

## Contextualising talent management

### *Introduction*

Since becoming part of the management lexicon in the mid-1990s, talent management (TM) has quickly become a key area of focus for human resource professionals and academic scholars alike (Cascio and Boudreau, 2016; Collings *et al.*, 2017; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017; Sparrow *et al.*, 2014). One constant over the past number of decades has been a continual struggle for organisations globally to source and retain the quality and quantity of talent required to deliver on their strategic agenda. This challenge did not abate in the global economic slowdown of the past decade and nor are there any signs of an improving climate moving forward. For example, a study of US CEOs identified the top three priorities of this group as talent, operating in the global marketplace and regulation and legislation (Groysberg and Connolly, 2015). Illustrative of this challenge, 70 per cent of CEOs globally identified the lack of availability of talent and skills as a key constraint on the growth prospects of their organisations (PWC, 2016). Further, a major study of over 2,500 HR professionals in Europe identified talent and leadership development as the key priority of the function moving forward (BCG, 2013). Indeed, the political climate in some of the world's leading economies is exasperating talent challenges. For example, some recent changes to immigration programmes such as the H1-B visa programme in the USA have forced organisations such as Microsoft to re-evaluate their talent strategies. This is evidenced through the establishment of a satellite office in Vancouver, Canada to take advantage of the more favourable environment, including Canadian immigration policy, for talent attraction (Dixon, 2017). Similarly, the recent Brexit vote in the UK has already impacted on the level of job applications from international applicants, with a survey from professional services firm KPMG reporting that over a million skilled professionals plan to leave the UK post-Brexit (Topham, 2017). Thus, for many organisations the context of TM remains complex, challenging, and continually evolving.

In picking up on the theme of context, the current special issue presents a set of papers from the fifth EIASM Workshop on Talent Management which was hosted in Copenhagen Business School in October 2016. As was the case for a number of previous workshops, the authors of the best papers from the conference (see Collings *et al.*, 2011, 2015; Scullion *et al.*, 2016; Vaiman and Collings, 2013 for previous special issues) were invited to submit their papers for consideration in this issue subject to a full blind peer-review process. The papers published in this issue are those that came through the process. As will be clear all pick up on context in different ways. In the first paper, Karin King considers the importance of organisational context and specifically organisational climate in supporting talent development and also highlights the importance of understanding employee perceptions and interpretation of TM practices as indicators of organisational priorities. In the second paper, Dagmar Daubner-Siva, Claartie Vinkenbureg, and Paul Jansen introduce the context of diversity management to our consideration of the TM debate. Then, Eva Gallardo-Gallardo, Liliana Arroyo Moliner, and Pedro Gallo consider how the networks of scholars working in the TM area are influencing the evolving literature. This represents an often-unexplored context – the evolution of the field of research. The fourth paper by Heba Makram, Paul Sparrow, and Kay Greasley returns to the organisational context and considers how key actors in organisation actually understand talent in the particular context of the organisations in which they work. The final paper by Lucien Alziari offers a particularly important insight into TM in the



---

applied context. Based on his extensive experience in CHRO roles, Alziari provides some important insights on the applied context of TM – TM in practice.

We now provide a more detailed overview of the contributions to the special issue.

### **SI paper overview**

The first article by Karin King “Talent climate: creating an organisational context supportive of sustainable talent development through implementation of a strong talent system” argues for the need to establish a psychological “climate for talent” to sustain development of talent potential over time. The study presents an original conceptualisation of the notion of talent climate and introduces a construct measurement approach for empirical investigation and construct development. The paper defines a strategic climate for talent which supports talent development and highlights the importance of understanding employee perceptions and interpretation of TM practices as the indicators of organisational priorities. Through developing the notion of a strong talent system and talent climate, the paper highlights the importance of organisational context and the need to link TM practices with context. The paper also highlights the importance of understanding employee perceptions of talent practices, and how these perceptions influence their perception and interpretation of the system.

Overall, this conceptual study extends strategic human resource management, TM, and climate literatures introducing a cross-level model of a strategic organisational climate which examines proximal employee outcomes of TM practices. It supports management practice in an increasingly dynamic context to implement sufficiently distinct, consistent, and contextually relevant talent practices. The paper also offers a few important research, practical, and social implications.

In the second article by Dagmar Daubner-Siva, Claartie Vinckenburg, and Paul Jansen titled “Dovetailing talent management and diversity management: the exclusion-inclusion paradox” advances our understanding of TM by adopting a paradox lens for linking and creating closer alignment between the subfields of TM and diversity management. The authors introduce the original notion of the “exclusion-inclusion” paradox to highlight that diversity management and TM reflect contradictory principles of exclusion and inclusion. On the one hand, organisations promote exclusion through their TM architecture that focusses on the identification and development of a few selected employees, while at the same time, promote inclusion in the attempt to minimise existing inequalities for traditionally underrepresented groups.

The use of paradox theory provides for a range of different, sometimes opposing, perspectives on the issues at hand and for insights which allow for a broader understanding of TM and its development. The study also provides for greater understanding of the need for organisational actors to make choices on whether to respond actively or defensively to the paradox. The authors suggest that future research should focus on the individual level to consider personal aspects of experiences and recommend applying the concept of identity, which also helps link TM and diversity management.

The third paper in this special issue is authored by Eva Gallardo-Gallardo, Liliana Arroyo Moliner, and Pedro Gallo and titled “Mapping dynamics in talent management research”. This paper examines both the extent and nature of collaboration in TM research and provides evidence of TM research evolving from its earliest stage to a more mature phase of development.

The authors highlight the dynamics in TM research through a detailed analysis of the evolving networks. The study adds to the literature through detailed analysis of the structure and nature of its research communities, identifying the key players in the field and highlighting the major topics emerging from research. This paper employs social network

analysis and is the first study in the field to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among researchers in the field.

The findings of the study are particularly useful to understand the structure and evolution of collaborations among TM researchers and provide good insights into the development of the field. ELASM TM workshops and journal special issues were highlighted as being especially important for network creation and development. Finally, the article highlights the considerable potential for greater cohesion in the TM research networks through further international and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

The next paper by Heba Makram, Paul Sparrow, and Kay Greasley “How do strategic actors think about the value of talent management? Moving from talent practices to the practice of talent” is premised on the argument that there is a need to understand how organisations define TM and to explore the perceptions of strategic actors of TM.

The study is designed to capture the views and meanings that strategic actors in an organisation assign to TM, how these actors define TM or operate without a formal definition, and how they perceive the value of TM in its entirety. The authors argue that only once we have such understanding should we attempt to examine the value of TM and understand how it may add value to organisations, thereby helping to resolve the definitional debates around TM.

The paper adopts a strategy-as-practice perspective which involves a shift of focus from understanding talent practices to understanding the practice of talent. The study demonstrates that organisations could implement TM without operating with broad definitions of TM. The study also highlights the limitations of traditional approaches to development and shows that the value of TM is perceived in relation to four areas: translating strategy into talent capabilities, making use of talent potential, extending talent capabilities to acquire new knowledge and skills, and creating a culture which enables talent to add value.

The final paper by Lucien Alziari “A chief HR officer’s perspective on talent management” addresses the problem of a lack of consistency in the way that HR managers approach and think about talent and TM from the perspective of a leading global CHRO. The paper uses an industrial setting and professional experience to link TM to the wider management of organisational capabilities. In particular, the paper identifies and examines five core beliefs that should structure a discussion around, and underpin, the practice of TM. These core beliefs are notions of human capital management, questions about whether talent is generic or not, distinctions between TM and HRM, determinations of who makes decisions about TM, and the moments of truth.

The paper suggests that organisations adopt a capability perspective which results in different clusters in terms of priority for development, and that they are careful to invest mainly in critical capabilities. The main implication of the paper is that talent is not generic, and that a contingency approach to TM is required. The paper highlights the link between strategy, capabilities and talent and demonstrates the need to support the processes that facilitate the deployment of talent to build specific organisational capabilities. It offers a valuable insight into the practice of TM in the global context.

**Vlad Vaiman, David G. Collings and Hugh Scullion**

## References

- BCG (2013), *Creating People Advantage*, Boston Consulting Group, London, available at: [www.bcgperspectives.com/content/articles/human\\_resources\\_organization\\_design\\_creating\\_people\\_advantage\\_2013/?chapter=2#chapter2\\_section2](http://www.bcgperspectives.com/content/articles/human_resources_organization_design_creating_people_advantage_2013/?chapter=2#chapter2_section2) (accessed 30 August 2017).
- Cascio, W.F. and Boudreau, J.W. (2016), “The search for global competence: from international HR to talent management”, *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 51 No. 1, pp. 103-114.

- 
- Collings, D.G., Mellahi, K. and Cascio, W.F. (2017), *The Oxford Handbook of Talent Management*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Collings, D.G., Scullion, H. and Vaiman, V. (2011), "European perspectives on talent management", *European Journal of International Management*, Vol. 5 No. 5, pp. 453-462.
- Collings, D.G., Scullion, H. and Vaiman, V. (2015), "Talent management: progress and prospects", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 233-235.
- Dixon, L. (2017), "Tighter immigration policy pushes firms to open foreign satellite offices", *The Talent Economy*, available at: [www.talenteconomy.io/2017/06/19/tighter-immigration-policy-pushes-firms-open-foreign-satellite-offices/](http://www.talenteconomy.io/2017/06/19/tighter-immigration-policy-pushes-firms-open-foreign-satellite-offices/) (accessed 30 August 2017).
- Groysberg, B. and Connolly, K. (2015), "The three things CEOs worry about the most", *Harvard Business Review*, p. 16.
- McDonnell, A., Collings, D.G., Mellahi, K. and Schuler, R.S. (2017), "Talent management: an integrative review and research agenda", *European Journal of International Management*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 86-128.
- PWC (2016), *CEO Pulse Survey*, PWC, London.
- Scullion, H., Vaiman, V. and Collings, D.G. (2016), "Strategic talent management", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 2-7.
- Sparrow, P.R., Scullion, H. and Tarique, I. (2014), *Strategic Talent Management: Contemporary Issues in International Context*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Topham, G. (2017), "Lack of skilled EU workers 'could choke UK growth post-Brexit'", *The Guardian*, available at: [www.theguardian.com/business/2017/aug/29/lack-of-skilled-eu-workers-could-choke-uk-growth-post-brexit-say-manufacturers?CMP=tw\\_t\\_gu](http://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/aug/29/lack-of-skilled-eu-workers-could-choke-uk-growth-post-brexit-say-manufacturers?CMP=tw_t_gu) (accessed 30 August 2017).
- Vaiman, V. and Collings, D.G. (2013), "Talent management: advancing the field", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 24 No. 9, pp. 1737-1743.