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Talent management practices: A hook, line and sinker

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Abstract

In recent years, research on the practice of talent management have received greater attention in organizations. Much of the prior work in this area is directed at the implementation of talent management practices in terms of talent attraction, talent acquisition, talent development, talent retention, succession planning. There is an absence of work that integrates research findings concerning the main variables contributing to an employee to be labelled as talented employee. There is mismatch between the assumed shortage of talent and actual shortage of talent in an organization. In this paper we address this question by reviewing the organisational literature and focuses on characteristics of talented employee. Based on selected studies, an integrated framework for labelling employee as talented and not so talented is developed, helping us to summarise the extant scholarship in this area. The framework provides a foundation for emerging research area and outlines key directions for future research.

Keywords: Talent management practices, hook, line, sinker

Introduction

Talent Management evolved into a "hot topic" in human resources (HR) practice about 10 years before it became an academic topic of interest (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin, & Michaels, 1998) ^[14]. Since 1998, when a group of McKinsey consultants originated the phrase "war for talent" and proposed that organizational effectiveness requires a basic belief in the importance of talent (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001) ^[47, 48], the concept of talent management has attracted the attentions of both practitioners and academics. One of the most significant human capital difficulties that twenty-first-century enterprises face is talent management (Ashton & Morton, 2005) ^[3]. Less attention has been paid to talent identification, and the variables contributing to an employee to be labelled as talented employee.

An insight into these variables related to employee is important for multiple reasons. It can help address the problems related to shortage of talent in an organisation. In light of the current economic downturn and volatile market environments, talent management has become an ever more important tool to gain a sustained competitive advantage through human capital (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Tarique & Schuler, 2010) ^[21, 75]. At the heart of the rhetoric of shortage is the inability of organizations to recognize talent in the workforce and labour market, as well as convincing that it is not a true lack of "talented" people in the empirical sense (Swales, 2013) ^[69].

Most of the existing literature reviews focused on defining talent management, talent management practices, further research dealing with talent identification strategies is somewhat lacking; the question has not yet been answered as to whether it is actual shortage of talent or the organisations lacks in defining, identifying talent within an organisation. Managers must make sure that they continuously look up for talented employees and improve their potentials so that it adds on to their productivity. Organisational productivity is generally dependent on the quality and quantity of its workforce. Thunnisen, Bonselie and Fruytier (2013) found that identifying, selecting, developing and retaining the best employees in the organisation who perform consistently must be given opportunity for capacity building to ensure their future goals, which is a general concern of talent management. The lack of highly talented and skilled workforce and competition makes the process of attracting and retaining talents one of the biggest concerns managers have globally.

The review can help us to synthesize the existing limited understanding of this significant and overlooked area of research. Second, it is important to analyse and critique the existing literature in this area so as to generate new knowledge and directions for future research (Torraco, 2005) [76]. Review of literature shows that talent management is a growing field. In response to the significant gaps in the extant scholarship, this article reviews the literature, where it first elucidate talent management, then we purposefully took a broad view to literature review by including Talent management as a sustainable strategic advantage. We deliberately took reviews from past 20 years study in the same domain area.

Elucidating Talent Management

Consensus on the meaning and underlying principles of talent management is lacking. Talent management is a relatively young academic field that lacks a solid base of empirical research to test and validate core conceptual ideas (Thunnissen, M., Boselie, P., & Fruytier, B. 2013) [72]. In their 2006 review, Lewis and Heckman stressed the point that talent management, as a field of study was still in its infancy as it lacked a clear and consistent definition of its

core construct as well as a clearly defined scope and a conceptual framework based on empirical research. The concept of talent management has attracted a substantial debate on the lack of a consistent definition and conceptual boundaries (Ashton & Morton, 2005; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006) [21, 3, 44]. A few years later, Collings, Scullion, and Vaiman (2011) [22] observed some progress regarding the establishment of a definition and conceptual boundaries of talent management, and concluded that the field was moving from infancy into adolescence. Talent management is described as "a mindset" in several recent practitioner-oriented articles (Creelman, 2004) [23]. Talent management concentrated on placing the right person in the right place at right time (cited in Duttagupta, 2005) [30]. To fully realise the potential of internal talent, an organisation must first identify those roles within the organisation that have the potential to have a significant impact on performance (Collings, D. G., & Mellahi, 2009) [21]. It advocates for differentiating these people's management by techniques aimed at attracting, retaining, and developing high-performing and high-potential personnel (Sparrow, P. R., & Makram, 2015) [66].

Table 1: Key perspectives of studies selected for review.

S. No.	Authors (Year)	Perspectives	Key words
1.	Thunnissen, M., <i>et al.</i> (2013) [72]	Talent management is presented as a tool to manage the talent, in the sense of both people and characteristics present in an organization, effectively so that individual and organizational performance is under control and can be improved.	Tool.
2.	Delbridge & Keenoy, (2010); Delbridge, Hauptmeier, & Sengupta, (2011); Paauwe, (2009) [79, 80, 81]	Talent management literature can be characterized as managerialist, comparable to criticism of the field of human resource management	Managerialist.
3.	Cappelli, (2008) [13]	Talent management exists to support the organization's overall objective, "which in business essentially amounts to making money"	Support.
4.	Tarique and Schuler (2012) [71]	TM is selective and focuses on key positions, which are perceived by the management as vital for developing long term competitive edge for any business.	Key positions.
5.	Garavan <i>et al.</i> , (2012) [35]	Talent Management (TM) thus, emphasizes development and effective employment of corporate strategies for effective utilization of the talent pool to ensure a continuous supply of talent to meet its short / long term objectives, and overall activities of the organization are in harmony with its TM processes	Development and effective employment, talent pool.
6.	Collings & Mellahi, (2009) [21]	The systematic identification of key positions that differentially contributes to the sustainable competitive advantage of the organization is the starting point of any talent management system.	Key positions, talent management system.

Method

Literature search and inclusion criteria

A comprehensive literature search using the Google Scholar and Scopus database was conducted in March 2022 to identify studies that involved labelling employees as talented, characteristics of talented employees, parameters to defines talented employees. The keywords "talent management, talented employees, high performers, high potential, talent shortage, talent identification were used to identify relevant studies in the databases. Studies published in English were included. The title and abstract of multiple studies were reviewed to identify the relevant articles. The review also indicates that most of selected studies collected data from diverse industries.

Overview of selected studies

From the included review, 6 studies have defined talent on different parameters. Each definition is reviewed thoroughly

and key words were taken out from them. Further it helps in providing a base for our study. Hoglund (2012) [77] claimed that there is a serious lack of consensus in the literature as to what the term talent means, what is it to be managed and how. There is a lack of consensus among academicians about "who is considered as a talent" and often organizations are left to define talent. Every employee is different in terms of performance and potential, and employees' potential is often a common denominator in identifying talents (Tansley, 2007) [78]. The identified employees may be groomed to meet the requirements of the key positions. The goal of these reviews was to do a thorough study and identify some main key words used to define talent such as skills + knowledge + ability + experience + knowledge + character + judgement (Michael *et al.*, 2001; CIPD, 2006) [47, 48, 20], High potential + High performer (Schuler *et al.*, 2011; Tansley, 2011; CIPD, 2006; Simonton, 1999) [58, 70, 20, 82], Cognitive and Behavioural

capability (Nijs, Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, & Sels, 2014) [83].
 “High performance” and “high potential” underpins most

definitions of talent/TM (e.g. CIPD, 2007; Iles, Chuai, *et al.*, 2010) [41, 42].

Table 2: Key words identified from selected studies

S. No.	Author	Definition of Talent	Key words
1.	Michael <i>et al.</i> , 2001 [47, 48]	‘Sum of a person’s abilities-his or her intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, judgment, attitude, character, and drive. It also includes his or her ability to learn and grow’	Basic: Skills + knowledge + ability. Additional: Experience + Knowledge + Character + Judgement.
2.	Schuler <i>et al.</i> (2011) [58]	‘Valuable contributors, including high level executives, those with high managerial potential, and those with rare technical skills’.	High managerial potential
3.	Tansley (2011) [70]	‘Organisational talent refers to those who are identified as having potential to reach high levels of achievements with consistent high performance.’	High potential + High performer
4.	CIPD (2006) [20]	Features a complex mixture of knowledge, skills and cognitive abilities that employees possess and deploy in their work context. It furthermore includes their potential, values, and work preferences.	Skills + knowledge + ability + High potential
5.	Simonton (1999) [82]	“Any innate capacity that enables an individual to display exceptionally high performance in a domain that requires special skills and training”	High performer
6.	(Nijs, Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, & Sels, 2014) [83]	Talent is equipped with both cognitive and behavioural capability that are the main sources of intelligence and creativity	Cognitive and Behavioural capability

Labelling employee as talented

Among the selected studies, few studies listed above have been selected on the basis of the domain which included: talented employee, talent identification, talented workers, top talent. Authors have focused on the features of talented employees. What is unique with talented employees is that their first impression of being labelled or recognised as talented is the feeling and obligation to work harder and prove that they deserve being labelled as talented (Aflah Zaher Al Shaqsi, by, Héliot Professor Gavin Hilson Copyright, Y., Zaher Al Shaqsi, A., & ii, D., 2017) [1]. Talented employees believe that their recommendations and

solutions will make a difference to the overall business performance. Talented employees are both an organization strategic asset and a manipulable resource that has the potential to contribute to value creation.

Whilst the people philosophy argues that the differentiator for high-performing firms unsophisticated HRM processes, but rather a fundamental belief held by leaders throughout the organization about the importance of individual talent and the creation of internal “talent markets”, the practices approach acknowledges need for a dedicated set of advanced and sophisticated practices.

Table 3: Main features of talented employee.

S. No.	Domain	Feature	Authors
1.	Talented employee	Commitment to a high and desired performance, intentions to stay/quit, willingness to utilise potential and share knowledge, and cultivating trust relations.	Rousseau, 1989; Robinson, 1996; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1995; Pate and Malone, 2000; Martin <i>et al.</i> , 1999; Guest, 2004 [56, 55, 57, 54, 45, 37]
2.	Talented employee	Those who exhibit high performance and make a difference to the organisation’s success through their immediate contribution or through demonstrating the potential to do so. They reflect leadership qualities and are well educated. They are also technically knowledgeable, experts in their fields, and difficult to replace.	Aflah Zaher Al Shaqsi, by, Héliot Professor Gavin Hilson Copyright, Y., Zaher Al Shaqsi, A., & ii, D. (2017) [1].
3.	Talent identification	Employees who are identified as talented by their organisations include those who perceive themselves to be talented form a distinguished psychological contract	(Bjorkman <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Sonnenberg <i>et al.</i> , 2014) [5, 63]
4.	Talented employee	Talented employees would usually be high performers with high potential;	Aflah Zaher Al Shaqsi, by, Héliot Professor Gavin Hilson Copyright, Y., Zaher Al Shaqsi, A., & ii, D. (2017) [1].
5.	Talent identification	Identified as talented is partly about having the right attitude.	Aflah Zaher Al Shaqsi, by, Héliot Professor Gavin Hilson Copyright, Y., Zaher Al Shaqsi, A., & ii, D. (2017) [1].
6.	Talented workers	Talented workers can create great value for companies in which their capabilities are highly valued and hard to imitate.	(Kyndt <i>et al.</i> , 2011) [84]
7.	Top Talent	Someone who challenges the status quo, who believes they have unlimited choices. They have stamina, discipline and the courage to come out on top.	(McCormack, 1989) [85]
8.	Talented employee	Talented employees are “those individuals who can make a difference to organisational performance, either through their immediate contribution or in the longer term by demonstrating the highest levels of potential”	(Tansley, 2007) [78].

Talented Employees: A set of high performance and high potential

‘High performance ‘and/or ‘high potential ‘underpins most definitions of talent/TM (e.g. CIPD, 2007; Iles, Chuai, *et al.*, 2010) [41, 42]. Early indications of ‘high potential ‘therefore provide a basis for predicting who is likely to excel. Gagne (1999) [33], however, stresses that talent emerges from learning, “the superior mastery of systematically developed abilities and knowledge in at least one field of human endeavour, rather than mere potential” (Heller, Mönks, & Passow, 2000, p. 67) [39]. organization leaders often approach talent management as if it applied only to their elite high-potentials, making them reluctant to take time to manage talent that is not part of the elite group. HR may develop programs based on assumptions that many employees will benefit from talent development and its effects are not limited to the top group (Boudreau, J. W., 2013) [7]. Motivation and engagement are mostly presented as means to achieve (high) individual performance, and through that high organizational performance (e.g., Cheese *et al.*, 2009; Christensen Hughes & Rog, 2008; Collings &

Mellahi, 2009) [15, 17, 21]. Retention of high performers was among the top five workforce challenges identified in the Talent Practices Impact Survey conducted by Hewitt (2008) [86]. A survey by Tower Watson (2011) [87] found that almost 30% of companies struggle with the retention of their talented employees. Losing a normal employee is costly for any organization, because of replacement expenses incurred and hidden costs like productivity loss and morale damage (O’Connell & Kung, 2007; Tracey & Hinkin, 2008) [51, 88]. Motivation and engagement are mostly presented as means to achieve (high) individual performance, and through that high organizational performance (e.g., Cheese *et al.*, 2009; Christensen Hughes & Rog, 2008; Collings & Mellahi, 2009) [15, 17, 21].

The potential “talent gap” in the upcoming years as vast numbers of capable managers and executive retire. In addition, employees no longer have the belief that their company will always be there for them and are making career decisions based on their own vested self-interest rather than the company’s (Nardoni Ren).

Table 4: High potential and outcomes related to talented employee

S. No.	Study	High Potential	Outcome
1.	Church, A. H., Rotolo, C. T., Ginther, N. M., & Levine, R. (2015).	Past performance, current performance, Assessment data, Mobility, Demographics.	Top development companies use assessment, and they use it well. Perceived impact of assessment practices is high. Best practices for high-potential assessment are emerging. Build assessment practices with the end state in mind.
2.	Aflah Zaher Al Shaqsi, by, Héliot Professor Gavin Hilson Copyright, Y., Zaher Al Shaqsi, A., & ii, D. (2017) [1].	Proactive, those who come with solutions, and run for things; they are not waiting for others to tell them what to do.	
3.	Odiorne, 1984	Past performance, intelligence and aptitude, future availability to the organisation, interests and desires, supply and demand factor, biographical information.	

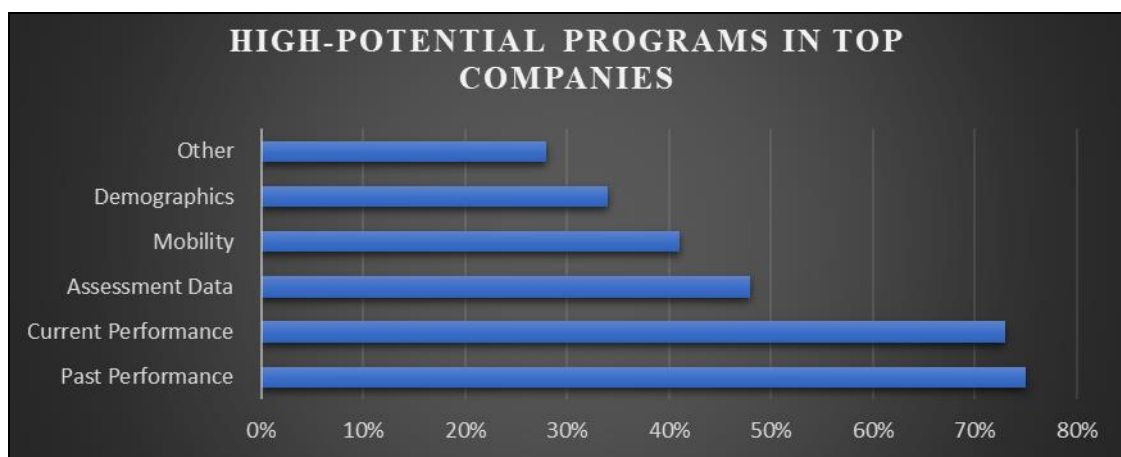


Fig 1: Indicators of high potential from Church, A. H., Rotolo, C. T., Ginther, N. M., & Levine, R. (2015)

As figure 1, summarises the indicators of high potential, where past performance is an important indicator of future performance (Gatewood, Feild, & Barrick, 2010) [36]. Is talent management really about managing the top elite, important but a few major individuals? From an employee's perspective, a talent management strategy begins with identifying a single "star" performer who is considered a source of competitive advantage. The philosophy then advocates differentiating the management of these talented

and promising employees through practices designed to attract, retain and develop them. For the bulk of organizations the term talent management, and also the consequent sets of activity, has its prime target unearthing those employees who qualify for the term “high potentials” and, if they do not exist internally, attempt to find such employees outside the organization. (Sparrow, P., Scullion, H., & Tarique, 2013) [67].

Potential is best described as a "drive" that includes both ambition and stamina (Daniel Goleman, 1995) [25]. According to Martin and Schmidt, a high potential to some extent, have all of the following characteristics:

1. Ability Intellectual, professional and emotional ability.
2. Commitment The personal attachment and commitment that employees feel about the company.
3. Effort-Awareness, progress, and desire for future rewards

The potential "talent gap" in the upcoming years as vast numbers of capable managers and executive retire. In addition, employees no longer have the belief that their company will always be there for them and are making career decisions based on their own vested self-interest rather than the company's (Nardoni Ren).

Discussion

Research on talented management is increasing in organisational scholarship. Previous reviews of talented management have not presented a comprehensive framework of individuals to be labelled as talented. There is a lack of consensus among academicians about "who is considered as a talent" and often organizations are left to define talent. Every employee is different in terms of performance and potential, and employees' potential is often a common denominator in identifying talents (Tansley, 2007) [78].

The goal of this review was to synthesize, analyse, and critique the extant organisational literature that examines the

factors responsible for an employee to be labelled as talented (Fig 2). Using selected criteria, few studies were identified as relevant for integrative review.

Critique and Implication for further research

Overall, the review suggests that the talent management and its implications, and the factors responsible for retention of employees has been largely overlooked in much extant research, only few studies were found to address the problem of labelling employee as talented. The review also shows that most of the selected studies were published in recent years which highlights the talent management practices and how these practices are boosting the overall performance of an organisation. It is good to see this trend as it addresses an important but overlooked area of research. As an important step, this article serves to advance this work by framing extant organisational literature to provide a foundation for scholarship and practice that can be drawn upon by future scholars and practitioners.

Theoretical Framework

The review shows that the topic of talent management and its implications is emerging in organisational scholarship. Scholarship now needs to theoretically frame this emerging understanding of talented employee and its relationship with high potential and high performance. The integrated framework developed here, based on key findings, suggests that high potential, high performance and talented employee are interrelated. This review found that the use of theoretical framework is relatively limited in this research area.

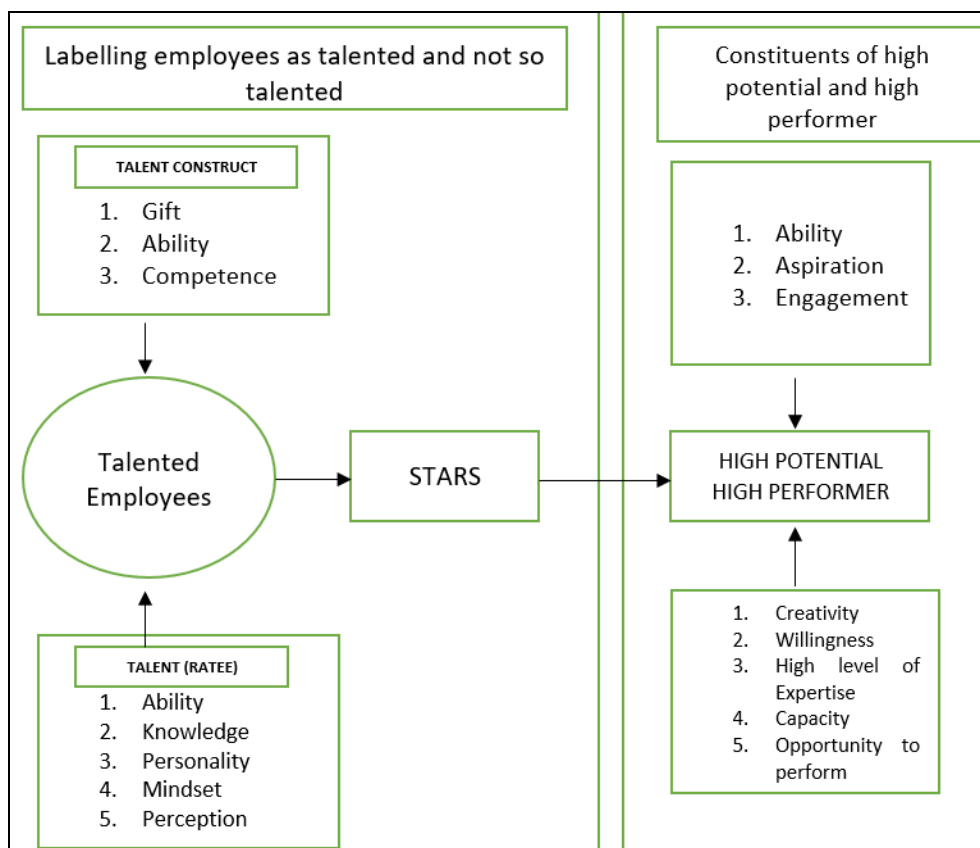


Fig 2: A framework for labelling employees as talented and not so talented

As discussed in the paper that talent management comprises of talented employees which distinguishing successful organisation with another. This review tries to focus on the

importance of differentiates talented employees from not so talented employees. The most significant practical implication is providing a framework for top management to

consider how to label employees as talented and not so talented. Based on the framework shown in (fig. 2), it comprises of multiple variables. A talent construct consists of gift (Gagné, 2000) ^[34], ability (Michaels *et al.*, 2001) ^[47, 48] and competence (Boyatzis, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993) ^[9, 68]. The main characteristics of ratee for the assessment of talent includes ability (Boselie *et al.*, 2005; Boxall & Purcell, 2008) ^[6, 89], knowledge (Tansley, 2011) ^[70], personality, mindset (Dries, N. 2013) ^[27] and perception. An individual comprising of the variables listed above will said to be a talented employee. A talented employees are often counted as a star in an organisation. It was noted that a star has a high potential which further leads him to be a high performer. Noted in the previous literature, we propose the constituents of a high potential employee, i.e. ability; a combination of the innate qualities that employees use in their daily work and the skills they have acquired, aspiration; the quantity to which an worker wishes or dreams status and popularity withinside the organisation, engagement; emotional commitment, rational commitment, discretionary effort, intent to stay (Tansley, C, 2011) ^[70]. Further constituents of a high performer is listed, i.e. creativity, willingness (motivation, job satisfaction, status), high level of expertise, capacity (ability, health, intelligence, education), opportunity to perform (tools, equipment, working conditions, co-worker and leader behaviour) (Collings, D. G., & Mellahi, K, 2009) ^[21].

Conclusion

While research interest in talent management is rapidly developing, little attention has been paid to the factors responsible for employee to be labelled as talented and how it influences workplace outcome. Yet an examination of these factors is important for developing an understanding. Earlier reviews do not present a comprehensive framework with which to synthesize the parameters responsible for labelling employees as talented and not so talented. This integrative literature review thus examined factors associated with talented employee in an endeavor to reduce key theoretical “blind spots” in organizational field and further facilitates a more integrated and systematic understanding of the literature which can be used to inform future research endeavors.

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