Introduction
Attracting the right managers to work in any organization has become essential these days and the search for talent is becoming more and more competitive. This is particularly true for public transport organisations as they are also faced with the problems of an aging work-force and an increasing demand for more skills, knowledge, experience and education. McKinsey Quarterly had already described the problem in 1998:

“Companies are about to be engaged in a war for talent that will remain a defining characteristic of their competitive landscape for decades to come. Yet most are ill-prepared and even the best are vulnerable.”

This shortage of high quality managers is due to various factors and the following points explain the rapidly increasing difficulties in filling the “talent-management pipeline.”

I Demographic developments
The shortage of well-qualified personnel as the “baby boomers” retire will have a negative impact on economic growth. The demographic decline of the population in European countries and beyond will create a “talent war” between companies.

II Educational mismatch
There is a mismatch between the educational level of graduates leaving higher education and current business needs. This will have an impact on the availability of talented people on the job market. The availability of talented “beta”-educated graduates has been declining in the last decade, while at the same time public transport organisations are in great need of this talent.

III Emergence of the “Y” generation, born after 1985
A new generation of talented people is emerging. This generation were born in the 1980s. They are the first generation raised in a “connected” environment with mobile phones, computers and internet. Freedom, enjoyment and work life balance are essential to their career plans. These people are looking for employers with an interesting product line, good employee benefits and a good reputation.

As a consequence of this “war for talent,” there are a lot of public transport companies fishing in the same pond for qualified managers and professionals. It has become increasingly important for companies to be attractive as an employer. How can these firms become an “employer of choice” for the demanding talent on today’s labour market? Or in
other words, how can these firms ensure that talent gravitates towards their company and chooses to stay, even when approached by other companies. We can see that managing talent effectively has become a competitive necessity. Talent management is defined as “attracting, retaining, developing and promoting outstanding talent.”

How to attract and select new talented managers

One of the best weapons on a competitive labour market is a strong employer brand that attracts and retains key talent. The labour market is much more fluid today, with more and better information available to employees than ever before. Public transport companies can brand themselves as employers through the value proposition of their employment offer. This can be compared with the branding of their regular services and products. Much like a service on traditional markets, the job offer must meet employee preferences, be differentiated from competing offers and have a strong reputation or brand. Thus we can see that companies need employer branding and strategies to differentiate themselves.

Employer branding as a concept to attract, select and retain (young) management talent can only work if the recruitment strategy has been adapted accordingly. This is the umbrella for all steps in the recruitment process and can be divided into the following parts: employer branding; attraction strategy; selection methodology; and early career monitoring. Most of the time, the ‘right’ manager will not simply arrive at an employer’s door. It is therefore essential that the firm has a proper recruitment strategy to support effective employer branding strategies.

The perception of a company as a well-managed firm and a great place to work has a long-term impact. Conversely, a weak employer brand can decrease the effects of even the best recruitment and retention strategies. Effective employer branding pays off as organisations gradually find it easier and less expensive to recruit and retain top talent, while their competitors must look harder and pay more to get good people.

Most companies which have an employer branding strategy in place aim to increase:
- knowledge about the company as employer;
- preference for the company as an employer (become an employer of choice);
- the intention of candidates to apply with the company.

How to manage and retain talented managers?

It is difficult to predict your company’s employment needs and make plans to satisfy them. The talent management challenge is much greater and more complicated than it once was because so many dynamics and variables have changed. The workforce is growing, but the pool of skilled talent is not growing quickly enough to fill the vacant positions in the organisation in the future. Given this high level of competition for talent, the companies that find and keep good managers are more effective at creating an attractive work environment, selecting the right candidates and getting them to do their best work. To become a company like this public transport companies have to learn how to manage talent, since people are “the ultimate source of all information, service and added knowledge” in an information-based economy.

The three main key steps for managing talent are alignment, engagement and measurement, as outlined below.
Alignment
Align your managers with your business strategy by letting them know where they are going, what you are doing to get there, how they can contribute, and what they will gain as a result. Managers provide the greatest possibility for rapid change. Although enduring cultural change can take many years, managers can change faster than most technology or work processes, but only if they understand what you want them to do and why.

Engagement
Obtain commitment to your mission, vision and direction. Once you have developed a clear vision of the type of organisation you are and the best type of management talent for the company, focus more on engaging and rewarding managers to achieve their best performance. Provide managers with a good work environment that helps attract and retain them. With more involvement and engagement managers will obtain more of a sense of control and choice. This will make them feel more empowered and motivated.

Measurement
When you use effective measurement techniques, you make the alignment and engagement processes real for your managers. Measurement ties everything together. In addition, accurate feedback can transform your organisation by pointing the way to further improvement and better results. In many cases public transport companies use the Balanced Scorecard approach, which takes into consideration shareholder, customer and employee values and has an important role for managers to work with budgets, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and strict deadlines.

Conclusion
Defining high potential and young managers and developing them is critical to a public transport company’s long-term success. Talent management needs to be focused around the following activities:

- Finding and bonding
- Bonding and exciting
- Exciting and growing

Finding, bonding and creating more talented managers will be essential for the future growth of public transport organisations. Employer branding is a critical factor in effective recruitment. Becoming an employer of choice means that an organisation’s branding message truly aligns with the reality that exists for its management. Adequate recruitment and retention strategies will pay off its investments.

Align managers with the company’s strategy to get the best performance and results: match managers to your strategic style and style of leadership. Always explain what managers can do to contribute. Involve managers in order to create a long-term engagement and provide sufficient development opportunities for them to obtain new skills and competencies.

Traditionally, talent management is seen as the sole responsibility of the human resources (HR) department. However, talent management should also be a critical task of top management and should be supported rather than owned by HR. The aim is to flow management talent to where it is most needed in the organisation and to where it can best grow. Top management should be co-responsible and accountable for talent management in conjunction with HR.

Sources:

Note: This document is based on both the cooperative desk research of Sputnic project partners and input from public transport practitioners/experts.