



Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA)

**Understanding the Hard to Fill Vacancies in the Public
Service Sector: The Case of Provincial Departments.**

Research Report

December 2017

Understanding the Hard to Fill Vacancies in the Public Service Sector: The Case of Provincial Departments.

Research conducted by the Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA)

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Executive Summary

The focus of this study was to analyse, and understand the hard to fill vacancies that exist in provincial government departments and the reasons of the vacancies being deemed hard to fill by those departments. The study explored this question by presenting evidence from the qualitative interviews which PSETA held with key informants from the participating provincial government departments and online survey. The results of this study has shown that the determinants of hard to fill vacancies in the public service vary greatly, depending on individual departments' goals and strategic objectives. However, some reasons do cut across most provincial government departments such as:

- The wages and conditions of employment for some occupations in the public service sector may be less than attractive to candidates.
- Some positions stringently require industry specific qualifications and registration with professional bodies, recruitment of a candidate who meets these requirements at the required level of experience and seniority presents provincial departments with challenges.
- The moratorium on posts by issued by National Treasury on filling of positions in 2015 due to fiscal constraints in provinces. Most provinces are currently implementing the moratorium which impacts on the hard to fill vacancy.

The findings from this study has shown that using the length it takes the vacancy to be filled as a sole indicator of HTFVs can be misleading, the determinants and factors are usually complex and most of them are interrelated and should never be viewed in isolation.

- It is recommended that provincial departments widen their search and change how they recruit or advertise their vacancies in addressing their hard to fill vacancies. Tied to this is the recommendation that job profiles and/or descriptions in the advert plays a key role in attracting the 'right' candidate for vacant positions.
- Building talent pipelines in-house through mentoring and coaching and other mechanisms, succession planning can go a long way in assisting the provincial departments in filling future vacancies and vacancies that are hard to fill.

Chapter1: Background and Introduction

This chapter introduces the research study on understanding the hard to fill vacancies (HTFVs) and their related reasons in the provincial government departments sub-sector within the Public service sector. For the purposes of this study, hard to fill vacancies are defined as those vacancies that take the employer a period longer than six months to find suitable candidates to fill the vacancy (with mainly skills-related reasons)¹.

Sutherland (2010)² mentioned that the underlying reasons why vacancies are hard to fill may vary from organisation to organisation depending upon numerous factors. Given the existence of the problems with hard to fill vacancies, the presence of hard to fill vacancies in provincial departments may negatively impact the performance and production of the workplace, this of course depends upon the number of vacancies, the type of occupations with those vacancies and the duration of the vacancy Sutherland (2010) .

1.1. Motivation for the Study

The highly turbulent South African labour force affects most sectors including the public service sector at provincial level which is the second largest employer in the Public service (after national departments) under the Public Service Act (PSETA, 2017)³. Sutherland (2010) noted that larger sized establishments are more likely to have HTFVs when compared to smaller sized establishments. In the case of this study most provincial government departments fall under medium and large organizations (as sourced from the Workplace Skills Plan (WSP), based on their employee complement. Therefore these establishments are likely to report hard to fill vacancies.

The Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA) has deemed it necessary to embark on a study that will determine whether some of the vacancies

¹ It should be noted that however the provincial government departments follow the Public Service regulations (2016) as a guideline in filling the vacant positions.

² Sutherland, J. (2010). Skills Gaps and Hard to Fill Vacancies at Establishments in Scotland. Centre for Public Policy for Regions University of Glasgow.

³ Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (2017). Sector Skills Plan 2018-19.

within provincial departments are described as hard to fill. The information gathered will help identify the hard to fill vacancies that exist in the sub-sector and will assist in the update of the PSETA Sector Skills Plan. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017)⁴ study on getting skills right attest to the validity of the identified skills needs in the SSPs through the Professional, Vocational, Technical and Academic Learning (PIVOTAL) list depends crucially on the quality of the information provided by employers in this case government provincial departments, as well as the capacity of the SETA to understand and analyse the data. The analysis and understanding of the existence of the hard to fill vacancies in the public service will assist the sector to understand the vacancies which provincial departments find challenges in filling and their related reasons in filling the vacancies. This will assist provincial government departments in channelling its limited resources where most required.

1.2. Aims and Objectives

This study is aimed at analysing, and understanding the hard to fill vacancies that exist in the provincial government departments and the reasons for the vacancies being hard to fill at the provincial level. This study will be guided by the following objectives:

- To determine whether some of the vacancies within the sampled provincial government department are described as hard to fill;
- To understand the skills related reasons for the vacancies to be hard to fill; and
- To understand the non- skills related reasons for the vacancies to be hard to fill.

1.3. Provincial Departments Sub-sectoral Profile and Scope of the Study

The scope of the PSETA is informed by the Standard Industrial Classification of all Economic Activities (SIC) codes that informs the sectoral classification or categorization. Provincial government departments are the vehicle for service delivery implementation in their respective provinces. PSETA is primarily responsible for the provision of transversal skills to all provincial government departments. Transversal

⁴ OECD (2017), *Getting Skills Right: South Africa*, OECD Publishing, Paris.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264278745-en> .pdf

skills and functions include administration, management, planning, legislation and policy development, which form the focus to drive the development of skills and competencies in areas that will make the delivery of the business of government more effective and efficient. Therefore all employees employed in terms of the Public Service Act of 1994 in all provincial government departments falls within PSETA's mandate. The scope of this study covers all participated provincial government departments that are registered with the PSETA. In total forty one (41) provincial departments participated in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature review is key to support the research study on the studies that have been undertaken before by various authors and field experts over the years. This chapter presents the various studies that have been conducted by various experts on the hard to fill vacancies.

2.1. Hard to fill vacancies analysis approach

Other countries such as the United Kingdom utilise the information on existing vacancies provided directly by employers through the National Employment Survey to detect recruitment difficulties (OECD, 2017). This is done through contracting three indicators at an occupational level to assess whether an occupation is in shortage or not. The indicators are as follows: a). percentage of skill-shortage vacancies relative to employment. b). percentage of skills-shortage vacancies relative to all vacancies. c). percentage of skills-shortage vacancies relative hard to fill vacancies. When these indicators exceed a certain threshold they therefore indicate a shortage. It is suggested that a similar methodology be employed by SETAs in a South African context, if SETAs were to request employers to share data on the number of vacancies they have that are all hard to fill and if the SETAs used the same threshold to identify shortages. This kind of survey could go a step further to detect other sectoral issues existing if done at SETA level.

In 2015 the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) published a list of occupations in high demand that provided information on shortages at national level with SETAs scarce skills list providing information at sectoral level. The OECD (2017) emphasizes that South Africa falls short when it comes to skills needs information at organisational level which OECD countries are currently collecting.

The literature has shown that for organisations to remain competitive in their space, knowing what skills the workforce has, where they are lacking, and how to bridge any gaps is key. The hard to fill vacancies analysis cannot only assist an organisation to relook its recruitment process but also to hire the right employee for the right position and can further assist the organisation to plan for the future in terms of addressing their future skills needs.

2.2. Reasons for vacancies to be “hard to fill”?

Sutherland (2010) summarily noted that hard to fill vacancies may arise for several different reasons, which can be practically subdivided into two categories; the quantity of applicants and/or the quality of the applicants. Few individuals may apply for vacancies in cases whereby the nature of the job (such as wages, conditions of employment, and/or location of the firm) does not suit the demands of the labour market (Sutherland, 2010). Hard to fill vacancies may arise for quality-related reasons; that is when the applicants have deficiencies in related experience and/or qualifications (Sutherland, 2010).

Literature shows us that the lack of available or suitable applicants is the most common reason employers give to explain why they are having difficulties in filling the available vacancies (Manpower group, 2016)⁵, mainly due to the applicants’ lack of experience, and lack of technical competencies required to perform competently in the occupation (Manpower group, 2016). Employers also added that the salary expectations that exceed what they are offering always worsen the situation of filling the vacancies within the required time (Manpower group, 2016). The lack of soft skills also cause delays in filling the vacancies for employers. This shows that the reasons for a vacancy to be deemed hard to fill can be complex depending on the nature of the occupation and the size and status of the employer.

Jensen (2001) pointed that most sectors undergo difficulties in recruiting and filling hard to fill vacancies in the workforce due to competition within the sector and other economic sectors, the lack of adequate management of human resources and unattractive working conditions are also contributory factors.

The South African public service sector faces the same challenges despite the National Development Plan’s (NDP) call of turning the “Public service as a career of choice” outlined in the Diagnostic Evaluation documents of the National Planning

⁵ MANPOWER Group (2016). Talent Shortages. Accessed at: http://www.manpowergroup.com/wps/wcm/connect/2d7acf6d-2814-489a-bd7f-ec5c98d67481/2013_Talent_Shortage_Survey_Results_US_high%2Bres.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=2d7acf6d-2814-489a-bd7f-ec5c98d67481

Commission that observed that amongst the many factors preventing the state from achieving the desired levels of performance, one is the skills deficits within the public service sector. Amongst the five key areas where targeted action would be important, the NDP (2012) recommends the following:

Making the Public Service as a career of choice. The state needs to build a capable and professional public service from both the top and the bottom. It recommends that at the top, recruitment and management should be based on experience and expertise while at junior levels, the state needs to focus on producing the skills and expertise that will be necessary for future public service cohorts.

The NDP (2012)⁶ recommends a two-pronged strategy to building a more professional public service from the top and the bottom - an approach that places the development of skills and professionalism at the heart of the plan for improving the public service. The strategy is aimed at increasing the pool of skilled people by ensuring that the public service and local government become careers of choice for graduates who wish to contribute to the development of the country and high-level staff are recruited on the basis of their suitability for the job. The challenge remains with filling those vacancies that are hard to fill.

The structural changes in the economy are exacerbating the skills shortages (Rasool & Botha, 2011)⁷. In cases where the organisation resorts to hiring externally to fill the vacancies, the organisation must be prepared that they may find difficulties in finding individuals in the external market who have the specialized skills that the organisation is looking for (Human Capital Institute, 2016)⁸. For provincial government departments to attract skills from the external labour market to fill vacant positions, they need to have the ability to identify, attract and secure the best talent within the external labour market (Human Capital Institute, 2016).

⁶ National Development Plan of South Africa Vision 2030

⁷ Rasool, F., & Botha, C. J. (2011). The Nature, Extent and Effect of Skills Shortages on Skills Migration in South Africa. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 9(1), 1-12. doi:10.4102/sajhrm.v9i1.287

⁸ Human Capital Institute. (2016). 6 B's: build, buy, borrow, bounce, balance, bind, and OD. Retrieved August 11, 2017, from <http://www.themanufacturinginstitute.org/Hidden/~-/media/F13B6B8B333E4B17A27281BADB776AEB.ashx>

Chapter 3: Methodology

This section provides details on the research tools, research design and techniques employed by the study to achieve its objectives of determining whether some of the vacancies are described as hard to fill in the participating provincial government departments and the reasons thereof. This chapter answers the questions of how the data was collected and how the results were analyzed to allow the study to arrive at reliable findings and recommendations. The focus of the research study was on HTFVs in participating provincial government departments using the six months length or more in terms of how long it takes to fill the vacancies.

3.1. Research Design

Methods of data collection employed by this study were both primary as well as secondary methods. Primary methods utilised were the researcher-administered semi-structured face-to-face survey method with key informants from the sample. To increase its credibility the study augmented the primary method with other sources which comprised of documents analysis (desktop literature review). Desktop literature review data included but not limited to review of: government online statements, research papers/reports, and policies which relates to skills planning/development. The secondary method of data collection was employed to further allow the researchers access to the information the participants were unwilling or unable to provide.

The process to find answers to this research study was qualitative approach. The qualitative method allowed the study to explore the reasons for the participants' responses, as noted by Nieuwenhuis and Smit (2012)⁹ "the qualitative method is best when one is exploring the processes that are best obtained through interacting with those who are involved". The adoption of this method of inquiry was based on its ability to provide the study with validity, as it allowed the study to investigate different aspects of the HTFVs in the public service sector in more detail, as the participants were allowed to share their deep insights on the research questions.

⁹ Nieuwenhuis, J. and Smit, B. (2012). 'Qualitative Research', in Wagner, C. Kawulich, B, B. and Garner, M. (eds.) *Doing Social Research: A Global Context*. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Education.

3.2. Sampling Methods and Study Population

The HTFVs analysis for this study was conducted from eight (8) provinces with 40 provincial government departments that are registered with PSETA on the Indicium system. The sample group members for the study was therefore selected on the basis of accessibility and availability. The specific type of the non-probability sampling that was utilised by the study is the purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was employed to allow the researchers to use their own personal judgement on choosing the sample that meets the predefined characteristics of the study, this was to ensure that the study gets the opinions of the specific target population as required by the objectives of the study.

Laher and Botha (2012)¹⁰ highlighted that with purposive sampling the researcher relies on their experience or ingenuity to identify and find the participants that are deemed to be representative of the population of interest. The study engaged the senior officials from Human Resource Planning and Human Resource Development, those involved in recruitment within their departments. Accordingly, the study adopted the sub-category of purposive sampling known as expert sampling to choose its participants. The expert sampling was chosen by the researchers for the reasons that it allowed the study to sample and elicit the views of individuals with expertise and experience in recruitment processes for their respective departments.

3.3. Research Instruments and Techniques

Face-to-face interviews were held with all the provincial government departments who responded to the invitation. And one participant responded via the online survey tool.

The data collection tools for the research were face-to-face interview questionnaire guides for key informants, and an online survey questionnaire using survey monkey. The questionnaire was semi-structured in that it consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions. This was done to ensure that more in-depth information is gathered from the respondents, and to allow the researchers an opportunity to probe further where clarity was needed.

¹⁰ Laher, S. and Botha, A. (2012). 'Methods of Sampling', in Wagner, C. Kawulich, B. B. and Garner, M. (eds.) *Doing Social Research: A Global Context*. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Education.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The electronic data provided by two provinces in Microsoft Excel was organised for analysis. The data was then analysed using Microsoft Excel. The participants were matched with their identified HTFVs in their departments and the related reasons explaining why those vacancies are considered hard to fill in their respective provincial government departments.

Chapter 4: Data Display and Analysis

Captured in table one below are some of the HTFVs gathered from the Eastern Cape Province. The list represents all government departments in the Eastern Cape Province and was gathered from the Office of the Premier (OTP). Some of the HTFVs were identified by more than one respondents (department) as hard to fill whilst some were only identified by one.

Eastern Cape

Table 1: HTFVs from the Eastern Cape Province

HTFVs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher(x4¹¹) • Systems Analyst • Economist • Organisational Design Specialist • HRD Practitioner (x2¹²) • Internal Auditor • Accountant (Managerial) • Accountant (Financial) (x2) • ICT Project Manager • Project Manager (x2) • Strategic Planners (x2) • Policy Analysis and Development Manager (x2) • Information Security Specialist • Forensic Auditors • Data Technicians (x2) • IT/ICT Technicians (x2) • Construction Project Managers
Reasons	The above hard to fill vacancies were collected from the Eastern Cape OTP and are representative of the Eastern Cape provincial departments, the reasons why these vacancies are hard to fill in

¹¹ Mentioned by four departments

¹² Mentioned by two departments

	the Province were not noted as the data was presented as scarce occupations/skills in the province.
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Western Cape

Table two below presents the vacancies that the Western Cape Province identified as hard to fill. These hard to fill vacancies were gathered from the Western Cape Office of the Premier and are representing information collected from all the provincial departments in the Western Cape, some of the HTFVs were identified by some government departments whilst some were not.

Table 2: Occupations with hard to fill Vacancies in the Western Cape

HTFVs	Procurement Specialist	Development economist
	Process Practitioner (OD Practitioner)	Economists (Macro and Behavioural) / Econometrists
	Skills Analyst	IT Auditor (Application Control)
	System Administrator	Policy Analyst and developer (SP)
	Business Analyst	Research and Strategy analyst
	Data Manager (Co-ordination and Governance)	Strategy Developer
	Project manager	
Reasons	The Western Cape hard to fill vacancies were gathered from the Western Cape Office of the Premier and are representing information collected from all the provincial departments in the Western Cape. The overall cited reasons why these occupations are hard to fill are quoted verbatim as follows: <i>“Occupations that are proven difficult to recruit from the labour market are due to insufficient market related salary or specialised Public Sector experience (Knowledge of public</i>	

service system/specific protocol/process)” (WC Office of the Premier).

Gauteng

Table three below presents the vacancies that respondents from Gauteng Province identified as HTFVs in their respective provincial departments and the reasons thereof. The data was collected from five Gauteng Provincial government departments who were the ultimate respondents to this study.

Table 3: Occupations Identified as hard to fill vacancies in the Gauteng Province

HTFVs	Reasons
Director: Regulator & liquor licensing	The position has been vacant because the department need someone with legal background plus experience in the public service sector. Internal candidates are not yet at the level which is required by the position, the lack of required interpersonal skills in the internal candidate is sometimes a barrier. The department was forced to go through the recruitment agencies to get a suitable candidate.
Deputy Director: Economic Research	Hard to fill due to the combination of experience required, the position needs someone with research background, statistical analysis and economic analysis. The department had to go through re-advertisement.
Director Services Sector	It is a new position in the department and the department is struggling to find the suitable candidate with the required skills.
Deputy Director: Business alignment (its within IT)	The position is mostly found in the private sector, so the private sector outcompetes the public sector in salary remunerations. The department has re-advertised three times without finding a suitable candidate.
Performance Audit	This position is at an Assistant Director level, few applications are usually received from potential applicants.
IT audit	The position requires a combination of experience and skills, these

	requirements prevents the department from getting a suitable candidate.
Programme or Project Manager	The public service is outcompeted by the private sector in salary scales, the salary scales of the public service are usually low.
Director: Audit and risk management	The challenge is to find a candidate who is more competent in both risk and audit. The department had to head-hunt and go with the route of recruitment agencies to try and find the suitable candidate. The position was re-advertised, and took 12 months to fill.
Other HTFVs that were cited by the some departments in Gauteng included;	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic researchers • Assistant Director: Contract management in SCM • Statistician with economics • Chief Director Procurement • Transversal Sourcing (Director) • Construction Project managers 	

Mpumalanga

Table four below presents the vacancies that Mpumalanga Province identified as HTFVs in their respective provincial departments and the reasons thereof. Almost all government provincial departments in Mpumalanga province are affected by the Moratorium on filling of vacancies. The aim of the moratorium in the employment of new employees by Mpumalanga Provincial Government was to curb the growing compensation of employees by setting a targeted ratio between spending on salaries versus the total provincial budget earmarked for service delivery (Mpumalanga Provincial Government, March 2015). This has therefore had an impact on filling vacancies in the province and as a result gathering which positions are hard to fill in the province of Mpumalanga was a challenge as some of the vacancies were said to be abolished/frozen.

Table 4: Occupations Identified as hard to fill in the Mpumalanga Province

HTFVs	Reasons
Chief Financial Officer (CFO)	The provincial department have struggled to get the suitable candidate with the required skills and level of experience, they have sourced the CFO through secondment from a parastatal.
Economist	The provincial department mentioned that they had to re-advertise after not finding the candidate with the specific skills required in the position.
Sector specialist (project management)	The position is hard to fill due to lack of registration with professional bodies from the candidates. The department resorted to head hunting the candidate.

North West

Table five below presents the vacancies that respondents from North West Province identified as HTFVs in their respective provincial departments and the related reasons. Nine occupations on the list below cut across the provincial departments and are common in the Public service sector in general.

Table 5: Occupations Identified as hard to fill vacancies in the North West Province

HTFVs	Cited Reasons
Senior Government Official/Chief of Staff	The position has been vacant, the appointment is done by the private office of the Premier (OTP) and the reasons why there are challenges in filling the vacancy can be clarified by the OTP.
ICT Systems Analyst/Specialist/System ¹³ (x2)	The provincial IT function is centralised, located in the OTP. Geographical location was mentioned as one of the reasons why the department is struggling to attract highly skilled candidates that are in demand in the labour market.

¹³ IT function is centralized in the OTP, therefore the ICT function is only in OTP supported by State Information Technology Agency (SITA)

	Candidates with scarce skills are reluctant to move especially if the salary is low. Thus the department relies on employee referrals from SITA.
General Manager Public Service/Chief Director /Director: Director: Employee wellness Director: Legal Services and Chief Director: Financial Management	All positions went through re-advertisement without finding suitable candidates with the required skills and personality.
Assistant Director: Research	Hard to fill due to lack of qualifications, usually the requirement is a post-graduate qualification. Lack of relevant experience was also noted.
Supply Chain Practitioner/Supply Chain Administrator (x3) SCM: Deputy Director	There is a difficulty in finding a senior person with the relevant experience, Candidates usually fail to meet the ethical requirements.
Personnel / Human Resource Manager/Employee Relations Manager/Transition Manager	It is usually the HR personnel with organisational design specialization that are hard to fill. Lack of job evaluation skills, job description skills, and job analysis skills are also mentioned as a challenge in this field.
Senior Government Manager/Deputy Director General/Director General (DG)/Head of Department/Ambassador	<i>"The position is not filled because of skills related reasons but because it's a political appointment. The person needs to be compatible with the political heads requirements" (KII).</i>
Forensic investigator	The candidates come with basic South African Police Services (SAPS) training but what is required for the position is the certification in fraud detection therefore lack of relevant experience and qualifications makes it difficult to fill this vacancy.
Other HTFVs that were cited by the some departments in North West included;	

- Director: Communication (vacant since September 2014)
- Director: Crime Prevention (vacant since December 2016)
- Director: Public Transport Services
- Assistant Director: Logistics
- Assistant Director: Transport
- Deputy Director: Acquisition

KwaZulu-Natal

Table six below presents the vacancies that respondents from KwaZulu-Natal Province identified as hard to fill in their respective provincial departments and their related reasons. The data below was collected from three KZN government departments, whilst some of the HTFVs were noted by numerous departments within the province some are distinct to the individual departments.

Table 6: Occupations Identified as hard to fill vacancies in the KwaZulu-Natal

HTFVs	Reasons
Director: Performance Audit	Hard to fill due to lack of experience and specific skills required. The position is relatively new within the provincial department and starts at a director level.
Supply Chain Practitioner/Supply Chain Administrator (Contract management).	The position is hard to fill due to the requirements in contract management, law qualifications and experience.
Director: Interlinked Financial Systems	The requirement for the position is IT skilled candidates with accounting, the combination of required qualifications and experience make it hard to find. This is a new position within the organisational structure.
Financial Accountant (Deputy Director: provincial accountant general)	The position is hard to fill due to few applicants with the required skills.
IT Project Manager	It was mentioned that it's hard to attract candidates with the correct combination of IT and project management experience. Furthermore risk management related skills are additional requirement.

Security and Risk Manager	This position is hard to fill due to lack of relevant qualifications and experience that are security related. It is also mentioned as a new qualification.
General Manager: Human Resources	<i>“General manager in departments that large is generally a HTFV compared to small departments”</i> (KII). The department have re-advertised.
CFO	Hard to fill due to lack of relevant experience that candidates possess and due to low salary offered by the provincial government department. The department had to re-advertise the position.
Economist	The position is hard to fill due to job requirement which are economic modelling, econometrics, and statistics, that the applicants often lack.
Corporate Services Executive Deputy Director: General Corporate Services	The position requires a combination of three qualifications due to the nature of work as these individuals are managing at different functions within the department. The position has been re-advertised four times.
Chief Provincial Inspector	Hard to fill due to combination of qualifications required and employment equity considerations.
Programme or Project Manager/Project Director	Registration with professional bodies is the major challenge which hampers finding a suitable candidate.
Chief Director: Public and Freight Transport Management	Hard to fill due to combination of qualifications and experience required.
Other HTFVs that were cited by the some departments in KZN included;	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Economist • Finance manager and accountants • General Manager IT audit 	

4.1. Common Reasons

Whilst this paper acknowledges that some of the challenges in filling vacancies are distinctive to respective government provincial departments, this paper recognises that some of the challenges faced by employers however do cut across, and most

government provincial departments do experience most of these challenges at one point in their recruitment lifecycle .

- The wages and conditions of employment for some occupations in the public service sector may be less than attractive to candidates, this opens the public service sector to be susceptible to being outcompeted by the private sector in talent attraction. One respondent noted that for middle management services positions their department is usually outcompeted by the private sector.
- The nature and length of contract offered by the employer plays a role in determining the quality of candidates that will apply for the vacancies. One respondent in Gauteng noted that they had difficulties in filling the vacancy of the deputy director econometrician due to the nature of contract for the position, the vacancy was a one year contract. It presented the department with challenges in filling the vacancy as it was highly unlikely to attract a senior employee on a short-term contract basis.
- Some positions stringently require industry specific qualifications and registration with professional bodies, recruitment of the candidate who meets these requirements at the required level of experience and seniority presents provincial department with challenges.
- The positions that require the approval of the political heads (MECs or premiers) in the public service sometimes delays the process of filling these vacancies when the political heads take too long to approve the appointments for vacancies.
- Moratorium on posts (posts are frozen and abolished). The National Treasury issued a moratorium on filling of positions in 2015 due to fiscal constraints in provinces. This meant that provincial departments cannot fill the unfunded vacant posts and also they have to hold back on filling the funded vacant posts. Most provinces are currently implementing the moratorium which impacts on the hard to fill vacancy.
- HR Planning is normally dependent upon line managers to craft job profiles for recruitment. This internal processes are therefore depend on the line manager for efficient planning and may delay the filling of post in some instances.

- The convenience of the geographical location of the employer at times influences the quality of the applicants that the employer receives, particularly for positions that are in high demand.

4.2. Implications

The presence of hard to fill vacancies and its negative effects is well documented in the literature. The findings of this study yielded the same kind of results in confirming that the presence of hard to fill vacancies negatively affects the operations and efficiency of the department. The Western Cape OTP purported that the presence of hard to fill vacancies negatively impact on the department's capability to achieve its strategic mandate.

A number of respondents in this study summarily further noted that with some occupations not being fully available presents the departments with the challenges in terms of the burden of taking over the duties of the colleagues that have left. So the provincial government departments are compelled to work with reduced human resources, as a result we have seen a number of acting arrangements in government departments. Quoted verbatim from one of the participants below encapsulates what the HTFVs present to the departments;

The “no reserve” and “not enough, limited availability” situation, places strain on employees in the environments where these occupations exist and could result in “burn-out”.

4.3. Overcoming the Talent Shortages

Respondents were asked about the steps they are taking to address the difficulties they face in filling vacancies. A number provincial government departments adopt various strategies in overcoming hard to fill vacancies in their respective departments. When respondents were asked what approaches they were using to overcome the difficulties filling positions, the most common response from the respondents was to provide extra training through re- skilling and development to existing staff so that the department can recruit from within in areas that is susceptible to hard to fill vacancies.

- A number of provincial government departments stated that they have graduate trainees programme in their scarce occupations for 2-3 years, the number of years gathered in the graduate trainee programme qualifies these trainees to apply for Assistant Director Positions in the public service. This allows the departments to promote from within to address their scarce occupations.
- One department noted that as a way of accommodating their graduate trainees they have proposed internally that some positions whose occupations are scarce need to start at level 8 which will afford graduate trainees an opportunity to qualify and apply for positions in the public service.
- One respondent noted that their department have no struggles to fill the vacancies in economics as an example, the requirements for these positions helps them to consume and recruit from their interns.
- *“The department relies more on the internal workforce (promotion) and sometimes the acting arrangement to deal with the effects of HTFVs” (KII).*
- A number of provincial government departments stated that they have increased their efforts on improving the pipeline of future candidates and partnering with educational institutions, like the Chartered Accountant (CA) training programme in KZN in partnership with the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) under the Thuthuka Programme. CAs, specifically female CAs get trained at managerial training level (3 year programme).
- One respondent noted that to address the HTFVs in IT Audit the department takes the IT personnel and place them in the learnership of auditing.
- Succession Planning, one provincial government department stated that they first identify a position that may have challenges, like tax, provincial accounting posts, and accounting and put in place training programmes like learnerships and internships.
- Whilst some provincial department groom talent from within to address the areas and occupations that are prone to HTFVs, some provincial department have outsourced these functions through temporarily hiring consultants. The ICT/IT functions were noted as a common example.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

Some departments have deemed some of the vacancies hard to fill based on the recruitment difficulties experienced when the recruitment of the vacancies is underway, the recruitment difficulties sometimes are reflected in the fact that some of the vacancies had to be re-advertised and the length of time vacancies remain open was as a result lengthened. This paper has shown that there are a number of dynamics from which the presence of hard to fill vacancies rests upon. Whilst some reasons noted above were skills related reasons some are non-skills related reasons and all require attention when addressing hard to fill vacancies in the public service sector.

Based on the results of this paper, this paper put forward the following recommendations when the public service sector address the hard to fill vacancies.

- It is recommended that the departments widen their search and change how they recruit or advertise their vacancies in addressing their hard to fill vacancies. Tied to this is the recommendation that job profiles/descriptions in the advert plays a key role in attracting the 'right' candidate for vacant positions.
- Special attention be given to scarce competencies e.g. by awarding bursaries in particular fields (KII).
- Building talents pipeline in-house through mentoring and coaching and other mechanisms, succession planning can go a long way in assisting the provincial departments in filling future vacancies and vacancies that are hard to fill.
- Finally, the length it takes the vacancy to be filled cannot be seen as a sole indicator of HTFVs, the determinants and factors have been seen to be usually complex and most of them are interrelated and should never be viewed in isolation.