



An evaluation of fellowship program on talent management a case study at the centre for infectious disease research in Zambia (Cidrz)

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Abstract

Fellowship programs have gained prominence as strategic tools in talent management, nurturing the growth and development of early career professionals. This study presents an in-depth analysis of the evaluation of the influence of fellowship program implemented by (CIDRZ) within the context of talent management. CIDRZ's fellowship program has evolved into a cornerstone of talent management, serving as a conduit for cultivating and harnessing talent. The program's structured approach, mentorship, and real-world immersion provide participants with the practical skills required to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and its application in the field. This study utilized a casual research design imbedded in a mixed methods approach and employed Taro Yamene's formula to calculate the 121-sample size. Data was collected from a purposive sample where a survey questionnaire was self-administered for the quantitative data which was analysed by Stata. A research interview guide was used to collect qualitative data from key informers. This study explores the multifaceted influence of the fellowship program on career progression, talent development, and organizational growth and the impact of the declining opportunities for fellowship positions as postulated by literature and perceptions on the ground. It delves into the experiences of program beneficiaries, revealing that the fellowship program has substantially improved their career opportunities, honed their skills, and instilled a deeper sense of professional competence. Graduates of the program have seamlessly transitioned into full-time positions, assumed leadership roles, and, in several instances, embarked on independent research endeavors. Furthermore, CIDRZ's fellowship program has attracted international attention, thereby enhanced the organization's reputation, and generated increased demand for participation. However, the program has not been without challenges. Issues such as funding constraints, and the need for ongoing adaptation have presented hurdles along the way. Additionally, the program's status has exhibited periods of growth and decline, reflecting the dynamic nature of fellowship initiatives. The study further reveals that highlevel leadership championship is required for the growth and sustainability of the fellowship training program. In conclusion, this study underscores the remarkable impact of CIDRZ's fellowship program on talent management, emphasizing its role as a catalyst for talent development, knowledge dissemination, and organizational capacity building. Despite challenges and fluctuations, the program remains an invaluable asset in CIDRZ's pursuit of effective talent management.

Keywords: Healthcorps fellowship training program, talent management, capacity development, declining fellowship opportunities, centre for infectious disease research in Zambia

Introduction

The Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia (CIDRZ) is a non-profit organisation founded in 2001 as a collaboration between the University of Alabama at Birmingham, United States of America (USA), the Ministry of Health of Zambia and the University of Zambia School of Medicine. In 2011 CIDRZ became an independent, Zambian, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) able to collaborate with multiple local and international universities (CIDRZ, 2015, HR Manual). The organisation's vision is a Zambia and a region, in which all people have access to quality healthcare and enjoy the best possible health, including a life free of AIDS¹. It is also guided by a mission to improve access to quality healthcare in Zambia through capacity development, exceptional implementation science and research and impactful and sustainable public health programmes (CIDRZ Annual Report, 2021).

CIDRZ through its collaboration, received manpower support from the USA to support its outreach work and help build capacity in the local people for sustainability. In 2004, medical students seeking to fulfil their educational requirements of a practicum with international experience for their studies were sent to Zambia to support the HIV/AIDS programs. To enhance capacity development,

students from local universities at the time mostly from the University of Zambia, were paired with the American Students to work in the various programs implemented by the organisation. The students undertook this practicum during the school recess periods. This program was then known as the HIV Corps Program.

In 2012, after CIDRZ was incorporated as a local NGO, it enlarged its mandate beyond HIV/AIDS to include other infectious diseases. This change also necessitated a reorganization of several programs within the organisation including its training programs. The HIV Corps Program was restructured to be used for capacity development in various fields. It was renamed to be known as the CIDRZ HealthCorps Fellowship Program (CIDRZ Annual Report, 2018).

In the dynamic landscape of talent acquisition, the HealthCorps Fellowship Program emerges as a strategic response to the global "war for talent" (Michaels *et al.*, 2001, McKinsey Quarterly) ^[22]. As organizations vie for the most exceptional professionals, the HealthCorps Fellowship Program focuses on developing and retaining top-tier talent within its ranks. While the program has expanded its reach to encompass candidates worldwide and from diverse local universities, the challenge lies in declining fellowship

opportunities available. ensuring that the fellowship effectively identifies, nurtures, and retains this talent.

The overarching goal of the HealthCorps Fellowship is to contribute to a robust pool of researchers and skilled professionals, yet the program's success hinges on addressing specific challenges. These challenges include refining the selection process to attract the best talent, structuring a curriculum that optimally develops participants' strengths and skills, and utilizing various strategies such as mentoring, coaching, and specialized exercises to enhance their capabilities. Furthermore, in a context where the global market for talent is fiercely competitive, there is a need to continually assess and adapt the fellowship program to meet evolving needs and expectations.

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the HealthCorps Fellowship Program in achieving its goals of talent identification, development, and retention. By analyzing the program's structure, strategies, and outcomes, the research seeks to provide insights into areas for improvement, ensuring that the fellowship remains a cornerstone in the organization's talent management strategy.

The HealthCorps Fellowship Program is focused on capacity development for early career researchers and health professionals. It was expanded to now accept candidates from any country in the world and any local university in Zambia. To contribute to a pool of researchers for the organisation, the fellowship program was also used as a strategy to identify and develop talent for retention into the organisation and onward specialization.

The HealthCorps Fellowship was structured to attract top talent, with a strict assessment at selection into the program. The program also comprises of a strict curriculum that allows for identification of strengths and development of skills necessary for a researcher or any knowledgeable professional. The program utilizes strategies such as mentoring and coaching, regulator check-in sessions, scientific writing exercises, and a Journal Club which are used to horn participants presentation and scientific writing skills.

The war for talent as postulated by (Michaels *et al.*, 2001) ^[22] in Mckinsey's quarterly journal entails that every organisation is looking to hire the best talent on the market. (Rabbi *et al.*, 2015) ^[25] also postulates that if you cannot find readily available talent on the market, you can grow it. One of the methods of growing talent is done through training and focused capacity development programs. There are several training programs which can be utilized for talent development in the workplace which include Internships, Industrial attachments, apprenticeship, Fellowships and other inclusive training and development programs

Statement of the Research Problem

In the dynamic landscape of talent acquisition, the HealthCorps Fellowship Program at CIDRZ has strategically evolved to address the global "war for talent" (Michaels *et al.*, 2001, McKinsey Quarterly) ^[22]. As organizations worldwide vie for exceptional professionals, CIDRZ's HealthCorps Fellowship aims to attract, develop, and retain top-tier talent. Despite its expansion to a global talent pool and inclusion of candidates from diverse local

universities, the program grapples with challenges in effectively identifying, nurturing, and retaining talent.

The literature reviewed underscores the pivotal role of fellowship programs in evaluating potential leadership candidates, fostering interaction between current management and emerging professionals, and introducing contemporary academic theories (Buell, 2012; Lomperis *et al.*, 2014) ^[15]. However, fellowship programs, including CIDRZ's HealthCorps, are confronted with challenges such as high per-person costs and insufficient funding, leading to a decline in opportunities (Mihalec-Adkins, 2022) ^[23].

At CIDRZ, the HealthCorps Fellowship program, once admitting seventeen fellows in its inaugural year and maintaining an average annual enrollment of 15 fellows over the subsequent five years, has experienced a consistent decline. The last two consecutive years have seen no fellowship openings (CIDRZ Fellows Database, 2022). This decline raises critical concerns about its impact on CIDRZ's talent management strategy, particularly as fellowship programs are integral for nurturing a pool of skilled professionals for future recruitment.

Therefore, this research aims to comprehensively evaluate the HealthCorps Fellowship Program's effectiveness in talent identification, development, and retention, with a specific focus on the decline in fellowship opportunities. By analyzing the program's structure, strategies, and outcomes in the context of existing literature, the study seeks to provide insights into the implications of reduced fellowship availability for CIDRZ's ability to advance its research agenda and meet strategic goals. The investigation will address the challenges posed by the decline in fellowship opportunities and provide actionable recommendations for the program's enhancement.

Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to assess the influence of the HealthCorps Fellowship Program's decline on talent management at CIDRZ.

Research Objectives

General Objective

- The objective of this research will be to evaluate the declining opportunities of the HealthCorps Fellowship training program on Talent Management at CIDRZ

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the correlation of the HealthCorps Fellowship training program on talent availability in CIDRZ
2. To assess the influence of the fellowship training program on career development of the participating fellows
3. To understand strategies which can be used to improve the decline of fellowship training program to enhance talent management at CIDRZ.

Research Questions

1. How does relationship between the fellowship training program and Talent Management affect talent availability at CIDRZ?
2. How does the fellowship training program influence the career progression of its beneficiaries?
3. What strategies can be used to improve the decline of fellowship training program

Significance of the study

The fellowship program has been implemented for several years without an evaluation of its contribution to talent management and its contribution to organizational performance. In light of declining opportunities, this study therefore will evaluate the influence on the HealthCorps fellowship program on talent management identify and analyze the key factors that have led to the decreasing number of fellowship opportunities at CIDRZ. (Rabbi *et al.*, 2015) [25] vias that you can buy the talent on the labour market, or you can grow the talent. The HealthCorps Fellowship training program is capacity development strategy for nurturing talent within the organisation. The study therefore will evaluate the contribution of the training program to talent management for the organisation. Additionally, the study aims to explore the consequences of this decline on CIDRZ's ability to identify, develop, and retain skilled professionals crucial for advancing its research agenda and achieving strategic goals. Through an in-depth examination, the study intends to contribute valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge on fellowship programs and talent management within research-focused organizations

Rationale for the research

The study will provide valuable information of the contribution of the fellowship program as a platform to develop talent for the organisation. It will also add to the academic body of knowledge on the presence of fellowship training programs in Zambia and their usefulness in shaping the career trajectory of its beneficiaries. The study area has been chosen because of the author’s interest in the phenomenon of fellowships, how it utilizes mentorship and exposure to hands on work experience to build capacity in people. This is coupled with how such platforms can be used to develop talent which can contribute to any organisation’s strategic goals. The author has worked as Training Coordinator for the program and other capacity development initiatives within CIDRZ for over 5 years.

Research Design Matrix

Table 1: Research Design Matrix

Research Questions	Research Objectives	Population and sampling	Data Collection technique	Data Analysis
How does relationship between the fellowship training program and Talent Management affect talent availability at CIDRZ?	To assess the correlation of the HealthCorps Fellowship training program on talent availability in CIDRZ	Purposive sampling	Questionnaire Key informant Interviews	Univariate and bivariate analysis
How does the fellowship training program influence the career progression of its beneficiaries?	To assess the influence of the fellowship training program on career development of the participating fellows	Purposive sampling	Questionnaire Key informant Interviews	Thematic analysis
What strategies can be used to improve the decline of fellowship training program	To understand strategies which can be used to improve the decline of fellowship training program to enhance talent management at CIDRZ	Purposive sampling	Questionnaire Key informant Interviews	Univariate and bivariate analysis

Data collection instruments

The study used both primary data and secondary data. Primary data was collected by way of interviews and questionnaires, while secondary data collected from a

Delimitation of the Study

Talent Management has attracted increasing attention from academicians and practitioners in recent years, but there are many gaps and omissions left for further theoretical and empirical development (Cannon and McGee, 2011) [8]. The correlation of implementing a specific training program to how it impacts an organisation’s talent pool has not been widely studied and documented in Zambia. This study anticipates adding to the body of knowledge by contextualizing the influence of a HealthCorps fellowship training programs to an organisation’s Talent management. This study will be conducted at the CIDRZ head office in Lusaka.

Research Assumptions

The study's presumptions include that the study's instruments would collect the necessary responses in an impartial manner. The study participants did comprehend the questionnaire, and the participants will offer their opinions about how the fellowship program has affected talent management honestly and openly.

Material and Methods

This study pursued the qualitative approach through interviews with key staff at CIDRZ who have pushed the agenda for the fellowship program and understand the essence and its intended results in the long term on the organisation. Qualitative data was gathered from the fellowship alumni and the current fellows. The qualitative approach was ideal for this research because the aim of the study was to gather in-depth information about the implementation of the fellowship training program on talent management and what factors are leading to the program’s decline
 This study pursued the quantitative approach through self-administered questionnaires given to members from the fellowship alumni, the current fellows, and employees within CIDRZ. By collecting questionnaire data from these participants, the quantitative part of this study provided key statistical data relating to the implementation of the fellowship training program to talent management.
 The research methodology for this study was a case study.

review of policy documents and internal databases as well as institutional annual reports.
 The findings of the study as collected from the respondents through a survey that was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The

survey was conducted using an online platform on google where a link to a google form was shared with the participants. The in-depth interviews were mostly conducted virtually while a few were held physically. All interview sessions were recorded for coding and analysis on a Microsoft teams' platform.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the influence of the fellowship training program on talent management at CIDRZ. By elucidating the connections between propositions, the researcher was able to draw connections and provide conceptual coherence. The research was firmly rooted in the pursuit of connections between theoretical concepts in fellowship training programs. The study identified the fundamental components of the fellowship training program and offered insight into how these antecedents affect talent management within an organization. The criteria that were reported and measured made it evident that the study's objective was met. Based on the empirical data acquired, the research results mostly support the preliminary findings of the literature review. As such, the study offers a conclusion of outcomes that is consistent with the research questions.

Determining the connection between Talent Management and the fellowship training program was the first study objective. The evidence gathered through this study reveals that a relation does exist and generally the fellowship training program leaves a positive impact on the career progression of its beneficiaries. Many fellows have advanced in their careers, transitioned to leadership roles, pursued further education, and contributed significantly to the organization's mission.

Further, the study established that the fellowship training program enhances skills development and capacity building. The program effectively develops skills and competencies required for career progression. It provides practical experience, mentorship, and opportunities for knowledge sharing, enhancing the professional growth of early career professionals.

Talent Acquisition and Retention: The fellowship program contributes to talent acquisition by bringing in fresh talent and creating a talent pool within the organization. It also aids in talent retention, with successful fellows often being retained or reincorporated as staff. This is evidence that the fellowship program can be utilized as a talent management strategy.

The second research question was structured to demonstrate the influence of the training program on the career progression of its beneficiaries. The findings show the most positive influence that the fellowship program has had on its beneficiaries. Career Decision Support was highlighted among other findings. The program assists fellows in making informed career decisions by exposing them to various career pathways and providing real-world grounding in their chosen fields. The fellowship also provides a platform for networking and knowledge.

The third research question was applied to analyze the status of the fellowship program and uncover strategies to improve its offering at CIDRZ. Evidence based results revealed that the status of the fellowship program is varied from decline, stalled, active and some participants being unsure. It also uncovered some of the reasons for the declined fellowship program. However, the findings further provided strategies to improve the program, recommended best practices and

provided some research-based resources necessary to run a fellowship program.

This study has been informative and provided sufficient evidence-based information on how a fellowship training is correlated to talent management, how it can be used for talent management and strategies to improve and best practices for its implementation in any setting.

In summary, the CIDRZ fellowship training program has proven to be a valuable asset for talent management, career progression, and capacity building within the organization. It contributes to research excellence, skills development, and the acquisition of talented individuals. However, addressing post-fellowship challenges will be essential for sustaining the program's success.

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