice of a research approach is further determined by the nature or essence of the research problem that is under investigation, the understanding of the researcher as well as the people that the study affects or intends to reach out to (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative approach was adopted in this study. This was motivated by the fact that the population of individuals in managerial positions within the institution is relatively small; therefore, a qualitative inquiry was considered to be more practical and pertinent.

The nature of the study also necessitated a qualitative approach because an organisational branding is fostered by employers and directed towards employees as one of the stakeholders. In terms of this study, the organisational branding is fostered by the management of the HEI and directed towards its academic staff members. Therefore, the researcher found it incumbent to obtain the detailed views or perceptions on organisational branding of the management of the merged South African HEI via qualitative inquiry in the form of interviews.



### **Research strategy**

This research followed a case study strategy, as it was considered best suited to the researcher's goal to investigate a current phenomenon in a real-life situation (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The themes were extracted from the partly-structured interviews and confirmed by scrutinising the worldwide body of existing literature. Qualitative case study approach in this research falls within the interpretive/ constructivist paradigm (Yin, 2012). In this instance, the ontological belief is that reality is local and specifically constructed.

### **Research setting**

The research setting in this study included a sample comprising 12 managerial staff members of a merged South African HEI. These participants were geographically scattered across the three different campuses of the institution. Most of the participants were interviewed in person in their offices. In cases where the researcher could not travel to areas that were not within reasonably close proximity, the researcher made use of virtual interviewing methods such as telephonic and Skype conversations for greater convenience. The researcher obtained the approval of the participants when virtual interviewing was used.

### **Research method**

Research methods entail the types of data gathering, analysis and interpretation that researchers choose to adopt in their studies (Creswell, 2014).

### **Research Procedure**

Permission to carry out this research was sought and obtained from the relevant authorities of the institution by means of a letter of request prior to the collection of data. Upon obtaining permission, the researcher approached interview candidates personally, requesting interviews, and the participants were required to give consent before answering any of the researcher's questions. Anonymity was upheld and all information provided remained confidential in adherence to the code of ethics. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to the execution of the study.



## Sampling

The participants in this study included the management of the three campuses of a merged South African HEI. The research participants were interviewed one after the other until data saturation was reached. This study made use of purposive convenience sampling, meaning the participants were selected based on their willingness and availability to take part in the data collection process and the relevance of their contributions.

Twelve individuals in managerial positions participated in this study through interviews. Table 2.1 below shows the demographic delineation:

**Table 2.1: Sample Demographics**

| Participants | Gender | Race          | Qualification   | Job Level            |
|--------------|--------|---------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1            | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 2            | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |
| 3            | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 4            | Female | White         | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |
| 5            | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 6            | Female | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |
| 7            | Female | White         | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |
| 8            | Male   | White         | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 9            | Female | White         | Doctoral degree | Middle management    |
| 10           | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Middle management    |
| 11           | Female | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 12           | Male   | White         | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |

As can be seen from the table above, the majority of the participants were male, making up 58,33% (seven participants) of the sample, while the female participants constituted 41,67% (five participants) of the selected sample. The demographic distribution of race was constituted of more black/Africans in the sample, with 58,33% (seven participants) being black/African and 41,67% (five participants) being white as depicted in Table 2.1. 100% (all



twelve individuals) of the participants in the sample demonstrated being of a superior calibre as they all have doctoral degrees as exhibited in the table above. The distribution in terms of managerial levels as depicted in Table 2.1 showed 41,67% (five participants) to be in the executive tier of management, another 41,67% (five participants) to be in the senior tier of management and 16,67% (two participants) to be in the middle tier of management. The demographics displayed in Table 2.1 also show that only one out of the five participants in executive management is female, that is, 8,33% of the entire sample as opposed to a clobbering 33,33% of males in the entire sample who hold executive managerial positions. At senior management level, we have three out of the five participants being female, that is, 25% of the entire sample, as opposed to 16,67% of males in the entire sample of the participants that hold senior management positions. In the sample represented by the demographics of Table 2.1, it is also shown that one out of two participants are in middle management, that is, 8,33% of the males represented in middle management participants and the females represented in middle management participants in the aggregate sample.

#### **Data collection method**

The qualitative data collection was conducted by the use of semi-structured interviews. The interview schedule also consisted of a page for the participants to fill in demographic information as a further point of analysis in this study. The purpose of the interviews was to divulge more profound meanings by allowing for new information and concepts to emerge from the results, which the quantitative data would not have managed to reveal. The interview sessions managed to specifically unravel the perceptions that management have concerning organisational branding within the merged South African HEI. The HEI management interview participants were requested to delineate their experiences where organisational branding is concerned – in line with this framework. The questions sought to determine the current organisational branding of the merged South African HEI.

#### **Recording of data**

The researcher deemed it fit to capture audio recordings of the participants' answers so that these responses could be transcribed as the data were gradually obtained due to the large volume of data that were gained as a result of a qualitative study. The audio recordings were



played back and *verbatim* transcriptions of the data were made in a Microsoft Word document for analysis once all the data had been gathered.

### **Data analysis**

In accordance with Bernard and Ryan (2010), a process known as transcription was used, whereby the audio recorded responses of the participants were converted into text in a Word document. Thematic analysis was used in this study to uncover the associations that existed across the phenomena and how these associations relate with the aggregate cultural setting of this research could be determined (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). The researcher attached mnemonic labels to each theme and sub-theme through open coding to provide a description of the newly discovered phenomena as well as inclusion and exclusion criteria. The generated codes were then refined through axial coding and the labels and their descriptions were supported by *verbatim* quotes from the interview responses and also compared with literature and similar studies in order to determine the validity of the data and ensure that the main research question was appropriately addressed (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008).

### **Ensuring the quality and rigour of the research**

As opposed to quantitative researchers, who employ statistical approaches to determine the rationality and consistency of research results, the goal for qualitative researchers to encourage rigour and quality in research is to craft and implement methodological approaches to guarantee the genuineness and credibility of the findings and these strategies include (Sargeant, 2012):

- Being cautious of individual biases which may have affected the findings.
- Recognising and evading prejudices in sampling and continuous consideration of techniques to guarantee adequate profundity and significance of data gathering and the analysis thereof.
- Keeping a thorough record, showing all the methods employed for the analysis of data and making sure that the explanations of data are reliable and apparent.
- Determining correspondences and variances throughout responses to ascertain that the various perceptions are symbolised.



- Adding a significant volume of *verbatim* participant explanations to back the findings.
- Distinguishing between lines of thought during the analysis of data and the explanations that follow.
- Validating findings by requesting the participants to offer remarks concerning the interview transcripts to determine if the ultimate themes constructed significantly represent the concepts being examined.
- Using data triangulation, which entails applying various techniques and perceptions to generate a more wide-ranging group of findings.
- Taking into account the nature of the subject under investigation, to select the right method for addressing research questions, for example, individual interviews as opposed to focus groups tend to cater more for issues that are sensitive.

The researcher used the above-mentioned strategies to ensure the quality and rigour of this research.

### **Reporting**

The findings of this research have been tabulated, displaying the themes and various sub-themes that emerged from this study. The themes and sub-themes are substantiated by *verbatim* quotes obtained from the participants' answers provided during interviewing. This was done in accordance with the contemporary qualitative research approach which entails the validating or supporting knowledge of the assumptions made in particular research settings (Bowen, 2009).

## **FINDINGS**

Table 2.2 depicts the frequency of the themes that arose from the interviews with management. The findings in Table 2.2 shows that work and surrounding environment; reputation and image; and organisational culture and identity were the most frequently occurring sub-themes.



Table 2.2: Frequency of Themes

| Theme and sub-themes |                                     | Frequency |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Theme                | Organisational branding             | 78        |
| Sub-Themes           | Reputation and image                | 14        |
|                      | Organisational culture and identity | 13        |
|                      | Strategic vision                    | 5         |
|                      | Corporate social responsibility     | 12        |
|                      | Work and surrounding environment    | 28        |
|                      | Merger implications                 | 6         |

### ***Theme: Organisational Branding***

The sub-theme of work and surrounding environment under organisational branding occurred most frequently in this research. Other themes that arose in descending order of frequency were: reputation and image; organisational culture and identity; corporate social responsibility; merger implications; as well as strategic vision.

### ***Sub-theme: Reputation and image***

The participants expressed that the upstanding reputation of the institution and the aim of being recognised both locally and internationally, for instance in top calibre research and high-quality teaching and learning, as well as superior service delivery is what attracts their pool of academic talent as indicated by the following participant:

*I don't believe we have a specific brand as such; however we are constantly doing our part to ensure that we provide effective and efficient services to our clients, the stakeholders, and ensuring that our staff members are comfortable with that kind of agenda.* (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Another participant indicated:



*In my opinion, we are an internationally recognised university that is largely renowned especially for our research, so that is what I believe is our brand as an Institution. As far as value goes, this institution is extremely committed to offering superior value to all our stakeholders, especially to our academic staff members.* (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).

And:

*We want to be comparable across the continent; we want to be recognised internationally.* (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Participant 12 further added:

*The campus, our value proposition is to be an innovative university campus that is internationally recognised. Recognised for scholarship in teaching and learning and to conduct research relevant to the societies we serve. So the value proposition of the campus is an innovative University campus, so that brings ties into the whole business and I.T. side of the faculty.* (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

#### ***Sub-theme: Organisational culture and identity***

In line with the findings, the participants supported the notion that the institution has a relatable, accommodative and attractive organisational culture and identity. The participants expressed that a culture of empowering academic staff to reach their best potential exists within the institution as pointed out by the following participant:

*I think specifically and I won't say the campus, but I will rather say the faculty, I think that if you speak to the people that want to come and work here in interviews and stuff,*



*they will tell you that it is because there is a culture in the faculty of empowering people.* (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

Other participants mentioned the strongly embedded culture of research that makes the institution attractive to academics:

*That is why I'm able to stay here for this number of years to see how I can add to the culture of research.* (Participant 5, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Another participant added:

*There's a spirit of caring where you start interacting and asking about your health and your welfare, your children if you have any, you know things like those they are very little, but they matter a lot.* (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Participant 12 further indicated that there is an organisational identity within the institution, specifically within the faculty the participant worked for, of innovation and entrepreneurship:

*Our current brand in the faculty, we are positioning ourselves to become the business and I.T hub of this Institution, so that is, that's sort of what we say as a faculty, so we bring business, I.T and innovation to the table, that is my faculty, the Faculty of Economic Sciences and I.T's value proposition.* (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).



### ***Sub-theme: Strategic vision***

This sub-theme occurred less frequently; however, the participants indicated that strategic vision bears influence on the success of the organisational branding and how well it will be received by stakeholders, especially by academic staff members for the purpose of this research. Some of the participants noted that talent management is a recently embedded component in the institution's strategy, as expressed by the following participants:

*At this Institution we realise how important it is to manage the most crucial role players in our core business – our academics – which is why our new Institutional strategy even has talent management as one of the main elements. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

And:

*If you look at our new strategy, I don't know whether you've looked at the strategy, it's the first time I saw academic talent management in our strategy, do you know about it? So that is now a new strategy, I mean we're busy with the implementation but I think I can tell you that it was something I was very pleased about. Now that was previously never in our strategy, so I think for the first time, like your top Vice-chancellor and the likes are saying that this is important. (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).*

### ***Sub-theme: Corporate social responsibility***

The findings showed that academic staff members are able to draw gratification from being able to contribute to a larger cause through community participation with their institution, according to the participant's answer:

*When you work in academia, the assumption is that you want to use your talent in this environment and through your talent you want to contribute to communities, in making*



*them better.* (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Another participant added:

*I think most people would prefer to come to this campus simply because of the contribution they see themselves making. Remember this is more of a rural campus so if you see yourself making a lot of contributions, especially towards the communities that really benefit from the institution, I would see it in that way and then it also gives you the opportunity to engage better as an academic with communities in terms of projects and so on.* (Participant 6, female, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Participant 8 also concurred that:

*The value you will get is that you get to be part of the ebb-and-flow of the institution's aggregate contribution towards society which is much bigger than mere personal gain.* (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).

Participant 11 added that an interest in community involvement is also a factor when identifying strong candidates for employment:

*You'll see that the system which is involved in the recruitment and appointment, you'll see that it is done in such a way that we also target the best people who when they come here, they also perform in terms of our requirements, in terms of community engagement.* (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).



The participants also mentioned the importance of being able to make a significant contribution not only in teaching and learning as well as research, but also to the larger societies which they serve as indicated by the following participant:

*We are recognised for our scholarship in teaching and learning because we really do wonderful things in teaching and learning and we want to be known in terms of our scholarship in teaching and learning and also for the research we do, but not just research for the sake of doing research but doing research relevant to the societies we serve. (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).*

#### ***Sub-theme: Work and surrounding environment***

The sub-theme of work and surrounding environment occurred most frequently in this research. The participants were of the opinion that a working environment that enables academic staff members to perform, is imperative to ensure that they stay ahead as an institution of higher learning as described by the following participant:

*Then of course the most important thing is the environment which I would say is our competitive edge, to ensure that we provide a conducive environment for an academic to develop themselves because in an academic situation, an academic career is highly competitive. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

In addition, another participant mentioned that:

*Firstly, we provide a local environment that is conducive for focused work that is, research and teaching and learning. Secondly an enabling environment is important. If an academic needs time and flexibility, they can get it. So enabling in the sense that if I need money to go and do research, even apparatus, with the possibility of travelling to do interviews etc., then it must be available, also enabling in the sense of allowing an*



*academic to network.* (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).

The participants believe that it is important for academic staff members to express what is important to them so that management can create the necessary environment and conditions for them to develop and thrive in their work as indicated by participants 5 and 11:

*You must have a plan on what you want to do, and to achieve that plan, the employer gives the enabling environment to achieve that plan and you need to put something down to see what you can do.* (Participant 5, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

And:

*We provide a very conducive environment for one to study. If you're at this campus, as a lecturer, and you're not studying, you've got to account to me.* (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

The participants also explained that an attractive external environment in terms of the geographic location of an institution is also imperative in influencing the decision of academic staff members to attend the institution as expressed by the following participants:

*We have facilities such as shopping centres, medical facilities and so forth close by and within the reach of academics.* (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).

In addition, another participant mentioned the following:



*Another thing is that the environment also plays a very big role. A university in a rural environment finds it most of the time difficult to attract very top people into the place. They will tell you about distance, they will tell you about proximity to a good school, English school and all those kinds of things. They will tell you about proximity to the airport, we have an airport here but it wasn't functioning for some time. (Participant 5, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

A different participant stated that:

*Again I can only talk about my campus and my faculty and the one thing why people would like to come to this campus, is because this campus is in a small town with a city like feeling, so there's sort of like, I know it's a rural town and it's small, but it's close to all the big things that you need. I mean, we are 60 kilometres from Jo'burg, we are 70 kilometres from O.R Tambo, we are in the industrial heartland of Gauteng, so that's why people like to come to this campus. (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).*

Another participant also feels that working in such an environment as where their campus is situated is an advantage and that it has an element of attractiveness by mentioning that:

*You can see that generally it's located in a rural place, you know, if you look at the cost or the nature of the standard of living when you compare it with a very busy city like Cape Town, Pretoria or Jo'burg, you'll see that, and I think I'm also talking based on why I considered coming here, you'll see that life is not that very expensive in an environment like this. (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Participant 2 emphasises the influence that the surrounding environment of an institution has on organisational by stating that:



*So the environment itself and social amenities outside the university, all those types of things one would think are normal expectations of academics. (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

### ***Sub-theme: Merger Implications***

The findings indicate that the fact that the Institution emanated from three independent HEIs with first two Institutions merging to become one and then merging with a third Institution to form one Institution with three campuses, brought about certain implications, both good and adverse. There is for instance geographical disparity and differences in the backgrounds of each campus, as indicated by the following participants:

*The fact that it is a multi-campus, therefore we have got a wide range of possibilities and experiences with respect to people that you meet and the also the prospects of collaborating on projects across geographical divisions. (Participant 3, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

And:

*It's always that big challenge, and I would say now for the university at large, the backgrounds of our staff members are so diverse and it's always a problem in terms of how do I really address them in a way that I'd say is equitable, you know. Others come from historically advantages campuses, others from advantaged campus backgrounds. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Another participant expresses mixed feelings about the merger, stating that the upside has been the added funding for the Institution, however, administration processes have become more intricate:



*I think a lot of funding has probably come our way through the merger, but in a lot of ways, administratively it's more difficult.* (Participant 4, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

## DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to explore management perspectives on the building blocks of the organisational brand of a higher education institution for academic talent management. Stensaker (2007) points out that an upsurge in national and international rivalry within higher education has sparked an interest in the concept of branding within the sector. As a result, higher education institutions are presently reassessing their identity and image. Amzat (2015) further explains that branding is important in HEIs for the purposes of differentiation and integration; that is, the sustainability of a company in its sector is reliant on its capacity to offer a product that is superior to that its competitors and the application of all-inclusive marketing activities across all university components.

The findings of this study suggested that six sub-themes are crucial for consideration in order to ensure that the brand of the Institution is as appealing and accurate as it possibly could be. These are Reputation and Image, Organisational Culture and Identity, Strategic Vision, Corporate Social Responsibility, Work and Surrounding Environment and Merger Implications. All of these fall under the main theme of organisational branding. All the participants in the study mentioned various important phenomena pertaining to the organisational branding of the merged South African HEI.

The results of this study indicate that Reputation and Image was the second most frequently mentioned phenomenon amongst the participants. The participants agreed that the reputation and image of a higher education institution is pivotal in terms of ensuring an Institutional brand that will appeal more to academic staff members. Several studies conducted by other scholars confirm the findings of this study. In accordance with the participants, for example Participant 2 and Participant 8, Meyer and Bushney (2008) state that stakeholders need to be pointed out and their inputs keenly exploited to generate superior quality in higher education.



Lao's (2015) study confirmed what participants in this study stated, for instance Participant 10. This study revealed the importance of having educational institutions that are renowned as world-class universities. Bassett and Maldonado-Maldonado (2009) further allude that traditionally, higher education has always been considered as an international activity, in the sense that scholarship has never been restricted to national parameters. The mentioned authors also state that to a certain extent, globalisation has elevated this custom to greater heights with immediate communication all over the globe and with vastly augmented physical mobility of students and staff. Higher education is also associated with policies of local competitiveness both to a general extent of economic performance and also with regard to higher education being a competitive business itself.

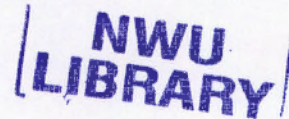
This study showed that the participants highlighted the culture and identity of the Institution as being important for its branding. This sub-theme was the third most mentioned among the participants. Culture is established from prior sequences of organisational behaviours that have been re-affirmed over time through perpetuation until they are now embedded in the social structure of the campus (Gappa 2002). Concurrent with the participants' responses in this study, like those of Participant 5 and 7, Bitzer (2009) contends that even though academics might not take heed of the culture of their institutions in terms of their everyday activities, each institution has a prevalent culture that is not evadable and regulates the manner in which things are carried out at each institution. Meserve (2006), outlines that it is imperative for an organisation to exhibit positive ideals that resemble the aims and aspirations of the organisation. These ideals should be inculcated in the behaviour of each employee. Such ideals may include honour, compassion, trust, reverence and diversity. Meserve (2006) further states that a culture of caring, empathy, as well as love, has the potential to transfigure the workplace and to perpetuate in the future.

Strategic Vision was the least popular sub-theme under organisational branding among the participants with only a few participants having brought it up. Nevertheless, the participants who brought up this phenomenon in their responses indicated how important it is in terms of the influence it has on the brand of the Institution. Bienkowski, Brada and Stanley (2012) opine that getting hold of superior leaders that possess a strategic vision and strategies for enacting it is crucial to the success of HEIs.



According to Hoare and Leigh (2011), cultivating talent is not an event, but rather an on-going process of refinement throughout the organisation, not limited to human resource divisions. Therefore, the cultivation of talent should preferably be entrenched from the boardroom downwards since it is fundamental to an organisation's strategic vision. Furthermore, talent management is an absolutely essential fragment of the long-term aspiration and strategy of an organisation, in other words it is more like DNA organisation. This is in line with what was described by the participants in this study concerning the strategic vision of the institution, for example Participant 12.

Corporate Social Responsibility was the fourth most popular sub-theme among the participants in this study as most of them agreed that it is indeed a crucial element of the brand of the Institution. Caeiro, Leal-Filho, Jabbour and Azeiteiro (2013) state that, rather than merely offering goods and services to the community, organisations overall, including institutions of higher learning, are now considered to be contributors towards the well-being of the larger communities.



Okpara and Idowu (2013) elucidate that following the launch of a new higher education institution within a particular geographic area, the community members have the view that this establishment will bring about the development to build upon. Much will subsequently be expected of the institution with regard to corporate social responsibility towards the society at large, implying that the community will anticipate that the institution will channel its three legs of research, teaching and community engagement in a manner that influences the community and society at large (Okpara & Idowu, 2013). This is in line with the findings that emerged from the interviews that were conducted in this study.

A study conducted by Darus and Yusoff (2014) found that a significant amount of proof is available that proves that CSR enhances the attitudes of employees and customers towards the organisation. Moreover, when employees are conscious of social responsibility policies, this is more crucial than the actual CSR policies of the organisation, because employees may possibly misinterpret or operate in oblivion of their firm's CSR policies and undertakings,



consequently reducing the bearing that CSR would have on the perceptions or behaviours of employees.

The sub-theme of work and the surrounding environment was mostly mentioned in this study as all the participants indicated the importance of a conducive and appealing internal and external environment where organisational branding for academic staff members in the Higher Education Institution is concerned. Zhu (2015) supports the emergent findings in this study by stating that universities need to offer competitive levels of work environment that would be conducive to faculty requirements with the aim of gaining faculty loyalty. This is in accordance with what was discovered in the results that emerged from this study, for example in the response of Participant 1.

Chait (2002) outlines that as institutions of higher learning strive to assimilate their faculty employment practices to changing circumstances, they should also draft policies that encourage a favourable operating environment for all academic staff members. The author adds that cultivating one fragment of academia though ignoring the working settings and enduring career requirements of the other would be a formula for disheartenment and possibly degeneration. Tan (2015) further affirms the findings of this study by stating that an atmosphere that is conducive for work is a critical factor for heightening the morale, drive and success of employees.

The sub-theme of Merger Implications occurred to a lesser, though significant extent among the participants in this study. Price (1999, p. 39) states that the officials involved in mergers and acquisitions “ignore the people issues at their peril” and that “issues of culture, values, behaviour and working styles should be carefully managed from the very beginning of the process.” The responses provided by the participants pertaining to Merger Implications proved to be in support of what Price suggests in the literature. Koontz and Weihrich (2010) state that mergers could have an adverse effect on employees and the organisational culture, if the leadership and senior management is oblivious to the welfare and desires of their employees, and the disparities in culture that exist between the merged institutions. This supports the emergent findings from the interviews conducted in this study.



### **Implications for practice**

The present research makes important theoretical and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this study adds to the limited empirical knowledge that exists on the organisational branding of higher education institutions and the implications thereof for the effective talent management of academic staff members. From a practical point of view this research identified the key elements that should form part of an appealing higher education brand that will attract and retain current and future talent. Higher educational management are encouraged to create a conducive working environment where talented academic staff can flourish and grow. Management should also have the strategic foresight to create a work environment that will contribute to the competitiveness and sustainability of higher education institutions through its talented academic staff members. This will in turn enhance the reputation of the institution both locally and internationally as an employer of choice through top calibre research and high-quality teaching and learning, as well as superior service delivery.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

This research had some limitations. One of the limitations of this study was that there was very research available on the organisational branding of HEIs. This forced the researcher to draw comparisons and to validate the findings in this study aided by other studies outside the field of academia. Another limitation was that the participants were per definition in demanding positions of management and in several cases persons were inaccessible or difficult to access. Consequently, the researcher experienced the withdrawal of several participants who had initially agreed to participate in the study, but had to pull out due to pressing work commitments. It therefore took longer than initially anticipated to reach a substantial number of participants that could offer credible results. Finally, this research was conducted in one higher education institution. As a result the findings cannot be generalised to other higher education institutions.

A recommendation from this study is that in the case of a merged HEI, a campus specific brand should be emphasised in addition to the overall institutional brand to provide a clearer depiction of each particular campus in a way that will differently appeal to various academic



employees and potential academic employees. The brand of a HEI should be marketed to potential academic staff members and inculcated in the already existing academic staff members of the Institution to ensure that it is effectively communicated and adequately understood. Additionally, further research on OB should be done in Higher Education contexts to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon as most of the research in this area has commonly been conducted in non-academic organisations.

## **Conclusion**

Branding is a novel and contentious research area in higher education, eliciting scepticism on its possible implementation. Owing to the on-going rivalry, HEIs must accentuate their distinctiveness, which gives rise to a new outlook on HE which is the crafting of an international institutional brand. This thought demonstrates that branding is now a contemporary subject in the management of education and it produces a unique export product for the nation. A member of faculty is not likely to take up an offer from a disreputable or less reputable institution merely due to the brand of the institution of learning. Similar to business entities, institutions possess a brand that helps them thrive. A more robust brand draws talent into the institution and rallies greater resources. Successful branding should consider both the emphasis of internal ideals, ethos and vision, and also the outside emphasis on the promotion of the brand.



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## **Chapter 3:**

### **ARTICLE 2**



# A MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE ON FACTORS AFFECTING THE EMPLOYMENT BRAND FOR ACADEMIC TALENT MANAGEMENT

## ABSTRACT

**Orientation:** Academic staff members play a pivotal role in the success of HEIs therefore, it is necessary to foster an employment brand (EB) that will appeal to them as much as possible.

**Research purpose:** The main objective of this study was to explore management perspectives on the factors affecting the employment brand for academic talent management in a merged higher education institution.

**Motivation for the study:** Although a substantial amount of research has been conducted on employment branding, not much has emphasised the higher education sector.

**Research approach, design, and method:** A qualitative research approach was adopted, using semi-interviews to collect data from management (N=12) of a merged South African higher education institution.

**Main findings:** The findings showed that Fringe Benefits/incentives and Remuneration, Leadership and Managerial Support, and Occupational Health and Safety are the most important factors affecting a conducive employer brand for higher education institutions.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Management support for and inputs into the employment brand for academic talent management remains a key factor to ensure the future success and sustainability of higher education institutions.

**Contribution/Value-add:** This research identified the key elements that should form part of an appealing higher educational employment brand that will attract and retain current and future talent.

**Key words:** Academic staff, Employment/Employer Branding, Fringe Benefits/incentives and Remuneration, Job Security, Leadership and Managerial Support, Occupational Health and Safety, Performance Management and Development, Work/life Balance



## INTRODUCTION

Employment branding is a concise, enduring plan to govern the awareness and opinions of employees, prospective employees, and associated stakeholders concerning a specific organisation, such as higher education institutions (Sullivan, 2004). Employer branding (EB) epitomises an organisation's efforts to drive an unequivocal viewpoint of what renders it distinguishable and preferable as an employer, both pertaining to the internal and external environments of the organisation (Muncherji, Gopalakrishnan & Dhar, 2009). This strategy can be regulated to boost recruitment, retention, as well as the management of productivity in HEIs to render an organisation attractive or as a workplace of preference (Sullivan, 2004). Since Employment Branding and Employer Branding fundamentally delineate the same notion, the researcher uses the terms synonymously for the purpose of this study.

The relatively recent term employer branding, was first encapsulated by Ambler and Barrow (1996), who described it as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (p. 187). Thenceforth, the term has accrued significant consideration from academics, marketing and HR managers, including all kinds of management gurus (Savignano, 2007). The concept of EB in higher education was first applied in the early 1990s to indicate organisations as employers (Annapoorna, 2015). Existing EB literature is largely restricted to the discerning of potential employees as a target category of EB (Robinson, 2014). As a result, the researcher places much emphasis on the perceptions of current academics concerning the employment brand of the merged South African HEI. In terms of the recurrently cited war for talent (e.g. Torress-Coronas, 2008; Sparrow & Cooper, 2011; Martin, Gollan & Grigg, 2011), a resilient EB is considered incumbent to achieving an employer of choice status and enticing a higher calibre of academics (Sehgal & Malati, 2013).

The augmentation in rivalry for talent towards the conclusion of the twentieth century implied that employers, including HEIs, needed to discover a strategic method for distinguishing themselves from their contenders in the scuffle to entice and keep talented employees (Parry & Tyson, 2013). The embracing of marketing values by the HR function



can be aligned directly with the requirement for competitiveness in the labour market, similar to the manner in which the dependence on employees to stimulate organisational values via internal marketing in the 1980s and thereafter was motivated by the necessity for an organisation to contend for customers (Parry & Tyson, 2013).

In more recent times, Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2010) likewise established drivers of employer brand desirability stemming from a study of participants in India, ascertaining eight factors: being considerate (e.g. the institution caring for its employees), empowering (e.g. equipping the academic to apply her or his own aptitudes), career advancement (e.g. progression and development prospects), being trustworthy and impartial (e.g. treating academics fairly), being principled and accommodative (e.g. no corrupt practices), customer brand appearance (e.g. the clients' perception of the organisation's brands), affirmative employer image (e.g. how current academics perceive the institution) and worldwide exposure (e.g. prospects of travel).

The main objective of this study was to explore management perspectives on the factors affecting the employment brand for academic talent management in a merged higher education institution. The ensuing subsections elucidate the factors affecting the employment branding of higher education as outlined in this study namely, Leadership and Management, Performance Management and Development, Salary and Benefits, and Work/Life balance.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Factors affecting the Employment Brand of Higher Education**

For the purpose of this study, the factors that have been identified as those that affect the EB of HE are Leadership and Management, Performance Management and Development, Salary and Benefits, as well as a Work/life Balance. These constructs are delineated in further detail in the respective subheadings that follow.



## Leadership and Management

The dawn of South Africa's political democracy prompted new complications within HEI. Institutions were introduced to a new worldwide economy denoted by labour and capital structured on a global scale, therefore eliciting and calling on role players who were exposed to, and had at their disposal, the required facts and information (Chipunza & Gwarinda, 2010). It is commonly acknowledged that effective leadership is a necessary element of affirmative social transformation in any organisation, including universities (Herbst & Conradie, 2011). It also appears conspicuous that no society can proceed to mature and progress without sound leadership. Furthermore, no institution can flourish where leadership is absent (Herbst & Conradie, 2011). Consequently, the impact of leadership in HEI is now more unequivocally acknowledged than in prior times (Meek, Goedegebuure, Santiago & Carvalho, 2010). There is currently a calamity in leadership in several segments of society, and HE is not immune to these alarms. Building societies of manager-scholars that are eager to and capable of learning and confronting collectively, the challenges of modern-day academic life is incumbent. To maintain success, effective leaders at various levels are required to inspire their colleagues in order to accomplish the institution's mandate (Hill, 2005).

Hill (2005) further elucidates that organisational transformation is necessary to shape the leadership talent required for world class, cream-of-the-crop higher education institutions. Organisational transformation, particularly cultural transformation, is not an effortless task, especially considering that the political dynamics in HEI are becoming increasingly confrontational. Academics perpetually require, principally, first-class professional proficiencies (Bitzer, 2009). However, those proficiencies must be amplified by means of the conceptual and human proficiencies allied with leadership. These comprise, non-exhaustively, how to train and develop, construct and manage a diverse team, practice influence without formal or ceremonious authority, discuss and control conflict with various stakeholders, and envisage and administer transformation (Hill, 2005).

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One of the focal components outlined in the recently approved strategy for the merged South African HEI for 2015-2025 is academic talent management. This entails keeping abreast with



the globally evolving ethos of HEIs and a heightened sense of commitment on the Institution's part, to offer its academic staff utmost value during their journey and experience at the Institution, thus fostering a more desirable employer brand. As outlined by Evans and Chun (2012), one of the main benefits accrued by a higher education institution by means of an extensive and well deliberated talent management strategy, is the capacity to transform the organisation's culture and assist in the achievement of diversity; elements that are becoming increasingly important to employees within South Africa's diverse economy.

In order to build the leadership aptitude required for top-notch higher education institutions, managers must hold sound management and practical skills, including well-honed social and emotional competencies. Despite this knowledge, useless and unproductive leadership has been recognised as one of the main flaws of South African higher education, a reality that hampers the transformation plan (Jansen, 2004). The cause of this leadership capability deficiency may be that leadership development has been neglected by several South African higher education institutions.

Strategic management and leadership has been a pivotal motto in many European higher education transformations in the previous decade, and has consequently solidified the tiers of top level management in various countries (Degn, 2015). Rectors and deans are endowed with the gradually augmenting responsibility of transforming HEIs into more participative, entrepreneurial players in the community, and are in this manner mandated to embrace and occupy the role of strategic leaders to a much greater degree than previously expected in higher education systems (Degn, 2015). This position, besides the reality that many managers are not yet completely familiar with it, is likewise convoluted by the toppling of the old-fashioned and conventional management structures and the arduous defence of these very structures emanating from the academic staff. In South Africa, state interventionism has rendered university leadership more complex because of the prevalence of market rivalry, managerialism, as well as internationalisation and globalisation necessities (Tsheola & Nembambula, 2015). The probability of the endurance of South African HEIs in conditions of turmoil, volatility and ambiguity, consequently became reliant on transformational leadership, without which the market would become precarious (Jansen, 2003; Vinger & Cilliers, 2006; Louw & Zuber-Skerritt, 2009; Chipunza & Gwarinda, 2010).



## **Performance Management and Development**

In the previous decade, the higher education atmosphere has been labelled a tempestuous environment (Middlehurst, 2002). Many economic and political catastrophes have had influence on HEIs. They have been faced with concerns of growth, decentralisation and financial burdens (Smeenk, Teelken, Eisinga & Doorewaard 2009). Furthermore, these concerns have been coupled with societal expectations of accountability, cost-effectiveness and efficacy (Chan, 2001; Pollitt & Bouckaert 2004). The transfiguring environment has coerced HEIs to find methods to manage their employees more enthusiastically in order to comply with these requirements.

Employee performance management schemes have been embraced by several HEIs in Europe (Middlehurst, 2004; Ferlie et al., 2008; Decramer, Smolders, Vanderstraeten & Christiaens, 2012). Employee performance management is a “continuous process of identifying, measuring and developing the employee performance of individuals and teams and aligning employee performance with the strategic goals of the organisation” (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008, p. 139). There is an unequivocal association between human resource management and employee performance management. Adopting an employee performance management style involves positioning HRM practices in a manner that will maximise existing and prospective employee performance, which is consequently anticipated to influence organisational employee performance (Den Hartog, Boselie & Paauwe, 2004). HRM strategies and schemes, and similarly, employee performance management schemes, should eventually end in reduced employee absenteeism, greater satisfaction, an augmented readiness to remain with the organisation and increased effort (Decramer, Smolders & Vanderstraeten, 2013).

Other than the mandate that academic staff members have to fulfil the strategic goals of a higher education institution, their own personal development within the confinements of academia is also essential to them. The evolving setting of higher education, both globally and in South Africa, brings forth new difficulties for lecturers, which have resulted in more emphasis on academic staff development in several institutions (Quinn, 2012). Academic career development goes beyond mere experience in a particular field. Education is a vital



tool to use and it has an important role in the general academic career development process. However, there are alternative aspects that must be fully developed if the educational arena is to be adequately radiated (Bessette & Burton, 2014). Academic conferences are pivotal to various facets of career development. Academic conferences at times bid individuals to submit papers for publishing in the conference proceedings. Typically, conferences that provide this sort of publishing opportunity also have journals that they are in partnership with so that scholars can have their work published in these journals, provided that it is appropriate or acceptable. A conference presents an academic with the opportunity to be measured against a professional standards, and will gradually augment the academic's performance (Cahn, 2008).

Customarily, university lecturers have undertaken minimal or no proper training for their position as educators, yet there has been accumulative pressure both worldwide and in South Africa to offer structures to cultivate the professional aptitude of academics (Quinn, 2012). In the past ten years, both globally and to a slighter degree in South Africa, several higher education intuitions have started allocating resources into a spectrum of academic staff development initiatives (Quinn, 2012). Repetition yields a long-lasting effect; academic presentations on a specific theme are an appropriate method of applying expertise and intellectual abilities intensively to articulate one's knowledge and experience on a particular subject (Bessette & Burton, 2014). This development process is tedious to completely master, but the more frequently presentations are conducted, the greater of a master the individual becomes. Academic presentations are generally used by human resource departments to satisfactorily indicate that a scholar is sufficiently competent for a specific position. This form of development is also a contribution towards society and is therefore necessary in all facets of the academic work field (Bessette & Burton, 2014).

### **Salary and Benefits**

According to Barr and McClellan (2011), pay is the greatest proportion of expense in the budget of all HEIs. The introduction of performance-based pay and merit remuneration for academic staff contests the conventional supremacy of the professoriate and individual professors, as stated by Hazelkorn (2015). The last two issues were not previously within the



jurisdiction of universities. However, they have now become an integral part of management issues and a subject of conversation within institutions of higher learning. Zealous universities have taken an aggressive approach to recruitment with the use of enticing salary and benefits packages to heighten their success in identifying and approaching international academics and strategically classifying prospective employees (Hazelkorn, 2015).

Walker, Vignoles and Collins (2010), state that the remuneration of faculty distinctly influences the value of the higher education market. The debate is that if policy makers fail to deal appropriately with the challenge of relative salary in academia, it might become unmanageable to uphold the superior quality of the HE sector. As access to HE is broadened and there is added growth with regard to the need for HE academics, the expenses pertaining to any variations in comparative academic salary could be significant. To rise above the norm, there is an urgent need for strong practical substantiation on a variety of matters surrounding both academic pay and the general standard of resourcing in the HE market.

A study comparing the salary scales in Southern Africa was conducted not so long ago amongst four (4) universities namely, University of Botswana (UB), University of Cape Town (UCT), University of Mauritius (UoM), and the University of Namibia (UNAM). According to this study, UCT commerce academic staff is compensated with the most competitive pay scale among the 4 HEIs, partly because South African HEIs provide some of the most superior pay rates in the Commonwealth when measured in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) (Trotter, Kell & Willmers, 2014). This implies that a steady convergence of remuneration scales has occurred between all of the well-endowed Commonwealth nations because of international rivalry to reel in staff. Nevertheless, the elevated average pay grades in South Africa only disguise the great miscellany of actual salaries rendered, considering that each university in fact functions independently in determining how much to remunerate its academics (Trotter, Kell & Willmers, 2014). The researcher therefore seeks to through this study determine the competitiveness of salary scales of the merged South African HEI to subsequently recommend methods for improvement where necessary.



Indirect remuneration is a distinguished aspect of the TVP in higher education that offers a relative competitive advantage in comparison to the private sector (Evans & Chun, 2012). The Society for Human Resource Management (as cited in Evans & Chun, 2012) outlines that a study of 550 HR specialists carried out in 2009 exhibited that for the second consecutive year, employees considered job security to be the most essential facet of their job fulfilment. Unequivocally, recessionary budget reductions was an exit motivator in higher education, unfavourably impacting employees' sense of membership and job fulfilment or satisfaction. For instance, at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, 20 % of the labour force or four hundred posts were made redundant in 2011, together with further pay and benefits cuts. The enactment of an annual total compensation declaration for both faculty and staff has become a more imperative best practice for conveying the value of fringe benefits like leave programmes, tuition settlement, and employer advantage contributions (Evans & Chun, 2012); making it a pivotal element of a talent value proposition.

### **Work/Life balance**

Work-life balance is a greatly investigated field of interest as indicated by Mohd Noor (2011). Of late assisting employees to balance their career and family life is considered to be social and business, wise considering that work-life disparity experienced by employees has an adverse influence on employers and society at large (Kattenbach, Demerouti, & Nachreiner, 2010). Dundas (2008) argues that work-life balance has to do with successfully managing the balance between compensated work and all alternative undertakings considered significant to individuals such as family, community activities, charitable work, personal growth and relaxation and recreation.

Being able to achieve equilibrium between workplace requirements and personal life requirements is considered a crucial matter among employees worldwide and faculty members in HEIs are not exempt from this (Mohd Noor, Stanton & Young, 2009). Teichler, Arimoto and Cummings (2013) state that an increasing number of academic staff seems to be increasingly concerned with work-life balance, as opposed to a strong dedication to academic work. For instance, numerous researchers debate that work-life balance will continue to be a challenge for women until the family structure or constitution transforms and the cultural



customs related to motherhood and femininity are also transformed (Lerner, 2010; O'Meara & Campbell, 2011).

In Lester's (2015) view, work-life equilibrium is entrenched in individual situations, like that of a parent or the custodian of an elderly parent, and is linked to sociocultural family arrangements and gender roles. Lester (2015) further argues that in an attempt to generate an all-inclusive culture that delineates work-life balance and institutes unvarying policies for the institution, institutions of higher learning are failing to consider the uniqueness of the work-life balance, including the disintegration noted in complex and loosely combined institutions of higher learning. In light of this knowledge, the researcher seeks to determine the level of commitment by the merged South African HEI in order to provide its academic staff with a work experience that accommodates their life outside the workplace. The research also aims to uncover how important a work-life balance as part of the talent value proposition, is to the academic staff of this institution.

To summarise, employment branding and the efforts necessary to construct and manage an employment brand are potent tools that can be applied to augment the value of an organisation through human resources. More often than not, human resources seek to influence the bottom line of an organisation by endorsing cost-inhibiting initiatives that do not positively impact quality or efficiency. Employment branding can conversely augment the calibre of employees, assist in motivating them to become more productive, and can present the organisation with prospects in the marketplace that may not have been previously available to them. In a nutshell, EB can assist in dealing with several of the issues that organisations are presently confronted with. Disregarding the essentials that empower an organisation would inevitably obliterate it. The researcher therefore seeks to establish the essential components that comprise an employer brand that is most befitting and desirable to the academic staff of the merged South African HEI in this study.



## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Research approach**

Research approaches describe the strategies and the processes for research that extend across the stages from wide suppositions to meticulous techniques of data gathering, analysis, as well as interpretation. The choice of a research approach is further determined by the nature or essence of the research problem that is under investigation, the understanding of the researcher, as well as the people that the study affects or intends to reach out to (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative research approach was adopted in this study. This was motivated by the fact that management forms a minority within the merged South African HEI; therefore a quantitative approach would not have been practical as it would not have yielded the desired results.

The nature of the study also necessitated a qualitative approach because an Employment Brand is cultivated by the employer and directed towards the employee; in terms of this study, the EB is offered by the management of the HEI to its academic staff members. Therefore the researcher found it incumbent to first obtain the views or perceptions on EB of the management of the merged South African HEI via a qualitative inquiry in the form of interviews since the management population is small.

### **Research strategy**

A case study strategy was adopted in this research to structure and report on the findings as the data gathered were obtained from a real-life setting, as opposed to the research rooms of the Institution (Willis, 2008). The themes were extracted from the partly-structured interviews and validated against a global perspective as documented in the available literature. Qualitative case study approach in this research falls within the interpretive/constructivist paradigm (Yin, 2012). In this instance, the ontological belief is that reality is local and specifically constructed.



## **Research setting**

The research setting in this study entailed a sample comprising 12 managerial staff members of the merged South African HEI. These participants were geographically situated across three different campuses of the Institution. The participants were interviewed in person at their offices and in cases where the researcher could not travel to areas that were not within reasonably close proximity, the researcher took advantage of virtual interviewing methods such as telephone and Skype, with the approval of participants, for greater convenience.

## **Research Method**

### **Research Procedure**

Permission to carry out this research was sought and obtained from the relevant authorities of the Institution by means of a letter of request prior to the collection of data. Upon obtaining permission, the researcher approached interview candidates personally, requesting to conduct the interviews, and interviewees were required to give consent before answering any of the researcher's questions. Anonymity was upheld and all information provided remained confidential according to the code of ethics.

### **Sampling**

The participants consisted of the management of the three campuses of a merged South African HEI. The participants were interviewed, one after the other until data saturation was reached. This study made use of purposive convenience sampling, meaning participants were selected based on their willingness and availability to take part in the data collection process, as well as the relevance of their contribution. Twelve individuals in managerial positions participated in this study through interviews. The table below shows the demographic delineation:



**Table 3.1: Sample Demographics**

| <b>Participants</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Race</b>   | <b>Qualification</b> | <b>Job Level</b>     |
|---------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1                   | Male          | Black/African | Doctoral degree      | Executive management |
| 2                   | Male          | Black/African | Doctoral degree      | Senior management    |
| 3                   | Male          | Black/African | Doctoral degree      | Executive management |
| 4                   | Female        | White         | Doctoral degree      | Senior management    |
| 5                   | Male          | Black/African | Doctoral degree      | Executive management |
| 6                   | Female        | Black/African | Doctoral degree      | Senior management    |
| 7                   | Female        | White         | Doctoral degree      | Senior management    |
| 8                   | Male          | White         | Doctoral degree      | Executive management |
| 9                   | Female        | White         | Doctoral degree      | Middle management    |
| 10                  | Male          | Black/African | Doctoral degree      | Middle management    |
| 11                  | Female        | Black/African | Doctoral degree      | Executive management |
| 12                  | Male          | White         | Doctoral degree      | Senior management    |

As can be seen from the table above, the majority of the participants were male, making up 58,33% (seven participants) of the sample, while the female participants constituted 41,67% (five participants) of the selected sample. The demographic distribution of race was constituted of more black/Africans in the sample, with 58,33% (seven participants) being black/African and 41,67% (five participants) being white as depicted in Table 3.1. 100% (all twelve individuals) of the participants in the sample demonstrated being of a superior calibre as they all have doctoral degrees as exhibited in the table above. The distribution in terms of managerial levels as depicted in Table 3.1 showed 41,67% (five participants) to be in the executive tier of management, another 41,67% (five participants) to be in the senior tier of management and 16,67% (two participants) to be in the middle tier of management. The demographics displayed in Table 3.1 also show that only one out of the five participants in executive management is female, that is, 8,33% of the entire sample as opposed to a clobbering 33,33% of males in the entire sample who hold executive managerial positions. At senior management level, we have three out of the five participants being female, that is, 25% of the entire sample, as opposed to 16,67% of males in the entire sample of the participants that hold senior management positions. In the sample represented by the demographics of Table 3.1, it is also shown that one out of two participants are in middle management, that is,



8,33% of the males represented in middle management participants and the females represented in middle management participants in the aggregate sample.

### **Data collection method**

The qualitative data collection was conducted by means of partly-structured interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to uncover more profound meanings by allowing for new information and concepts to emerge from the results. The interview sessions managed to specifically unravel the perceptions that management have concerning employment branding within the merged South African HEI. The interviews were carried out in English and the questions were based on the employment branding framework of Parmar (2014). The HEI management interview participants were requested to delineate their experiences where employment branding is concerned in line with this framework. The questions sought to determine the current employment branding of a merged South African HEI.

### **Recording of data**

Due to the large volume of data that was gained as a result of this qualitative study, the researcher deemed it fit to capture audio recordings of the participants' responses so that these responses could be transcribed as the data were gradually gathered. The audio recordings were played back and verbatim transcriptions of the data were made in a Microsoft Word document for analysis once all the data had been gathered.

### **Data analysis**

Thematic analysis was used in this study to encode the qualitative interview responses and the researcher ended up with a codebook at the end of this process. Klenke (2016) delineates that thematic coding distinguishes between manifest themes, that is, the themes that can obviously be observed in the data, and latent coding, that is the more subtle themes building up to or relating to the greater phenomenon. In accordance with Patton (2015), an inductive approach to qualitative analysis was used, which entailed finding trends, themes and clusters in the gathered data, that is, generating fresh ideas, findings and concepts from the specific data collected. A deductive approach to qualitative analysis was used, which entailed the



analysis of data according to a framework that already exists, that is, assessing the extent to which the data collected is aligned with concepts, theories, ideas and findings that already exist, to confirm that the research question was addressed.

### **Ensuring the quality and rigour of the research**

This research was carried out to a lofty standard so that the outcomes could be trustworthy, significant, pertinent, as well as confidently applicable in reality (Baillie, 2015). In accordance with Ballinger (2006), the researcher ensured that the research design was congruent with the objective of this research. The researcher deduced the findings in a way that drew comparisons with the literature, thus substantiating the findings. Finally, the researcher's role in this research was unequivocally explained to minimise any research bias.

The researcher used the following strategies to ensure the rigour of this research (Baillie, 2015):

- Peer debriefing - The researcher and research were analysed by a fellow researcher, who challenged and assisted the researcher.
- Lengthened involvement within the research setting - The researcher spent enough time in the research field in order to be better acquainted with it and ascertain that the findings would ultimately be contextual.
- Participant verification - The researcher went back to check with the research participants whether the information they had provided was accurately captured in the transcripts.
- Elaborate description - The researcher provided an adequately elaborate description of the research setting, including the participants so that readers may determine whether this study's findings can be generalisable to other similar settings.
- Audit track - The researcher kept a record of every research phase and the decisions, as well as logic behind them.



## Reporting

The findings of this research are displayed in table format, showing the theme and various sub-themes that emerged from this study. The theme and sub-themes are substantiated by verbatim quotes obtained from the interview participants in this study. This was done in accordance with the contemporary qualitative research approach, which entails the validating or supporting knowledge of the assumptions made in particular research settings (Bowen, 2009).

## FINDINGS

Table 3.2 depicts the themes that were identified from the interviews with management. The frequency of these identified themes is outlined in the table above. Table 3.2 displays that Fringe Benefits/incentives and Remuneration, Leadership and Managerial Support, and Occupational Health and Safety were the most frequently occurring sub-themes in descending order.

**Table 3.2: Frequency of Themes**

| Theme and sub-themes |                                           | Frequency |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Theme                | Employment Branding                       | 178       |
|                      | Fringe benefits/incentives & remuneration | 45        |
|                      | Leadership & managerial support           | 38        |
|                      | Work/life balance & flexibility           | 15        |
|                      | Performance management & development      | 25        |
|                      | Occupational health & safety              | 28        |
|                      | Job security                              | 18        |
|                      | Fulfilment and Purpose                    | 9         |

### *Theme: Employment Branding*

From the collective responses pertaining to employment branding in this research, fringe benefits/incentives and remuneration appeared the highest number of times and fulfilment and purpose appeared the least number of times in the qualitative data.



***Sub-theme: Fringe Benefits/incentives and Remuneration***

Fringe benefits/incentives and remuneration is the most frequently occurring sub-theme under EB. According to the findings, participants affirmed that the salary offered in exchange for service or expertise is one of the chief elements of an employment agreement that allows Institutions to remain competitive, as supported by the following participants:

*I would like to say there is a salary in exchange for that. That is our first agreement, to ensure that we provide a good package.* (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

And:

*The total salary package should at least be competitive.* (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).

Other participants indicated that the Institution still needs to improve on the salaries it offers to academics as expressed by the following participant:

*I don't think the salary here is better than the salary other academics earn in other universities.* (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Participant 9 also added:

*I think maybe we should look at whether our salaries are market related.* (Participant 9, female, middle management, doctoral degree, white).



However, the findings did reveal that no amount of money can ever be enough for a person as mentioned by the following participant:

*I have never seen a person very happy with their salary. I also need more as I sit here. All I'm saying is that you never have enough, you never satisfy a person. When you do this, they want that, when you lift a standard, just like that. (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Evidence from the results also reflected that participants consider monetary rewards that are separate from basic salary to be important and encouraging to academic staff members. The following response explains:

*I previously participated in both research and teaching, so part of it you can keep it to yourself, meaning you're free to use it for what you want, then the other fifty percent you keep it into that line of what you have been doing. So it's also a two way thing so say one way you are encouraged as an individual, like I remember I was the first person to win the student rapport nomination for inspirational teaching here when I'd just arrived, I had three months only in the Institution and I was given R50 000 and I used it for whatever I wanted to do. (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Another participant adds:

*I think this Institution has got a package of stuff that we offer, I mean, we've got the performance bonuses, so that is one way we can incentivise people. (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).*



Participants also revealed that non-monetary benefits and incentives such as special leave periods and study benefits for even one's family are very important to the academic employment experience, as expressed by the following participant:

*We have got a study scheme and as an employee, you study for free and of course your dependants as well study for free and you personally get support in terms of your study leave, in terms of your research and your conferences. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Another thing that participants also agreed about was that a medical aid contribution would be a good fringe benefit to offer the academic staff members of the Institution as seen in the following response:

*I think we can also work on the fringe benefits like medical aid, we don't have medical aid contributions that we can give. (Participant 9, female, middle management, doctoral degree, white).*

#### ***Sub-theme: Leadership and Managerial Support***

The findings in this research indicate that participants believe management to hold a very crucial role in the success and growth of academics in HEIs, as is implied by the statement:

*What we do as a university is really to ensure that if your heart is truly in academia, we give you that support, so that you achieve what you want, so that eventually, you also reach the top pinnacle of your career. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Participant 1 also mentioned that a lack of managerial support is likely to result in a deficient performance amongst academics:



*I always say that you can't expect a staff member who's not happy. I mean an academic working with a whole class of students, you think that they are going to class and are not happy about the university, about management and you expect him to go there with love and perform his duties? That's the worst thing to expect, but if we show that we take care of them and address them, then automatically you can relax and know that he's going to take care of the class. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Another participant expresses the following:

*When the employee comes into the university, they will expect that they will get as much managerial support as possible to grow as a staff. (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Additionally:



*They want opportunities to grow and expect to be supported also internationally to become the very best in their field. (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).*

Participant 10, concurrent with several other participants, also expresses the opinion that the management of the merged South African HEI is currently providing sufficient support in various ways to their academic staff members, as implied by the following:

*I feel the commitment from management is there because every year we talk about participation that people should do research, people should do studying and you'll see even in terms of our budget, we always make sure that we have a budget to assist academics and even in terms of performance, you'll find that if we have a person like a weaker performing academic, we even have facilities where you pass through*



*developmental, I mean it takes time for someone to get a warning to say you're a poor performer.* (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Furthermore, some participants indicated that the leadership is very supportive of its academic staff members. However, sometimes academics do not conform or cooperate in terms of the support offered by management. The following response exhibits this point by stating that:

*I mean, if we have someone who is working at this University and does not improve their qualifications, I think they would also be not that clever because you've got all the opportunities to improve your qualifications up to a PhD and you've got the support of management and everybody to do that so yeah.* (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

#### ***Sub-theme: Work/life Balance and Flexibility***

Participants in this study revealed that the decision by an academic on which Institution of higher learning to join is also greatly influenced by their family members and family situation, as can be identified from the following responses:

*You have to think of your children; that is your family, where are they going to go to school?* (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Another participant added:

*What attracted me to this campus was because my husband came here, it wasn't out of choice, I had to come and I can't leave.* (Participant 9, female, middle management, doctoral degree, white).



Other participants also outlined the importance of giving academics that leeway to pursue their personal ambitions that are not necessarily part of their employment agreement, as indicated by the following response:

*Even if it means you have to take some time away from the University, to take part in those activities where your talent is sharpened and you are further refined, then we have to give you that opportunity. It won't be like no, you can't go and do this because we want you to be teaching every day. We create space for you so that even other additional resources that are needed, they give you and that helps a lot. (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Other participants indicate that there is the allowance for flexibility within the Institution as expressed as follows:

*If an academic needs time and flexibility, they can get it. (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).*

And:

*Sometimes there are schemes whereby an academic can take off certain months or a certain semester to go and write your work, or go and do your research and with reduced teaching. (Participant 3, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Another participant outlined how academic staff members do not appreciate a rigid routine or schedule for their work:

*Top performing academics value independency. They don't want to be bogged down by bureaucracy, they want to be independent, they want to make their own decisions, they*



*don't want to, yeah, they don't want to be bogged down by rules, like yeah there must be rules and regulations obviously but you know the bureaucracy well, that they don't like.* (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

#### ***Sub-theme: Performance Management and Development***

Performance Management and Development is the fourth highest occurring sub-theme under the theme Employment Branding. The general notion that emerged from the results in this study was that the performance of academic staff in the Institution is closely monitored with the intention of rewarding those who are performing well in a manner that will facilitate and even further performance through development and also developing those whose performance is lacking. This can be seen from the following statements of participants:

*I must tell you we one very unique university that has got a performance management system that we enter into a performance contract with staff and this performance contract would lead you towards promotion.* (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Furthermore:

*We have performance agreements through a yearly basis, they indicate what they need, what their needs are and we also indicate what we expect from them, so we review after 6 months and then we re-look into that around September.* (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Other participants also expressed the various rewards and advancement systems that are available for top performing academic staff members as can be gathered from the following responses:



*We've got the top performer's bonus, and then we got the merit bonuses that is, your tangible amount. But also in terms of the promotion, you don't have to wait until somebody dies to get a promotion. It is actually in your own hands. If you meet the criteria, then you get the promotion and it's not all universities that have got that.* (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

And:

*You'll see that key elements for promotion, when let's say you're a lecturer and you want to be a senior lecturer, if you look at what are the requirements, those things that I've been talking about to say okay, how was your teaching component, did you do study guides, did you publish a paper, did you also graduate a student, an honours student, so you see that those things that you've been doing are used to also now move you from one level to the other level and for sure I can't expect a situation whereby you were a lecturer this year and next year they make you a senior lecturer then you decide to leave the University, you see?* (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Participants also explained that it is important to use a positive and constructive approach when it comes to reprimanding and addressing poorly performing academic staff members, rather than an abrasive and harsh approach, which could worsen the situation. This finding is represented by the following response from one of the participants:

*I think there are some very disengaged academics, and it doesn't help to shout at them or to threaten them, or to say if you don't get a PhD we're going to kick you out because I think that's very demotivating, so it would be far better if we could find incentives and say if you don't have a PhD, what can we do to help, can we send you somewhere to go and study and also make more money available, find a teaching assistant so that you'll have more time.* (Participant 4, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).



### ***Sub-theme: Occupational Health and Safety***

Occupational Health and Safety is the third highest occurring sub-theme under the theme, Employment Branding. The results indicate that the participants in this study had diverging views when it comes to the general state of safety on the different campuses of the Institution. The prevalent view pertaining to one campus was that the management has safety measures under control to a very large extent as expressed by one of the participants:

*Management is always in control, so academic staff members feel safe, there is good communication if there will be picketing or a protest you'll find that usually we'll already be aware a day before the time and there is an sms system that informs our staff members immediately. Consider how we managed to organise the #feesMustFall campaign and yet it was so successfully handled with no violent disruptions and no one was endangered. (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, White).*

On the other hand, the common perception of safety on another campus was that management is doing well in terms of safety when working with hazardous equipment or substances, but lacks when it comes to control of safety issues concerning disruptive behaviours on their campus. The following responses articulate these concerns:

*I'm not sure about safe yet, in terms of a safe environment, we observe health and safety measures with respect to the laboratories, buildings, and then from time to time we ensure that the academic staff is safe but then the disruptions on campus is something that we don't have enough control over, yet. (Participant 3, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

And:



*We don't have effective policies, like you'd find in other universities in the States, where they have panic buttons everywhere and there are police on campus patrolling everywhere to make sure that staff and students are safe, we don't have that here.* (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Another campus generally had a positive stance on the issue of safety and displayed satisfaction with the current health and safety measures and procedures as supported by the following response:

*We've got everything in place, we've got regular reports in place so every building or every floor has got a safety and health officer and any safety and health issues get reported on a monthly basis and we address them as they go on.* (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

#### ***Sub-theme: Job Security***

Job Security is the fifth highest occurring sub-theme under the theme, Employment Branding. According to the data collected, participants expressed that job security is generally high in the field of academia and further indicated the outstanding track record of the Institution where job security is concerned. This is supported by the following responses:

*When it comes also to job security, I think generally from my own assessment I think lectureship is one of the areas where there is high job security as compared to other jobs. There's a lot of support that you get and I think it takes something very extreme to say you might wake up and find your job is gone. I think this field is one of those where you know if you get a job your chances of getting even to retirement in your job is high."* (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Another participant mentioned that:



*It is secure because we've got tenure and the majority of academic staff members have got long-term contracts, therefore security of tenure is one thing that we do have.* (Participant 3, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

And:

*I think the management of this University is trying its utmost to create and ensure a job secure work environment for academic staff.* (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

Participants further expressed that the Institution is doing comparably better than other HEIs in South Africa when it comes to job security, as implied by this response:

*In terms of job security the track record of the institution is very good and I suppose Musa you heard this news that the Vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Town actually announced that there will be job cuts because they need to save about 180 billion this year.* (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).

Furthermore, this participant expresses some challenges where job security is concerned:

*We're trying not to have people on contract, not contract but on temporary employment, but in an environment like this you can't avoid it because there are students who could come on temporary, I mean you can't put them on permanent, but with many of our staff members we try and give them contracts or permanent employment but there are some situations where a person has gone on maternity leave and you can't bring in a temporary person to make them permanent because the person who is on maternity leave will have to come back you see.* (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).



Another participant made mention of the challenge that foreign or international academics face in terms of job security due to the issue of work visas:

*In terms of job security, generally I think the foreign academic staff members face more of a problem because if they haven't got a work permit or if their work-permit expires it can take them a long time to get it renewed. Therefore, such staff can be off for 6 months or more just trying to renew their permit, meanwhile we need them because they've got skills.* (Participant 4, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

### ***Sub-theme: Fulfilment and Purpose***

Another theme that emerged from this study was Fulfilment and Purpose. The results showed that contentment is a crucial part of academia and its outcome is greater productivity and purpose as expressed by the following response:

*Once you have started feeling that you're an employee in a system, you become so much content with your job and you enjoy it, you do it with passion and interest and excitement and this is what I feel, I hope everybody is feeling like that.* (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Another participant also mentioned that:

*I can give you lots of examples, another Professor in my faculty when he speaks to his colleagues says, you don't understand, you'll never understand how I'm enjoying my job.* (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

Another participant expresses how academia brings about a sense of gratification and fulfilment for those who are rightly placed within the academic arena; something that other professions and even money cannot always provide:



*I mean, I have seen many young, not necessarily just academics, but young people entering careers in the Midlands of our country and the Johannesburgs, just chasing money and they eventually end up with large packages but if you really see them a few years down the line, you can feel that vacuum of somebody who feels like they did not go too far with their studies. They are actually very apologetic, you know. They may be doing well, you know financially with good materials, but the fact that somebody feels that he could have gone for a master's at least, or for a PhD at least, you can always pick up that vacuum that is there. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Participant 8 characterises the fulfilment that comes from academia as a “calling” that goes beyond mere recognition and monetary gain, giving a sense of purpose:

*More important or as important as the personal recognition is a sense of location, if I could use the word “calling” because we don't just work for a salary at the end of the month. (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).*

## DISCUSSION

The objective of this research was to explore management perspectives on the factors affecting the employment brand for academic talent management in a South African higher education institution. Employment Branding guarantees employer desirability; that is, the anticipated advantages gained by existing and potential employees when they work for a specific organisation. It can be used as a method of appealing to and retaining talent (Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005). In the present competitive work setting, a limiting factor for service-based organisations, for instance private institutions of higher learning, is to distinguish themselves by means of employer branding in a way that will effectively entice and retain talented employees (Knox & Bickerton, 2008; Maxwell & Knox, 2009). A study conducted by Rudhumbu, Chikari, Sivotwa and Lukusa (2014) outlines that when it comes to employer branding strategies employed by HEIs to draw talent, the following strategies are applied: making certain that the workplace is open, welcoming and genuine where morality is



accentuated; cherishes and recompenses the aptitudes of workers; is vibrant, performance-oriented and outcome-driven; and has employee-conducive recruitment practices.

The findings of this study suggest that seven sub-themes, namely Fringe Benefits/incentives and Remuneration, Leadership and Managerial Support, Work/life Balance and Flexibility, Performance Management and Development, Occupational Health and Safety, Job Security and Fulfilment and Purpose, under the main theme of Employment Branding are fundamental elements to be considered for ensuring a desirable and enticing EB within the Institution. All the participants in the study delineated their perception of the various significant phenomena pertaining to the EB of the merged South African HEI.

Fringe benefits/incentives and remuneration was the most discussed phenomenon amongst the participants in this study. The participants concurred that compensation for work as well as added incentives are crucial to creating a desirable employment agreement in higher education that will attract the most superior academic talent. According to Kirst and Stevens (2015), what is crucial is not the total ranking or grading of salaries, but their comparability to the pay offered in credibly different careers. They furthermore elucidate that providing competitive remuneration can be especially important in certain academic areas in which qualified persons usually have other enticing job offers external to academia. This is in support of what participants expressed in the interviews.

Tuition assistance for workers and their dependents can denote a substantial quota of an HEI's overall remuneration package (Ledford, 2003). Educational benefit schemes comprise discounted or cancelled tuition fees for workers who qualify, also including spouses, children and domestic companions (Evans & Chun, 2012). This description in the literature supports several of the participants' responses concerning fringe benefits, particularly the benefit to study.

Leadership and managerial support was the second most popular phenomenon among participants in this study. As per the findings in this study, participants agreed that the leadership and management have an important influence on the success of academic staff



members. In accordance with what participants expressed, Kastoueva-Jean (2013) states that the main efforts by management at HEIs are directed at the establishment of conditions suitable for academic staff to thrive in their work, as well as determining which systems would best encourage the enhancement of research output and the innovative doings of academic staff members.

Quinn (2012) argues that ideally, management should be actively involved and supportive in the development of academic staff in order to guarantee an institutional ethos that makes the university more competitive a desirable within its sector. Much was discussed by the participants concerning the significant role that management plays in terms of supporting academic staff development efforts.

Work/life balance and flexibility was the second least emergent amongst the participants in the interviews conducted in this study. The managerial staff members of the Institution were in agreement concerning the importance of offering academic staff members an employment experience that allows them to take charge of their routine and to have time for family and personal matters in their lives.

Workplace flexibility comprises policies and programmes permitting workers to achieve a relative equilibrium between work and family commitments, offer paid leave, grant constancy, and certainty to workers (Society for Human Resource Management, 2011). The development of drivers that promote flexibility in the work setting has become a more imperative focal point in higher education, particularly due to the lesser likelihood of being able to offer remuneration increases (Evans & Chun, 2012). This is concurrent with the findings gathered among the participants in the interviews.

Performance management and development was the fourth most discussed among the participants in this study. They explained that the academic staff members in the merged South African HEI are continuously monitored over a 6-month to a year period to ensure the optimal performance and growth of academics. McCaffery (2004) states that, performance management is a perpetual process of learning and development and that superior quality



feedback is pertinent to development. Therefore managers must exploit any chance they get to offer feedback to staff.

McCaffery (2004) further pointed out that in the UK, for instance, the government placed greater resources at the disposal of HEIs to allow them to incentivise and facilitate staff growth. Funding of this sort was dependent on HEIs developing their unique human resources strategy and these strategies were reciprocally anticipated to cater for consistent reviews of every staff member based on open and impartial benchmarks with incentives linked to each person's performance, including where applicable, their team involvement. They were also required to outline how the university would deal with cases of poor performance.

The workplace health and safety of academic staff members was the third most mentioned phenomena pertaining to Employment Branding and all the participants in this study agreed that workplace safety is crucial to ensuring a vibrant employment experience. Reinhold, Siirak and Tint (2014) express that professors must have the appropriate teaching materials at their disposal, directly associated with their discipline. Nevertheless, a deficiency exists with regard to teaching materials on Occupational Health and Safety for tertiary-level courses. Health and safety experts in institutions of higher learning are well positioned to advise concerning the overall structural design of the system and further aid with enacting it (Bradley, Kanwar, Parkinson, Taylor & Scott, 2015).

Makoni and McGregor (2016) state that there was a recent persistent bout of student protests at HEIs throughout South Africa during which a minority of students incited much violence. Nkosi (2015) states that the spokesperson of a certain South African University said during the heat of the protest period that all learning activities had been suspended at one point in an effort to ensure the safety of staff and students. However, this measure was taken while everything was sufficiently under control. During the initial protests towards the end of 2015, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2015) also released a statement in which the importance of HEIs ensuring that every campus fostered a safe and secure environment for



both students and staff was emphasised. Such efforts were similar to those described by participants in this study.

Security of employment was the fifth most mentioned sub-theme in this study. The participants believed that the Institution offers an adequately stable and certain employment agreement or contract and discussed the importance of this offering. The literature reveals that although in many cases academic staff members may be appointed on contract, thus diminishing the general job security and status of conventional professorship (Forest & Altbach, 2006), owing to the fact that academic staff members are generally characterised as civil service employees, this makes academia more attractive because civil servants have a greater extent of lifelong job security (Altbach, Reisberg, Yudkevich, Androushchak & Pacheco, 2012). Altbach (2016) further affirms that although it is not completely certain that academics globally will be forever secure in their employment, it is rare for faculty to be made redundant at any point in their academic career. This is a reflection of what was expressed by the participants in this research.

Fulfilment and purpose was the least mentioned, yet noteworthy sub-theme under Employment Branding and a few of the participants indicated that one of the factors that makes academia more appealing is the gratification and sense of purpose that it offers to academics. In accordance with the participants in this study, Louw and Zuber-Skerritt (1992) elucidate that academic staff members desire a sense of purpose and direction in their work, in addition to an enabling environment. Evans and Nixon (2015) further express that due to the nature of beliefs, moral and ethical standards that relate to the identity of HEIs, there is a sense of social responsibility and individual gratification and fulfilment that is linked with an academic career where teaching and research are concerned. Furthermore, Timpson (2009) states that being involved in higher education has a great degree of meaning and purpose for societies and general communities as the work that is carried out in HEIs is greatly significant to these communities. The discussions brought forth by the interview participants in this study were greatly inclined to this perspective.



## **Implications for Practice**

The present research makes important theoretical and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this study adds to the limited empirical knowledge that exists on the employment branding of higher education institutions and the implications thereof for the effective talent management of academic staff members. From a practical point of view this research identified the key elements that should form part of an appealing higher educational employment brand that will attract and retain current and future talent. Human Resource practitioners and higher education management are encouraged to reconsider the remuneration structure (i.e. compensation and benefits) of academic staff members as it appears to an important determinant of attraction and retaining talent. Management support for and inputs into the employment brand for academic talent management remains a key factor to ensure the future success and sustainability of higher education institutions.

## **Limitations and Recommendations**

This research has some limitations. Due to the minimal available research on Employment Branding, the researcher was faced with the limitation of having to seek much of the validation from studies outside the academic arena. The nature of the work of individuals in higher education managerial positions also posed a limitation for the researcher as it was quite a challenge and tedious process to solicit their participation. In the process several managerial staff members withdrew from the study after initially agreeing to participate due to pressing work matters. The study also focused on one higher education institution. As a result the findings cannot be generalised to other higher education institutions.

Since many of the participants mentioned that a medical aid scheme would be another good way of incentivising academic employees and that this would accrue their appreciation of such a gesture, the researcher recommends that the HEI under investigation in this study considers adding a medical aid plan to the fringe benefits of academic staff members.

The researcher recommends that further inquiry be made into the merged South African Higher Education Institution in order to obtain the views of current academic employees concerning the existing EB so that improvements can be made to it. The researcher also



recommends that an inquiry be done among the support staff of the HEI as well, as it is also important to have an appealing Employment Brand for them.

## **Conclusion**

The psychological contract has long been determined as a vital facet of the process of employment branding. For a while now, various establishments have made use of marketing and branding activities as a way to accrue the loyalty of customers in terms of their products and services. Beyond this, organisations are now further broadening this effort to set themselves apart and render themselves more appealing in the perspective of employees, both prospective, as well as current. If HEIs are to win the current war for talent that has characterised the tertiary education sector in the recent decades, it is imperative for them to create an employment experience that will entice the most superior calibre of academic talent, especially since the majority of organisations in the corporate sector are in a position to offer much more attractive compensation packages to their employees.



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**Chapter 4:**

**ARTICLE 3**



# **TOWARDS A TALENT LIFE CYCLE FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC STAFF IN A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION**

## **ABSTRACT**

**Orientation:** Most talent management programs tend to neglect a fully integrated approach that addresses all segments of the talent management life cycle. This can have negative consequences for business success and sustainability over the long term.

**Research purpose:** The main objective of this research was to develop a talent life cycle framework for academic staff in a merged South African higher education institution.

**Motivation for the study:** Despite the fact that a significant volume of research has been done on the Talent Life Cycle (TLC), not much of it has been directed at the Higher Education Sector.

**Research approach, design, and method:** A qualitative research approach was adopted, using semi-interviews to collect data from management (N=12) of a merged South African higher education institution.

**Main findings:** The findings revealed five components that should form part of the talent life cycle framework for academic staff: Talent mind-set, Talent preparation and acquisition, Talent Development, Talent Performance and recognition and Talent Retention.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Higher education management are encouraged to follow an integrated and strategic approach towards academic talent management by incorporating the dimensions of the talent life cycle.

**Contribution/Value-add:** This research identified the key process elements of a talent life cycle that can assist with the effective talent management of academic staff members from beginning to end.

**Key words:** Higher Education, Talent Life Cycle, Talent Mind-set, Talent Preparation & Acquisition, Talent Development, Talent Performance and Recognition, Talent Retention



## INTRODUCTION

The 21<sup>st</sup> century higher educational landscape became known for its war on academic talent. This 'war for academic talent' can be attributed to various factors such as globalisation and increasing competitiveness across markets, the aging work force, a decline in younger workers entering, a lack of adequate state and research funding, uncompetitive remuneration packages and research incentives and employment equity initiatives (Callaghan, 2015; Schulze, 2015; Singh, 2015). Without well qualified and committed academic staff, no academic institution can ensure sustainability and quality over the long term (Pienaar & Bester, 2008). Higher education management therefore needs to understand what core talent means, and how to leverage the talent in a manner that allows the higher education sector to act decisively to attract, retain, and develop academic talent and hence secure its future success (Theron, Barkhuizen & Du Plessis, 2014).

According to Leisy and Pyron (2009) most talent management programs focus almost entirely on filling open positions with qualified individuals while neglecting a fully integrated approach that addresses all segments of the talent management life cycle. The latter approach are more likely to contribute to an organisation's success. In order to harness to true essence of the talent life cycle (TLC) in higher education, it is important to first comprehend the aggregate concept of talent management. Talent management "refers to the concept of bringing together – in a unified technology platform – the functions of recruitment, selection, and assessment, learning and development, performance management, workforce planning, compensation, and other human resource functions" (Oakes 2006, p. 21). Talent management in essence follows the process of human resource life cycle by acquiring, developing, and retaining the appropriate talent for an organisation's unique strategy (Schiemann, 2009). Kurganova (2014) furthermore describes a talent life cycle (TLC) as an organisation's relationship with its employees as described in six phases, namely planning, attracting, identifying, selecting, deploying and managing.

The ClearCompany (2015) delineates that each organisation defines and plots out their TLC in their own way. Stages will differ, procedures will be diverse and associations between each phase will be distinct. This is because each organisation has its own unique character,

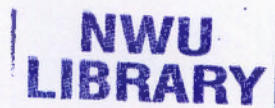


regardless of whether they operate within the same market or sector. The researcher therefore deemed it necessary to investigate the specific TLC that would best suit the merged South African HEI in order to achieve the most feasible approach to talent management within the institution.

This investigated the concept of a TLC by delineating each of the seven (7) components suggested by the literature - namely Talent Mind-set, Preparation for Talent, Talent Branding, Talent Mapping and Acquisition, Talent Development, Talent Performance and Recognition, and Talent Retention. Furthermore, this article sought to make these 7 components uniquely applicable and beneficial to the merged South African HEI referred to in this study. A brief historical background on the TLC, including the factors that affect a TLC in higher education, are discussed consecutively in the subsequent subsections.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A brief historical background on the TLC**



Savitz (2013) puts forth an important argument that entrenching sustainability is considered a fundamental aim for several organisations that cautiously heed the new requirements of the sustainability era. Nonetheless, it has proven to be a challenge for several organisations to realise this objective, including HEIs, mainly because it is never easy to transform customs of thought and behaviour that have been fashioned by decades or more of generations of practice. Sparrow, Scullion and Tarique (2014) elucidate that with regard to common practice, for the majority of organisations the roots of talent management are entrenched in two previous Human Resource practices, namely recruitment and career development. The collaboration or coupling of recruitment and career development duties resulted in the birthing of a life cycle strategy, and several of the definitions still used presently echo this line of thought (Sparrow, Scullion & Tarique, 2014).

Despite the roots of talent management being traceable back to 1865 (Simonton, 2011) and to the arenas of arts and show business, management, sports management, as well as initial education, the awareness of talent management within the parameters of business emerged in



the 1990s with the pioneering scholastic work entitled “The War for Talent,” by McKinsey (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). The origins of talent management applications revolves around the scuffle for breadth (resolutions encompassing focal talent procedures) and the necessity for depth (being able to offer the most superior functionality in every operation) (Schweyer, Newman & De Vries, 2009). The greatest eruption has been the advent of tools that emphasise the core of the TLC in the field of finding and breeding suitable talent candidates (Schweyer, Newman & De Vries, 2009).

The researcher noticed that very minimal literature can be traced back to the origin of the TLC as a holistic approach to tackling talent management in higher education, but rather the literature that exists pertains to the individual components that make up the aggregate TLC. It is therefore relevant that a comprehensive TLC be established and implemented in South African HEIs, considering the benefits that can be accrued from a watertight approach towards talent management.

### **Factors affecting the TLC in Higher Education**

For the purpose of this study, the factors that have been identified as those that influence the TLC in Higher Education are Talent Mind-set, Preparation for Talent, Talent Branding, Talent Mapping and Acquisition, Talent Development, Talent Performance and Recognition as well as Talent Retention. These constructs are explained further in the subheadings that follow.

#### **Talent Mind-set**

Best and Paterson (2010) allude to the fact that majority of organisations are weak where talent management is concerned and need to adopt a talent mind-set. Managers in possession of a talent mind-set have confidence that talents are an essential and vital source of competitive advantage (Tan, 2012). According to Elegbe (2010), the manner in which managers establish performance goals mirrors their talent mind-set. Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod (2001) further maintain that being devoted to talent management with a strategic inclination nurtures a talent mind-set. Synders (2015) evidently concurs with these authors by defining the talent mind-set as fully comprehending and being able to recruit,



retain, and identify talent in people that can be successfully deployed and perpetually developed in the direction of a particular purpose that inclines the strongpoints and enthusiasms of the person towards the short and long-term objectives of the organisation.

Organisations have a better chance of conquering the war for talent by establishing a talent mind-set, that is, employing the finest, compensating top performers considerably more, defining and conveying a TVP and, most essentially, recognising and developing talent belligerently; which generally means that being aware of who your stars are and investing in them accordingly (Nagpal, 2013). From the previous argument, one can deduce that an organisation that possesses a talent mind-set is merely one that has a heightened sense of awareness that human capital or talent as the most critical asset to its current and long term success. It would therefore be appropriate to conclude that an organisation without a talent mind-set is more prone to performing a haphazard job of attracting, nurturing and retaining talent.

Viljoen (2014) argues that there is an immense challenge within higher education markets when it comes to retaining academic staff, and the successful application of a comprehensive talent management tool in HEIs would require organisations to first possess a positive talent mind-set. Kopp and Farr (2011) express the view that with a talent mind-set, education systems would vehemently recruit, that is literally go out and search for, extraordinarily endowed individuals with leadership potential, soliciting them to assume academic positions. They furthermore explain that with a talent mind-set, education systems would moreover insist on proprietorship of the advancement of their academics considering that HEIs are held responsible for the outputs of their academics and are similarly in the best position to understand what their academics require for them to be able to warrant the success of students.

### **Preparation for Talent**

Preparation for talent entails, being in the right state or position to utilise talent when the need for it arises. Kurganova (2014) believes that the more strategic facets of the TLC need refurbishing, especially with regard to aligning organisational and employee strategies. She



furthermore argues that labour force and succession planning assists to assess the precise pool of candidates that an organisation is attempting to aim for and where these candidates can be accessed, and also orchestrates the establishment of the organisation's talent value proposition. Maxwell (2010) believes that preparation is fundamental in attaining any degree of success and that only this can strategically place talent in a manner that allows it to realise its potential. This deduction is made on the basis that talented individuals, with specific reference to employees, will surely be unable to achieve their anticipated potential to advance the organisation's mandate if the organisation never prepared for them to be able to fulfil such a role prior to their employment.

Turner and Minnone (2011) states that a crucial stakeholder group in universities is the faculty or academic staff members, which are a principal resource that holds a magnificent role in perpetually producing and expanding knowledge and consequently boosting the institution's competitive advantage. Turner and Minnone (2011) further allude to the fact that academia is made custodian over the unearthing and proliferation of knowledge in our communities. It is therefore essential to be in possession of high quality staff, specifically, academic staff, which displays a great intellectual capacity. It is therefore also incumbent that higher education institutions determine the specific outcomes and contributions that they wish to achieve within the market in which they operate, which will allow them to appropriately prepare for the recruitment of the necessary talent with precise objectives in mind.

### **Talent Branding**

Stringer and Rueff (2006) explain that talent branding images can concurrently appeal to an organisation's target applicants while deterring those who may be incongruent with its needs. Whoever is responsible for designing an organisation's talent brand must cooperate with its marketing department to discern the captivating and absorbing links between the organisation, its values, aims, ethics, as well as its talent (Stringer & Rueff, 2006; Thompson, Russo, Rueff, Stringer, Fyock & Finney, 2013).



Baker and Balmer (1997) indicate that communication is essential for governing the brand support compartment of academic staff members in higher education institutions. Silzer and Dowell (2010) further point out that the appropriate management can influence a talent brand to advance the agenda of reeling in the most superior academic staff to HEIs.

According to Smither (2003), the progression of an employee through the introductory stage and beyond is to a large extent dependent on the occurrences of the recruitment and hiring stage. If new employees are impressed with their initial experience, chances are that they will facilitate the external communication of the talent brand. Smither (2003) believes that organisations that effectively keep their new workers in the long term are those that do the following during the introductory stage:

- Determine the career wants and expectations of employees and ensure that the organisation is able and willing to comply with these anticipations.
- Leave employees awestruck on their first day by preparing and refurbishing their office with all the required materials such as telephone connections, computer-related tools, and all the necessary equipment for the execution of their duties.
- Acquaint new workers with all their co-workers and receive them with sincere enthusiasm.
- Show a personal concern in each person and motivate managers to do likewise, as this will not merely encourage more people to remain longer, but also encourage them to achieve better outcomes in response to the personal interest shown in them by managers and employers.
- Offer exceptional orientation, comprising a background on the organisation's strategy, performance, and main difficulties, as well as specific mentions of the manner in which new employees are required to add to the organisation's accomplishment and moreover, discussions on specific customers and what the organisation offers them.
- Perpetually convince new employees what makes the organisation a great place to work, and ensure that you also believe the impression you convey.

Higher Education Institutions that comply with the above mentioned points are likely to put across a positive talent brand to their current as well as prospective employees.



## **Talent Mapping and Acquisition**

Greer (2013) describe talent mapping as the connecting of the available talent with the talent that is foreseen to be required to sustain growth in a way that determines existing lacks or discrepancies. Shalini (2015) also shares a similar view. Mengel (2015) informs us that several of the paramount organisations apply talent mapping as a tactic to classify pools of prospective best-match applicants for a specific position, and that establishing a set pipeline of top class candidates, even prior to the need for it, assists in augmenting the hiring quality and hiring speed, and is able to additionally reduce hiring expenses. Determining an organisation's sources of talent and pursuing prospective best-fit applicants beforehand can assist the organisation's recruitment team to formulate the most appropriate search criteria (Mengel, 2015). This can be done by nurturing networks and relationships with highly talented individuals long before an official post is readily available. Van Eeden (2014) states that organisations have become too accustomed to ceremonial talent mapping procedures in South Africa that they may possibly be missing the point if they fail to capitalise on these already forged relationships.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (2011) states that their talent mapping process is steered by the result of talent identification procedure. Their institutional talent is sketched in harmony with their performance potential-matrix comparative to leadership-specialisation ranks. The aftermath of this procedure is an optical and most likely a graphical illustration of the discrepancies and strong points of every tier of management.

Silzer and Dowell (2010) describe talent acquisition as discovering the appropriate talent when it is required and conveying a consistent applicant experience throughout the magnetism, recruitment, appointment, and on-boarding procedure. The outcome of talent mapping, which is a talent pool, provides the capital to construct a maintainable talent pipeline for instant, intermediate and long-term talent acquisition throughout tiers, operations and geographic. On the other hand, Kumaarr (2014) states that talent acquisition implies an outlook of not merely occupying job posts, but additionally making full use of the candidates and the competencies they gain from an arduous recruitment procedure as a way to occupy



comparable job posts in the future as well. From these definitions, one is able to establish the close relationship between talent mapping and talent acquisition, which perfectly justifies why the two concepts have been coupled as one in the TLC model of this study.

Evans and Chun (2012) contend that talent acquisition by means of perpetual tracking, recruitment, and outreach practices is crucial to institutional sustainability and organisational rejuvenation in an institution of higher learning. Even so, in spite of the requirement for haste, dexterity and stealth when it comes to obtaining talent, the methods that higher education institutions employ in pursuit of candidates are frequently hindered by inflexible stages, tedious interview schedules, and the deficiency of modernised, technologically nimble employment schemes (Evans & Chun, 2012).

### **Talent Development**

Garavan, Carbery and Rock (2011) define talent development as a process that places emphasis on the preparation, selection and enactment of development approaches for the whole talent pool in order to guarantee that the organisation has at its disposal both the existing and forthcoming source of talent to achieve strategic aims and that development practices are allied with the talent management practices of the organisation. Talent development practices are generally carried out by organisations for the purpose of ensuring the absence of talent shortages, to warrant premeditated and calculated succession as opposed to impulsive replacement, and to further augment the standing of the organisations as a talent magnet (Gandz, 2006).

The main purpose of talent development is to ready individuals to tackle the future; development in this instance being an enduring process that assists individuals to achieve the status of becoming agents for group or organisational transformation and learning (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003). What is required at present is a means of foretelling future talent needs and future learning requirements, in contrast to the more conventional approaches of needs calculation on which talent management has previously been founded, that merely ready individuals to correct previous performance misdemeanours (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003). This means that experience alone cannot be the basis of talent development, since it is an



outcome of the past and may not be suitable ground on which to enhance future performance, unless it is guaranteed that the future will bear resemblance to the past.

In terms of the talent development perspective in higher education, as outlined by Messick (2008), superiority depends on an institution's capability to develop the talents that are academic staff members to the greatest degree conceivable. Astin and Antonio (2012) argue that a talent development attitude in higher education is the most certain method of not merely upholding academic quotas, but additionally exploiting to the utmost level, the quantity of human capital at their disposal. Holm-Nielsen, Thorn, Olesen and Huey (2013) suggest that development is concerned with safeguarding the future development of an academic field of study. They further outline that PhD students should not simply be seen as obliging researchers in existent research clusters, this being because the talents of present day are in fact the magnificent innovators of future technologies. The North West University (2014) explains that it seeks to make the most of the campus-wide "growing our own timber" initiative in all faculties of the NWU and further examining the likelihood of spreading such initiatives to help sustain various departments. This makes evident that the institution is aware of the importance of recognising internal talent and developing it to the maximum extent in order to obtain utmost competitive advantage from this in the near future.

### **Talent Performance and Recognition**

Schoemaker (2005) defines talent as the superior ability to perform a particular undertaking. This definition accentuates the exceptional nature of talent and the specific influence it has on performance (Van der Sluis & Bunt-Kokhuis, 2009). Van der Sluis and van de Bunt-Kokhuis (2009) further explain that a crucial inference of associating talent with performance is that talents are not essentially vastly applicable, as they can be matchless and inimitably purposed for a specific task. Job performance can be described as the overall anticipated organisation value of the distinct behavioural incidences that a person performs over a typical period of time (Motowidlo, 2003). Dunkel and Kleemann (2013) on the other hand express that appreciation and acknowledgement implies the extraordinary value that is given to work performance. MacLean and Redman (2006) then outline that investigations in applied behavioural psychology have established that recognition or recompense should comply with



the distinctive requirements of different people or groups of people if they are to succeed at influencing exceptional performance in the long run.

Mone and London (2010) point out that recognition, similar to feedback, is frequently a disregarded facet of performance management and a facet about which several leaders are apprehensive. The previously mentioned authors also outline that recognition can positively influence the commitment and contentment, self-esteem, confidence, throughput, and usefulness of an organisation's workers. Moreover, several easy and nonmonetary methods exist to acknowledge performance and, consequently, augment drive and enthusiasm. Appropriate appreciation means that the leader commends an employee when the task has been performed according to or beyond expectation and offers constructive reproach when necessary (Rush, 2003). For appreciation to strengthen performance, the acknowledgement itself must be administered on a regularly basis (Nelson & Economy, 2010).

Marshall (2016) opines that superior staff performance aims to necessitate the learning institution to intensely support its staff. It is imperative that there should be full, well-timed and perceptible acknowledgement of the inputs to an HEI's mission by its staff members who exhibit outstanding and peculiar excellence, insight and commitment (Rauhvargers & Rusakova, 2009). Khurana and Singhal (2010) concurs with this by stating that gauging, cultivating and recompensing the academic staff of a learning institution are essential devices of fostering an inspiring, high-achievement atmosphere. According to Huisman, de Boer, Dill and Souto-Otero (2015) the behaviour of higher education managers must embrace conspicuous performance anticipations, apparent and arduous incentive schemes, acknowledgement and recompense, the offering of chances for development, as well as rewarding and celebrating the success of individuals and teams. Directors of schools or departments in Higher Education Institutions attest to having to constantly address frivolous university procedures, a perpetual sequence of *ad hoc* demands and gatherings that minimally pertain to the mainly desired organisational results; signifying a deficiency of acknowledgement, recompense, and commendation for the accomplishments of academic staff; and the burden of managing intensified grievances, staff performance impediments, and financial limitations (Fullan & Scott, 2009).



## **Talent Retention**

Retention is the last stage of the selection procedure and refers to the organisation's success rate in keeping talented workers on-board (Van Tiem, Moseley & Dessinger, 2012). The majority of organisations acknowledge the detrimental cost effect that losing talented individuals has. In spite of this, several organisations are still not exerting adequate effort to comprehend what causes workers to exit (Smither, 2003). One of the reasons why organisations are not as apprehensive and proactive as they ought to be is that people usually take the actual expense of forfeiting a talented employee too lightly (Smither, 2003).

Epie (2014) elaborates on this by saying that a bulk of the research available on talent retention has occurred in Western populaces and further studies are required in emerging countries because skills are becoming increasingly rare in these emerging countries, which implies that employing organisations have to aspire to keep their talent whenever they obtain it. Reitman (2013) suggests that the beliefs of managers that they possess the most superior available talent, who require being constantly engaged and gratified, is pivotal to successful and efficient retention habits. This probably owing to the fact that an employer that recognises and acknowledges that they have high quality talent at their disposal will do everything in their power to keep that talent content and engaged in their work for the aggregate benefit of the organisation (Reitman, 2013).

Box-Steffensmeie, Cunha, Varbanov, Hoh, Knisley and Holmes (2015) hold the opinion that how well an organisation manages to keep its talent revolves around the research performance of universities. A study conducted in South Africa by Theron, Barkhuizen and du Plessis (2014) showed that 34% of academics in their sample contemplated abandoning their current institution and discontentment with remuneration surfaced as the most prevalent motive for academics to abandon their current employment position. These authors recommended that the national government reconsider and upsurge the budget provision for academic remunerations and that HEIs should place further emphasis on crafting appropriate incentives and benefits for academic staff and provide reasonable bonus structures. The previously mentioned authors also lobbied that the career-path development and mentorship



for higher education scholars should be more vigorous and emphasised for institutions of higher learning.

It sum it can be concluded that making the most of talent in the complete TLC is an intricate procedure that determines the level of success of talent investments. Management in learning institutions should be able to acknowledge the significance of the TLC and how important it is to implement the correct processes. Talent careers can be considered from the perspective of a TLC where the principal notion is that the same way it is with products, talent meanders through a relatively foreseeable set of phases, that is, from introduction and development, to maturity and ultimately deterioration, or in case of talent, retirement. Marketers are aware of the strategic difficulties they will face in each of those stages and since talent meanders through its own sequence of phases, critically learning the life cycles of talent is pertinent.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

Research design is the manner in which researchers structure a study and the techniques involved in carrying out the investigation. The research design is further elaborated in the next few subheadings.

### **Research approach**

Research approaches describe the strategies and the processes for research that extend across the stages from wide suppositions to meticulous techniques of data gathering, analysis, as well as interpretation. The choice of a research approach is further determined by the nature or essence of the research problem that is under investigation, the understanding of the researcher, as well as the people that the study affects or intends to reach out to (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative research approach was adopted in this study. This was motivated by the small population of individuals in managerial positions within the Institution, which means that a quantitative approach would have been impractical.



The nature of the study also necessitated a qualitative approach because a TLC is administered by the employer, to the employee - in terms of this study this would be the management of the HEI to its academic staff members. Therefore, the researcher found it incumbent to obtain the views or perceptions on TLC of the management of the merged South African HEI via qualitative inquiry in the form of interviews since the management population is too small for quantitative data collection and analysis to have been done. Qualitative case study approach in this research falls within the interpretive/ constructivist paradigm (Yin, 2012). In this instance, the ontological belief is that reality is local and specifically constructed.

### **Research strategy**

A case study strategy was used in this research as this has been considered one of the most suitable strategies for qualitative research because it allows the researcher to explore a phenomenon in reality (Lichtman, 2014). The themes that emerged were obtained through the partly-structured interviews that were conducted, which were then authenticated against the globally available theory.

### **Research setting**

The research setting in this study entailed a sample comprising 12 managerial staff members of the merged South African HEI. These participants were geographically situated across the three different campuses of the Institution. The participants were interviewed in person at their offices and in cases where the researcher could not travel to areas that were not within reasonably close proximity, the researcher took advantage of virtual interviewing methods such as telephone and Skype, with the approval of participants, for greater convenience.

### **Research Method**

The specific research methods adopted by the researcher in this study are delineated in the subheadings that follow.

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## Research Procedure

Permission to carry out this research was sought and obtained from the relevant authorities of the Institution by means of a letter of request prior to the collection of data. Upon obtaining permission, the researcher approached interview candidates personally, requesting an interview, and interviewees were required to give consent before answering any of the researcher's questions. Anonymity was upheld and all information provided remained confidential according to the code of ethics.

## Sampling

The participants consisted of the management of the three campuses of the merged South African HEI. Interviews were conducted one after the other until data saturation was achieved. This study made use of purposive convenience sampling, meaning participants were selected based on their willingness and availability to take part in the data collection process and the potential relevance of their contribution. Table 4.1 below shows the demographic delineation of the 12 management participants in this study:

**Table 4.1: Sample Demographics**

| Participants | Gender | Race          | Qualification   | Job Level            |
|--------------|--------|---------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1            | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 2            | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |
| 3            | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 4            | Female | White         | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |
| 5            | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 6            | Female | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |
| 7            | Female | White         | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |
| 8            | Male   | White         | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 9            | Female | White         | Doctoral degree | Middle management    |
| 10           | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Middle management    |
| 11           | Female | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 12           | Male   | White         | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |



As can be seen from the table above, the majority of the participants were male, making up 58,33% (seven participants) of the sample, while the female participants constituted 41,67% (five participants) of the selected sample. The demographic distribution of race was constituted of more black/Africans in the sample, with 58,33% (seven participants) being black/African and 41,67% (five participants) being white as depicted in Table 4.1. 100% (all twelve individuals) of the participants in the sample demonstrated being of a superior calibre as they all have doctoral degrees as exhibited in the table above. The distribution in terms of managerial levels as depicted in Table 4.1 showed 41,67% (five participants) to be in the executive tier of management, another 41,67% (five participants) to be in the senior tier of management and 16,67% (two participants) to be in the middle tier of management. The demographics displayed in Table 4.1 also show that only one out of the five participants in executive management is female, that is, 8,33% of the entire sample as opposed to a clobbering 33,33% of males in the entire sample who hold executive managerial positions. At senior management level, we have three out of the five participants being female, that is, 25% of the entire sample, as opposed to 16,67% of males in the entire sample of the participants that hold senior management positions. In the sample represented by the demographics of Table 4.1, it is also shown that one out of two participants are in middle management, that is, 8,33% of the males represented in middle management participants and the females represented in middle management participants in the aggregate sample.

### **Data collection method**

The qualitative data collection was conducted by means of partly-structured interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to explore more profound meanings by allowing for new information and concepts to emerge from the results, which the quantitative data wouldn't have managed to reveal. The interview sessions managed to specifically unravel the perceptions that management have concerning the talent life cycle within the merged South African Higher Education Institution. The interviews were carried out in English and the questions were based on the talent life cycle framework of Schutte and Barkhuizen (2015). The HEI management interview participants were requested to express their experiences where the talent life cycle is concerned in line with this framework. The questions sought to determine what talent life cycle can be applied to the academic staff members of the merged South African HEI.



## **Data analysis**

In accordance with Maschi (2016) qualitative content analysis can involve a combination of inductive and deductive analysis approaches. In this study, the researcher first and primarily used the inductive approach to analyse the qualitative data and uncover deeper relationships from the new concepts that emerge, for the purpose of making credible recommendations. Deductive analysis was used for the sake of addressing the research objective. This way, the researcher was also be able to make sure that the specific research question in this study was relevantly and appropriately answered, while making concrete recommendations based on new emerging information from inductive analysis.

## **Ensuring the quality and rigour of the research**

The researcher used certain techniques to ensure the quality and rigour of this research. The forte of qualitative research is that it is informative, exhaustive and relatively prolonged within the research setting; furthermore, it is essential to consider whether the research is contextual. According to Nakkeeran and Zodpey (2012), these strengths are sometimes forfeited in reality due to a lack of time and applying qualitative techniques in such situations could render the findings of the study unreliable. The previously mentioned authors describe certain techniques that enable researchers to make up for the lack of time they may be faced with in ensuring quality and rigour of data, through the use of a more thorough and flexible research design, a relatively prolonged data gathering period, and an initial data analysis process. Participants with the ability to offer weighty information were used in substitute of an unnecessarily long data collection stage. The data was also recorded, stored, and is readily available for any further reference. The rigour of this study was also upheld by shying away from generalising the study's outcomes of the study outside the acceptable bounds. The researcher was also instinctive and outright concerning all the research phases instead of presuming them to be complication-free.



## Reporting

The findings of this research have been displayed in table format, showing the theme and various sub-themes that emerged from this study. The theme and sub-themes are substantiated by verbatim quotes obtained from the interview participants in this study. This was done in accordance with the contemporary qualitative research approach, which entails the validating or supporting knowledge of the assumptions made in particular research settings (Bowen, 2009).

## FINDINGS

Table 4.2 demonstrates the themes that came up in the interviews with management. The frequency of emergent themes is generated in the table. The researcher identified one main theme from the combined responses of the contributors and this theme had a group of sub-themes. Table 4.2 illuminates that talent development, talent retention, and talent performance and recognition were the highest recurring sub-themes.

**Table 4.2: Frequency of Themes**

| Theme and sub-themes |                                  | Frequency |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Theme                | Talent Life Cycle                | 165       |
|                      | Talent mind-set                  | 8         |
|                      | Talent preparation & acquisition | 11        |
|                      | Talent development               | 71        |
|                      | Talent performance & recognition | 37        |
|                      | Talent retention                 | 38        |

### *Theme: Talent Life Cycle*

The sub-themes that emerged in this study in descending order of occurrence frequency are talent development, talent retention, talent performance and recognition, talent preparation and acquisition and finally, talent mind-set. All these sub-themes were characterised under the aggregate theme of TLC.



### ***Sub-theme: Talent Mind-set***

Although the sub-theme of Talent Mind-set did not occur as frequently as the other sub-themes, the participants noted it to be a crucial element in ensuring that academic staff members are kept happy by taking good care of them, esteeming them as fundamental role players of the Institution and offering the most worthwhile employment experience . This is indicated by the following response:

*As far as value goes, this institution is extremely committed to offering superior value to all our stakeholders, especially to our academic staff members. We are motivated by the core business, or the persons involved in core business, if they are not in a position to be top performers then the institution is at risk, so it's important to ensure the well-being of the institution by ensuring that the persons involved in core business are happy and that they have all the resources to remain effective and to perform. (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).*

Another participant concurred by saying:

*The most important thing is to take care of our staff. If I really don't take care of the campus Rector, and she's not happy, there's no way she can take care of the campus, you know and the same goes for our academic staff. Unfortunately that's how it is, you know. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Another participant also acknowledges the significance and indispensable nature of academic staff in HEIs:

*At a university there are two things – staff and students and both need equal attention. You can't have the one without the other, so I think that it's very important for the sake*



*of managing your talent* (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

### ***Sub-theme: Talent preparation and Acquisition***

The participants outlined how important it is to prepare a desirable working atmosphere for the academic staff members beforehand to enhance the attractiveness of the Institution as mentioned in the following response:

*We assume that as the employer you should be able to assure your staff that everything will be provided for them because if you don't assure them they won't come here. So the management recognises that and that is why they make an attempt to review their salaries every year and make an attempt to accommodate them when they first assume their duties.* (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).

The following participant describes how management identifies and grooms the students they perceive to have a strong potential to thrive in the academic arena:

*We also have what we call G.O.O.T programme – growing our own timber. We recruit these young ones and we look at the scarce programmes and that's how we're trying to attract you guys and give you employment, at the same time mentoring you to become a well-rounded academic.* (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Participants also expressed the factors that make the Institution attractive to academic staff to facilitate the acquisition of talented academic staff into the Institution as suggested by the response:

*I think what attracts talent at this university especially this campus is because it has got a history of real scholarship and what we have also managed to do over the years is to*



*draw scholars from different countries and so on. (Participant 6, female, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Another participant added:

*You know the areas that distinguish us from most universities in South Africa is the fact that we have 3 campuses, each with a unique profile and it's not a deficit, it's an asset because it enables us not only to attract a much broader spectrum of students but it also enables us to attract a much broader spectrum of staff. (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

And:

*Coming to this Institution as I said, due to the fact that I can say to academics, we're working towards becoming the business hub of this Institution, that is a practice for them and also our entrepreneurial culture is also very attractive to them. (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).*

Other participants also make mention of the measures that are taken to orientate and assimilate newly acquired academic staff members within the Institution and can be seen in the response:

*New staff is subjected to training for one year so that they can get to know the university and also they provide training in teaching, for instance teaching large classes that are hard to control, so that kind of support that the university has made available. (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).*



### *Sub-theme: Talent development*

Talent Development is the sub-theme that occurred most frequently in this study. This indicates that the participants deemed it to be the most crucial component of a successful TLC. All the participants agreed that opportunities for development within the Institution are plentiful as can be detected from the following statement, for example:

*There are lots of opportunities for development. (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).*

Participants labelled the Institution to be an ideal climate in comparison with other South African HEIs, for developing and establishing oneself within their academic discipline. This is mirrored by the following statement:

*It's difficult if one is to go to UCT today or to Wits, I think if I can look at it from my own position, the growth that I went through, you know, if you go to a well-established environment already or somewhere where the pace has already been set, you'll simply need to go and fit into it, but here I feel people get a chance to be involved in the programs, in the developmental processes, so you feel ownership of what is going on and you become part of the system, so in that case you take responsibility and care of what is happening. (Participant 10, male, lower management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Another participant further expressed:

*You know at my level, I always tell staff members to say we give you bursaries, we give you Sabbatical leave to encourage you to study. (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*



Another element that proved to trend in the results as a driving factor of development was that of personal development plans, which was mentioned several times by participants, like in the following response:

*I think it is how you develop that person's potential and I think something like a performance development plan to show you that this is where you are, but we can help you to get at this level. (Participant 9, female, middle management, doctoral degree, white).*

Additionally:

*Staff will tell you their personal development plans and at the beginning of every year they are supposed to submit them so that we know in what areas you need assistance to grow as an academic and not only for academic staff but even for support staff. (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Participants also outlined the opportunities available for academics to develop themselves and gain relevancy and recognition on a national and global scale as expressed in the statement:

*I would submit conference articles and I would get invited to conferences and make that presentation. In an academic world, it is very important for networking and also for you to learn from others and others to learn from you, so as to make your impact or your mark in your field of study both nationally and internationally it is important. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*



### ***Sub-theme: Talent performance and Recognition***

The participants in this study mostly agreed that what they feel is one of the most important things to academics is being acknowledged for their work well done. This is supported by the following statements:

*High performing academic staff members want to be recognised, they want recognition and if you don't recognise them, they feel worried. They want to be recompensed for their performance and if they are not properly recompensed for their performance, they look for other places where they'd be appreciated. (Participant 5, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

And:

*At the top of the list is personal acknowledgement, personal recognition. That is, informing personally the people that are doing excellent work, instead of a mere announcement at a staff meeting or an email, so more of a personal recognition. (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, White).*

Another trend that was identified from the findings was that the participants were of the impression that although academic staff members do appreciate monetary compensation and benefits however, they actually esteem recognition for excellent performance higher than any monetary reward alone. This is confirmed by the response:

*You know what I think would work with people would be to give them recognition. Recognition for things other than monetary, monetary can work but recognition as in being recognised and valued and maybe if it's made known to the other staff members than you've achieved this, okay. So I think recognition is important as I've picked up with people and then also if they know why they have to do certain things. (Participant 9, female, middle management, doctoral degree, white).*



Another participant added:

*I think high performing academics staff members want to be able to grow, I think that's important to them, but also we do have performance incentives as well, so people can also say okay, if I do well I will qualify for something tangible, although money is not the only incentive but, I mean if people get a top performer's bonus, or if they even just get recognition, not always money, just recognition, appreciation. (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).*

Another finding that arose amongst participants was that academics are provided with continuity in terms of opportunities to excel once they have been identified and recognised as high-fliers as implied by the response:

*There are rewards that are given, most of the time they might be monetary in value, but what I've realised, the most important thing is, there's a key element in that even if there's a monetary element, but one element which is there is the continued facilitation of excellence. What we normally do it that if you have a talent in research, we still give you some funds to facilitate your continued performance first after they have recognised you and told you that you are a high performer in that category. (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Participants further expressed that there is also recognition of high performance through promotion systems that allow academics to take up greater responsibility once they have proved themselves in their current position, which was identified through the following statement:

*Academic staff is also rewarded in terms of promotion, because if you have worked yourself towards a senior position, your performance is what leads to a promotion. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*



### ***Sub-theme: Talent retention***

Talent retention was the second most frequently occurring sub-theme in this study. The results demonstrated that participants believe that as management they are doing the best they can to manage turnover. However, there are certain factors they noted as being out of their control like family, as is supported by the statements:

*We do get resignations but usually if we do the exit interviews it's because of things like all my friends, or my wife isn't getting a job in Mafikeng, so I'm going to another university because it's in a bigger city, but I'm actually crying because I don't want to leave because I'm enjoying my work. (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).*

In addition:

*I am speaking now from what has emerged in exit interviews whereby a person will say I have extended family factors, my siblings, my other family members are less fortunate and now I have the opportunity with this bigger salary to be able to support them. (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).*

Another trend that emerged amongst participants from the findings was that the compensatory package has a significant influence on retention. This is implied by one of the statements pertaining to this matter:

*We want to remain compatible with the industry so that we don't lose academics for reasons that we could have anticipated, so on that part of it we've got to do a good market analysis of our packages. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*



Many of the participants also expressed that although they felt retention was satisfactory, there is still much room for improvement as is supported by the following response:

*I think so far if I have to rate to say retention here is effective because it's a relative thing, I still feel for the talented people, what is happening is okay but I still feel something more can be done to make sure that we retain people.* (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Another participant concurred by saying:

*I don't think we as management are doing a lot, to retain staff. Perhaps we are trying, but not much.* (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).

## DISCUSSION

The objective of this research was to determine a talent life cycle framework for academic staff in a merged South African education institution. The subject of talent life cycle has not been investigated much, nevertheless, it is prevalent and pervasive in the thinking of recruiters. According to Deb (2006), the management of the talent life cycle is dependent on the provision of both the employer and the employee with a complete life cycle of gains and services from the onset of employment until exit or termination. Bondarouk, Ruel, Guiderdoni-Jourdain and Oiry (2009) further states that a feeble regulation process of the TLC will have an adverse effect in all talent management activities in the organisation in terms of the quality and consistency of its data and daily operations.

The findings of this study indicated that five (5) sub-themes namely Talent Mind-set, Talent Preparation and Acquisition, Talent Development, Talent Performance and Recognition, and Talent Retention, under the main theme of talent life cycle, are pivotal in ensuring that the academic talent of the Institution is managed in the most effective manner possible. All the participants in the study elaborated various imperative phenomena pertaining to the talent life cycle of the merged South African HEI.



Although the sub-theme Talent Mind-set was the least discussed among participants in this study, substantial information emerged from the interviews that implies that the management of the Institution is fully cognisant of the acute importance and indispensable nature of academic staff members, as they are pivotal in the effectiveness and success of South African HEIs and worldwide. Bitzer (2009, p. 257) describes the academic staff of a higher education institution as “its most expensive and precious commodity.” Tan (2015) also adds that workers are one of the fundamental resources of any organisation and consequently, highly driven workers will result in an enhancement in quality emphasis, and consequently the level of performance will increase. This literature is in agreement with the findings of this study.

Barkhuizen (2015) contends that leadership and management mind-sets are vital for effective talent management. This author further states that managers must therefore, understand their talent mind-set, especially when it comes to the contemporary tentative setting and regulation, so as to capture the vibrant essence of talent management and to accrue utmost benefit from it.

The findings in the study suggest that processes pertaining to the identification and acquiring of talent are considered to be important within the HEI that was investigated in this research. Fifty per cent (50%) of the participants discussed and were in agreement pertaining to the importance of having effective recruitment strategies in place for academic staff members.

Chun and Evans (2009) delineate that preparing for talent involves determining where the highest calibre employees can be located internally and creating external sourcing mechanisms to draw a variety of candidates to the organisation. These authors also explain that the mechanisms that increase variety in the talent acquired comprise wider job needs to acknowledge diverse backgrounds, the establishment of diverse acquisition teams, as well as highlighting the benefits of joining an organisation, such as development opportunities, incentives and an accommodative working atmosphere. Information from the findings emerged in support of this literature.



Talent development was one of the two most discussed among the participants in this study with all 12 participants admitting to the absolute importance of providing academics with the opportunity to grow and advance within the arena of academia. Bitzer (2009) states that, higher education institutions continue to have a pivotal bearing on the perpetual development of their academic talent by means of institutional divisions or centres intended to augment aptitudes and abilities of staff for the benefit of the Institution. Faculty sabbaticals offer a distinct basis for competitive advantage in the sector of higher education by providing faculty professional development and research opportunities with compensated leave or partly funded leave from a period of six months to a year (Evans & Chun, 2012). This is in accordance with the findings obtained from this study.

Huang, Finkelstein and Rostan (2014) indicate that it seems that HEIs are becoming increasingly concerned with the need to forge international collaboration and networks during training for research. This implies that HEIs realise the importance of conforming and keeping abreast with the ever broadening, already global academic sector in a manner that will keep them relevant and competitive. This also coincides with the findings in this study.

Talent performance and recognition was the second most discussed by the participants in this study. Fifty-eight per cent (58%) of the participants that were interviewed unearthed matters pertaining to the recognition of particularly top achieving academic staff members and all agreed that acknowledgement for work well executed is pertinent to achieving an effective TLC. McCaffery (2004) pointed out that in the UK, for instance, the government placed more resources at the disposal of HEIs to allow them to incentivise and offer growth to staff, and this assistance was given provided that HEIs designing a distinguishable talent strategy and these strategies were to also allow for constant evaluations of all staff, by means of attainable and unbiased standards, with incentives linked to the effort of employees and where applicable, their involvement in team work.

Packard (2009) states that managers must place significant emphasis on esteem requirements for acknowledgement and purposefully deliberate on methods through which they can identify and acknowledge extraordinary performance. Halvorsen, Ibsen and M'kumbuzi



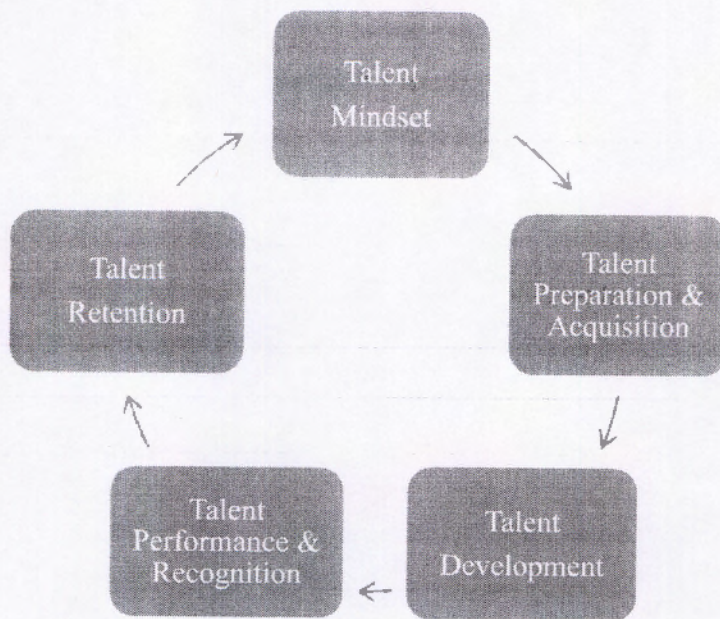
(2015) elaborate that monetary incentives tend to be particularly important to employees due to the great importance and desirability that society has placed on it. These authors further indicate that many universities in South Africa, China, Europe and the U.S.A offer financial rewards to academics for every research paper they finish and publish. On the other hand, HRzone (2007) contends that although cash and fringe incentives both acknowledge the effort of an employee, however, non-financial rewards have a more lasting effect and will more easily forge an employer-employee connection that money probably wouldn't. This literature coincides with what the participants in this study expressed.

Talent Retention was the second of the two most frequently discussed sub-themes among the participants in this study with all 12 participants mentioning issues pertaining to the retaining of academic talent. Samuel and Chipunza (2013) express that rivalry for superior academic talent throughout the setting of higher education as well as research in South Africa has emerged as a prominent factor and this spectacle has stirred up an all-time rise in attrition of academic employees from one institution to another.

Selesho and Naile (2014) further delineate that keeping staff members in HEIs is a critical challenge because of the accentuated exit rate of academic employees which creates much difficulty for these institutions. High exit numbers of workers detrimentally affects the quality, dependability, and steadiness of academic entities. Samuel and Chipunza (2013) argue that employees will more probably stay with an organisation if they feel as though the organisation cares and caters for them, if they know are fully aware of what they are supposed to do, if their job is best suited with their strengths, and if they get consistent optimistic feedback and acknowledgement.

In the light of the preceding the following talent life cycle process is presented for the talent management of academic staff:





**Figure 4.1** Talent life cycle framework for academic staff (Source: Author's own).

### **Implications for practice**

The present research makes important theoretical and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this study adds to the limited empirical knowledge that exists on the talent life cycle of academic staff members in higher education institutions. From a practical point of view this research identified the key process elements of a talent life cycle that will aid to the effective talent management of academic staff members from beginning to end. Higher education management are encouraged to follow an integrated and strategic approach towards academic talent management by incorporating the dimensions of the talent life cycle. Human resource practitioners and management should also focus on creating state of the art career development opportunities to ensure the relevance of the skill set of academic staff members in an ever changing higher educational environment. Higher education institutions can further benefit from developing performance management systems that are integrated with talent and business scorecards.



## **Limitations and Recommendations**

A limitation to this study was that minimal knowledge currently exists with regard to the talent life cycle in the academic setting; therefore the researcher had to rely on non-academic organisations to obtain most of the literature. Another limitation was the hectic nature of work in higher education managerial positions. As a result, several prospective participants could not commit due to their already tight schedules and in some cases it took a long time before the researcher could secure an interview appointment. Other participants were even forced to withdraw from the study after initially agreeing, due to pressing work issues. The researcher also experienced a certain degree of reluctance from some managers in the HEI to participate due to apprehension emanating from the recent fees-related protests nationwide.

The researcher recommends that a further inquiry of a quantitative nature be conducted in the merged South African HEI to obtain an academic staff member perspective. The Institution should also consider applying the talent life cycle to non-academic staff members in the Institution. The talent life cycle should also be implemented in line with the Institutional strategy which has been revealed in this study as having talent management as one of its key components. More research on the talent life cycle also needs to be done in other South African HEIs.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research highlighted the importance of following an integrated approach for the effective talent management of academic staff by through a talent life cycle approach. It is therefore imperative for higher education leaders manage the entire process through which talent progresses in the workplace in order to ascertain a successful and purposeful employment experience that benefits not only the employee, but the employee as well.

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**Chapter 5:**

**ARTICLE 4**



# **A TALENT VALUE PROPOSITION FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC STAFF IN A SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION**

## **ABSTRACT**

**Orientation:** Despite some inroads made into the concept of talent value proposition, many higher education institutions are yet to appreciate the importance of having a strong as a strategy for attracting top academic talent.

**Research purpose:** The main objective of this research was to develop a talent value proposition framework for academic staff in a South African Higher Education Institution.

**Motivation for the study:** A compelling talent value proposition appears to be neither a strategic or operational priority for managing academic talent in many South African Higher Education Institutions.

**Research approach, design, and method:** A qualitative research approach was adopted, using semi-interviews to collect data from management (N=12) of a merged South African higher education institution.

**Main findings:** The findings resulted in an integrated talent value proposition framework for academic staff by incorporating the elements of organisational branding, employment branding and talent life cycle processes.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Management should therefore take cognisance of the key elements of organisational and employment branding coupled with a talent life cycle processes that are needed to create an appealing talent value proposition for academic staff members.

**Contribution/Value-add:** This research contributes an integrated framework that higher education management can utilise to implement an appealing talent value proposition that will attract and retain academic talent.

**Key words:** Academic staff, Employment Branding, Higher Education, Organisational Branding, Talent Life Cycle, Talent Value Proposition



## INTRODUCTION

Despite some inroads made into the concept of Talent value proposition (TVP), many organisations are yet to appreciate the importance of having a strong as a strategy for attracting top talent (Aloo & Moronge, 2014; Thompsen, 2010). TVP is the equilibrium of recompenses and advantages employees obtain in exchange for their effort at the workplace (Posthumus, 2015; Ng & Ngai, 2015). Posthumus (2015) proceeds to outline that a TVP is not founded on ambition, but is rather based on the actual state of the organisation, which must be capable and prepared to deliver the assurances extended to high prospective employees.

Yet it appears that a compelling TVP is neither a strategic or operational priority for managing academic talent in many South African Higher Education Institutions (Hazelkorn & Moynihan, 2010). Schierenbeck (2013) suggests that institutions of higher learning should provide a TVP that is desirable to prospective candidates, over and above the monetary compensation levels. Available research in South African HEIs suggests a lack of TVP as an approach to improve the general performance and sustainability of these institutions. Furthermore, most HEIs merely use separate talent management techniques of organisational branding, employment branding and talent life cycle (Cubillo et al. 2006; Pampaloni 2010; Sehgal & Malati, 2013; Schweyer, Newman & De Vries, 2009), which could lead to the incongruence and conflict of the techniques applied, as opposed to a combined, more holistic and comprehensive TVP.

Trost (2014) reiterates that TVPs that fail to reflect the actual state of the organisation further bear an adverse effect with regard to keeping talented new staff members owing to the trend that they usually exit the organisation through the course of the probationary period due to inability on the part of the organisation to uphold the expressed TVP. This awareness is what prompted the researcher to develop a tool or model that specifically epitomises the needs of the academic staff at the merged South African HEI in question by means of investigating the current reality of the Institution in order to conspicuously convey a well-established TVP and further advise on how identified gaps in the model can be bridged. Trost (2014) also realised that target-group-based TVPs are more solid, more inclusive, and more task-oriented, which



normally accentuates the difficulties and labour related to a main function. It is for this reason that the researcher decided to target specifically academic staff in the HEI.

The following subsections describe how each of the components suggested to form part of an inclusive TVP for this study interrelate and cooperate with one another in a manner that makes them justifiably suitable to be clustered into one holistic and effective model.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Organisational Branding and TVP**

Balmer and Greyser (2003) state that the marketing-associated notion of an organisational brand is encapsulated as an organisation's vision of who they organisation desires to be, conveyed not solely by means of palpable emblems, construction and outward proclamations, however also in the expressing of mission, policies and ethics. In association with employment, this concept is normally denoted as the TVP (Martin & Hetrick, 2006). Thompsen (2010) believes that the organisational brand delineates the organisational culture and the TVP mirrors that culture to a particular group of recruits in a personalised and devoted manner. Furthermore, the TVP designed must be in accordance with the sorts of recruits sought after and in this regard, the subsequent questions must be retorted:

- What does the appropriate recruit stand to benefit from employment by this organisation?
- What facets of the organisation will be considered desirable by these recruits?
- How is the organisational culture in accordance with the career viewpoint of these recruits?

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To this end, the researcher interviewed the management of the merged South African HEI in attempt to determine what institutional brand they believe is perceived by current academic staff and whether they believe the Institutional Brand is attractive to academics in general.



## **Employment Branding and TVP**

One phrase that normally accompanies any argument concerning employment branding is TVP, which constitutes a resilient employment brand (Hor & Keats, 2008). In the perspective of Armstrong and Taylor (2014), the TVP of an organisation can be articulated as an employment brand, referring to the picture painted by an organisation as a respectable employer.

Thompsen (2010) states that it is imperative to make the employment brand parallel with the TVP and to establish a TVP before an employment brand is developed. This is due to the fact that if the brand that is depicted to existing and potential employees does not correspond with the real work experience communicated in the TVP, then that creates the possibility of failing to retain employees who become cynical. The researcher therefore interviewed the management of the merged South African HEI to solicit their views on how they think their employment brand is perceived by academic staff and whether it is attractive enough to attract and retain academics.

Muncherji, Gopalakrishnan and Dhar (2009) assert that employment branding fosters a TVP that corresponds with both the desires of employees, as well as the expectations of them by their employer. Moreover, employment branding is concerned with describing the culture of the organisation, its standards and principles, and it produces the enhancement of applicant magnetism, engagement, loyalty, intention to stay and enthusiasm (Muncherji, Gopalakrishnan & Dhar, 2009).

## **Talent Life Cycle and TVP**

In the constantly growing information economy, and particularly with stringent labour markets, the TVP is rendered undeniably fundamental to expert skills and talented workers due to the reality that there is a high probability of there being vehement rivalry where they are concerned (Reilly & Williams, 2006). The previously cited authors further suggest that in this circumstance, the purpose of strategic talent management is to determine the need of the organisation, consider the organisational competences of existing stock, calculate the discrepancies and establish the resourcing strategy (all relating to the talent life cycle stages



outlined in this study) and then create the TVP that is aligned with that strategy. The TVP is mainly concerned with attraction and retention (Reilly & Williams, 2006); constructs which lie at the core of the talent life cycle. Gabay (2015) iterates that except in the event that all the phases of the employee life cycle, comprising talent magnetism, engagement and retention, resulting in the practical average employment experience, emphasise an unequivocal employee value proposition, the discrepancy between a brand's assurance and the actual state of employment would result in disengagement and heightened turnover.

Taking segmentation into consideration (that is, finding the strategic groups of current and prospective workers by understanding the most crucial dissimilarities between them in terms of what the organisation requires from them or what the organisation is able to provide to entice or inspire them, in a manner that enables organisations to design inimitable deals that live up to the requirements of specific sectors) takes talent management through a reasoning trail that has the ability to influence practically all facets of the employee value proposition, as well as the talent life cycle (Boudreau & Jusuthasan, 2011). This renders talent management more effective, as a blanket approach is avoided. The researcher therefore investigated the constructs of the talent life cycle that management apply towards the academic staff of the South Africa HEI, by means of interviews.

### **Organisational Branding and Employment Branding**

The researcher argues that organisational branding and employment branding are closely related, not only each to a TVP, but to each other as well. This argument is supported by some of the existing literature found by the researcher of this study. Moroko and Uncles (2008) argue that customer, organisational, and employment branding show comparable features; meaning, a brand must be perceptible, appropriate and resounding, not forgetting distinguishable. Muncherji, Gopalakrishnan and Dhar (2009) state that employment brands are designed to be in accordance with the organisation's product and organisational brand. Assimilating an organisation's employment brand into its organisational brand will create a brand stronghold, that is, a talented structure of individuals cooperating with one another to sustain similar organisational goals and accomplish positive results from their exertions (Ordioni, 2013).



The importance of making organisational branding parallel with employment branding becomes increasingly imperative when we think of the intensifying intricate personalities of stakeholders who have substantial bearing on organisational brand management (Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng, 2010). In this case, there is the possibility that prospective candidates could also be the clients of an organisation, and with regard to corporate administration, both are seen as main external stakeholder observers (Knox and Freeman, 2006). The researcher believes this to be pertinent to higher education as many students end up being interested in an academic career by merely observing the employment sentiments and experiences of those that are already in academia. It is therefore imperative that the organisational brand and employment brand in a HEI are well aligned.

### **Organisational Branding and Talent Life Cycle**

Gripp and Bloodhart (2011) believes that an organisation can grow into a brand-motivated business by operationalising its convincing, competitive peculiarity at all phases of the talent life cycle that is, transforming employees from being hearers, to being believers, and in the long run becoming the perpetual epitome of the brand. Hetrick and Martin (2006) opine that organisational brands are the consequence of the esteem levels that people have in the organisation's capacity to convey superior levels of what they hold dear concerning its organisational image and the commitment they exhibit towards the organisation's products and/or services. Furthermore, the propellants of organisational image are in the communications amid organisational identity and personal empathy with their organisations, including organisational management and progressive leadership. Talent management can substantially influence organisational reputations and branding by impacting the sentiments of workers, the eminence of their personal employment relationships, and by means of these, organisational identity, management and leadership (Hetrick & Martin, 2006).

Since talent management has the ability to positively influence an organisational brand, this implies that the emphasis and appropriate management of each stage of the talent life cycle for academic staff would promote the overall organisational brand of the merged South



African HEI in a manner that will yield a heightened competitive advantage in the market within which the institution operates.

### **Employment Branding and Talent Life Cycle**

Present talent management is not merely concerned with handling the procedures linked to the TLC, but is rather concerned with fostering the circumstances and experiences in every stage of an talent's expedition that generate matchless engagement; the opportunity being about allowing a dominant employment brand to surface and grow into an addition of the brand which the consumer is aware and fond of (McLeod & Waldman, 2011). Auger, Devinney, Dowling, Eckert and Lin (2013) believe that the labour market is transforming and prospective talent is becoming increasingly ready to contemplate a lesser remuneration rate whilst pursuing employment with a more reputable organisation. In like manner, the superior brand bears a positive influence on current employees as well (Bhasin, 2015). Stefanie, Janina and Buttgen (2012) are of the opinion that several employment qualities must be established in an attempt to determine an employment brand; these qualities produce, operational, efficiency and psychological gains.

Stefanie, Janina and Buttgen (2012) make use of the TLC notion whereby stages are employed to elucidate how commitment to the organisational brand can prove advantageous to the effectiveness and success of an organisation:

- Before employment; the difficulty being the promoting of the organisation's values and culture,
- Introduction; it is important for the pointers gathered by a new member not to dispute those gathered in the stage prior to employment. Mentoring is particularly cited as a manner to govern greater effectiveness of new arrivals who gain acquaintance of the organisation in a short period of time,
- Growth and development; the employees expedite their performance by means of training while going on to advance both professionally as well as on an individual level,
- Maturity; organisations must maintain the employer of choice status by applying the supportable talent management practices.



- After employment; it must be acknowledged that previous talent has the ability to influence the reputation of the organisation.

Talent is pivotal in conveying the organisation's employment brand, not only internally but also outwardly or externally to prospective employees. Therefore, the merged South African HEI needs to ascertain that it provides each academic staff member with the best talent life cycle experience possible in order to increase their commitment and contribution towards building and expressing an enticing employment brand.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher has investigated and discovered that a most effective TVP for the academic staff of the merged South African HEI would be one that encompasses the three constructs that are, organisational branding, employment branding and a talent cycle, which are further dissected into specific elements namely: reputation, organisational culture, strategic vision, organisational identity, intended image and construed image (which make up organisational branding); leadership and management, performance management and development, salary and benefits, and a work/life balance (which make up employment branding); and finally, a talent mind-set, preparation for talent, talent branding, talent mapping and acquisition, talent development, talent performance and recognition, and talent retention (which make up the talent life cycle).

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Research approach**

Research approaches describe the strategies and the processes for research that extend across the stages from wide suppositions to meticulous techniques of data gathering, analysis, as well as interpretation. The choice of a research approach is further determined by the nature or essence of the research problem that is under investigation, the understanding of the researcher, as well as the people that the study affects or intends to reach out to (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative research approach was adopted in this study. This was motivated by the fact that the population of individuals in managerial positions is small, therefore a qualitative inquiry was considered to be more practical and relevant. The nature of the study also



necessitated the use of a qualitative approach because a TVP is offered and implemented by the employer which in the case of this study is the management of the Institution. Therefore, the researcher found it incumbent to obtain the views or perceptions on TVP of the management of the merged South African HEI via qualitative inquiry through interviews.

### **Research strategy**

This research used a case study strategy, which was considered most pertinent in exploring the real-life interests of human beings (Taylor & Francis, 2013). Because this research was qualitative in nature, the case study strategy used tackled the relationship between literature and research in an inductive manner, in accordance with Bryman (2016). Qualitative case study approach in this research falls within the interpretive/ constructivist paradigm (Yin, 2012). In this instance, the ontological belief is that reality is local and specifically constructed.

### **Research setting**

The research setting in this study entailed a sample comprising 12 managerial staff members of the merged South African HEI. These participants were geographically situated across the three different campuses of the Institution. The participants were interviewed in person at their offices and in cases whereby the researcher could not travel to areas that were not within reasonably close proximity, the researcher took advantage of virtual interviewing methods such as telephone and Skype, with the approval of participants, for greater convenience.

## **Research Method**

### **Research Procedure**

Permission to carry out this research was sought and obtained from the relevant authorities of the Institution by means of a letter of request, prior to the collection of data. Upon obtaining permission, the researcher approached interview candidates personally, requesting an interview, and interviewees were required to give consent before answering any of the researcher's questions. Anonymity was upheld and all information provided remained confidential according to the code of ethics.



## Sampling

The participants consisted of the management of the three campuses of the merged South African HEI. Participants were interviewed, one after the other until saturation was reached. This study made use of purposive convenience sampling, meaning participants were selected based on their willingness, relevancy and availability to take part in the data collection process.

Twelve (12) individuals in managerial positions participated in this study. The table below shows the demographic delineation of the research sample:

**Table 5.1: Sample Demographics**

| Participants | Gender | Race          | Qualification   | Job Level            |
|--------------|--------|---------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1            | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 2            | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |
| 3            | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 4            | Female | White         | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |
| 5            | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 6            | Female | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |
| 7            | Female | White         | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |
| 8            | Male   | White         | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 9            | Female | White         | Doctoral degree | Middle management    |
| 10           | Male   | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Middle management    |
| 11           | Female | Black/African | Doctoral degree | Executive management |
| 12           | Male   | White         | Doctoral degree | Senior management    |

As can be seen from the table above, the majority of the participants were male, making up 58,33% (seven participants) of the sample, while the female participants constituted 41,67% (five participants) of the selected sample. The demographic distribution of race was constituted of more black/Africans in the sample, with 58,33% (seven participants) being black/African and 41,67% (five participants) being white as depicted in Table 1. 100% (all twelve individuals) of the participants in the sample demonstrated being of a superior calibre



as they all have doctoral degrees as exhibited in the table above. The distribution in terms of managerial levels as depicted in Table 5.1 showed 41,67% (five participants) to be in the executive tier of management, another 41,67% (five participants) to be in the senior tier of management and 16,67% (two participants) to be in the middle tier of management. The demographics displayed in Table 5.1 also show that only one out of the five participants in executive management is female, that is, 8,33% of the entire sample as opposed to a clobbering 33,33% of males in the entire sample who hold executive managerial positions. At senior management level, we have three out of the five participants being female, that is, 25% of the entire sample, as opposed to 16,67% of males in the entire sample of the participants that hold senior management positions. In the sample represented by the demographics of Table 5.1, it is also shown that one out of two participants are in middle management, that is, 8,33% of the males represented in middle management participants and the females represented in middle management participants in the aggregate sample.

#### **Data collection method**

Data collection of qualitative data involved one-on-one interviews. This was meant to allow for more insightful meanings to emerge from the results, something that quantitative data would not have accomplished. The interview sessions were precisely able to exhibit the outlooks and viewpoints that management have concerning the comprehensive concept of a TVP within the merged South African Higher Education Institution. The interviews were carried out in English and the questions were based on a TVP framework that was suggested by the researcher. The interview participants were requested to delineate their experiences and perceptions where TVP is concerned, in line with this framework. The questions sought to build towards the development of a TVP that could be implemented by the merged South African HEI.

#### **Data analysis**

Thematic analysis was used in this study. The researcher also incorporated the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) which is a logical, inductive, and relative approach for guiding inquiry which has the aim of building theory (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Henwood, 2007). The motivation behind this choice was that the researcher realised that GTM is at present the



most vastly used and prevalent qualitative research method over a vast range of academic fields and subject topics. As a result several doctoral students have successfully accomplished their degrees through the GTM (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). The researcher used open, axial and selective coding within the GTM by first reviewing the data to discover the large domains that could be discerned from it; subsequently breaking down the open codes that had been derived from the data into more extensive groups in a manner that allowed the identification of relationships among codes; then finally the researcher identified the trends, processes and classifications occurring among the axial codes to produce a theory encompassing a TVP that is specifically relatable to the merged South African HEI (Hays & Singh, 2012).

### **Ensuring the quality and rigour of the research**

The researcher employed the following strategies in ensuring the quality and rigour of this research:

- Triangulation – the researcher gathered the data for this study from three different tiers of management in order to minimise any possible bias of information (Hadi & Closs, 2015).
- Self-reflection – the researcher clearly stipulated her role within this study and was cautious of any bias that could have resulted from personal or subjective viewpoints (Hadi & Closs, 2015).
- Peer-debriefing – the researcher engaged another researcher who had no direct stake or involvement in the study as the research was conducted, to promote reliability and dependability (Nguyen, 2008).
- Extensive description – the researcher also provided extensive descriptions concerning the research setting, sample traits, including the data gathering and analysis techniques in this study, to render the findings more credible and generalisable to other similar research settings, to an acceptable extent (Creswell, 2006).
- Lengthened engagement – the researcher further gained the trust of the participants by being involved with them for a substantially long period of time, thus a comprehensive volume of information was obtained (Creswell, 2006).



## Reporting

The findings of this research are displayed in a table, showing the theme and various emergent sub-themes in this study. The theme and sub-themes are substantiated by verbatim quotes from the interview participants' responses in this study. This was done in accordance with the contemporary qualitative research approach which entails the validating or supporting knowledge of the assumptions made in particular research settings (Bowen, 2009).

## FINDINGS

The researcher noted four themes from the interviews as depicted in Table 5.2, including sub-themes and their frequencies. Table 5.2 shows Employment Branding, Talent Life Cycle and Organisational Branding were most frequent in this study.

**Table 5.2: Frequency of Themes**

|                | <b>Themes and sub-themes</b>                | <b>Frequency</b> |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Theme 1</b> | <b>Organisational Branding</b>              | <b>78</b>        |
|                | Reputation and image                        | 14               |
|                | Organisational culture and identity         | 13               |
|                | Strategic vision                            | 5                |
|                | Corporate social responsibility             | 12               |
|                | Work and surrounding Environment            | 28               |
|                | Merger Implications                         | 6                |
| <b>Theme 2</b> | <b>Employment Branding</b>                  | <b>178</b>       |
|                | Fringe benefits/incentives and remuneration | 45               |
|                | Leadership and managerial support           | 38               |
|                | Work/life balance and flexibility           | 15               |
|                | Performance management and development      | 25               |
|                | Occupational health and safety              | 28               |
|                | Job security                                | 18               |



|                |                                    |            |
|----------------|------------------------------------|------------|
|                | Fulfilment and purpose             | 9          |
| <b>Theme 3</b> | <b>Talent Life Cycle</b>           | <b>165</b> |
|                | Talent mind-set                    | 8          |
|                | Talent preparation and acquisition | 11         |
|                | Talent development                 | 71         |
|                | Talent performance & recognition   | 37         |
|                | Talent retention                   | 38         |
| <b>Theme 4</b> | <b>Talent Value Proposition</b>    | <b>69</b>  |
|                | Importance of TVP                  | 26         |
|                | Mutual expectation                 | 15         |
|                | Implementation challenges of TVP   | 28         |

### ***Theme: Organisational Branding***

Collective sub-themes of Organisational Branding were the third most frequently occurring in this study. The findings indicated that mainly the reputation and image that the institution gives off, and the working and surrounding environment are the elements that make up an attractive Institutional Brand for academic staff members in the HEI. The culture and identity that has been forged, the institution's long-term strategy, the social responsibility of the institution, and the implications associated with merger Institutions were also indicated to be important. However, these sub-themes occurred to a lesser extent.

### ***Sub-theme: Reputation & image***

The findings provide evidence that shows that the management of the Institution believes it to be of a reputable calibre according to the statements:

*This is one of the top research universities in the country.* (Participant 3, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

And:



*I think however also the standards, the quality service, I think if you look at the programmes that we offer, all our undergraduate programmes went through external programme evaluation and the last one was last year. (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).*

Another participant also felt that the Institution has a credible reputation within its market. The following response further reveals an existent relationship between Reputation, Corporate Social Responsibility and loyalty translating into enhanced retention:

*When we work for an institution that has an honest standing tradition and we can now be loyal to that, including the contribution that the institution makes to our national well-being and my reason for being committed and loyal to the institution is because of its values and its attributes towards nation building. (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).*



#### ***Sub-theme: Work and Surrounding Environment***

The results displayed that the participants in this study largely agreed that a favourable working atmosphere is really an imperative the work performance of academic staff as supported by the following statement:

*When the employee comes into the university, they expect that they will be allowed to operate in a very conducive atmosphere with all the facilities around uninterrupted internet access, access to the library, getting access to online research and things like that. (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Another participant adds:

*The high performing staff member say please sort out the politics. We want to get on with our work. There must be no interference from inside politics or national politics*



*because they want to be able to focus on their work, that is be effective in their research and achieve excellence in teaching and learning. (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).*

The findings also revealed a relationship between Talent Development and Work and Surrounding Environment as suggested by the following statement:

*So you see that we give an opportunity for someone who wants to develop and grow professionally and academically, I think it is an ideal environment for that, so whoever wants to come, either to develop, or even to come and study usually it's a very good environment. (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

A relationship between Work and Surrounding Environment and Retention is also uncovered as seen in the following response:

*If I stayed here for two or three years and I wasn't comfortable with the environment, I would have gone away. (Participant 5, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

The participants in this study also widely raised the issue that geographic location is a factor that academic staff members consider important and further reveals a relationship between Talent Acquisition and Surrounding Environment as supported by the response:

*A university in a rural environment finds it most of the time difficult to attract very top people into the place. They will tell you about distance, they will tell you about proximity to a good school, English school and all those kinds of things. (Participant 5, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*



Yet another relationship is discovered in the findings between Talent Acquisition and Surrounding Environment as supported by the statement:

*The one thing why people would like to come to this campus, is because it is in a small town with a city like feeling, so there's sort of like, I know it's a rural town and it's small, but it's close to all the big things that you need. I mean, we are 60 kilometres from Jo'burg, we are 70 kilometres from O.R Tambo, we are in the industrial heartland of Gauteng, so that's why people like to come to this campus."* (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

### ***Theme: Employment Branding***

The combined sub-themes of Employment Branding were the most frequent in this study. The findings implied that Fringe Benefits/Incentives and Remuneration, as well as Leadership and Managerial Support are the main elements that make up an attractive Employment Brand for academic staff members in the merged HEI. Work/Life Balance and Flexibility, Performance Management and Development, Occupational Health and Safety, Job Security, and Fulfilment and Purpose are other sub-themes that also occurred in this study, to a lesser extent.

### ***Sub-theme: Fringe benefits/incentives & remuneration***

The participants in this study concurred that equitable remuneration is a key element in the employment agreement between employer and employee. Several responses also revealed a relationship between Remuneration and Retention. This is evidenced by following the statement:

*Over and above the yearly increment, we are amongst the Universities that are highly paying, yes, among top Universities that are highly paying and when we do this we really make sure that we negotiate with our staff, to make sure that they get what they want, and we're also at the same time ensuring that they also give us what we want.* (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).



Furthermore:

*We want to remain compatible with the industry so that we don't lose academics for reasons that we could have anticipated, so on that part of it we've got to do a good market analysis of our packages. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

And:

*I know people that have come here and run away why, because they came just because of money and when the money is not trickling in the way they want, they leave. (Participant 5, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

In terms of Fringe Benefits/incentives, the findings showed that the Institution provides several benefits outside of the basic remuneration package in order to better attract and retain academic staff members. One participant mentioned the following:

*My wife is studying her Master's in Law right now, so we support your spouse and about four kids for seven years each, no fees, no nothing, they just study if you have talent in your house that you want to upgrade, so you can see that it goes beyond just you alone, they even give your family, your wife can study and your children can study." (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

A relationship can be established from the findings between Fringe Benefits/incentives and Talent Performance and Recognition as described by the following response:

*I think our system that we brought in that I article is equal to 1 overseas trip. So if you speak to lecturer A, he went to Miami now for the first time and also lecturer B and they're coming to my office and I just ask them how was your trip and it's like I can't*



*get them out of my office so the opportunity that if you work hard, you can go on an international trip and you can go meet other researchers and you can network and you can start with research.”* (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

Additionally:

*When you supervise students, I give you a merit bonus, if they complete on record time, you get a certain amount of money, unexpectedly so, because I want to encourage you to do more.* (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

#### ***Sub-theme: Leadership & managerial support***

The participants in this seemed to believe that the management of the Institution are indeed committed towards their academics and give them the necessary support as seen in the following response:

*“It seems to me; well my experience is that it is a total commitment from management to talented academics.”* (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).

A relationship between leadership and flexibility is discovered, as noted in the following response:

*They don't want to be bogged down by bureaucracy, they want to be independent, they want to make their own decisions... The researcher and the academic must be assured that they will be able to do their work and not a massive administrative thing that's being added to their portfolio.* (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).



The findings generally indicate that the management of the Institution in this study believes that academic staff really value and require support from their employer to be able to execute their responsibilities and grow, thus unravelling a relationship between Leadership and Managerial Support and Talent Development. This is aptly described by the following answer:

*You can't expect them to get their PhD's for example if you don't create and give them the resources to do that and also to manage your talent is to grow them, to assist them in their growth path and to assist them with their career planning. (Participant 7, female, executive management, doctoral degree, white).*

It was also discovered that the level of commitment from management also has a direct influence on whether employees in the Institution choose to leave or stay, as backed by the following response:

*You know, the minute a staff member gets frustrated or stressed with the manager they are more likely to resign. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

### ***Theme: Talent Life Cycle***

Collective sub-themes Talent Life Cycle were the second highest occurring in this study. The findings suggested that Talent Development and Talent Retention are main the elements to be considered for an effective and functional TLC for academic staff members in the higher education institution. Talent Mind-set, Talent Preparation and Acquisition, and Talent Performance and Recognition also emerged as sub-themes, however to a lesser extent.

### ***Sub-theme: Talent development***



The general results showed that participants believe that academics, especially interested and superior calibre academics in the Institution, are provided with good opportunities for development as notable from the following statement:

*You're given even a chance to develop yourself, so if you if you have got your own specific skills or specific areas that you feel you're an outstanding person in, you're given that opportunity to express it and you're facilitated to express it. (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

A different participant stated that:

*On the teaching and learning side, we've got a whole unit for academic development support. We give them courses on you know teaching and learning, how to be a better teacher, how to do PowerPoint presentations better, how to put together an exam paper. Then if we go to the research side, there are lots of opportunities for research development, how to write an article, how to conduct research, the quantitative as well as qualitative, so there's ample opportunities for development, for staff to learn themselves. (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).*

Another participant explains how the development of academic staff members, facilitated by management, is essential in order to ensure continuity within academia and that this enhances the Employment Brand of the Institution as captured by the statement:

*It is important because we don't live forever and as blacks we've never been so committed into developing and mentoring the young academics, so if we right now, if we start mentoring and we start developing talent amongst our young ones, we are sure of the succession plan, we're sure that the standards will never go down because you have an interlink between, or an interface of mixing the older ones with the younger ones and with that mixture, you bring a very strong brand of a staff member... (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*



### *Sub-theme: Talent retention*

Several participants indicated their opinion about how HEIs generally focus more on acquiring talent, but do not establish appropriate and effective retention strategies. This is supported by the following statement:

*I think that we spend a lot of money attracting people, in terms of recruitment, but I think not all organisations do a lot on the retention side...* (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

And:

*It doesn't help to recruit and not have strategies to retain. So what we're trying to do is to have those strategies that would assist us in retaining academic staff.* (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

The participants in this study generally indicated that they felt that there is still much room for improvement in terms of sound retention strategies as expressed through the statement:

*I think we could do better in terms of retaining our academic staff.* (Participant 6, female, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).

A relationship is established in this study between Fringe Benefits/Incentives and Remuneration and Talent Retention as many participants believe that money and incentive has a significant influence on the retention of academic staff members. This view is backed by the following statement:



*Salary wise, it is a concern for most of our academics, that's why they tend to leave our institution. (Participant 6, female, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

And another mentioned:

*For me, the retention strategy is about the level of incentives that are there for researchers and also for those who are excelling in terms of teaching and learning and also community engagement. (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).*

A link between Fulfilment and Purpose, Work/Life Balance and Retention emerged from the results as participants suggested that academic staff tend to be more loyal to an organisation if they derive a more meaningful and prolific experience from it. This is illustrated by the response that says that:

*I believe it's only the sense of procreation, loyalty, or wanting to work with students that can actually retain the academic staff members, especially those that have extended family members, whereby the person has been enabled by the extended family members to reach this point of professionalism and it's payback time, so the person will now be pressurised not to remain for R500 000 at a university so the person will choose to leave. (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).*

Overall, the participants felt that retention in the Institution is relatively good however, the poaching of high calibre developed staff came up several times from several participants. This therefore demonstrated a connection between Talent Development and Retention. These results being evidenced by the following statements:

*The figures show that there's a very good retention system, except for one thing and I'll say this is a national phenomenon in the field of academia, retention factors that we*



*have noted during the leaving interviews and also based on experience is that a person will be trained and will get an honours degree let's say, but the moment they get their master's degree, not even to speak about the PhD, especially in the professional areas, then it becomes an issue. (Participant 8, male, executive management, doctoral degree, white).*

Furthermore:

*...remember when you develop them, what happens, they get stolen by others, they move away. So you also have to think for yourself that can I really train people in a rural Institution like this one and do you think UCT will leave them alone and Wits and UP? No ways! (Participant, 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Another relationship that was noted in the results of this study is that between Leadership and Managerial Support, and Retention, illustrating that the nature of leadership and the level of support from the management specifically in charge of managing a particular group or rank of employees directly affects the Retention of academic staff members. This is described as follows:

*The people that could resign because of the Vice-chancellors must be the deputy vice-chancellors but I cannot have a lecturer resigning because of me, so it's the line management. The lecturer may resign because of the school director, and the school director may resign because of the Dean, and maybe the Dean can also resign now because of the deputy Vice-chancellor. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

**Theme: TVP**



The joint sub-themes encompassing the main theme of TVP were the fourth most frequent in this research. The findings indicated that the Importance of TVP, the Mutual Expectation in the TVP and the Implementation Challenges of TVP are important elements to be considered when constructing a customised TVP for academic staff in the HEI.

#### ***Sub-theme: Importance of TVP***

The general feedback received from the interview participants indicated that they all believed TVP to as supported by one of the several similar responses which states that:

*Yeah, that's very important, the psychological contract, you know.* (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Participants had various reasons, some similar and some different, why they feel that a TVP is essential to their Institution. Some believed it to be important because they assist in acquiring talent, thus uncovering a relationship between Talent Preparation and Acquisition, and TVP, articulated as follows:

*...if these things such as TVP are not well placed, then we're not going to attract good workers or academic staff.* (Participant 2, male, senior management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Others believed a TVP to be important in terms of giving academics the room to grow in their respective fields or professions of academia, thus unearthing a relationship between Talent Development and TVP, outlined as follows:

*I think that it's very important for the sake of managing your talent, and to do the career planning so that they're given the opportunities.* (Participant 7, female, senior management, doctoral degree, white).



Participants also motivated that a TVP should be emphasised and taken more seriously than it perhaps currently is. Furthermore, two of the participants underlined that a TVP is not only essential for academic staff, but all the staff members of HEIs. This is demonstrated as follows by a response stating that:

*I believe it is essential and I actually feel there is a great need for something like that because I don't think it is something that the institution really pays attention to showing people how they can develop their talent but in the faculty you will find that there are still personal development plans...so I think maybe you should also say for the support staff there should be something similar.”* (Participant 9, female, middle management, doctoral degree, white).

#### ***Sub-theme: Mutual expectation***

Overall, the participants in this study had consensus that a TVP should benefit both parties involved in an employment contract that is, the employer and the employees. They emphasised that it is essential for a TVP to be implemented so that this mutual benefit is explicitly expressed, thus unravelling a link between the Importance of TVP and the Mutual Expectation, articulated as follows:

*It is essential because higher education institutions are populated by individuals who have their own interests and reasons why they joined those and largely academics are people that want to grow, be promoted and then as management we must send them proper structures and policies, that can actually help them know the how part in terms of them growing and getting what they want out of academia.* (Participant 3, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).

Most of the participants highlighted that a TVP is what will make the expectations from both the side of the employer and the employee, more clear and understandable, as outlined in the following response:



*Well, in my view the TVP is sort of what do the academics bring to the table and what do I give to them in return. (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).*

A relationship was discovered between Leadership and Managerial Support, and Mutual Expectation in that participants expressed that it is difficult to support or commit to an academic who does not hold their end of the expectation bargain as seen in the following response:

*We're trying to make sure that we provide for them, we address their needs and sometimes it's not very easy you know because when you're talking about commitment to TVP, there are those you can't commit to because they are also not committed to you, so you know when you embrace, you receive a hug, that's a principle, so when we see an upcoming academic who is really committed, we support them. (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

#### ***Sub-theme: Implementation challenges of TVP***

This sub-theme occurred the most in this study under the main theme of TVP. Some participants indicated financial limitations to be a possible challenge as supported by the statement:

*I think one challenge might be that maybe even if there is a will, but things that need financial support might also have a constraint in terms of whether we have the budget for that. Sometimes you will see that there is no way management could actually run some programs because there is no such financial support, so that can be a challenge. (Participant 10, male, middle management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

Other participants also indicated that both parties affected by the TVP would have to embrace the concept first before it can be implemented in the Institution, therefore it could be a



challenge if either of the parties did not perceive the importance of a TVP. This is seen in the following response:

*I also think you'll have to run an awareness campaign sort of, where you explain to lecturers why it's important and how they can benefit from it because if they don't buy in, it mustn't just be a top down approach whereby management must sort of force it down on them, they must buy in so you'll have to have an awareness campaign and show them what they benefit for it, but the management must also be convinced.*

(Participant 9, female, middle management, doctoral degree, white).

Other participants also underlined that the diverse cultural characteristics inculcated over time on each of the three campuses could also be a challenge, thus bringing out a relationship between Organisational Culture and Identity and Implementation Challenges of TVP. This view was articulated as follows:

*I know the VC (Vice-Chancellor) has a dream that this University should have one culture and I've said to him it's a fantastic dream and I wish him all the best, but to change a culture, you don't just switch something off or switch something on to get a culture. A culture develops over time.* (Participant 12, male, senior management, doctoral degree, white).

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A relationship between the Implementation Challenges of TVP and Merger Implications was also discovered as described in the responses stating that:

*Then the other challenge is also that for anything that needs to be implemented, you need all of us to agree as campuses, therefore it takes time to actually implement things across the system.* (Participant 3, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).



Another relationship, this time between Work and Surrounding Environment and Implementation Challenges of TVP was also uncovered as identified in the following response:

*Another challenge maybe relating to the, could be the fact that the environment now is not as conducive as before, the strikes and all that could be a challenge because amongst the three campuses, we are the ones that are burning our property, and now with that an academic staff might decide to go to another campus where there's nothing of this nature. (Participant 11, female, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

One of the participants mentioned a solution that could assist in curbing the implementation challenges of a TVP and help facilitate a smoother transition through the implementation of the TVP within the Institution as articulated in the following response:

*If we can have a programme in place it may address more or less the basic issues, but there are more specific one you can't be able to address as an organisation. (Participant 1, male, executive management, doctoral degree, black/African).*

## **DISCUSSION**

The main objective of this study was to develop a talent value proposition framework for academics staff in a South African higher education institution. The findings of this study showed that the participants agreed that three sub-themes namely the Importance of TVP, Mutual Expectations and Implementation Challenges of TVP, are crucial for consideration when ensuring that an effective and well-suited TVP is constructed and implemented. The findings of this study indicated that the most common sub-themes of OB that are critical for consideration in order to guarantee an appealing brand of the Institution were Work and Surrounding Environment, as well as Reputation and Image.



The results of this study indicate that Reputation and Image was the third most mentioned phenomenon amongst the participants, who agreed that the reputation and image of a higher education institution is pivotal in terms of ensuring an Institutional brand that will appeal more to academic staff members. Several studies conducted by other scholars confirm the findings of this study. In accordance with the participants, de Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Avila and Knight (2005) states that the motivation to attain a global reputation as a universal superior calibre institution is linked with the pursuit for global name acknowledgement in an attempt to spark interest in the best academics, international students, and top-notch research and training assignments. Davies (2016) puts forth that social responsibility is a criterion for organisational reputation at present. Tench and Sun (2014) further allude to the fact that the relationships forged through community engagement result in the enhancement of staff loyalty to an organisation, as they view the organisation as trustworthy.

The sub-theme of work and surrounding environment was the most popular among the participants in this study, who indicated the importance of a conducive and appealing internal and external environment where Organisational Branding for academic staff members in the Higher Education Institution is concerned. Bentley, Coates, Dobson, Goedegebuure and Meek (2013) allude that although the academic field is characterised by positive perceptions, the academic operating circumstances and the administration and leadership of HEIs should perpetually be given precedence for the sake of creating a favourable working atmosphere and culture which supports effectiveness and protects the welfares of academic staff, the institutions, as well as the Ministry of Higher Education. Stoeger (2012) opines that the development of talent is largely influenced by how conducive the working environment is. Smart (2010), mentions that a favourable working atmosphere complements the retention of employees. Frueh (2014) adds that the surrounding environment is also vital in producing a sense of assimilation to the organisation; therefore, the geographic area of an organisation is a factor that affects the acquisition of talent.

The findings of this study indicated that the most common sub-themes of EB that are critical for consideration in order to guarantee a desirable employment brand of the Institution were Fringe benefits/incentives and remuneration, as well as Leadership and managerial support. Knapp and Siegel (2009) express that remuneration rates and benefits or incentives are a



critical facet of the employment contract. Some scholars contend that remuneration and fringe benefits are less gratifying to senior faculty members as opposed to other elements such as collegiality and managerial support, however, they as well require market related compensation scales and rewards centred on their performance (Kramer, 2010). This is supported by the findings in this research.

McCaffery (2004) outlines that some of the management's attempts to support academic staff have not been well received as the academics felt they were rather restricted from being innovative and truly applying their expertise and considered such attempts to be largely bureaucratic with so much form-filling and administrative work involved as opposed to their core business in higher education. A study conducted by Teichler (2011) indicated that academic staff perceived a supportive university as one that supports academic activities within the institution and provides opportunities for the professional development of staff members. Antoniou, Cooper, Chrousos, Spielberger and Eysenck (2009) also reveal the results of a study whereby inadequate or no support from middle managers resulted in psychological disorders and turnover among healthcare employees. This literature is in line with the findings in this research.

The findings of this study indicated that the most common sub-themes of the Talent Life Cycle of academic staff members in the Institution that are crucial to take into account were Talent Development and Talent Retention. Blackmore and Kandiko (2012), concurrent with Beaton and Gilbert (2013), and Dale, Holland and Matthews (2016) state that several HEIs now have developmental strategies in place like workshops, which are pertinent to academic activities such as teaching, learning, research for academic staff members. Wilkinson and Lubas (2016) feel that making provision for the foreseen or anticipated needs of an organisation necessitates a deliberate approach by management towards succession planning and management undertakings and is most effective in terms of developing organisational power. This is in accordance with the findings in this study.

According to Weems (as cited in Jean-Marie & Lloyd-Jones, 2011) it seems as though most HEIs tend to place more emphasis on acquiring talent, rather than retaining it. This relates to



this study's findings. Wolhuter and Wiseman (2013) states that although HEIs have improved in their remuneration scales over recent years, they still continue to be beaten by the private sector, which offers much more competitive salaries than them, thus making the retention of academic staff in higher education more challenging as described by the participants in this study. Kochan and Dyer (as cited in Price, 2011) express that organisations that encourage the professional advancement of their employees stand the risk of losing them to rival organisations that would not have invested at all in those employees. This is also discovered in the findings in this research.

The findings of this study showed that the fundamental elements of TVP that are imperative for consideration when determining the most effective and appealing offering of value to academic staff members by the Institution were the Importance of TVP, Mutual Expectations and the Implementation Challenges of a TVP. In accordance with the findings of this study, Nagpal (2013) states that it is important to have a well-established TVP as this would aid with the attraction of talent. Turner and Kalman (2014) allude that a TVP is important because it demonstrates the opportunities available for talent development. This also supports the findings in this research.

Martin, Burke and Cooper (2011) express that the TVP is what establishes the mutual expectation and benefit between the employer and the employee. Holbeche (2015) further elaborates that fostering a setting where both institutions and their workers significantly benefit is in fact the most robust and trustworthy foundation for a relationship of employment that is more inclined to the requirements of the present day rapidly changing worldwide economy. Therefore, one party should not gain more than the other as described in the findings of this study.

According to Volunteer Ireland (2014), a shortage of financial resources can be a limiting factor to the management and implementation of a TVP. Cogswell (2015) states that it is not only imperative that senior management buy into the TVP for the sake of endorsing it, but also for deeply inculcating it within the organisation, therefore a lack of management buy-in to the TVP would circumvent the implementation process. Love and Singh (2011) also states



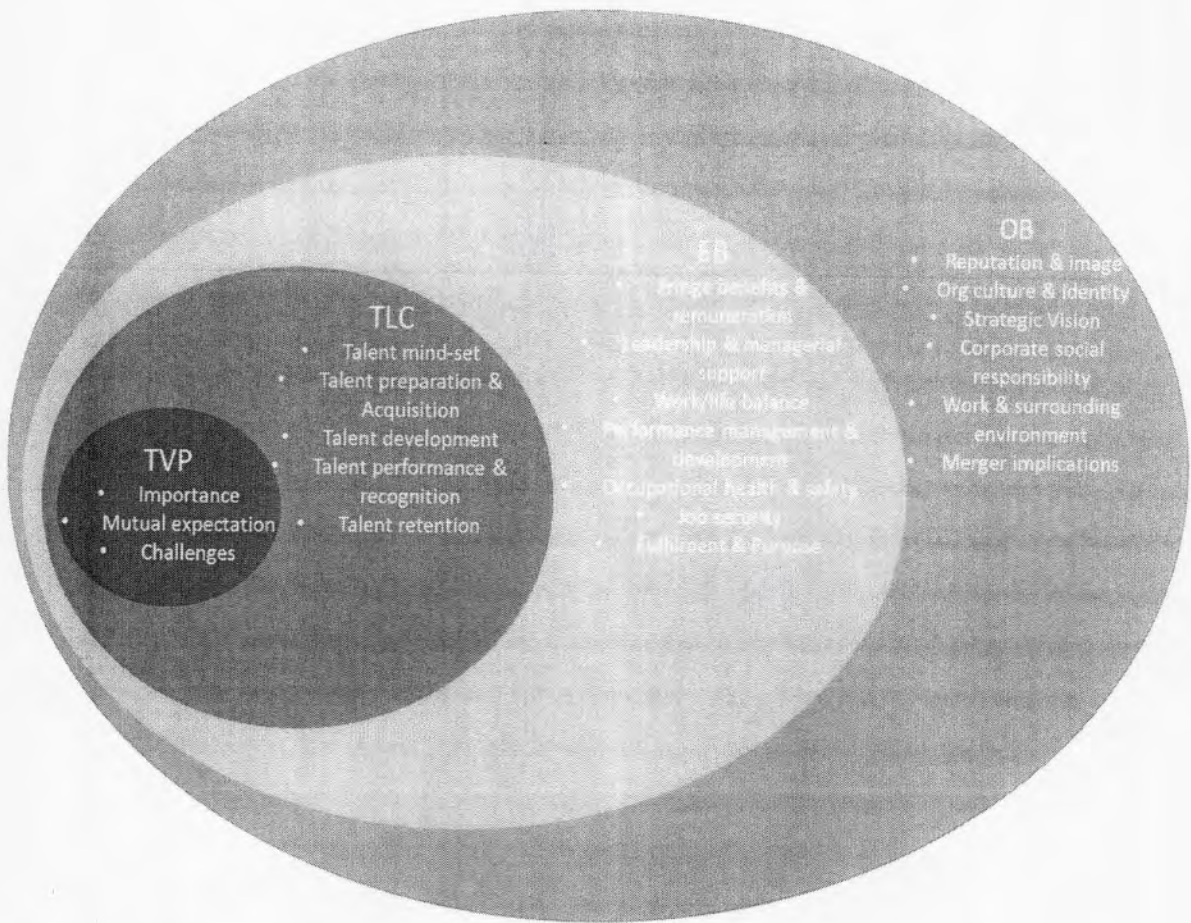
that the implementation of a TVP does not happen overnight due to the fact that it must come from the fibre of the organisation, therefore elements such as previously embedded cultures and methods of doing things may take long to accommodate the TVP, furthermore, the stakeholders of the TVP may also require some time to absorb the whole concept.

## **A FRAMEWORK FOR THIS RESEARCH**

The model depicted in Figure 5.1 suggests that an ideal Organisational Brand of the merged South African HEI is one that encompasses the reputation and image of the institution, the culture and identity of the institution, the strategic vision of the institution, the corporate social responsibility of the institution, the working and surrounding environment of the institution, as well as the merger implications to be considered by the institution. The model suggests that this OB is what attracts academic talent to the Institution. Subsequently, an ideal Employment Brand would be one that comprises the concepts of fringe benefits/incentives and remuneration, the leadership and managerial support within the institution, the work/life balance offered by the institution, the management and development of performance of academics, the occupational health and safety measures taken towards academics, the level of job security offered to academics, and the fulfilment and purpose that working for the institution brings to academics.

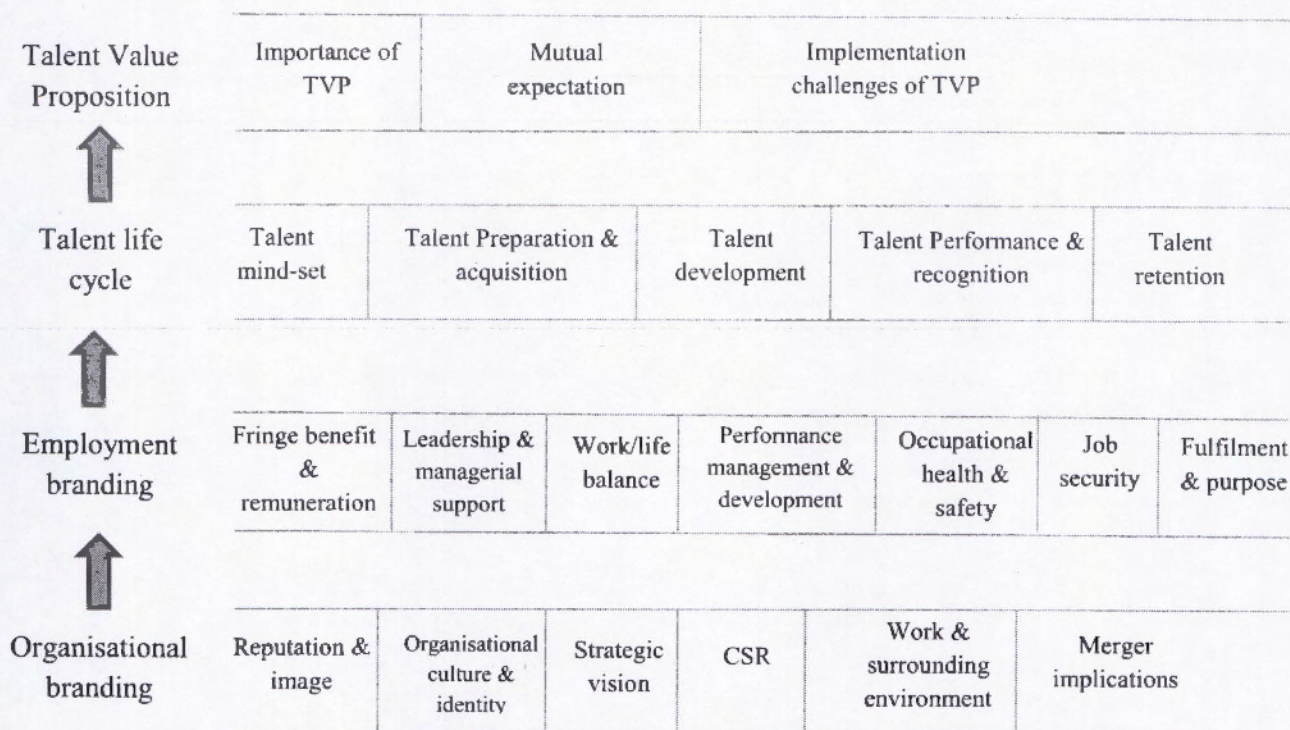
The model then implies that once academics have been lured by an attractive EB, the next phase would be managing this talent through the application of a talent life cycle consisting of a talent mind-set, the preparation and acquisition of talent, the development of talent, the recognition of high performing talent, as well as the retention of talent. At last, the model depicts that after the OB, EB and TLC processes have unfolded within the institution, these concepts then collaborate towards the establishment of a TVP for academic staff members and in order for this TVP to be most effective, it must take the following elements into consideration: the importance of having a TVP, the mutual expectation involved in a TVP, as well as the challenges involved in implementing a TVP. The same is also depicted in the framework presented below in Figure 5.2.





**Figure 5.1: A TVP onion model for this study.**





**Figure 5.2: A proposed TVP framework for this study.**

### Implications for Practice

The present research makes important theoretical and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this study adds to the limited empirical knowledge that exists on the talent value proposition of higher education institutions and the implications thereof for the effective talent management of academic staff members. From a practical point of view this research presented an integrated framework that higher education management can utilise to implement a Talent Value proposition that will attract and retain academic talent. Management should therefore take cognisance of the key elements of organisational and employment branding coupled with a talent life cycle processes that are needed to create an appealing talent value proposition for academic staff members. The TVP should benefit both parties involved in the employment contract, that is, the employer and the employees.

### Limitations and Recommendations

A limitation to this study was that since it was qualitative in nature, this restricted the ability to render the findings applicable to a bigger population. Therefore the findings in this study



can to a large extent only be considered reliable and valid for the specific institution that was investigated. The research was faced with limitations pertaining to the hectic nature of the work of individuals in HE management positions. This implied that several individuals approached declined the researcher's request for their participation in the study as they had no time to spare.

The researcher recommends that there be further inquiry among the academic staff members of the institution in a quantitative way to also gain their perceptions on the state of TVP in the institution and capture what is truly important to them. The HEI should consider applying the framework generated through this study as a basic and standard TVP for its academic staff members. Another recommendation is that the merged South African HEI should also consider having campus-specific TVPs in supplement of an overall institutional one, to achieve optimal results.

## **Conclusion**

TVP is fundamental to the success of an organisation's employer brand and to achieve real success, the employment brand of an organisation should epitomise the overall personality of the organisation and be embedded within every facet of the employment experience. Therefore generally, the TVP signifies the way an organisation would like to be perceived by current and prospective employees and expresses the mutual expectation and benefit of the employment contract, that is, what employees are anticipated to contribute in exchange for what they also stand to gain. This is what makes a TVP so imperative for the employment brand of an organisation.



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## **Chapter 6:**

# **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**



## **6.1 CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter serves the purpose of deducing conclusions from the four articles that constitute this study. Conclusions have been deduced in line with the objectives of this research. More so, factors that limited this study are also outlined, together with recommendations for the merged South African HEI. At last, opportunities for further research that have emanated from this research are presented.

### **6.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The aim of this research was to explore the management perspectives on a talent value proposition for academic staff in a South African Higher Education Institution.

The specific objectives of this study were:

- To explore management perspectives on the building blocks of the organisational brand of a higher education institution for academic talent management.
- To explore management perspectives on the factors affecting the employment brand for academic talent management in a South African higher education institution.
- To develop a talent life cycle framework for academic staff in a merged South African higher education institution.
- To develop a talent value proposition framework for academic staff in a South African Higher Education Institution.

### **6.3 CONCLUSIONS**

The conclusions of the pragmatic studies are subsequently outlined. The conclusions are elaborated on according to each objective that was established for this research.



### **6.3.1 Management perspectives on the building blocks of the organisational brand of a higher education institution for academic talent management**

The phenomenon of branding in higher education has received increasing attention in recent times, this interest being sparked by the need for HEIs to be distinguishable in the rivalry for students, staff, and resources within the higher education market. It has become important for HEIs to put across a unique image that will make them desirable and competitive both nationally and internationally (Sataøen, 2015). Although organisational branding has recently gained much attention, investigation into branding in the sector of higher education is still in its infancy (Pettigrew, Cornuel & Hommel, 2014). This research therefore added to the minimal existing knowledge on organisational branding in the higher education context.

This literature in this article explored the concept of organisational branding in-depth by evaluating its historical background and development up to date, and also by dividing it into six (6) succinct components - namely Reputation, Organisational Culture, Strategic Vision, Organisational Identity, Intended Image(s), and Construed Image. On the other hand, the findings in this study indicated that the current perceived organisational brand of the HEI is made up of Reputation and Image, Organisational Culture and Identity, Strategic Vision, Corporate Social Responsibility, Work and Surrounding Environment and Merger Implications are the elements that reflect the brand of the specific Institution. Work and Surrounding Environment as well as Reputation and Image, were the most frequent sub-themes that emerged in the findings.



### **6.3.2 A management perspective on factors affecting the employment brand for academic talent management**

In order to maintain competitive edge within the higher education sector, HEIs need to offer their employees a desirable employment experience. Davis and Farrell (2016) state that higher education institutions need to contemplate what reputation they put across as employers if they want to successfully entice the most superior academic talent. Furthermore, it is important for the leaders of HEIs to communicate the calibre of academic talent that they seek to employ within their institution. According to Lenka and Chawla (2015), employment branding has several advantages, including functional, economic and psychological benefits.



Andresen and Nowak (2015) suggest that various employment brands appeal to various target groups. Therefore, a more specific approach to employment branding that focuses on a particular employee group's needs will enhance the effectiveness of the employment brand. The researcher followed this cue by investigating the specific brand of employment offered by the merged South African HEI.

This investigation was conducted to obtain information from current employees that will impact the forthcoming employer branding approaches of the merged South African HEI's management in such a way that intrigues prospective academics. In the literature, Leadership and Management, Performance Management and Development, Salary and Benefits, and Work/Life balance were discussed as the appropriate components of an employment brand. The findings, however, showed that Fringe Benefits/incentives and Remuneration, Leadership and Managerial Support, Work/life Balance and Flexibility, Occupational Health and Safety, Performance Management and Development, Job Security, and Fulfilment and Purpose were the elements that constitute the HEI's current specific employment brand. Fringe Benefits/incentives and Remuneration, as well as Leadership and Managerial Support, were the highest occurring sub-themes in this study.

### **6.3.3 Towards a talent life cycle framework for academic staff in a higher education institution**

A Talent Life Cycle is important for ensuring that academic talent is well managed from the time when they are still prospective employee candidates, and throughout their employment period, until exit (Narasimharao, Kanchugarakoppal & Fulzele, 2013). Zandvakili (2015), states that the Talent Life Cycle is a comprehensive mechanism for Talent Management, which determines the phases that talent passes through during their time with a particular employer. This study therefore sought to investigate the TLC stages that enhance the employment experience when applied to academics in the merged South African HEI.

This article investigated the notion of a TLC, by evaluating its historical background and progression until recent times in the literature, and also by explaining each of its seven (7) concise components according to the literature - namely Talent Mind-set, Preparation for



Talent, Talent Branding, Talent Mapping and Acquisition, Talent Development, Talent Performance and Recognition, and Talent Retention - that directly pertain to the notion of a TLC. The findings, however, indicated that Talent Mind-set, Talent Preparation and Acquisition, Talent Development, Talent Performance and Recognition and Talent Retention are the elements that make up the Talent Life Cycle of academics in the specific HEI. Talent Retention and Talent Development were the most frequent sub-themes in this study.

#### **6.3.4 A talent value proposition framework for academic staff in a South African higher education institution**

The literature in this study indicated that there is limited research where Talent Value Proposition, especially in higher education, is concerned. This served as motivation for the researcher to establish a TVP for the merged South African HEI under investigation in this study. Although monetary compensation is pivotal to the employment relationship between an HEI and its academic staff members, HEIs also need to provide a TVP that will appeal to prospective academic talent over and above financial gain (Schierenbeck, 2013). Breslin (2013) explains that owing to the reality that many organisations today, institutions of higher learning not excluded, are still finding it a challenge to acquire and keep talent, the employment relationship has become more and more important, that is, the give and take between the employer and the employee. This research therefore sought to determine what elements should be considered when establishing the most effective TVP for academic staff members in the merged South African HEI that would enhance the attraction and retention of talent within the HEI in question.

Organisational Branding, Employment Branding and Talent Life Cycle were discovered to be the determinants of a TVP in the merged South African HEI. The sub-themes of Organisational Branding were the third most frequently occurring in this study. The findings indicated that the reputation and image that the institution projects, and the working and surrounding environment are the main elements that make up an attractive Institutional Brand for academic staff members in the HEI. The culture and identity that has been forged, the institution's long-term strategy, the social responsibility of the institution, and the



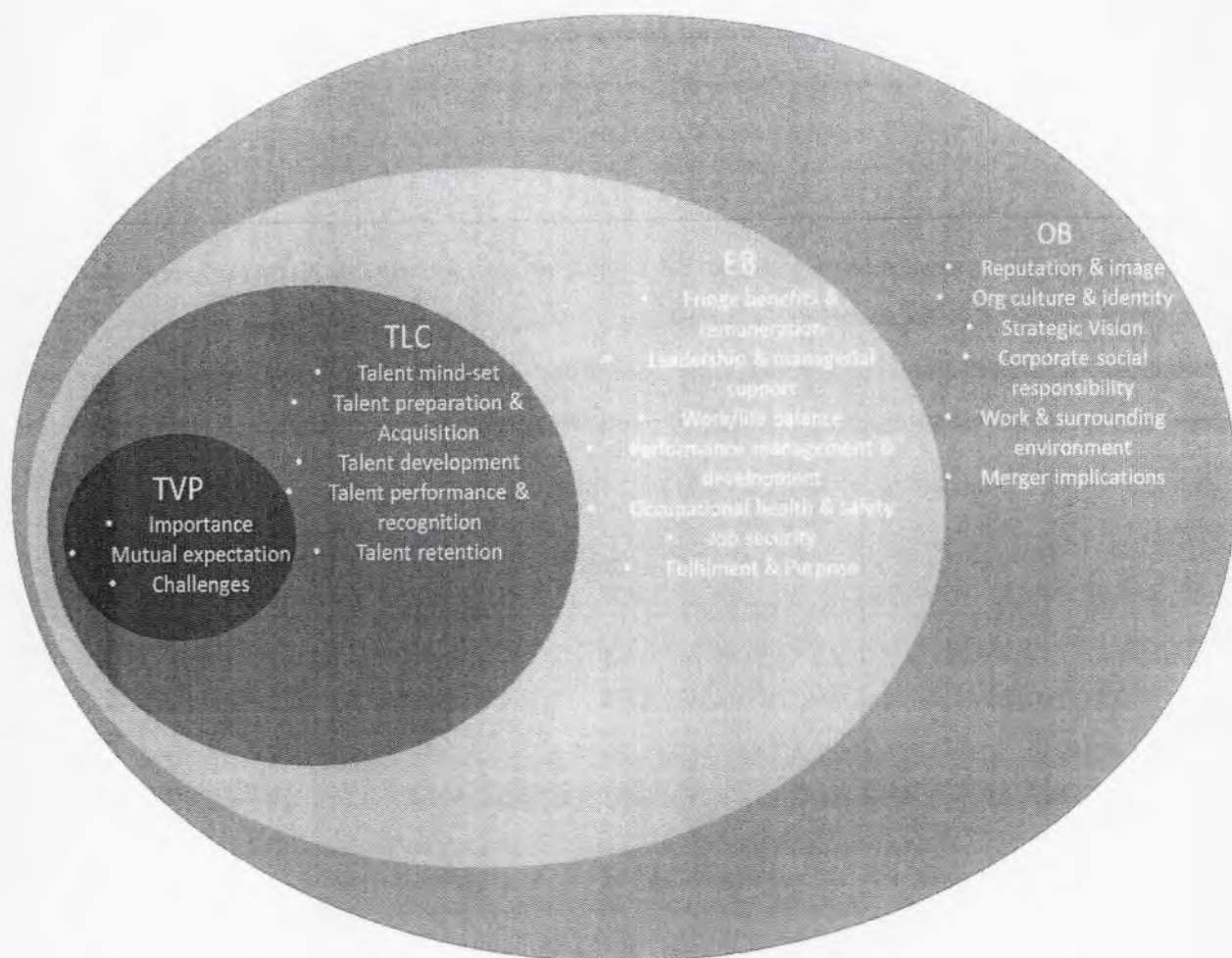
implications associated with merger Institutions were also indicated to be important; however, these sub-themes occurred to a lesser extent.

The sub-themes of Employment Branding were the most frequent in this study. The findings implied that Fringe Benefits/Incentives and Remuneration, as well as Leadership and Managerial Support are the main elements that make up an attractive Employment Brand for academic staff members in the merged HEI. Work/Life Balance and Flexibility, Performance Management and Development, Occupational Health and Safety, Job Security, and Fulfilment and Purpose are other sub-themes that also occurred.

The sub-themes Talent Life Cycle were the second highest occurring in this study. The findings suggested that Talent Development, and Talent Retention are main the elements to be considered for an effective and functional Talent Life Cycle for academic staff members in the higher education institution. Talent Mind-set, Talent Preparation and Acquisition, and Talent Performance and Recognition also emerged as sub-themes, although to a lesser extent.

The proposed model for this study is depicted in Figure 6.1 below:





**Figure 6.1: A TVP onion model for this study.**

The sub-themes encompassing the main theme of Talent Value Proposition were the fourth most frequent in this research. The findings indicated that the Importance of TVP, the Mutual Expectation in the TVP and the Implementation Challenges of TVP are important elements to consider when constructing a customised Talent Value Proposition for academic staff in the HEI. Relationships between different themes and sub-themes were also discovered in the findings of this study and were compared and discussed in accordance with the literature.

## **6.4 LIMITATIONS**

As in any other research, this study also encountered some limiting factors.



Firstly, very little research is available on the various topics of this research as they relate to HEIs. The researcher therefore had to draw comparisons and get validation for the findings in this study from other studies outside the field of academia.

Secondly, since the participants are in demanding positions of management, they were in several cases inaccessible or difficult to access. Several participants who had initially agreed to participate in the study withdrew later on due to pressing work commitments. It therefore took longer than initially anticipated to reach a substantial number of participants that could offer credible results.

Thirdly, the researcher also experienced a certain degree of reluctance from some managers in the HEI to participate due to apprehension emanating from the recent fees-related protests nationwide.

Fourthly, because this investigation was qualitative in nature it restricts the possibility of applying the findings to a bigger population, therefore the findings in this study can to a large extent only be considered reliable and valid for the specific institution that was investigated (Gramatikov, Barendrecht, Laxaminarayan, Verdonschot, Klaming & van Zeeland, 2010).

## **6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.5.1 Recommendations to solve the research problems**

The findings of this research indicate that the merged South African HEI is on the right track towards a suitable and appealing TVP for academic staff members. However, there is still much room for improvement. The following recommendations are therefore made:

- The Institution should consider applying the TLC to non-academic staff members in the Institution.
- The TLC should be implemented in line with the Institutional strategy that has been revealed in this study as having talent management as one of its key components.



- In the case of a merged HEI, a campus-specific brand should be emphasised in addition the overall Institutional Brand so as to provide a clearer depiction of each particular campus in a way that will differently appeal to various academic employees and potential academic employees.
- The brand of a HEI should be marketed to potential academic staff members and inculcated in the already existing academic staff members of the Institution in order to ensure that it is effectively communicated and adequately understood.
- Further research on Organisational Branding should be done in Higher Education contexts to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon as most of the knowledge that exists from research in this area has been commonly conducted in non-academic organisations.
- The HEI under investigation in this study should consider adding a medical aid plan to the fringe benefits of academic staff members in line with what participants discussed.
- The HEI should consider applying the framework generated through this study as a basic and standard TVP for its academic staff members.

The findings further suggested that support staff members also value a TVP; therefore the researcher recommends that the Institution considers and addresses this requirement.

The findings in this research implied that the perceptions about salaries and benefits within the HEI are not uniform across campuses, as some believed the remuneration rates to be competitive and other participants perceived the Institution to be lagging behind within the market in this regard. A standard remuneration scheme across university campuses is therefore also recommended.

#### **6.5.2 Recommendations for future research**

The following recommendations are offered for further research:

- A further inquiry in quantitative form should be conducted among the academic staff members of the merged South African HEI in order to determine their specific requirements where a TVP is concerned.



- A follow-up study may be conducted pertaining to the individual branding of academic staff members within the merged South African HEI, as this can also be valuable to a TVP.
- The current study can be expanded to validate the talent value proposition framework in other higher education institutions
- Future research can further validate the talent value proposition in other corporate contexts
- Questionnaires for Organisational Branding, Employment Branding and Talent life cycle processes can be developed and tested among other samples of respondents
- Organisational branding, Employment branding and Talent life cycle factors can be correlated with antecedents variables (i.e. leadership style) and outcome variables (i.e. turnover intentions, productivity, service delivery)

## 6.6 CONCLUSION

As demonstrated above, the objectives for this research have been accomplished. Organisational Branding, Employment Branding, as well as the Talent Life Cycle, are the elements that are crucial in establishing an attractive TVP for academic staff members in the merged South African HEI. This research gave rise to a model that can be used by the South African HEI to determine the elements of a TVP that would specifically suit their Institution and this model can be implemented at will.



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