

Public relations campaign planning



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Research and Situational Analysis

The term ‘brain drain’ refers to the outflow of entrepreneurial skills and talent hindering productivity and, possibly, prospects for economic growth (Tyson, 2011). The Malaysian brain drain dilemma is attributed to political, economic, social and cultural causes (Tyson, 2011). The current world average of brain drain stands at about 5 per cent, whereas Malaysia’s was at 10 per cent in the year 2000. (Foo, 2011). Out of a population of 27 million, there are an estimated 1.5 million Malaysians living abroad.

The last decade brought much scrutiny and substantial media analysis on the topic of brain drain in Malaysia. Emphasis was put on numbers of skilled Malaysian-born people emigrating and its lasting effects on the Malaysian economy (Foo, 2011). In a study conducted by Foo, by examining destination country characteristics, it has been found that some of the key determinants of the brain drain dilemma include religious diversity, high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, proximity to home country, and English language usage.

The main causes of brain drain, however, are deeply rooted and entrenched in the Malaysian society. In recent years a large of Malaysian emigrants proved to young non-Bumiputeras, In a survey conducted by the World Bank, the chief reason Malaysians abroad cite as their reason for leaving the country is social injustice. The respondents cited unequal opportunities in attaining scholarships and places in higher learning institutions (Azlan, Jeram, Sivapragasam, & Tyson, 2011). Another large number cited the lack of career prospects and unattractive salaries in Malaysia as a deterrent in the decision of coming back to Malaysia.

All these matters, of course attribute to the various government policies that encourage race-based incentives rather than merit-based ones. The policies in question are the economic models that uphold the ‘ special’ Bumiputera rights and the revisionist Ketuanan Melayu policies (Azlan, Jeram, Sivapragasam, & Tyson, 2011). The barriers are the main causes identified in instigating the talent exodus or brain drain in Malaysia. The government needs to acknowledge that the brain drain is at the cost most of national development, future competitiveness and productivity (Azlan, Jeram, Sivapragasam, & Tyson).

To help counter the brain drain dilemma, under the Prime Minister’s Department and the 10TH Malaysian Plan, Talent Corporation Malaysia Berhad (TalentCorp), was established in the year 2011 in hopes of activating and facilitating initiatives that will help to put an end to the outflow of the country’s talent. The corporation will be working closely and establishing affiliations with many Malaysian Government agencies and leading companies. TalentCorp boasts a plethora of affirmative programmes to engage and attract Malaysian talents that have settled overseas while also focusing on nurturing and developing those already within Malaysia. Network-building between these talents are also prioritized.

Although still new, TalentCorp claims to have a clear vision in running their organisation, which is to build effective partnerships, and make a difference in addressing Malaysia’s talent needs to enable the country to reach its aspiration of a high-income nation (About Us: TalentCorp, 2011). TalentCorp also possesses a one-stop centre to deal with related matters pertaining to immigration and government documentation.

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To analyse TalentCorp deeper, SWOT analysis can be utilized to identify the corporation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. One main strength that TalentCorp has is it is run by a group of relatively young professionals, all around 25 to 40 years of age, all led by Johan Mahmood Merican. This means that the management itself could relate and acknowledge the stakeholders because of the similar age and similar experiences they may have gone through, and vice-versa. The new brains will bring a much needed vigour and vitality to the scene, especially when the old existing policies were set up by policy makers and politicians who are of an older generation. The corporation's new and affirmative action team hopes to create a distinctive competence in managing the talent in Malaysia, unlike their predecessors.

The main weakness of TalentCorp would be the age of the organisation itself. Since it is a newly set up organization, it may not have prominence and influence in the society yet. As a corporation, it has limited visibility and only gained nationwide exposure for a limited amount of time during the conception of the corporation. Ever since that, there has been virtually no mention of the corporations in major media platforms, even though articles and commentaries criticizing the nature of the corporation pops up from time to time in mainly opposition online media. This results in many young Malaysians in and outside of the country to fail to acknowledge TalentCorp and become aware of what it functions as.

One opportunity that TalentCorp has is that it is in collaboration with many other Government agencies. Currently, it is working together with the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), Inland Revenue Board (LHDN), Ministry

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of Finance (MoF), the Public Service Department (JPA) among others. With all these partnerships at its disposal, TalentCorp can benefit greatly from the resources, manpower, and intellectual property to come up with even better policies in the benefit of its stakeholders.

The main threat that the corporation faces is the target audience themselves. The professionals who are living abroad already made that difficult decision to migrate in hopes of greener pastures elsewhere. It is important to know that most of the emigrants are of non-Bumiputera stock, mainly comprising of Malaysian Chinese. Looking back at the main causes of brain drain, while abroad, these people have become accustomed to being rewarded based on their personal performance and merit, unlike the Bumiputera-rights based policies they have been subjected to in Malaysia. While TalentCorp, with its various incentives and affirmative action plans might be able to convince them that there are opportunities abound in the homeland, the professionals will be doubtful of the existence of a meritocracy-based, level-playing field, back home. This raging doubt coupled with the many unpleasant happenings in the country they have come to know from a globally wired world may be the biggest deterrent of them returning home. TalentCorp needs to realize all these and investigate further into the issue.

Action Planning

Objectives

In relation to public relations management campaign strategies, the main objectives of TalentCorp are to be evaluated. The objectives of this corporation are:

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- To optimise Malaysian talent;
- To attract and facilitate global talent; and
- To build networks of top talent

To analyse the objectives, the SMART objective approach should be used.

The objectives should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound. In the case of TalentCorp's objectives, they merely state the obvious, without specifically stating the details of what has to be done. There is little information on how the objective is supposed to be measured and attained, with the absence of actual quantifiable figures. The lack of a specific time-frame suggests that there is no specific time-period for corporation's activities to be carried out. The objectives instead should be presented as:

- to optimize Malaysian talent by 50% among Malaysians by the end of 2014,

Key Messages

The key messages that should be prominent during the entire course of the campaign are:

1. Suicide can be prevented through early detection and professional intervention.
2. Suicide is not the solution, seek professional help.
3. Suicide is a growing problem in Malaysia.

Target Public

TalentCorp's the primary target audience or the group and the current focus of their campaign are Malaysian citizens currently staying and working

overseas. Although this target public is the essence of establishing the whole programme, emphasis should also be given to Malaysian students currently pursuing tertiary education, who are contemplating on staying in their host country when studying overseas in the future, as they are the future of the country.

The secondary target public are the journalists and a variety of media houses to promote the agenda of TalentCorp to future primary target audience and the Malaysian public.

Strategies

Based on the objective of optimizing Malaysian talent, these three strategies have been put forward:

1. Raise career awareness by of ETP career opportunities for tertiary students through physical and virtual channels and involving selected company partners and key sectors
2. Build platforms to optimise talent-Manage assignment of scholars- Establish early involvement of industry in university life- Encourage collaboration of companies, industry bodies and learning institutions to develop structured internships
3. Enhance school-to-work transition- Upskill to address critical skills gaps in key sectors- Advocate policy change Build HR community and advocate best practices

Based on the objective of attracting and facilitating global talent, these strategies have been put forward:

1. Outreach to Malaysians abroad- Assist key industries and companies to meet talent requirements through facilitation and outreach programmes
2. Facilitate returning talent- Facilitate ease of entry for global talent & Address policy impediments on entry of global talent
3. Enhance expatriate facilitation- Facilitate ease of entry for global talent & Pilot catalytic initiatives for policy refinement

Based on the objective of building networks of top talent, these are the strategies that have been put forward:

1. Build networks of future leaders -Develop networks for leadership pipelining & Private-Public Sector and Intra-Private Sector Talent Cross Assignments
2. Develop diaspora networking platforms- Develop networks of professional diaspora and eminent Malaysians to assess opportunities in Malaysia or contribute from abroad
3. Engage expatriate community- Engage expatriate community to develop networks

Communication

Tactics

The tactics can basically be separated into two categories; public campaign tactics and media campaign tactics. This is because the different target publics need different strategies to be communicated to. But there should always be a realisation that both types of tactics are very-much dependent on each other and are interlinked.

For Malaysian talents already living overseas, professional outreach programmes like sector-focused networking programmes for the Malaysian diaspora are organised in major cities around the world. In these programmes, the participants can be connected to potential employers and explore available opportunities back home. Student outreach programmes can help TalentCorp engage with top Malaysian students abroad. Possible collaborators to look into are the Education Ministry, Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam or JPA and various student associations.

To facilitate returning talent, a programme called the Returning Expert Programme (REP) was introduced, with tax cut incentives, Permanent Resident (PR) status for foreign spouses, and potential positions in Malaysia's leading companies. There is also a REP Club, which functions to provide a sense of inclusiveness within the community and network building.

One public campaign tactic that will directly resonate with the suggested primary target public, Malaysian tertiary students who are contemplating to contribute to the brain drain is to have career fairs and road shows by collaboration with universities and local leading companies. The face-to-face interaction between the students and employer creates channels of raising awareness in job environments and requirements.

Besides that, a regularly updated organisational website will be set up for easy information access that will also serve as an online portal for career awareness and career guidance in attaining jobs in local companies. Building a presence in social media platforms, such as creating a Facebook page or

creating a Twitter account will resonate with the young, tech-savvy individuals of the target public.

Another public campaign tactic is to have upskilling programmes and internship opportunities with leading companies for tertiary education students that will function as a fast track to their career in Malaysia.

Competitions could be held to increase the visibility of TalentCorp in the minds of the students. Working together with JPA, TalentCorp established the Scholarship Talent Attraction & Retention (STAR) programme, whereby a scholarship bond requires the scholars to work with leading companies in Malaysia.

Publishing and printing collaterals such as posters and pamphlets that are distributed to institutions of higher learning will drive the message of these youth-targeted programmes and of the organisation itself to town.

For the media tactics to be carried out, we have to realize that the media plays a crucial role in disseminating any information gained from the client, whereby in this case, is a corporation which is under the purview of the government, to the target audience. Ultimately, in essence, no campaign is successful without a media relations campaign. Hence, as PR practitioners it should be wise to plan out the tactics through a wide range of media. By building the campaign around a newsworthy event like the talent and student outreach programmes, the likelihood of the media houses, especially print media, carrying the stories and key messages will be very high. The measures taken to 'place' news stories will be very important. The media tactics that will be used in the campaign are:

1. Press Releases

The press release announcing the proposition of the event and the campaign in general, would be sent to the database of journalists, newsdesks of major media and even online news organisations. The media targeted in this tactic are print media and online media.

2. Media Briefing

Before an actual press conference is called upon the issue, there could be a small-scale media briefing to let individual or a small, select group of journalists know about the event and the intended key messages to be delivered. A smaller, more intimate session will allow issues to be clarified better and helps develop relationships with journalists as well. The media targeted in this tactic are print media and online media.

3. Press Conference

A national-level outreach programme or event ultimately calls for a press conference to be conducted. Through the press conference, larger groups of journalists and media houses could be targeted. The press conference provides the organisers a controlled environment to unveil statements and deliver their intended key messages accurately. Nevertheless, a press conference can also be an uncontrolled environment as the organisers are subjected to media enquiries and questions. A separate evaluative press conference could be held after the event as well. A media kit containing press statements, profile of the organisation, pamphlets and souvenirs will be provided to all the journalists present. The media targeted in this tactic are print media, broadcast media, and online media

4. Television and Radio

Utilising broadcast media such as television and radio, can be used to address and portray issues clearly. Interviews and talks featuring credible opinion leaders, government officials, and the organisers and management team of TalentCorp themselves will help set the campaign's agenda clearly. Radio could also add an interactive element to the programs aired by encouraging the participation of interactive callers, otherwise known as 'Talkback-Radio'. Also, the broadcast media have a great audience penetration.

Evaluation

Since this is public relations campaign, the evaluative measures should focus and assess the impact of the public relations efforts. But before the summative evaluation, implementation checking and formative monitoring should be conducted to correct any discrepancies and assess the progress of the campaign (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, & Toth, 2013).

To measure the worth of public relations efforts, an impact analysis could be conducted. The audience coverage addresses whether the intended audiences were reached. One could track the media coverage of all the events and activities that have been promoted. For print publication, special electronic databases can be used to track specific key words and terms related to the event. Google News offers a similar service too. The cumulative index of readers of the posts about the campaign and the TalentCorp programmes could also be assessed. In terms of broadcast media, its audience interactivity allows one's to gauge the number of

inquiries, opinions and requests for advice. We could also take the program tune-in rate to account.

At the end of each outreach programme and personal engagements with the publics, a survey could be handed out to a select few of the attendees to measure and evaluate the audience response. This could also be done electronically by including a feedback section in the corporation's website.

Besides that, we could also assess the number of hits on the organisation's website, especially when journalists or other interested parties follow up mentions of the event in other media. For newspapers, we can monitor the number of press-releases that have been issued and comparing it with the newspaper take-up rates. Campaign exposure can also be measured by press cuttings.

With or without consensus, the position of the Malaysian government is quite clear: the brain drain is detrimental to national development, productivity and future competitiveness. Therefore the government continues to experiment with policy initiatives in order to reduce, or even reverse, the brain drain, pinning a significant amount of hope on the newly created Talent Corporation led by Johan Mahmood Merican. Most of the initiatives to date have been about economic reform and have been driven by technocrats, leaving a void that needs to be filled with pragmatic and robust political analysis. For instance, in a somewhat controversial editorial, Mokhtar (2010) opined that the talent exodus can be explained by disillusionment linked to rising crime, a tainted judiciary, human rights abuses, and an outmoded education system. While the general assumption is that Chinese

and Indian Malaysians have a greater tendency to leave because of their *pendatang* (sojourner, alien) status – being guests in a *bumiputera* (Malay) land – increasing numbers of Malays have emigrated as well, disillusioned by corrupt practices as well as the rigid confines of state Islam (Mokhtar 2010).