



TALENT MANAGEMENT AND COMPETITIVE STRATEGIES IN KUWAITI PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AGENCIES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates talent management (TM) strategies, and competitive advantages in Kuwaiti public administration agencies. The research was based on a random stratified sample of 328 of human resources and other directors in four ministries, four public authorities/institutions, and four state owned companies. In analyzing data, the researcher used many statistical methods including frequencies, percentages, standard deviations, correlations, simple linear regression, and One Way ANOVA, to answer and test study questions and hypotheses. Study results showed that strategies of TM and competitive advantages were around 3.00 on Likert's five-point scale. The implications of study results require that government agencies exert more efforts in adopting TM strategies and achieve competitive advantages in order to achieve national development goals.

Key words: Human resources management, talent management, competitive advantages, public administration, public administration agencies, Kuwait.

Introduction

Human resources management (HRM) is of a prime importance for all organizations in public or private sectors especially in this age of globalization and competition. The interest in talent management (TM) might explain the change of terminology with regard to HRM from administrative affairs, personnel management, human resources management, intellectual capital, and lately talent management. TM started to be used in the 1990s because of tough competition for attracting highly qualified and competent individuals, investing in their training and development, and providing them with incentives in order to retain them, and avoid the risk of losing them by moving to work for other organizations. (*Al-Qarioti, 2015:20-34*). Nowadays, attracting talented people, training them, and succeeding in retaining them are becoming the main function of HRM departments, which encouraged many organizations to adopt TM strategies aiming at recruiting, developing, and empowering employees to achieve their potentials at the highest possible levels (*Jain et. al., 2012; Rowland, 2011*). The emphasis on using TM goes back to 1998 in a report entitled “The Global War for Talent” (*Beechler, S., & Woodward 2009*). Since then, the topic has gained much importance due to talent management importance in enhancing organizational efficiency, effectiveness, and competitiveness (*Hartmann et al., 2010*).

With regard to the definitions of talent and TM, many definitions were given which differ with type of organizations, strategies, competitive environments, and the importance they give to employees’ training and development, performance evaluation, retention, promotion, and compensation policies among other issues in their efforts aiming at better use of human resources in the long and short run. Such efforts are influenced by organizational culture, which appreciates attracting, recruiting, developing, compensating, and maintaining competent individuals and motivating them to exert maximum efforts (*Michael’s et. al., 2001:126, Bhatnagar, 2007; Paradise, 2009*). According to Forman model (*Forman, 2005*), TM have many approaches which indicate that there are no shared definitions of those concepts as attempts to define them tend to get confused on two fronts. First, the parts of the workforce to which the term talent might apply can range from a small number of potential leaders to the whole workforce. Second, the HR profession has extended the core ideas of attracting and rewarding talent into all processes of retaining, motivating, rewarding, and so on (*Garrow & Hirsh, 2008:390*). Furthermore, especially in the public sector, people fear that TM will cut across equality of opportunity and transparent processes that allow people to apply for higher-level jobs in order to further their careers. However, in this study we adopt

CIPD definition of TM as “the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention, and deployment of those individuals with high potentials who are of particular value to an organization (*Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 2006*). TM as a more proactive approach to skill and career development has the most to offer when there are specific types of roles that are hard to fill either because recruitment is difficult, or because career paths require very different skills and experiences at different levels in the organization. In short, TM refers to the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention and deployment of high potential and high performing employees, to fill in key positions which have significant influence on organizations’ sustainable competitive advantage.” (*Gallardo-Gallardo & Theunnissen, 2016: 50*). Moreover, the concept has the potential to apply both to meeting the needs of organizations, and of individuals which is in tune with the current sense of what HR professional should be trying to do (*Garrow and Hirsh, 2008:390*).

Problem Statement

At this contemporary millennium, which is characterized by drastic changes at social, political and economic levels and scarce resources, all countries are required to exploit their resources wisely and to look for better ways to deal with such conditions and maximize benefits and minimize imminent threats. In this context, managing human resources becomes the most important element to make necessary adjustments and achieve competitive advantages as a base for development and progress. This necessitates that various organizations and government organizations in particular exert great efforts in HRM to attract best talents as a main vehicle to achieve national aspiration of sustainable development and progress. This is where TM becomes imperative as a way of attracting, recruiting, developing, motivating, rewarding, and maintaining highly qualified people especially in the public sector, which plays the major role in development of many countries such as the State of Kuwait. Special care should be taken in order not to have brain drain, which is a major problem faces many developing countries. It is argued that good TM in more advanced countries (MDCs) is the other side of the brain drain phenomena facing (less Developing Countries (LDCs) as MDCs are attracting highly qualified people and consider them a competitive edge in the great leap towards development and progress at all levels. This argument is very valid in the case of Kuwait which enjoys abundant natural resources as an

oil producing country with a small population and needs to have industrious human resources who if are well managed can make difference.

Importance of the Study

The importance of this study stems from practical implications in shedding light on how government agencies can benefit by adopting specific TM strategies. Such strategies can help in utilizing human resources which constitute a main component of the intellectual capital (IC), which plays an important role in achieving competitiveness, due to their core competence they enjoy, which affect positively the decision making process towards more efficiency and effectiveness. This is especially true in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which have a great gap they wish to bridge in the area of digital knowledge economy in contrast to MDCs.

GCC countries and the State of Kuwait in particular did not succeed much in making the required transformation towards knowledge management in its software and hardware dimensions, which necessitate attracting the best minds. For these reasons, it is important to investigate whether government agencies in Kuwait are benefiting from the human talents they employ. Government organizations are a great reservoir of national competencies, as more than 93% of their employees are Kuwaitis. Effective TM strategies can make a big difference by investing in human resources as an intellectual capital, which otherwise can move to the private sector, or migrate to other GCC countries, and deprive Kuwait of these valuable resources. This study is important and could be a step toward initiating more interest in researching this topic, which is valuable from practical as well theoretical perspectives. As far as the present researcher knows, no such research had been conducted on TM in Kuwaiti public administration and this research can lead the way towards this goal.

Study Objectives

This study aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. Shedding light on the concept of TM strategies in government organizations.
2. Examining competitive advantages and their importance.
3. Investigating the role of TM in enhancing competitive advantages in government agencies.
4. Providing recommendations regarding ways to adopting TM strategies in Kuwait government agencies.

Study Questions and Hypotheses

The study aims to answer and test the following questions and hypotheses.

1. Do Kuwaiti government agencies apply TM strategies?
2. Do Kuwaiti public administration agencies achieve competitive advantages?
3. What are the main obstacles, which government agencies face when adopting TM strategies?

Guided by the study objectives and research questions, the following hypotheses are presented.

H1. Government agencies' adoption of TM strategies affects competitive advantages at significant levels.

H2. Government administrators evaluate government agencies' application of TM strategies differently at significant level according to type of agency, position, gender, age, education, length of service, and nationality.

H3. Government administrators evaluate government agencies' adoption of competitive advantages varying at a significant level according to type of agency, job title, gender, age, education, length of service, and nationality.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Many researchers had defined the concept of TM. The use of the concept goes back to the late 1990s when McKenzie report entitled “**The War for Talent**” was published, which referred to an increasingly competitive landscape for recruiting and retaining talented employees (*Beechler & Woodward, 2009*). Since then, many definitions had been given to TM, but most of the literature on the topic contains a central notion that TM is associated with different human resource department practices, such as the strategic recruitment, retention, development, and training of talented high-performing employees. Some defined talented people those who possess exceptional competencies and potentials which positively affect efficiency and effectiveness of the organizations where they work in (*Ready and Conger, 2007a; Ready and Conger, 2007b; Vlădescu, 2012*).

Other researchers defined talented people as those who are influential in achieving organizational objectives and have a competitive edge (*Horváthová, 2011; Bahati et al., 2011*). In this context, Lewis and Heckman identified three types of conceptualizations of TM, which refer to typical human resources management (HRM) practices, talent flows of employees into jobs in an organization, and a focus on high-performing employees. (*Lewis and Heckman, 2006*). The first type associated TM with HRM practices including recruitment, training, and motivating employees. (*Casio, 1998; Heinen & O'Neill, 2004; Creelman, 2004; Chuai, et al. 2008*). The second type focuses on human resource planning or workforce planning and development to secure the supply of employees in different parts of an organization in relation to specific jobs and tasks. (*Jackson and Schuler, 1990; Rothwell, 2010; Schweyer, 2004*). The third type encompasses the high performance employees who have to be rewarded, and the “undifferentiated good” who are to be managed and guided to achieve high performance levels by the HRM in an organization (*Becker & Huseid, 2006; Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Brown and Tannock, 2009*). In this sense organizational success is increasingly attributed to the outstanding performance of a few select employees, and the differential value created by the most talented employees is considered to be significant (*Axelrod et al., 2002; Cheese et al., 2008; Heinen and O'Neill, 2004; Michaels et al., 2001; Buckingham and Vosburgh, 2001; Walker and Larocco, 2002*). Collings and Mellahi (2009) have suggested a fourth talent perspective, which associated TM with identifying key positions in an organization in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (*Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005; Huselid et al., 2005*).

With regard to TM strategies, which are adopted by HRM, they can be classified into four categories as follows: (Kehinde, 2012; Al Ruwaili et. al., 2013; 2013 and Yunfei, Hanif).

1. Talent attraction strategy: This strategy is designed to attract the most talented people as most relevant to current and future requirements for excellence, adaptability and high productivity within the organization to achieve a competitive advantage (*Erekat et al., 2010, Rowland, 2008*). This strategy is based on the vision and values of the organization from strategic thinking perspective of human resources that support attracting smart talents, differing from normal conditions of employment (*Pruis, 2011; Glen, 2007*).

2. Talent development strategy: This process of developing capabilities, potentials, skills, and knowledge of employees through training and continuous informal and formal development programs (*Areiqat, 2010*), aims at achieving high performance levels and

match jobs to work requirements and identify knowledge gaps to be bridged (*Cains, 2009, Williamson, 2011*).

3. Retention strategy: This strategy aims at retaining and preserving talents, which is very important in this age of tough competition and can be a hygiene factor. (*Whelan and Carcary, 2011; Iles and Preece, 2010a*). The tools for implementing this strategy emphasize improving working conditions, providing direct, indirect, intrinsic, and extrinsic incentives and compensations, which can motivate employees to stay working in their organizations and reduce the indirect leakage of talent (*Cannon and McGee, 2011; Iles and Preece, 2010b*). Another important part of this strategy is providing training and development opportunities, which can positively affect organizational loyalty and commitment. Many countries have adopted various strategies in this context, as the case in Brazil, France and the Netherlands, or enforcing laws and giving more confidence and respect for employees as the case in Japan, or adopting effective performance measures as the case in Italy, or providing favorite retirement conditions, as the case in Canada (*Poorhosseinzadeh, and Subramaniam, 2012*).

4. Succession Planning: This strategy aims to provide talent through forecasting and securing future organizational needs of competent human resources to ensure stability and achieve strategic visions. This strategy is based on selecting a senior staff team and assigning them to future leadership positions, and designing plans to provide a large base of appropriate employment of talents which gives talented employees real opportunities to fill important positions (*Hills, 2009; McDonnell et. al., 2010; Hartmann et. al., 2010; Charan et. al., 2001, Kasmi, 2011; Ahmadi et. al., 2012*). (*Cappelli notes, 2008b; James and Rita, 2011*). Such processes of effective succession planning depends on vital attributes including leadership competency model, and performance measurement system based on the principle of leadership skills which are essential steps towards successful planning for job replacement in leadership positions (*Areiqat, 2010*).

With respect to the **concept of competitive advantages**, Michel Porter's theory of competitive advantage considers competitive advantage as "the value created by the organization to its customers and may be materialized in lower commodity prices, or unique product characteristics which justify the price increase" (*Hajaj, 2007*). Alderson & Fakey define competitive advantage from administrative perspective as "quest for unique features which distinguish the organization from other competitors in the same sector, or set properties owned and maintained by the organization for a period of time, and achieve superiority over competitors" (*Gould, 2008; Low and Praveen, 2010; Al-Maadhidi,*

213:2007). Competitive advantages depend on a number of criteria. They include source and multiple features, level of improvement and development of trained and qualified workforce, or high technology that supports the organization's final product excellence, or long-term experience associated with centers of research and development of products and services, which add additional values to final consumers. Multiple competitive advantages possessed by the organization indicate that whenever organizations adopt a greater number of competitive advantage are far from imitation and simulation by competitors. Researchers defined several criteria to measure competitive advantages in organizations being determined by ability to outdo other competitors in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, and quality of outputs and services to customers. Some of these criteria include efficiency, quality, flexibility, speed, innovation, and responsiveness to (Jones & George, 2009:23). Al-Qarioti refers to other types of competitive advantages, which are cost reduction, cost leadership, product differentiation, and focused differentiation (Al-Qarioti, *Organization Theory and Management*, 2015:170-171).

Literature Review

Many theoretical and empirical studies have been conducted on TM. One study provided a comprehensive review of empirical research on TM, which had been published between 2006 and 2014. It concluded that TM focuses on systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention and deployment of high potential employees, to fill in key positions which have significant influence on organizations' sustainable competitive advantage." (Gallardo-Gallardo & Theunnissen, 2016). Another study identified and explained TM practices, which contribute to the building of a broader and more balanced theoretical framework in which the impact of the organizational context and its interrelated actors are taken into account. (Thunnissen, 2016). A similar study specified four main practices that top executives need to follow to create and develop a talent-powered organization through which organizations can maximize the strategic impact of their analytical talent and enhance organizational capabilities (Harris et. al. 2010). Yet another study showed the important role that TM plays in achieving competitive advantages and recommended that organizations attract, identify, develop, engage/retain, and deploy high potential and high performing employees, to fill in key positions, which have significant influence on organizations' sustainable competitive advantage (Shrimali and Ghidwani, 2012). Another study discussed the substance of talent and the problems associated with identifying talent by using closely related concepts, which are employability, knowledge, and

competence. It suggested a model in which talent includes individual, institutional, and organizational-social dimensions (*Nilsson & Ellstrom, 2012*). Yet another study of TM shed light on challenges, which face business organizations because of aging workforce, and recommended that talented and experienced employees transfer their expertise to their mates before they retire (*Calo, 2008*). Another study called for reviewing recruitment and motivating employees in MDCs and draws lessons on how to attract and retain best talented people and have such lessons to guide efforts in LDCs (*Lavigna and Hays, 2004*).

Many empirical studies have been conducted regarding TM. One specific study investigated the effectiveness of TM practices of 138 Swiss companies and showed that different sets of TM practices result in different organizational outcomes. (*Bethke-Langenegger et al. 2011*). Another study on global drug market confirmed that well-managed talent is crucial for success in the highly competitive global drugs market. It identified leadership potential, retaining talent and evaluating the cost of recruiting senior executives as key issues for today's life sciences executives who identified leadership development, high potential employee identification and assessment, performance management, and succession planning. (*Stephens, 2010*). Another study examined talent retention practices in Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL), a public sector Indian company. It concluded that effective TM practices help the Indian public sector's organizations in general to retain their best talent. TM practices are focused on competencies, knowledge, learning and increased broad group engineering and technology transference. It recommended that organizations should invest in the process of TM and development of its employees for building up the reservoir of competencies of the internal workforce to make them future-ready (*Rana et al. 2013*).

With regard to empirical studies, in a study of small and medium organizations in Canada, Ramadan investigated the relationship between TM and competitive advantages. The study concluded that TM is highly related to organizational productivity and recommended that top management give more importance to attracting and retaining talented people (*Ramadan, 2012*). Another country study highlighted TM practices, various methods applied by Malaysian companies and problems, which they face in this process. The study concluded that all companies applied TM programs as a response to internal and external pressures, and looked at strategic TM an important impetus for growth and an important source of competitive advantage, and that TM practices are still in the initial stage and asked for conducting more studies in this area. It recommended that Malaysian companies should

create specialized units for TM to be responsible for all activities concerning gifted people, train, retain talented people, and provide them with effective and fair incentives and compensations systems that have a significant impact on preserving talent and motivating them to do their utmost to achieve the strategic organizational goals(*Abdul Nasir et al., 2012*). A similar country study of 25 companies in Pakistan investigated the relationship between TM activities and traditional practices, and between emotional stability and TM practices and their impact on organizational performance. Results of the study showed that TM practices, had positive impact on work performance, and that employee's emotional stability had a positive impact on performance and recommended more investments in human brains more than technology, and to focus more on evaluating and developing talent through a powerful mechanism for building individual and social responsibility(*Iqbal et al., 2013*).

With regard to TM and competitive advantages, many research studies have been conducted on TM and its impact on competitive advantage for public and private business organizations. A study on management efficiency as a tool of management talent surveyed 33 information technology organizations in India and showed that most of the staff at middle and senior management levels considered HRM recruitment, planning, and performance appraisal are of prime importance for an effective human resources management. (*Vanka Sita, 2013*). Conclusions were reached, concerning the relationship between TM and organizational effectiveness in youth and sport sector in West Azerbaijan state. The study called for adopting a strategic rewarding system for talented employees (*Haghparsast et al., 2012*). Another country study in Pakistan highlighted the importance of TM practices in the pharmaceutical industry in achieving sustainable competitive advantage. It concluded that TM practices led to the positive performance, and stressed the importance of focusing on talented individuals who represent a valuable feature which can distinguish organizations from competitors and play a vital role in achieving the strategic objectives especially in the highly competitive environment (*Abbasi et. al., 2010*).

As far as studies conducted in the Arab world are concerned, many studies have addressed topics related to the concept of TM as intellectual capital and its role in achieving competitive advantage. One study was on TM in Saudi government organizations and their impact on overall organizational performance. It recommended that government agencies adopt modern methods of TM, and develop clearly defined management policies for acquiring, developing, motivating and retention of talented people through suitable training and research programs, and for the advancement of government organizations and the

services they offer (*Al Anqari, 1436 h*). Another study examined the impact of TM strategies adopted by governmental organizations in Jordan and their impact on the achievement of competitive advantages. Results showed high levels of competitive advantages in government agencies which adopted and applied TM strategies in terms of quality, efficiency, creativity, responsiveness, and excellence. Moreover, these results showed that talent development is the most influential strategy in achieving competitive advantage, followed by attracting, maintaining, and succession strategy. The study recommended that top management pay more attention to TM and focus on talent development strategy through training programs to enhance self-confidence commitment, empowerment, and participation, which can contribute to organizational performance (*Al-Azzam, 2014*). Another empirical study on physicians working in Zagazig University hospitals in Egypt investigated the impact of TM on integration of functional and organizational personnel to determine whether balance between work and family mediates this relationship or not. Results showed an impact of TM on the functional and organizational integration and that balance between work and family mediates this relationship (*Morsi, 2013*).

Another study on requirements for sustaining competitive experience in the Islamic University in Gaza showed that requirements of sustainability and competitive experience substantially affected the assessment of the University's resources and capabilities, organizational learning and continuous improvement, organizational adjustment. The study recommended continuous improvement of academic programs and policy services, and innovations because they are influential for sustainable competitive advantage (*Ali, 2013*). Another similar study investigated the role of TM in achieving competitive advantage at the Islamic University in Gaza. It found a strong correlation between competencies and creative human capabilities and competitive advantages, and recommended more dissemination of a merit culture in HRM and exclusion of patronage and marginalization (*Al-Maqadma, 2013*).

Another country study in Lebanon investigated employees' knowledge and awareness of TM concluded that the majority of Lebanese companies do not have any clue about TM processes or strategies, and a small proportion of companies appreciate the concept of TM and its strategies. The study recommended that companies invest in TM to achieve competitive advantages (*Haddad et al. 2012*). Another similar country study examined the relationship between TM and high performance, in Kufa and Al-Qadissiya universities in Iraq (*Alkaraawy, 2010*). It found that talent is an important an important factor for sustainability and a major driving force for achieving competitive advantage. The study

recommended developing leadership in strategic awareness of TM and talent retention as a means to improve competitiveness. It emphasized the importance of conducting more studies to investigate the impact of TM on competitive advantages. Another country study examined Algeria Nijma Telecommunication Company's competitiveness and concluded that knowledge management ensures competitiveness forces that could strengthen competitiveness and found of a strong correlation between knowledge management and competitiveness through enhancing information technology, communication skills, and effective HRM. The study recommended providing motivation, development and retention of qualified human resources as a vital source of knowledge and competitiveness (*Abd AlMalek, 2012*).

Yet another country study investigated the impact of TM on competitive advantage in Jordanian companies, and the role of integration as a source of knowledge broker on the relationship between TM and enhancing the competitiveness of these companies. It showed that achieving competitive advantages depends largely on talent management, knowledge integration, and recommended linking talent management strategy and knowledge of the organization's strategy to have an important role in achieving competitive advantage (*Al-Maaitah, 2013*). A similar study on three telecommunications companies in Jordan examined the relationship between TM and reputation. The results showed that TM is not at a good level and did not achieve any competitive advantage, and positive significant relationship between TM and reputation, which require that these companies adopt TM strategies in order to achieve competitive advantages (*Salih, and Al Naji, 2014*). Another country study investigated the role of intellectual capital in Jawwal Palestine cellular communications company in achieving competitive advantage. It found significant relationships between them, and that the company possesses a strong competitive advantage in this regard. The study recommended that the company preserve and develop its intellectual capital as a strategic source for promoting greater competitive advantage (*Shaaban, 2011*). Yet another study on TM in the Islamic University in Gaza showed a vague understanding of the concept and recommended that certain measures should be taken for creating a special administrative unit for TM, which can help in creating suitable culture and better understanding of TM, which can positively influence competitive advantages of the university (*Siam, 2013*).

In the context of **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries**, a study on a painting company in the United Arab Emirates examined the relationship between talents and competitive advantages. It showed that talents affect competitive advantages at a significant

level, and recommended giving special attention to talented people (*Agah and Alrubaiee, 2012*). Another study on TM strategies in the U.A.E. strategy through adoption of Sheikh Khalifa Excellence award, and other awards for creative and talented people to help in developing TM culture and supportive strategies in order to achieve the strategic vision for the organization in the near and long-term perspectives. The study recommended more emphasis on TM to attract qualified talents, ensure continuity in organizations, develop a strategy for education and training, and facilitate the Arab labor mobility, develop a model of talent management as a vehicle for achieving excellence in providing services or products to meet consumers' expectations and excel competitors(*Al- Hamidi and al-Hadi, 2011*).

In the **State of Kuwait**, a study on TM was conducted on Kuwaiti commercial banks' innovative orientation towards achieving competitive advantages. It found significant impact between innovation and competitive advantages of responsiveness and excellence. The study recommended the need for looking for new patterns in operational management in order to be competitive and to allow for more participation by employees in the decision-making process to help achieve competitive advantage (*Al-Mutairi, 2012*).

It can be concluded from the above mentioned literature review that TM is an influential force in creating and sustaining competitive advantages which make it necessary for all kinds of organizations (whether public or private, or joint sectors) to adopt suitable TM strategies which fit their goals. This study which was based on a questionnaire distributed to administrators in a random stratified sample of government agencies, can fill a gap in research regarding TM strategies in government agencies. It aims to examine if TM strategies were applied and whether they are effective in achieving competitive advantages.

The Field Study

Methodology

This exploratory study adopts a descriptive approach in investigating Kuwaiti government agencies' application of TM strategies and competitive agencies from administrators' perspectives. Secondary and primary data collection were engaged in this endeavor. Secondary data were collected of prior studies, papers, articles, books and the World Wide Web. Primary data collection was carried out using a self-designed questionnaire, which was developed by the researcher based upon the literature review. The questionnaire consisted of four parts. The first part included 7 demographic items covering

type of agency, position, gender, age, education, experience, and nationality. The second part included 20 items covered recruitment, development, maintenance, and succession planning TM strategies. The third part included 20 items covering quality, efficiency, innovation, responsiveness, and excellence as competitive strategies. The fourth part consisted of two open-ended questions. The first question was about obstacles facing government agencies in adopting TM strategies and achieving competitive advantages. The second question was about administrators' suggestions on how government agencies can better adopt TM strategies and competitive advantages. The value of Cronbach alpha of these constructs was 0.968, indicating a high internal consistency as the most often used measure of reliability ranging from zero to 1 with values of 0.60 to 0.70 deemed the lower limit of acceptability (Sekran, 2003). The face validity of the questionnaire was ensured through a pilot study by presenting the questionnaire to 10 faculty members, where the format of the questionnaire was modified according to their comments and suggestions. Questionnaire's items were measured on a five-point Likert's scale (1) "strongly disagree," (2) "disagree," (3) "neutral," (4) "agree," and (5) "strongly agree". When measuring items, respondents were asked about their degree of dis/agreement. Calculated weights of respondents' answers on a five-point Likert's scale were interpreted as follows: Less than 3 points means low, 3-3.5 points means good, 3.51-3.99 points means very good, 4 points or more means excellent.

Data Analysis and Methods of Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical methods, which were used in analyzing data, include frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation, variance, regression analysis, and inferential statistics (T-test) data using version 23 of SPSS software.

Population and Sample

The total study population consisted of a random sample of 12 government agencies including four ministries, four government authorities/institutions, and four state-owned companies. The study sample consisted of 380 of departments' directors in these agencies. The researcher and two trained research assistants administered questionnaires during the fall of 2015. The total number of 328 completed questionnaires were collected which accounts for 86% response rate. Frequencies and percentages of respondents about demographic characteristics are shown in table (1). It indicates that 58.8% of respondents came from ministries, 25.6% from public authorities and institutions, and 15.6% from state-owned

companies. Regarding job title, 29.6% were human resources directors, and 70.4% were other directors. Regarding gender, males constituted 61.9%, and females 38.1%. With respect to age, 36.3% were 30-less than 40 years old, 33.2% were 50 years and more, 27.7% between 40 to less than 40 years old, and 2.7% from 20 to less than 30 years old. Regarding education, 70.1% had first university degree, 12.5% had two years of college education or less, and 17.4% had Master or higher university degree. With regard to years of experience, 50.6% respondents had 15 years or more, 27.1% had 5 –less than 10 years, 18.6% had 10 to less than 15 years, and 3.7% had less than 5 years. With regard to nationality, 98.8% were Kuwaitis and 1.2% were non-Kuwaitis.

Table 1
Profile of the Sample
(N= 300)

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<u>Type of Agency</u>		
1. Ministry	193	58.8
2. Public authority/Institution	084	25.6
3. State owned Company	051	15.6
<u>Position</u>		
1. Human Resources Director	097	29.6
2. Directors of Other Departments	231	70.4
<u>Gender</u>		
1. Male	203	61.9
2. Female	125	38.1
<u>Age Group</u>		
1. 20 - less than 36 years	9.0	2.7
2. 30 - Less than 40 years	119	36.3
3. 40 - less than 50 years	91	27.7
4. 50 years and more	109	33.2
<u>Education</u>		
1. 2 years College and less	41	12.5
2. B.Sc. degree	230	70.1
3. Master degree and above	57	17.4
<u>Experience</u>		
1. less than 5 years	12	3.7
2. 5 to Less than 10 years	89	27.1
3. 10 years -less than 15 years	61	18.6
4. 15 years and more	166	50.6
<u>Nationality</u>		
1. Kuwaiti	324	98.8
2. Non Kuwaiti	4	1.2
Total	328	100

Results & Discussion

Answers to Study Questions

1. Do Kuwaiti government agencies apply TM strategies?

Results of the study showed that the means and standard deviations of administrators' evaluation of TM strategies and competitive advantages as shown in table (2). The overall mean for all talent strategies on Likert's five -point scale was 3.14 points.

Table (2)

Means & Standard Deviations of Talent Management Strategies & Competitive Advantages

Strategies	Means	S. Deviations	Application Level
Talent Management Strategies together	3.14	.74721	Medium
Recruitment strategy	3.03	.92121	Medium
Development Strategy	3.13	.885139	Medium
Maintenance Strategy	3.28	.73382	Medium
Succession Planning Strategy	3.08	.87633	Medium
Competitive Advantages Strategies together	3.23	.67323	Medium
Quality	3.34	.79724	Medium
Efficiency	3.27	.73712	Medium
Responsiveness	3.17	.84623	Medium
Innovation	3.17	.72870	Medium
Excellence	3.19	.82153	Medium

The means for various strategies on Likert's five-point scale were 3.03 for recruitment strategy, 3.13 talent development strategy, 3.28 for maintenance strategy, 3.08 for employment strategy. These results showed that the overall evaluation of TM strategy is at a good level. The results showed that government agencies apply TM strategies and achieve competitive advantages at a good level. These results are in contrast to Al-Azzam's study results, which showed that Jordanian government agencies apply TM strategies at a high level (Al-Azzam, 2014). These results showed that there is a gap to be bridged in this regard by

Kuwaiti government agencies. Such an effort is imperative as Kuwaiti government is entrusted to play a leading role in national development, as it is the greatest reservoir of national human resources. Kuwaiti citizens constitute 93% of the total work force in the public sector, which is the prime driving force for achieving national aspiration for achieving sustainable development. This requires that Kuwaiti administrative leaders in government agencies exert sincere efforts to recruit, train, maintain, motivate, and best use national talents in the country and look to them as the main vehicle for achieving excellence. This objective can be realized through building an organizational climate and culture, which enhances positive work ethics including empowerment, trust, cooperation, innovation among other values, which are very essential for transforming the workforce towards TM strategies and competitive advantages.

2. Do Kuwaiti public administration agencies achieve competitive advantages?

To answer this question, means and standard deviations were calculated. Study results as shown in table (2), showed that the overall mean of competitive advantages was 3.23. Individual competitive strategies means were 3.34 for quality, 3.27 for efficiency, and 3.17 for responsiveness, 3.17, and 3.19 for excellence. These results are in tune with the application of talent management strategies' results. This result is logical because levels of applying TM strategies and achieving competitive advantages are related.

3. What are the main obstacles, which government agencies face when adopting TM strategies?

Study results concerning main obstacles and constraints that hinder governmental agencies' adoption of TM and achieve competitive advantages showed several factors which can be summarized as follows:

1. Absence of merit standards of public service in various government agencies, especially in leadership positions which negatively influence policy development and decision-making. There are no specific criteria for appointment in these jobs and they follow the same standards of political positions. The Civil Service law and regulations No. 15 of 1979, established criteria for all posts in the civil service with the exception of the leadership positions.

2. Political and social pressures exerted on the various government agencies to take decisions on political grounds, which deprived them from attracting best talents, but excluded them and pushed them to leave work and go to other sectors within or outside Kuwait.
3. Lack of training for top bureaucrats in government agencies in TM and benefits, which can be achieved.
4. Lack of adequate administrative training for government employees especially in supervisory positions on leadership and motivating skills.
5. Absence of performance criteria at individual and institutional levels in terms of key performance indicators ((KPIs) that helped to assess performance objectively against which staff knowledge and those with outstanding performance can be rewarded and those with poor performance can be held accountable.
6. Lack of work and procedures manuals provided by government agencies to employees and citizens, allowing for complicating procedures and discrimination practices in the provision of services.

Testing Hypotheses

H1: Government agencies' adoption of TM strategies affects competitive advantages at significant levels.

To test this hypothesis, simple regression analysis was used because it is an effective means to see the influence of an independent variable on a dependent variable. Study results as shown in table (3) indicated a regression impact at a significant level of TM strategies on competitive advantages. As shown in the table, the regression coefficient value of TM strategies as a whole was 1.029 at a 0.000 significant level. The calculated (T) value was 22.800, which means that the TM strategies variable can predict competitive advantages, as increase of one point in applying TM strategies increases competitive advantages 1.029 points. Results showed strong positive relationship (R) 0.785 between applying TM strategies and competitive advantages, and 61% of (R²), which means that applying TM strategies explains 61% of the competitive advantages. These results support the hypothesis. The findings are similar to findings of other studies (*al-Azzam, 2013; Maaitah, 2013; Al-Maqadmeh; al-Mutairi, 2012*), which indicated influence of Arab culture on adoption of TM strategies. The same above-mentioned results concerning the influence of TM strategies as a

whole on competitive advantages are applicable to the influence of each individual TM strategy on competitive advantages.

Table (3)

Regression Analysis of Talent Management Strategies on Competitive Advantages

Variables	Sig	T	Sig.	F	R2	R	Regression Coefficient	Level of Significance
All Talent Management Strategies	000.**	10.336	.000 ^b	519.849			1.029	Significant
	000.**	22.800			.616	.785 ^a	703.	
Consonant	000.**	18.333					1.817	Significant
Recruitment Strategy	000.**	14.904	.000 ^b	222.131	.405	.637 ^a	465.	
Consonant	000.**	14.877					1.562	Significant
Talent Development Strategy	000.**	16.465	.000 ^b	271.087	.454	.674 ^a	533.	
Consonant	000.**	8.691					.963.	Significant
Maintaining Talents Strategy	000.**	21.027	.000 ^b	442.119	.577	.760 ^a	.693	
Consonant	000.**	16.108					1.452	Significant
Succession Planning Strategy	000.**	20.513	.000 ^b	420.783	.563	.751 ^a	577.	
								Significant

a. Predictors: (Constant), All Talent Management Strategies and for each strategy alone

b. Dependent Variable: Benefiting from competitive advantages

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table (3) showed that the regression coefficient of the impact of applying recruitment strategy on competitive advantages was 1.817 at a significant level. The calculated (T) value was 14.904, which means that an increase of one point in applying recruitment strategy affect competitive advantages 1.817. Moreover, the results showed a positive relationship between talent development and competitive advantages at significant level 0.674. The

calculated value was 16.465, which means that a change in applying this development strategy can predict competitive advantages where an increase of one point in applying this strategy lead to an increase of 1.562. Moreover, results showed a positive relationship 0.674 between applying talent development strategy and competitive advantages, and 45% of (R²), which means that applying talent development strategy explains 45% of the competitive advantages. With respect to talent maintenance, strategy results as shown in table (3) indicated that regression coefficient of applying this strategy affects competitive strategies was 0.963 at a significant level. The calculated value was 21.027, which means that a change in applying this strategy can predict competitive advantages where an increase of one point in applying this strategy lead to an increase of 0.963. Moreover, results showed a positive relationship 0.760 between applying talent maintenance strategy and achieving competitive advantages, and 57% of (R²), which means that that applying talent maintenance strategy explains 57% of the competitive advantages. As far as succession planning strategy is concerned, results as table (3) indicates, that regression coefficient of applying this strategy impact competitive strategies was 1.452 at a significant level. The calculated value was 20.513 which means that a change in applying succession planning strategy can predict competitive advantages where an increase of one point in applying this strategy lead to an increase of 1.452. Moreover, the results showed a positive relationship 0.751 between applying this strategy and competitive advantages, and 56% of (R²), which means that that applying succession planning strategy explains 56% of the competitive advantages

H2: Government administrators' evaluation of government agencies' application of TM strategies varies at a significant level according to type of agency, position, gender, age, education, length of service, and nationality.

To test this hypothesis, the researcher conducted One Way ANOVA analysis. The analysis as shown in table (4) showed variations at significant levels attributed to the type of agency, job title, gender, age, experience, and nationality but not attributed to educational level. These results support the hypothesis. The post hoc tests (Scheffe) showed that variations attributed to type of agency were higher in government authorities/institutions, which might be explained by their structures as they enjoy more autonomy as they work on commercial base, which is not the case in ministries. The variation is reflected in the means, which were 2.85 for government authorities/institutions, 3.07 for ministries, and 3.47 for state-owned companies on Likert's five-point scale. With regard to variations attributed to

job title, results showed that HR directors' evaluation of TM strategies is 0.30 higher than other directors' evaluation. These results might be explained by the fact that HR directors are more appreciative of TM strategies than other directors are. With regard to variations attributed to gender, the mean for male was 2.96 and 3.24 for females. This might be explained by cultural factors as society gives males priority over females in taking leadership positions and major decisions and females share these attitudes. Regarding variations attributed to age groups, post hoc tests (Scheffe) showed that the means were higher in the older age groups than other age groups, which might be explained by cultural attitudes, which consider older people more mature than young generations. Likewise, post hoc tests (Scheffe) showed that variations attributed to experience were higher in less experienced groups than administrators with more years of experience, which is in tune with the previous explanation of variations among age groups.

Table (4)

One-Way ANOVA of Applying Talent Management Strategies According to Demographic Variables

Talent Management Strategies	Sig.	F Value	Acceptance/rejection of hypothesis
Talent Management Strategies & type of Agency	.000**	13.847	Acceptance
Talent Management Strategies & Job title	.001**	11.595	Acceptance
Talent Management Strategies & Gender	.001**	11.134	Acceptance
Talent Management Strategies & Age	.000**	6.963	Acceptance
Talent Management Strategies & Education	.316	1.156	Rejecting
Talent Management Strategies & Experience	.001**	6.017	Acceptance
Talent Management Strategies & Nationality	.011**	6.593	Acceptance

*significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Finally, conclusions on variations attributed to nationality, as study results showed, cannot be drawn as the number of non-Kuwaitis were just 4 administrators while Kuwaitis were 324.

H3: Government administrators’ evaluation of government agencies’ adoption of competitive advantages vary at a significant level according to type of agency, job title, gender, age, education, length of service, and nationality.

To test this hypothesis, the researcher conducted One Way ANOVA analysis. The analysis as shown in table (5) indicated variations at significant levels attributed to the type of agency, job title, gender, age, experience, and nationality but not attributed to educational level. These results support the hypothesis. The results are similar to the results of Al Anqari’s study on variations in employees’ evaluation of Jordanian government agencies of competitive strategies attributed to type of agencies.

Table (5)

One Way ANOVA of Competitive Strategies according to Demographic Variables

Competitive Strategies	Sig.	F Value	Acceptance/rejection of hypothesis
Type of Agency	.000*	8.838	Acceptance
Job title	.003*	9.220	Acceptance
Gender	.001*	10.617	Acceptance
Age	.000*	6.633	Acceptance
Education	.764	.270	Rejection
Experience	.565	.680	Rejection
Nationality	.018*	5.643	Acceptance

*significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The post hoc tests (Scheffe) showed that variations attributed to type of agency is higher in public authorities/institutions than other government agencies, which might be explained by their different structure, as they enjoy more autonomy because they work on commercial bases, which is not the case in ministries. Regarding variations attributed to gender, it might be explained by cultural factors whereas men are given priority in occupying leadership positions, and taking major decisions which females share these attitudes. Regarding variations attributed to age groups, post hoc tests (Scheffe) showed means of older age groups were higher than other age groups, which might be explained also by cultural

attitudes, which consider older people more mature than younger generations. Likewise, post hoc tests (Scheffe) showed that variations in evaluations attributed to experience are higher in less experienced groups than the case with more experienced administrators, which is in tune with previous explanation of variation among age groups. No generalizations concerning variation attributed to nationality as the number of non-Kuwaitis were four administrators only while Kuwaitis were 324.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In view of analyzing data, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Kuwaiti government agencies apply TM strategies at a good level with a mean of 3.14 on a five-point Likert's scale and a standard deviation 0.74721.
2. Kuwaiti government agencies apply competitive strategies at a good level with mean of 3.23 on a five-point Likert's scale and a standard deviation 0.67323.
3. There are similarities in levels of TM and competitive strategies, which reflect shared culture among all government agencies in Kuwait (ministries, public authorities/institutions, and state-owned companies).
4. TM strategies have an impact on competitive advantages as study findings showed significant positive correlations 0.785 and that applying TM strategies as an independent variable explains 61% of competitive advantages as a whole, or as individual strategies, as a dependent variable.
5. Administrators' evaluation of government agencies' application of TM strategies vary according to type of agency, position, gender, age, and nationality, but not to education and years of experience.
6. Administrators' evaluation of government agencies' achievement of competitive strategies vary according to type of agency, position, gender, age, experience and nationality, but not to education.

Recommendations

Results of the study showed that it is important that decision makers in all government organizations give more attention to talent management and adopting TM strategies, which can help them to achieve competitive advantages. This is of particular importance in the State of Kuwait now for two reasons. The first reason is the diminishing public resources because

of the dramatic decline in oil export revenues, which constitute the main component in the financial resources of the State of Kuwait. The second reason is the increasing expectations and popular demands to deliver public services efficiently and effectively in a manner that can enhance state's legitimacy, especially in the period of the so-called Arab spring that causes instability of many Arab States and no country in the region is immune to its repercussions. It is no longer reasonable for governmental agencies in the State of Kuwait, despite the availability of financial resources, not to improve performance levels in managing available national human resources and continues to be highly dependent on either non-Kuwaitis in the private or public sectors. It is incomprehensible that Kuwaitis continue to look for the government sector as a safe haven, even if they are not motivated enough, and not willing to perform their duties, and continue getting jobs just because they are Kuwaitis. The government sector cannot pursue employing Kuwaitis even if there is no real need for employing them. It is no longer possible for any state to continue employing people as a way to distribute wealth for humanitarian reasons. In view of research findings and administrators' suggestions, the researcher recommends that decision-makers consider the following measures:

1. More attention should be made by government decision makers to TM strategies, as a means for achieving competitive advantages, and transitional processes consistent with cognitive and technical developments, that had increased citizens' expectations eligible for getting good services from government employees in return for generous salaries they earn.
2. Adopting TM strategies, systems, and clearly defined policies to attract talents on merit bases as the case in the private sector, which emphasizes a clear relationship between performance and compensation to ensure the level of performance away from patronage systems.
3. Investing more in leadership training because leaders are the main engine for motivating administrators' to adopt TM strategies, which can promote excellence in the services, provided to beneficiaries.
4. Investing more in development and training at all levels especially for supervisory jobs to emphasize humanitarian methods in HR, which can create a healthy organizational culture, which can foster confidence, and create more commitment which contribute to overcoming difficulties in work, strengthening positive leadership styles.

5. Enhancing the sense of empowerment of managers in various government agencies by giving them greater powers to strengthen confidence and contribute to changing traditional perceptions of leaders, and improve bureaucratic administration and change its negative connotations as slow and corruptive machine, by providing a supportive cultural environment with open communication channels.
6. Emphasizing an effective system of accountability in its positive and negative dimensions, and adopting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) at individual and institutional levels to ensure good performance is rewarded and deviations are held accountable.
7. Conducting more research studies, seminars and workshops on TM in government agencies to improve HRM and enhance the concept of quality services. More research is needed on the relationship between TM and competitive advantages in government agencies.
8. Conducting in-depth studies about the role of talented people and strategies for dealing with them and strategies for attracting and developing talents in particular.

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