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Talent management: Progress and prospects

David G. Collings^{a,*}, Hugh Scullion^b, Vlad Vaiman^{c,1}*DCU Business School, Dublin City University, Glasnevin, Dublin 9, Ireland**Department of Management, J.E. Cairnes School of Business & Economics, NUI Galway, Galway, Ireland**School of Management, California Lutheran University, 60 West Olsen Rd., #3550, Thousand Oaks, CA 91360, USA*

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ABSTRACT

This paper serves as an introduction to this special issue on talent management. The articles featured here are inspired by the second EIASM workshop on talent management. Following a summary review of the current state of the talent management literature the paper introduces the four articles in the issue.

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1. Introduction

There is little doubt that the area of talent management has become one of fastest growing areas of academic work in the management field over recent decades. One of the first academic reviews of the area of talent management published almost a decade ago (Lewis & Heckman, 2006: 139) concluded, 'if the volume of literature in the popular and practitioner press is any guide, practitioners in the field of human resources are now primarily in the business of talent management'. However, the same paper lamented the lack of academic work underpinning the development of talent management. The intervening period has represented a period of catch up in the conceptual and intellectual development of the area. This special issue draws inspiration from the second workshop on talent management organised by the European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management held in Brussels, Belgium in 2013. This annual workshop has emerged as an important forum for the discussion of emerging insights in the area. The workshop and special issue also build on a number of recent special issues on the theme of talent management over the past 5 years or so (see Al Ariss, Cascio, & Paauwe, 2014; Collings, Scullion, & Vaiman, 2011; Dries, 2013; McDonnell, Collings, & Burgess, 2012; Scullion, Collings, & Caligiuri, 2010; Vaiman & Collings, 2013).

While there has been significant development of our understanding of the area, many questions remain. Dries (2013) has argued that the research agenda has developed based largely on a phenomenon-driven agenda as opposed to a theory driven one. Arguably this is reflective of the emergence of talent management in practice and the on-going challenges which organisations face around effectively managing talent (BCG, 2013). This has also been reflected in a largely managerialist and performative agenda in much of the earlier work in the field (Collings, 2014a). However more recently a more pluralist understanding of the contribution of talent management has emerged (Collings, 2014b; Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier, 2013). The neglect of the perspective of the individual talent and the limitations thereof for our understanding of talent management have been recognised more recently (Collings, Doherty, Luethy, & Osborn, 2011) and consequently the employee perspective has received greater attention in recent years. Recent research suggests that talent management approaches need to be more balanced between organisational needs and that they should be more closely linked with individual's goals and expectations in order to retain high potential talent (Farndale, Pai, Sparrow, &

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +353 17006937.

E-mail addresses: David.collings@dcu.ie (D.G. Collings), Hugh.scullion@nuigalway.ie (H. Scullion), vvaiman@callutheran.edu (V. Vaiman).¹ Tel.: +1 805 493 3892..

Scullion, 2014). This represents a shift from the managerialist orientation of the earlier work (c.f. Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Mäkelä, Smale, & Sumelius, 2013; Farndale et al., 2014; Gelens, Hofmans, Dries, & Pepermans, 2014; Sonnenberg, van Zijderveld, & Brinks, 2014). Indeed the phenomenon-based emergence of academic work helps to explain the thematic (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006) and theoretical fragmentation of the field (Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Dries, 2013; Sparrow, Scullion, & Tarique, 2014).

We believe that the four papers, which comprise this special issue, provide a further step in the development of the conceptual and intellectual development of talent management. As a collection they help to evaluate the current state of the art within the area (Gallardo-Gallardo, Nijs, Dries & Gallo, in this issue). Furthermore the global context of talent management is brought to the fore in two of the papers (Khilji, Tarique, & Schuler, this issue; Vaiman, Haslberger, & Vance, this issue). Finally the theme of value is explicated in Sparrow & Makram (this issue). The following section introduces these papers.

2. The papers in the special issue

The opening paper in the issue by Shaista Khilji, Ibraiz Tariq and Randall Schuler broadens the scope of thinking on global talent management (GTM) to consider macro, country level effects. They argue that our understanding of GTM has been limited by its focus upon individuals and organisations, with country level effects and influences underexplored. They point to the import of talent mobility, and respective governments' direct involvement in attracting and developing national talent as central questions at the macro level of analysis. The paper develops a conceptual framework for macro global talent management (MGTM), which incorporates a macro view and supports and recognises the requirement for interdisciplinary research. Their framework foregrounds the macro context in which GTM unfolds while illuminating its multiple consequences traversing levels of analysis. It also captures the essence of complexities associated with managing talent globally. The paper concludes with a consideration of directions for future research and the implications for managers and policy makers.

Our second paper by Paul Sparrow and Heba Makram draws on the concepts of talent philosophies and a theory of value to bring some coherence and organisation to the talent management literature. Drawing insights on talent management architectures, the paper first analyses four talent management philosophies and the different underlying claims they make about the value of individual talent and talent management architectures to demonstrate the limitations of human capital theory in capturing current developments. Having demonstrated the complexity of issues being researched, the paper goes on to synthesise these into a theory of value, and develops a framework based on four separate value-generating processes (value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection). The major strength of the paper is the insights drawn from cognate areas of non-HR literatures, such as those on value creation, the RBV perspective, dynamic capabilities, and global knowledge management. These insights are used to understand the nature of value and how this might inform the design of any talent management system or architecture. The paper concludes with a clear research agenda and the development of research propositions.

The third paper in the special issue by Eva Gallardo-Gallardo, Sanne Nijs, Nicky Dries and Pedro Gallo adopts methods derived from bibliometrics and content analysis to evaluate the state of the field of talent management and to derive implications for research and practice unbiased towards a-priori assumptions of which frameworks or methods are most adequate. Based on their analyses of publication volume, journals and their impact factors, most cited articles and authors, preferred methods, and represented countries, the authors assess whether TM should be approached as an embryonic, growth, or mature phenomenon, and examine dominant (i.e., resource-based view, international human resource management, employee assessment, and institutionalism) versus 'alternative' (i.e., knowledge management, career management, strength-based approach, and social exchange theory) theoretical frameworks. The paper will be of value to TM researchers in positioning their work more explicitly vis-à-vis current debates in the existing literature and encouraging them to think about which approach best fits their research aims, questions, and designs.

In the final paper of the issue by Vlad Vaiman, Arno Haslberger and Charles Vance, the authors return to the global theme by exploring the topic of self-initiated expatriation. As corporations continue to look beyond traditional company-assigned expatriates in staffing global organisations, this paper provides a valuable examination of global talent management issues involving self-initiated expatriates. Vaiman and his colleagues identify self-initiated expatriates as an important employee group and argue that they have been under-researched in the literature on global talent management. The paper goes on to discuss how central elements of talent management (i.e., identifying, recruiting, and selecting talent from the external labour market; developing employees; managing talent flows; ensuring retention of talented employees) can apply to the effective utilization of self-initiated expatriates, with direct implications for guiding the future work of practitioners and researchers alike.

3. Conclusions

As illustrated by the four papers in this special issue, our conceptual understanding of the area of talent management continues to evolve at a high pace. It is hard to disagree with Gallardo-Gallardo et al s' (in this issue) assessment that the area remains far short of maturity. However, we do see increasing legitimacy for talent management as an area of study. For example, the EIASM workshop upon which the current issue is based represents an important forum for the dissemination of research on talent management. Furthermore, the *Journal of World Business* which has a strong tradition in publishing talent management research (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., in this issue) has as of January 2015 appointed a Senior Editor for Talent Management and International HRM, reflecting the recognition of the importance of talent management as an area of study.

However it is equally clear that the scepticism that surrounds the concept of talent management owing to the lack of agreed conceptual and theoretical boundaries, combined with the relatively mixed quality of empirical work in the area means that research explicitly in talent management has yet to gain credibility in the top tier of academic outlets. While there is much work that broadly

speaks to a talent management perspective, the discourse of talent management is rarely used in these top-level outlets (see for example Bidwell, 2011; Bidwell & Keller, 2014). However organisational talent are regularly conceptualised as stars in top level publications (see Aguinis & O'Boyle, 2014; Aguinis, O'Boyle, Gonzalez-Mule, & Joo, 2014; Groysberg & Lee, 2009; Groysberg, Lee, & Nanda, 2008; Oldroyd & Morris, 2012). The fact that this work is not framed in the language of talent management has two implications. First, it is often excluded from reviews of research on talent management. This means that the extent of empirical and theoretical work in the area may be underestimated. Second, it may be more difficult for reflective practitioners who aim to access academic work to access it as they may be searching with inappropriate key words. As the field moves towards maturity, establishing the legitimacy of talent management as an intellectual area of study remains a key challenge and it is suggested that more integration of the work on human capital with talent management may be a good step forward in this direction.

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