

Empower and legitimate talents' learning activities

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Introduction

This special issue of *The Learning Organization* contains research articles on talent management that support organizational learning. *Talent management* refers to “a process that identifies, attracts, retains, develops and deploys the most potential employees who play a role in developing value for the organization by using their capacity” (Patra, Datta, & Bose, 2024, p. 467). In other words, talent management is a set of practices that maximize the potential of “highly potential people” (Patra et al., 2024, p. 468).

Naturally, *talent* is at the core of talent management. According to Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, and González-Cruz (2013), the meaning of the term talent in the research domain of talent management can be classified into two perspectives. The *first* perspective is called the *object approach*. Talent in this approach means the characteristics of people. Using Patra et al.'s (2024) definition above, talent means some capacity to play a role in developing value for the organization. The *second* perspective is the *subject approach*. In this approach, talent refers to the people themselves. Using Patra et al.' (2024) definition, talent in here is “the most potential employee who plays a role in developing value for the organization by using their capacity.” Of the above two approaches, this paper takes the *subject approach*. That is, when we use the term “talent,” we refer to the “most potential employee” above (Patra et al., 2024, p. 467).

According to Patra et al. (2024), talent management consists of the following practices:

- attracting and retaining the potential employee;
- talent development (including training); and
- deploying the talent.

Needless to say, these are all important elements for an organization to build competitive advantage. Hiring competent personnel, motivating them to further develop their capabilities and assigning them to the right job positions are all important issues in management, not to mention Taylor's scientific management method. And effective utilization of talent is becoming more important in the present age symbolized by VUCA – volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (Patra et al., 2024).

Make the most of female talent with employer branding

To attract and retain potential employees including talent, a company must be attractive to its employees. Such attractiveness of a company as a workplace is called an *employer brand*. And practices to increase workplace attractiveness and to disseminate information about



them are called *employer branding*. Employer branding attracts target personnel and leads to improved retention and productivity of personnel, including talent.

From the perspective of employee branding, [Patra et al. \(2024\)](#) examined factors that contribute to the effectiveness of talent management practices. They also focused on *employee empowerment* as a factor linking employer branding and talent management, as employee empowerment is an important element for members' learning in organizations ([Eslahchi, 2023](#)). The result confirmed that employer branding is effective in attracting talented people. In particular, [Patra et al. \(2024\)](#) found that factors contributing to talent management practices exist in three domains: personal benefits and growth, transparent organizational culture and social commitment of the organizations. In addition, [Patra et al. \(2024\)](#) examined whether the effects of talent management practices differed by talent's demographic profile (age, marital status, gender and region of residence). They found that the effects of talent management practices were particularly prominent for 35–44-year-olds, single women and urban residents.

Of these findings, the most noteworthy is that employer branding is particularly effective for women. In other words, employer branding targeting women can attract and retain talent more efficiently.

This finding may provide useful suggestions for organizations to invest resources efficiently and may also contribute to promoting women's social participation. Of course, it is necessary to ensure fairness. However, finding the effectiveness of employer branding focused on women may provide important suggestions for organizations where women's advancement and success in society is an urgent issue.

Achieve ambidextrous management through developing talent's potential

Both *exploring* new knowledge and *exploiting* existing knowledge are important for organizations to survive ([March, 1991](#)). Exploiting existing knowledge improves efficiency, but as the environment changes, related practice becomes ineffective. For this reason, organizations must constantly explore new possibilities. However, exploitation and exploration are difficult to reconcile. Organizations tend to cling to successful experiences ([Levitt & March, 1988](#)). For this reason, there is a tendency toward exploitation rather than exploration which involves a high degree of uncertainty.

The *ambidextrous management* ([O'Reilly & Tushman, 2016](#); [Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996](#)) aims at solving this problem. Ambidextrous management is oriented toward both short-term adaptation (incremental change) and revolutionary change (long-term destruction) ([Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996](#)). Hence, ambidextrous management attracts researchers' attention ([Almahendra & Ambos, 2015](#)).

Most ambidextrous management studies deal with the ambidexterity of top management (e.g. [O'Reilly & Tushman, 2016](#)). In contrast, [Akbar and Anas \(2024\)](#) examined ambidexterity at the member level. [Akbar and Anas \(2024\)](#) revealed that talent management improves members' ambidexterity. It was also found that the effect of talent management on improving members' ambidexterity was positively moderated by practices of the *learning organization* ([Senge, 1990](#)). In particular, among the components of a learning organization ([Marsick & Watkins, 2003](#)), continuous learning opportunity, embedded system to share learning, empowerment and strategic leadership to support learning, significantly strengthened the effect of talent management.

Of note is the high affinity between talent management and learning organizations. In particular, the learning organization components (e.g. continuous learning opportunity and empowerment), whose effectiveness has been demonstrated, provide talents with opportunities and autonomy in their activities and facilitate exercising their abilities.

Furthermore, the effective use of talent does not only benefit the talent. Talent can be a catalyst for learning for all members. Talent can be the core driver of a learning organization (Senge, 1990). Therefore, management should take advantage of talent to build a learning organization and realize ambidextrous management.

Build two-way relationships that allow talent to reach their full potential

Even innovative talent cannot generate innovation on its own; generating innovation is an organizational activity. In Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) knowledge creation model interaction among members is recognized as an important element. Firms that are successful in continuously generating innovation employ a variety of practices to facilitate inter-personal interactions.

Smothers (2024) examined the effect of leader-member exchange (LMX) in the mechanism by which innovative talent's learning strategies (behavioral and cognitive) generate ideas, which are then put into practice. Here, LMX indicates a good vertical relationship in an organization. More specifically, LMX is a mutually trusting relationship between a leader and members, where leaders support members and members can speak up for leaders (Smothers, 2024).

Whereas the starting point for idea generation for innovation is individual learning, however, such individual learning does not always lead successfully to innovation. Here, Smothers (2024) found that the relationship between individual learning and idea generation is strengthened by LMX. Looking more specifically at the components of LMX, mutual trust between a leader and members, leaders' exercise of authority to support members and members' upward suggestions to the leader promote idea generation. As the term "exchange" suggests, LMX is a two-way relationship between leaders and members. Smothers (2024) findings indicate that the behaviors and perceptions of both the leader and the members are important. It is not enough to have one or the other.

Among the above components of LMX, leaders' exercise of authority is particularly important. Notably, authority should be exercised not only over the talent under the leader's command but also over outside stakeholders (e.g. upper management and managers of other departments with competing interests). Talent's activities may be interfered with by other departments whose own interests may be threatened by the talent. Organizations do not always act in a unified manner in line with the interests of the whole; organizational learning is a political process with self-interested actors acting in their own interests (Burgoyne & Jackson, 1997; Lawrence, Mauws, Dyck, & Kleysen, 2005; Nakanishi, 2023).

For this reason, leaders must protect talents from organizational politics. In other words, to support the utilization of talents' abilities, the leader must fully use his/her authority. Meanwhile, talents who are subordinates should not be reserved. Talent should be proactive in giving suggestions so that they can gain necessary support, including the leader's authority. In this way, it is the leader who makes the most of talent, and it is the talent who moves the leader.

Focus on the individuality of each talent

Antony, Arulandu, and Parayitam (2024) examined the effect of talent management on reducing turnover intention. They also examined the mediating effect of organizational commitment on this mechanism. The results showed that talent management increased talent's organizational commitment and decreased turnover intention. This effect was stronger for longer tenure and more pronounced for men than for women.

Antony et al. (2024) found that the more employees feel that the assigned job fits them, the more they are committed to the organization. Therefore, to improve employees' organizational commitment, a company needs to assign employees to jobs that they feel they

fit into. Conversely, employees should attempt to take jobs that they feel they fit into. This point corresponds to “deploying the talent” among talent management components.

The importance of job fit is widely recognized. This point is more pronounced in talent management. This is because for talents, using their potential is a very important concern. Talent will increase their organizational commitment if they recognize that they can demonstrate their potential in their organization. However, in an environment that does not allow talent to reach their full potential, the decrease in commitment and the increase in turnover intention will be more prominent for talent than for other employees.

Therefore, it is quite important for an organization to properly appraise the potential of its talent and assign them to the right position to improve organizational performance. One of the pillars of the bureaucratic organization, as advocated by Max Weber, was regulation-based, impersonal management. Of course, this principle has advantages in terms of organizational stability and predictability. However, in a modern society characterized by VUCA, effectively using the characteristics of each individual talent is required. For this purpose, we should pay attention to the individuality of each talent.

Provide cross-boundary opportunities for talent

Vega Chica and Valle Lituma (2024) examined the relationship between knowledge acquisition, learning motivation, and knowledge transfer. The unit of analysis was the individual, with students (undergraduate and graduate) engaged in business practice as subjects. The results revealed that knowledge acquisition improves learning motivation, which in turn promotes knowledge transfer.

This finding indicates that knowledge acquisition and transfer are inseparable. Therefore, if an organization wishes talent to transfer new knowledge to the organization, it should first provide opportunities to acquire knowledge. In particular, talent should not be confined to the organization if an organization aims at promoting knowledge transfer from outside. Talent must be given opportunities to learn outside the organization, i.e. *boundary crossing*.

Outside the organization, learners can acquire knowledge that is not available within the organization, and new perspectives are encouraged that allow for critical reflection on previously taken-for-granted beliefs. Learning at universities by working adults, as examined by Vega Chica and Valle Lituma (2024), is an example of boundary crossing. Participating in inter-organizational communities of practice (Nakanishi, 2019) is another form of across-boundary learning. With advances in information and communication technology, inter-organizational communities of practice can be operated across space, increasing their effectiveness in knowledge acquisition and learning (Hur & Brush, 2009).

Talent who learned outside the organization would serve as gatekeepers (Haas, 2015), connecting the inside and outside of the organization. They would also serve as catalysts for the learning of other members.

A Japanese proverb says, “Send your beloved child on a journey.” Management should let their beloved members have various experiences and learn from their journeys. Encourage the talent to go across boundaries and bring back their experiences.

Provide training that increases engagement

Increasing organizational members’ engagement not only leads to their satisfaction but also to improved organizational performance. Engagement refers to “the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s ‘preferred self’ in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional) and active, full role performances” (Kahn, 1990, p. 700).

Luthra, Dixit, and Arya (2024) examined the effects of faculty development (FD) programs on faculty's professional development and engagement in universities (business schools) as learning organizations. The results revealed that FD promotes professional development, which in turn increases faculty engagement. Interestingly, FD does not merely improve faculty members' teaching and research skills, but also their engagement. Naturally, this rule will also apply to some extent to for-profit companies.

Of course, not all training is like that. There must be some characteristics that contribute to improving engagement. If we infer from interpreting the questions used by Luthra et al. (2024) and apply the underlying constructs to organizations in general, including for-profit companies, the following learning activities are likely to increase engagement:

- exchange programs with other organizations/domains;
- training on an area different from your usual work;
- national/international conference; and
- learning and exploration activities and leave and funds for such activities.

Among these, for example, the effectiveness of participating in inter-organizational conferences is emphasized by Nakanishi (2019).

Use training to increase talent's engagement. Training is not just about improving practical skills.

Check if your organization provides a place where employees want to stay

Employee retention is an important component of talent management (Patra et al., 2024). Haque (2024), through an extensive prior research review, produced an exhaustive list of factors that influence employee retention. Notably, Haque (2024) classifies those factors into two categories: those that are manageable for the organization and those that are not. She then states that firms should focus on manageable factors in preventing turnover and retaining talent. Among those, the manageable factors for turnover prevention are mainly related to career and training/learning.

Haque (2024) specifically states that "the competence-based developmental approach is highly significant for employee retention" (p. 592). In other words, developmental programs not only enhance employees' skills and knowledge but also influence their perceptions. Notably, this point is in common with Luthra et al. (2024) assertion that university FD programs increase engagement.

The contribution of this study is the list of factors affecting retention (Table 2). Therefore, it is suggested to use Table 2, particularly items under the category of "job-related issues and apprehensions (under the organization's control)," as a checklist for evaluating companies' work environment. That is, through a survey of employees, the items listed in Table 2 (e.g. "poor growth opportunities/lack of career development opportunities," "dead-end job," "low control," etc.) are to be evaluated. This would allow firms to identify areas that need urgent improvement to prevent turnover.

Thus, Haque's (2024) Table 2 can be used as a powerful tool in determining employee retention countermeasures.

Conclusions

Each paper in this issue emphasizes the importance of talent management. For example, talent management contributes to member ambidexterity (Akbar & Anas, 2024) and to improving organizational commitment and preventing turnover (Antony et al., 2024). Furthermore, each paper provides implications for effective talent management. For

example, [Patra et al. \(2024\)](#) find that employer branding attracts talent to the organization. [Antony et al. \(2024\)](#) argue that assignment to jobs in which talent themselves feel fit enhances their organizational commitment. [Luthra et al. \(2024\)](#) point to the effectiveness of training in increasing talent engagement.

This essay presented practical implications based on the findings of each paper. The primary implications were as follows:

- protect talent from organizational politics;
- facilitate cross-boundary learning of talent;
- provide training that will increase engagement; and
- check issues that may lead to talent's turnover.

Common to these implications is the importance of creating an environment that empowers talent, gives them autonomy and allows them to exercise their capacity at their own discretion.

In addition, in achieving the above, it is important to legitimize the activities of talent. Organizational learning is a political process ([Burgoyne & Jackson, 1997](#); [Lawrence et al., 2005](#)). For example, even if talent crosses organizational boundaries to acquire knowledge and attempts to transfer knowledge into the organization, there may be groups of people who will hinder such knowledge transfer ([Nakanishi, 2023](#)). To prevent this, the leader or top management must formalize, legitimize and protect the talent's activities.

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