

Staffing System Management: Evidences from Singapore

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Abstract

This paper uses Singapore as a case study to illustrate how staffing policies and practices affect the quality of the workforce which ultimately influence performance at employee and organization level. It reveals that Singapore public service has been able to put in place most of the ‘critical factors’ for an effective staffing system management. The presence of those critical factors have played an important role in making Singapore to be one of the most effective public services in the world. Finally, it forwards theoretical and practical implications of the study and future research direction.

Keywords: Singapore, staffing, recruitment, selection, retention.

I. Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) is either part of the problem or part of the solution in gaining the productive contribution of people (Stone, 1998: 4). In the words of Pfeffer (1994: 33), having good human resource management is likely to generate much loyalty, commitment, or willingness to expend extra effort for the organization’s objectives. Put it differently, HR system can either enhance or destroy this potential competitive advantage (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2015; Pfeffer, 1994). An important component of HRM is staffing.

If organizations are to get maximum contribution from the workforce, they must have an effective HRM. An effective HRM includes a myriad of functional areas. In managing the workforce, organizations perform many HR function such as staffing, training and development, employee performance appraisal, compensation, etc. (Heneman, Judge, & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2015, Mathis, Jackson, Valentine, & Meglich, 2016). This study however focuses on staffing policies and practices of Singapore public service organizations. Although most scholars related staffing to identifying competent employees and bring them into the organization (e.g., DeCenzo, Robbins, & Verhulst, 2016), in this study, staffing is treated in a broader term consisting of three HR related activities: Acquiring, deployment, and retention (Heneman et al., 2015: 11). If organizations are to get maximum benefits from staffing practices, they have to manage staffing as a system, which has many parts; and the success or failure of one part can affect the success or failure of the staffing system as a whole.

Staffing activities are increasingly important components of HR systems (Heneman et al, 2015; Fernandez-Arroz, Groyberg, & Nohria, 2009; Lussier & Hendon, 2016). It is estimated that an HR department can spend up to 50-70 percent of their time on recruiting new applicants to the company (DeCenzo et al., 2016). With so much time and money spent on this function it is easy to see why this is such an important area of HRM. Staffing receives a greater percentage of total HR budget than other functions- 20 percent of total budget

(Heneman et al., 2015). Recruiting and selecting A-list employees who can move the organization forward is critical, especially in today's unpredictable and competitive market (Clark, 2014; Bressler, 2014). The US Department of Labor currently estimates that the average cost of a bad hiring decision can equal 30 percent of the individual's first-year potential earnings. Fernandez-Arroz et al. (2009) calculated that for a company with a market value of \$100 million, a 10 percent improvement in the quality of candidate assessments would have an expected return of almost \$2 million in additional profits per year and mean an increase in market value of \$30 million to \$40 million.

This study argues that acquiring qualified individuals is necessary but not sufficient. Thus, their deployment (placing them on the right position at the right time) and their retention is equally crucial. Employee retention is one of the greatest human resource challenges faced by organizations today. High employee turnover adversely affects organizations (Bush & Peters, 2016; Sangeetha, 2010; Woerling, 2010). The costs of high employee turnover are substantial as it involves not only the direct financial costs of replacing employee but also other repercussions such as the potential loss of key skills, knowledge and experience, disruption to operations and the negative effect on workforce morale. In addition, high turnover represents a considerable burden both on human resource and line managers as they are constantly recruiting and training new employee (Fox, 2014).

Costs of poor hiring decisions fall under two categories: tangible costs and intangible costs. Tangible costs include those associated with hiring and include advertising, interview expenses, employment testing and background checks, relocation, and possibly litigation for wrongful termination, outplacement expenses, and salary (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000; Bressler, 2014). Lussier & Hendon (2016) also underscored that organizations are more likely to spend considerable human resources and management time in developing the job description and advertisement, screening resumes, applicant testing and performing background checks, as well as interviewing. Whereas intangible costs are costs which are difficult to be quantified and include lost sales, lost customers, lower product quality, and reduced production. Additional costs can be incurred resulting from customer dissatisfaction and lower worker morale.

This study uses Singapore as a case study to illustrate how staffing policies and practices affect the quality of the workforce which ultimately influence performance at employee and organization level. Singapore is one of the newly industrializing countries that has shown a remarkable economic and social growth over the past four decades. Such fast economic growth has made Singapore one of the Asian Tigers (Cheema, 2005; Weder, 1999). As a result, many countries have taken this nation as a role model. Although many factors have contributed to the outstanding Singapore's economic achievements, the existence of an effective public service organizations has been particularly crucial to its success (Haque, 2009). Singapore's human resource of nearly 2 million is recognized as one of the most efficient in the world based on worker's productivity, attitude and technical skills (Cheema, 2005).

Although many studies have noted that the workforce of Singapore civil service organizations

are among the most effective and productive in the world, only a handful of studies have systematically examined staffing policies and practices in Singapore civil service organizations. As the importance of staffing has increased, it is critical to review the staffing policies and practices in Singapore. Therefore, the purpose of this present study is to develop a conceptual framework through which to discuss staffing policies and practices in Singapore public service organizations. This study tries to answer the following four research questions:

1. How are public servants recruited in Singapore?
2. How are public servants selected and placed in Singapore?
3. How are public servants retained in Singapore?
4. What lessons from the Singapore experience can be learned?

2. Literature Review

It is argued that if organizations are to be effective, they have to have the required quality and quantity of human resource and be able to properly utilize them (Berman et al., 2016; Tessema, Craft, Subhani, & Tewolde, 2015). To the above objective, organizations have to properly accomplish staffing activities. *Staffing* is an important function of HRM, that is, concerned with obtaining the proper kind (quality) and number (quantity) of human resource necessary to accomplish organizational goals. It is no accident, therefore, that the first operative function of HRM must begin with staffing of HR to run the organization (Sharma, 1994: 63). Organizations that fail to have the right people in the right place at the right time are at risk (Fox, 2014; Sangeetha, 2010; Woerling, 2010). A proper match between work and employee capabilities is now an economic necessity (Pfeffer, 1994). Heneman et al. (2015) also underline that a poor fit in the beginning is a reliable predictor of later turnover or higher training. For this reason, organizations often spend substantial resources trying to hire employees who are well suited to the positions that need to be filled. Careful decisions made at the outset concerning whom to hire can therefore be quite important. In the words of Decenzo et al. (2016), staffing is pivotal because if it is done poorly, then all subsequent human resource functions will be negatively affected. Tessema et al. (2015) further argue that the first challenge of any organization is to find and recruit the people necessary to meet its present and future skill requirements.

Staffing decisions impact everything from organization vision and values, to the extent it will become able to innovate and adapt in the highly competitive marketplace (Pfeffer, 1994; Lussier & Hendon, 2016). Perhaps the greatest challenge facing managers could be that of selecting and hiring employees, not just any employees, but employees capable of helping the organization achieve its stated mission. The Harvard Business Review (cited in Yager, 2012) reported that as many as 80 percent of employee turnover can be attributed to bad hiring decisions. Some of the common costs of a bad hire are: Lost productivity, lost time to recruit and train another worker, cost to recruit and train another worker, negative effects on employee morale, negative impact on clients, fewer sales, and legal issues (Lorenz, 2012; Henemam et al., 2015; Mathis et al., 2016). Given the cost of a bad higher, it is important to recruit the best and the brightest individuals. Otherwise, organizations can lose more than time, money and effort by recruiting, hiring and training individuals who perhaps should not

have been brought on in the first place (Lorenz, 2012).

If organizations are to have the right people in the right place at the right time, they have to accomplish a number of staffing related activities, such as HR planning, job analysis, recruitment, selection, and placement (Decenzo et al, 2016; Mathis et al., 2016). *HR planning* provides mechanism to eliminate any gaps that may exist between supply and demand. Thus, HRP determines the numbers and types of employees to be recruited into the organization or phased out of it. Proper HR planning could lessen the number of surprises involving human resources availability, placement, and orientation. Once a determination of HR planning has been made, job analysis has to be conducted. *Job analysis* refers to systematic way of gathering and analyzing information about the content, context, and human requirements of jobs. We conduct job analysis to produce two pieces of documents, namely job description and job specification. While the job description describes activities to be done, the job specifications specifies the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) an individual needs to perform a job satisfactorily. After a job analysis is conducted, the recruitment and selection processes can begin.

Recruitment is the process of attracting qualified candidates to apply for vacant positions within an organization (Pynes, 2009; Sangeetha, 2010). Recruitment provides information about available positions and encourages qualified candidates to apply (Berman et al, 2016: 71). The recruiting process is vital for an organization to keep a steady flow of qualified applicants interested in joining an organization. The central task of recruitment is therefore to generate a sufficient pool of applicants to ensure that there are enough people available with the necessary skills and requirements to fill positions as they arise. As defined by Noe et al. (2015), recruitment is the process of seeking applicants for potential employment. A good recruitment plan asks at least the following four questions: (1) what are your needs, (2) what is your strategy, (3) what methods will you use, and (4) how will you track the applicants? (Gatewood, Field, & Barrick, 2016; Noe et al., 2015).

Generally, the sources of recruitment could be grouped into major categories: internal and external. Internal sources are those sources that help an organization to fill the vacancies from existing employees, either through promotion, transfer, and in rare case through demotion. However, internal sources cannot meet the whole HR requirements of an organization. Therefore, whenever there is an inadequate supply of labour and skills inside the organization, it must effectively get its message across to external candidates. It is here where the organization's choice of a particular method of recruitment can make all the difference in the success of the recruiting efforts (Baron & Kreps, 1999: 340). The following external sources are available for an organization: Internet, advertisement, employment agencies, employee referrals, educational institutions (schools, colleges, & universities), job fair, professional organizations, and walk-ins. It should also be noted that all recruitment methods have their own pros and cons (Heneman et al., 2015; Gatewood et al., 2016). Among the most important factors that affect selection of recruiting methods are organizational policy, cost and time factor considerations, labor market conditions (supply and demand of labor) and kind of labor to be recruited (Sangeetha, 2010; Berman et al, 2016). In view of these, **O'Donnell** (2016) argues that to choose a method, the HR manager must know which is likely to be the most

successful in targeting a particular labor group. Berman et al. (2016) remark that recruitment, in the public sector, is the most important human resource function, but it is generally acknowledged to be the weakest for it has not been done effectively. For this reason, Ban suggests that recruiting is the critical first step... in a public service, this area needs improvement (1993: 83).

Once a pool of desirable applicants is identified, the next step in the staffing process is to choose those most likely to perform the job competently (Hays et al. 2009). When recruiting has accomplished its goal of attracting applicants who are available and willing to work, employee selection selects those who are likely to be most suitable and productive. *Employee selection* begins where recruitment ends. Selection technically starts when applications have been received. Selecting workers on the basis of their job-related ability is one of the sacred principles of the merit system. Selection is the process by which an organization chooses from a list of applicants the person or persons who best meet the selection criteria for the position available. Much of the screening is to find those people who could work best in the new environment, could learn and develop, and need less supervision (Pfeffer, 1994: 33). In the words of Hays et al. (2009), recruitment and selection are the avenues by which bureaucracy acquires its most important raw materials, human resources. **O'Donnell** (2016) further argues security in employment and reliance on the work force for competitive success means that one must be careful to choose the right people in the right way. In selecting the best and the brightest employees, organizations conduct a number of selection methods or devises. Given employee selection is a lengthy process, many assessment methods are utilized. First the number of applicants has to be narrowed down to candidates using initial assessment methods, then the number of candidates has to be narrowed down to finalists using substantive assessment methods, then the number of finalists has to be narrowed down to offer receivers using discretionary assessment methods, then the number of offer receivers has to be narrowed down to new hires using contingent assessment methods (see Figure 1). The use of the above methods depends on a number of factors including organizational hierarchy (type and level of the position), size and management philosophy of the organizations, legal considerations, decision making speed, applicant pool, and financial strength of the organization (Decenzo et al. 2016).

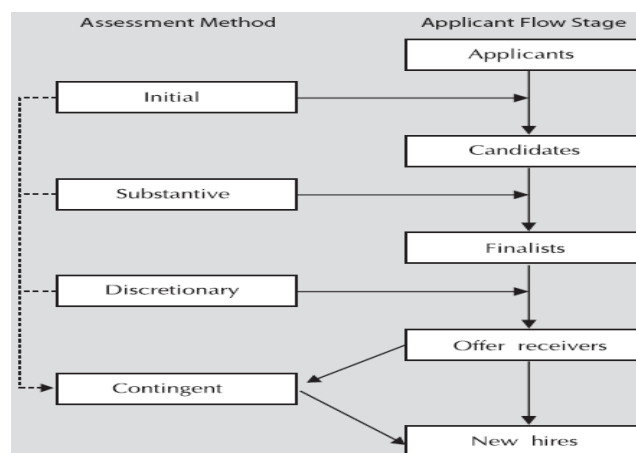


Figure 1. Employee selection process (Heneman et al., 2015).

As part of employee selection, HR professionals have to properly conduct pre-employment screening which may include educational checks, previous employers' history, references and credentials, criminal record checks, credit reports, psychometric testing and drug testing. According to Decenzo et al. (2016), organizations use the following selection methods at varying degree: phone screening, knowledge test, reference checks, behavior or personality assessment, and interviews. Lee (2016) however states that, employee referrals is number one source of new hires according to a 2016 SHRM benchmarking survey

The reason why organizations should assess applicants' past performance and behavior is the fact that an individual's past performance and behavior are typically good predictors of the employee's future performance and behavior (Heneman et al. 2015).

Selection and placement activities typically focus not only on applicants' knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), but they should also focus on the degree to which job candidates generally match the situations experienced both on the job and in the organization. Lack of fit between a person's KSAs and job requirements can be classified as a *mismatch* (Lussier & Hendon, 2016: 197). A mismatch results from poor pairing of a person's needs, interests, abilities, personality, and expectations with characteristics of the job, rewards, and the organization in which the job is located. So, if selection and placement are to be effective, matching of two types of fit (person-job fit and person-organization) are necessary (Gatewood et al., 2016; O'Donnell, 2016). If positive fit is established, organizations should have a more motivated and committed workforce that is more likely to stay and perform well. The investment of time and effort in selecting the right people for jobs will make managing them as employees much less difficult because many problems are eliminated (Pfeffer, 1994). *Good training will not make up for bad employee selection.* When people without the appropriate aptitudes are selected, employers will have difficulty training them to do those jobs that they do not fit (Mathis et al., 2016). Thus, it can be argued that the ultimate purpose of selection is placement, or fitting a person to the right job. *Placement* of people should be seen primarily as a matching process. How well an employee is matched to a job can affect the amount and quality of the employee's work, as well as the training and operating costs required to prepare the individual to do the work (Heneman et al., 2015). Further, employee morale is an issue because good fit encourages individuals to be positive about their jobs and what they accomplish.

Effective selection and placement are necessary but not sufficient. This line of argument implies the importance of *employee retention*. Unless qualified employees are kept for an extended period of time, it would be waste of resource. An important issue related to employee retention is employee turnover. Turnover occurs when employees leave an organization and have to be replaced (Mathis et al., 2016). Turnover could be of two types, namely, voluntary and involuntary turnover. While voluntary turnover refers to a type of turnover that is initiated by employees; involuntary turnover is a type of turnover, which is initiated by employers. Voluntary turnover could also be of two types: avoidable and unavoidable. While avoidable voluntary turnover could be prevented; unavoidable absenteeism could not be prevented (Heneman et al., 2015). Many organizations have found that turnover is a very costly problem (Clark, 2014; Lorenz, 2012). Although turnover is inevitable and the turnover of low-performing employees could be beneficial, high employee turnover has adverse effects on organizations (Martin, 2014).

The costs of high employee turnover is substantial as it involve not only the direct financial costs of replacing staff but also other repercussions such as the potential loss of key skills, knowledge and experience, disruption to operations and the negative effect on workforce morale. In addition, high turnover represents a considerable burden both on human resource and line managers as they are constantly recruiting and training new staff. Heneman et al. (2015) identified three major cost of turnover, namely separation costs (e.g., staff time and loss of productivity), replacement costs (e.g., recruiting and selecting new employee), and training costs (e.g., teaching new employees the job).

The main objective of this paper is to assess staffing policies and practices in the Singapore public service i.e., to discuss the way and context within which public servants have been staffed (recruited, selected, and retained) in Singapore. To that end, we developed a conceptual framework (Figure - 2) to focus our attention on the most important issues that affect staffing in the public sector. The conceptual framework was based on the following assumptions: External factors [“A”] (economic, political, legal, technological, and socio-cultural) affect the three staffing activities [“B”] (recruitment, selection, and retention), which in turn affect staffing outcomes [“C”] (HR competence, motivation, & job satisfaction), which subsequently affect employee performance [“D”]. The staffing system has several activities. In this study, they are grouped under three activities, namely recruitment, selection, and retention. The logic behind such classification is that first organizations tend to recruit, then select and placed and then retain them to realize their objectives. The effectiveness of staffing systems depends to a great extent on the effectiveness of the above three staffing activities. The three staffing activities are, in turn, affected by some factors, which we have called ‘critical factors’.

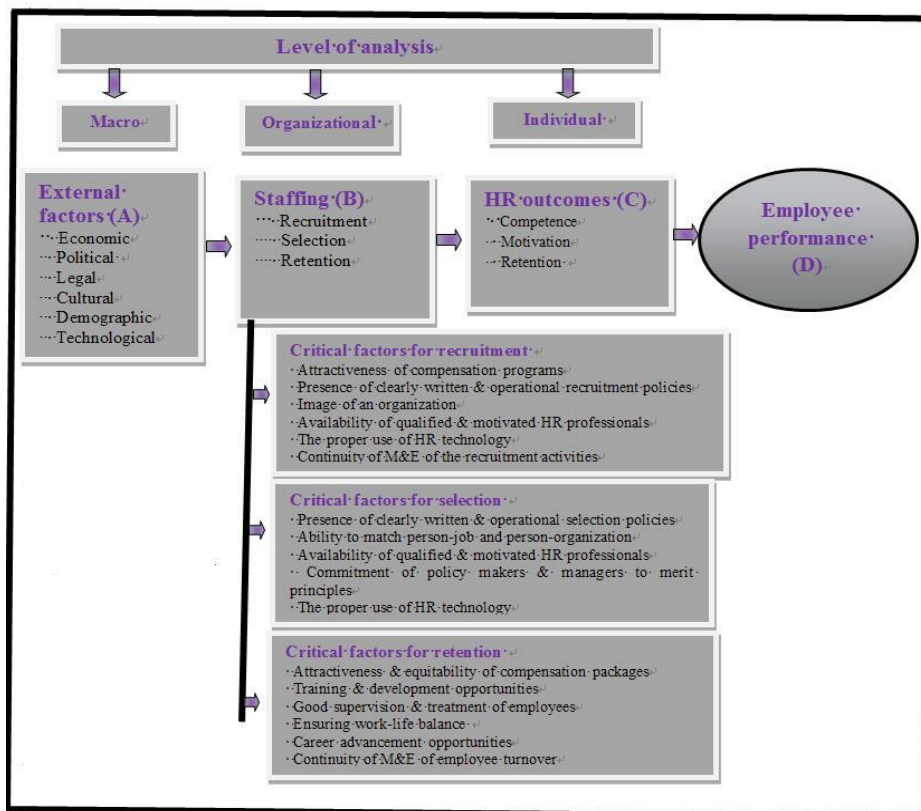


Figure 2. Framework for assessing the effectiveness of staffing practices

2.1 Critical factors affecting recruitment

Based on the review of the relevant literature, the following six critical factors, which affect *recruitment practices* in a public sector organizations are identified and are briefly discussed below.

Attractiveness of compensation programs: If organizations want to recruit outstanding people and want them to stay with the organization, paying more is helpful, although not absolutely necessary. High wages tend to attract more applicants, permitting the organization to be more selective in its hiring exercise (Pfeffer, 1994: 35). Paying more enables an organization to attract many potential applicants. This in turn could help an organization to hire the most suitable and qualified applicants. As underlined by Berman et al. (2016), higher compensation sends a message that the organization values its people. The presence of attractive compensation packages (base, incentive, and benefits) depends to a considerable degree upon the ability of a government to commit the required resources.

Presence of clearly written and operational recruitment policies: If public organizations are to attract potential applicants, they must have clearly written recruitment policies and be able to properly implement them (Naff, Riccucci, & Freyss, 2014). The recruitment policies or guidelines should include how to recruit and select the best ones among the attracted applicants. Gatewood et al. (2016) note that the existence of a clearly written policy manual with a comprehensive statement of HR policies in areas such as staffing, training, compensation, employee services and discipline is very crucial.

Image of an organization: The image of an organization plays a great role in attracting qualified applicants, which in turn makes an organization more selective in its hiring exercise. This may indicate that the image of an organization is *Sine qua non* for successful recruitment. However, at present many public organizations are confronted with a ‘slowly emerging crisis of competence’ due to a predicted decline in the quality of new hires (Ban, 1993; Shafritz, Russell, & Borick, 2015). Hays et al. (2009) argue that despite recruitment’s obvious importance to the success of any organization, public service has a poor track record as an effective recruiter, as contrasted to the private sector. Agencies often tend to satisfice or to invest very few resources in the effort. Therefore, one of the main challenges that is facing public organizations is the inability to attract the best and brightest candidates.

Availability of qualified and motivated HR professionals: If an organization is to successfully recruit, it needs to have qualified and motivated HR professionals. Recently, there has been a trend of providing line managers discretion to take HR decisions. In such a situation, line managers are dependent to a considerable degree upon the advice of HR professionals (Lussier & Hendon, 2016; Pynes, 2009). Although top management is responsible for ensuring that recruitment policies are developed, implemented and regularly reviewed, effective policy formulation requires active guidance and coordination, which HR professionals are able to provide (Naff et al., 2014). HR professionals are viewed as the “people strategists” capable of aligning the workforce with the goals of the organization. Organizations, more than ever before, need new leaders to guide their future. And HR professionals play a key role in assisting leaders/managers.

The proper use of HR technology: Technology has affected almost all HR functions (e.g., HR planning, job analysis, recruitment, selection, training, employee performance evaluation, pay, benefits, etc.). Most organisations use online recruitment to reach a wide group of potential applicants. The online recruitment method has increased the number of potential applicants, reduced recruitment cost, and improved the effectiveness of recruitment practices, which in turn has increased the quality of hires (Heneman et al., 2015; Lee, 2016).

Continuity of monitoring and evaluation (ME) of recruitment activities: Organizations have to regularly monitor and evaluate recruitment process and outcomes. This is because ME are used to assess past trends, evaluate the present situation, and project future events (Pynes, 2009). Hence, ME mechanisms could help organizations to take all necessary measures for future actions. Decenzo et al. (2016) also note that past staffing activities must be monitored and evaluated and used as signposts to charter the future course of action. Recruiting related data, therefore, need to be continuously up-dated.

2.2 Critical Factors Affecting Employee Selection

Based on the review of the relevant literature, the following six critical factors, which affect ***selection practices*** in the public organizations are identified and are briefly discussed as follows:

Presence of clearly written and operational selection policies: The presence of clearly written and operational policies are not only important for recruitment efforts but also for selection efforts. This is because such kind of policies reduce favoritism, nepotism, and bias (Gatewood et al., 2016). Heneman et al. (2015) also underscored the need for identifying relevant and appropriate selection criteria and enforcing them.

Ability to match person-job and person-organization: A useful perspective on selection and placement comes from two observations that underscore the importance of effective staffing: *Hire hard, manage easy* (Mathis et al., 2016). The investment of time and effort in selecting the right people for jobs will make managing them as employees much less difficult because many problems are eliminated. While person-job fit is important to match the applicant's knowledge and skills to the requirements of specific job openings, person-organization fit is necessary ensure an applicant is fit with the values and culture of the organization (Lussier & Hendon, 2016). Hence, organizations have to meet both person-job fit and person-organization fit if employee selection to be effective.

Availability of qualified and motivated HR professionals: The presence of such kind of HR professionals are not only critical for recruitment efforts but also for selection efforts. On the one hand, jobs are becoming more technical requiring more qualified employees; on the other hand, selection process is a lengthy and delicate (Mathis et al., 2016). Thus, employee selection has to be conducted by knowledgeable HR professionals. Put it differently, given the consequences of a bad hire, the availability of qualified and motivated HR professionals plays an important role (Tessema et al., 2015).

Commitment of policy makers and senior managers to merit principles: The commitment of a government (policy makers and senior managers) to merit principles in HR in general and

staffing related decisions in particular is critical. Top executives must commit themselves to active, visible, and personal involvement in the staffing decisions (Berman et al. 2016). When there is such kind of commitment, there would be less political interference and politicization of the public service (Shafritz et al., 2015).

The proper use of HR technology: Technology is not only useful for recruiting but also for employee selection. For the HR profession, technology has introduced entirely new ways of conducting business. Today, the number of organizations that use HR software (e.g., UltiPro, Peoplesoft, Bullhorn, ApplicantStack, Optimum, & TimeForce) has increased. The use of such technology has improved employee selection outcomes.

Continuity of monitoring and evaluation (ME) of selection practices: Organization should monitor and evaluate the selection process, criteria, and methods being used. According Heneman et al. (2015), organizations should assess selection process (time to hire), results (e.g., competence), costs (e.g., cost per candidate), and satisfaction of both hiring managers and applicants. Accordingly, they need to take the required actions.

2.3 Critical Factors Affecting Retention

Based on review of the relevant literature, the following six critical factors, which affect ***retention initiatives*** in public service organizations are identified and are briefly discussed below:

Attractiveness and equitability of compensation packages: Attractive and equitable compensation packages (base, incentive, and benefits) do not only affect the effectiveness of recruitment and selection practices but also employee retention. Studies show that organizations with attractive & equitable compensation packages are more likely to have high-retention rate or low-turnover rate (Berman-gorvive, 2014; Bush & Peters, 2016). While pay was the second most important contributor to job satisfaction; and employee benefits was the most important contributor to job satisfaction which affect employee retention (Lee, 2016). Thus, organizations do best with retention if they offer *competitive pay and benefits*, which means they must be close to what other organizations are providing and what individuals believe to be consistent with their capabilities, experience, and performance.

Training and development opportunities: Introducing an onboarding program into your hiring process can mean the difference between retaining a top employee for a lifetime, and watching them walk out the door shortly (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Pynes, 2009). Training and development opportunities can enhance employees' skills and knowledge, confidence, and job satisfaction, which in turn positively influence their willingness to stay with an organization for an extended period of time (Tessema et al, 2015).

Good supervision and treatment of employees: Given the expectations and preference of the modern workforce in supervision and treatment, organizations have to treat employees with respect and dignity if they are to retain and get maximum contribution from them (Berman-gorvive, 2014; Bush & Peters, 2016). For instance, according to the SHRM's (2016) employee job satisfaction and engagement research report, respectful treatment of all employees at all levels was the top contributor to overall employee job satisfaction for the

second year in a row.

Ensuring work-life balance: Organizations should attempt to ensure work-life balance, which is a concept that emphasizes proper prioritizing between work (career and ambition) and lifestyle (health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development/meditation) if they are to improve their retention capability. One way of ensuring work-life balance is to provide flexible work arrangement (Clark, 2014; Fox, 2014). Flexibility to balance work and life issues is an important factor that affect employee retention (Bush & Peters, 2016).

Career advancement opportunities: Career advancement opportunities are among the most factors that influence job satisfaction (Tessema et al., 2015) which in turn also impact organizations' ability to retain employees for a long period of time (SHRM, 2016; Scales, 2012). According to Scales (2012), millennials and gen xers were more likely than baby boomers to consider career advancement opportunities as important job satisfaction contributors.

Continuity of monitoring and evaluation (ME) of employee turnover: Organizations should periodically monitor and evaluate employee turnover. Analysis of employee turnover can be conducted for an organization as a whole, or based on the type of turnover (e.g., voluntary/involuntary, avoidable/unavoidable), or type of employee (e.g., exempt/non-exempt, fulltime/part-time), or job category, or geographic location (Heneman et al. 2015). Besides, there is a need to monitor and evaluate the attractiveness and equitability of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and accordingly there is a need to make revision (Pynes, 2009; Berman et al, 2016). This is because unless rewards are monitored and evaluated, organizations may not always be able to motivate and retain their employees in general and high-performing employees in particular as their perceptions and demands may change (Martin, 2014; Naff et al. 2014).

3. Research Methodology

This paper is mainly based on in-depth interviews with 17 Singapore public service managers: 4 from central management agencies (i.e. 2 from the Public Service Division and 2 from the Public Service Commission), 7 from the 15 civil service organizations (ministries), 6 from civil service training institutions (i.e. 3 from the Civil Service College main office and 1 from each of the three training institutes, namely the Institute of Policy Development, the Institute of Public Administration and Management and the Civil Service College Consultants). In order to focus the interviews on the most important issues, we identified relevant concepts from the literature to be used as a signpost. That is, guided by our theoretical framework and taking into account the context of Singapore, we prepared three different sets of interview questions. Once the 17 managers were identified and interview dates were set, the interview questions were mailed to the concerned managers. However, the interview questions did not limit the responses of the managers. In addition, a thorough review of relevant – published and unpublished - documents of the concerned organizations was conducted to enrich the interview data.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The main objectives of this study is to assess staffing policies and practices in Singapore public service organizations. To that objective, first we developed a conceptual framework taking into account the objective of the study and the context of public sector organizations.

At the outset, it must be noted that in Singapore, there are two parties, which play a role in staffing management system. These are the central management bodies (Public Service Division, Public Service Commission, and Ministry of finance) and the ministerial departments (PSD, 2004). Since 1983, it is the Public Service Division (PSD) that has had the principal responsibility for formulating and reviewing staffing policies in the civil service. Appointment, promotion and disciplinary control, on the other hand, rest with the PSC, which has also delegated many of its staffing authority to permanent secretaries. Moreover, the budget division of the MOF also plays a major role in controlling the size of the number of civil servants through budget appropriation. The request for more employees is vetted by the Budget Division of the Ministry of Finance (MOF), which has to give its approval. The experience of the Singapore shows that, although it started to decentralize some HRM activities in 1983, it was only in 1995 that the government gave the civil service organizations a substantial freedom or discretion on issues related to staffing activities. Interviewed civil service managers disclosed that the previous centralized system did not put the Civil Service on the same competitive footing as other employers. As one interviewed public service manager underscored, the fundamental problem of a centralized system is that it separates authority from responsibility. However, the current staffing management system has become more responsive than the previous one. It also allows the central management agencies to devote more time to staffing policy formulation and monitoring and evaluation (Tessema, Soeters, & Ngoma, 2009).

Central management agencies such as PSD and PSC safeguard the recruitment and deployment frameworks of the Singapore civil service and ensure that civil servants are deployed in accordance with the principles of open competition, meritocracy, incorruptibility, impartiality, and to maximize the individual's contribution to the Service. Staffing professionals play a critical role in assisting line managers effectively recruit, select/place, and retain their workforce. Recruitment into public service was based mostly on a transparent and competitive process (Chew, 2000; Quah, 1995; Iwasaki, 2004). A national civil service entrance examination used tough standards to sort out the skilled applicants. Sometimes, it is based on high academic achievement rather than entrance examination. Singapore's society is a very strong belief in meritocracy. As part of its goal to create a meritocratic society, Singapore follows a very strict system of exams and tracking that starts from an early age (Hogan, 2014; Quah, 2004). Effective staffing practices have been a major contributing factors in helping Singapore to have an effective workforce. As previously discussed, staffing practices are the starting point for building productive workforce.

It is worthy to note that in recruiting and selecting public servants, meritocracy has been the sole principle in Singapore, never nepotism or favoritism. These facts partly explain the secrets of the efficiency of the Singapore public service (Iwasaki, 2004; Kaul, 1997; World

Bank, 1997). The key principles observed in the recruitment process are meritocracy, incorruptibility and impartiality (Iwasaki, 2004; Quah, 2004). This is done via open competition for posts available to ensure that the most suitable person is selected for the job. Singapore has been frequently cited for its strong commitment to merit principles, which in turn has made the public service efficient and effective (Jones, 2001; Tessema et al., 2009).

Singapore also skillfully created a system to insure that the best talents from society are drawn into the public service through government scholarships. The government established a Management Associate Programs (MAPs) to recruit young and brilliant future senior public servants (managers) and co-ordinate mobility of senior public servants in the Singapore public service organizations. There has been a policy of recruiting high quality graduates who were considered to have potential to rise senior levels in the organization. It uses a fairly elaborate system to assess potential and intellectual ability as an indicator of future capacity to handle complex strategic issues.

Singapore uses online recruitment extensively to reach a wide group of potential applicants. The online recruitment method has increased the number of potential applicants, reduced recruitment cost, and improved the effectiveness of recruitment practices, which in turn has increased the quality of hires of Singapore public service organizations. The Singapore public service developed a new HR system, known as People Matters Management System (PM2S), to support and facilitate the strategic devolution of HR management and development in the Singapore Civil Service. PM2S leverages on technology to optimize HR management in general and staffing in particular, coupled with self-service functions to further empower the civil servants and managers. The PM2S has enabled Singapore civil service to better serve the IT needs in staffing activities.

Singapore carries out aggressive recruitment at entry level, entice high-flyers for further training and generally pay attractive salaries compared with the private sector (PSD, 2004; Tessema et al, 2009). Singapore pays public servants higher than the prevailing wage in the private sector (Weder, 1999: 12). This is a clear indicator that Singapore public organizations have a good image that could attract, motivate, and retain qualified workforce.

Singapore public service has attractive compensation packages (PSD, 2004; Tessema et al, 2009), which in turn has influenced positively the staffing activities. Effective staffing activities has helped Singapore public organizations to attract and select the best and brightest individuals. Wages and salaries in Singapore are at par with other industrialized countries including Japan and the United States. The Government monitors the wage policy and other aspects affecting labor conditions through the National Wage Council (NWC), which includes representatives from Government, business and labor. The NWC sets the standards for annual wage negotiations between employers and workers.

In-depth interviews indicate that once public servants are recruited, selected and placed, there is a good follow-up as to whether they are in the right positions or they are the right persons for the positions. Singapore public service regularly conducts functional reviews to pinpoint if there are constraints to efficient and effective staffing. Studies show that it is common to find overstaffing of public servants in some departments while others are understaffed. This is

mainly due to lack of proper monitoring and evaluation of staffing activities.

Although employee retention is one of the greatest HR challenges faced by organizations today (Berman et al, 2016; Shafritz et al, 2015), Singapore's public sector organizations have high retention rate mainly because of their ability to put in place the vast majority of the critical factors identified in the conceptual framework. An important lesson from Singapore is that organizations have to give due attention to some issues during and post hiring process if they are to retain their employees in general and high-performing employees in particular. For example, during the hiring process, it is recommended that organizations should look at all aspects of a candidate, especially those involving person-job and person-organization match. After hiring process, it is also recommended that organization should look at factors that affect their job satisfaction and motivations such as the attractiveness and equitability of rewards provided and how employees are treated in the post-hiring process.

The question is: Why staffing practices in Singapore public sector organization are effective? Singapore staffing practices are positively influence by both internal and external factors. Staffing practices in Singapore are significantly affected by external factors such as political, economic, technological, and socio-cultural. The proposed external factors within which Singapore staffing practices operate have been conducive in recruiting potentials applicants and retaining the high-performing public servants. For example, the economic conditions have been strong in that GDP growth rate in Singapore averaged 6.88 percent from 1975 until 2016 (Trading Economy, 2016). Since gaining independence in 1963, Singaporean economy has been growing rapidly and as a result the country has now one of the highest GDP per capita in the world. The political conditions have been stable and there has been minimal political interference (Quah, 2012; Chew, 2000). Public sector organizations are increasingly being influenced by external factors that impact their internal operations, particularly, staffing. Thus, this paper contends that knowing the environmental context plays an important role in improving our standing of how staffing related decisions are made and implemented in public organizations.

In contrast, in many other countries in general and that of the developing countries, the economic conditions have been strong, there has been an excessive political interference in the staffing practices. As a result, "politicization has resulted in the total erosion of traditional civil service values such as political neutrality, probity, rectitude, and objectivity" (Das, 1998: 19). Furthermore, Heady (1996) notes that recruitment to the public service in many countries is mostly based on considerations other than merit. As a consequence, some systems are 'public service' in name only and function as 'spoils systems.' In other words, the government's HR system may be nominally merit but practically political. Hence, public servants who are well qualified, motivated and productive is a goal common to many countries; yet, this simply stated goal is usually not achieved (Beugre & Offodile, 2001; Das, 1998; Pynes, 2009).

It must be noted that wide variations exist as to how countries manage staffing practices. That is, variations in contextual factors act as constraints on or enhancement in staffing practices. Nevertheless, the presence (or absence) of the critical factors affecting staffing identified in

the framework (Figure- 2) greatly affects the effectiveness of staffing practices, which subsequently influences performance at employee and organization level. Those critical factors for staffing practices are greatly affected by external factors. Especially, factors such as economic and political are found to be instrumental in either facilitating or hindering the presence of the critical factors, which influence the effectiveness of staffing practices. Thus, an important question to ask is that 'it is not how many employees are staffed (recruited, selected/placed, and retained), but how and who are recruited, selected/placed, and retained that matters'. The answer to the above question is multifaceted involving economic, political, and managerial factors.

This study concludes that staffing activities are properly conducted in Singapore. This is because the vast majority of the factors critical for an effective staffing in the public service (Figure 2) have been in place. Moreover, an analysis of the environmental factors (mainly economic and political) affecting the way public servants have been staffed in Singapore reveals that these factors are very conducive. On this basis, this study concludes that the presence of conducive environmental factors are the ones that have contributed to the effectiveness of staffing in the Singapore public service. It must be noted that as with any checklist (critical factors), our checklist might be incomplete and in some cases, has overlapping factors. Nevertheless, we found it is useful for diagnosing and understanding staffing practices in public organizations.

Although this study contributes to the existing literature on staffing system management in the public sector by highlighting the staffing practices in Singapore, future research should try to critically review in detail staffing activities (e.g., HR planning, job analysis, recruitment and selection/placement) separately. It would also be interesting if future research analyzes staffing practices in other newly industrializing countries like South Korea, and Taiwan using the proposed critical factors for an effective staffing policies and practices.

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