

A theoretical approach to talent management

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Abstract

Lately, the industrial revolution, high technological development, and global labor market opening have brought new challenges to labor markets and stimulated human resources to deal with the barriers that tested their adaptation skills, quick decision-making, and easiness in solving urgent problems under tight deadlines. Human resource policies, strategies, and good practices have become insufficient for the current requirements of the global markets, triggering the appearance of a new area of research, that is, talent management. To bring theoretical clarifications, this study aimed to review the literature in the field for the 2016-2021 period by overviewing the studies published in research journals and databases to investigate how talent and talent management have been defined, and which practices have been used globally. The studies showed that the field has not been researched enough due to difficulties encountered in formulating an unanimously accepted definition by both academics and practitioners.

Keywords: Human resources; talent; talent management; talent management practices.

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1. Introduction

Talent has mostly been linked to the exceptional skills of a person to perform activities in which they excel, mainly in arts, music, and sports (Wang, Xu, Zhao & Bian, 2022). The need of organizations in all fields to extend the search for valuable employees appeared together with the development of artificial intelligence, globalization, and digitalization, and with the deficit of qualified labor force in some sectors (Richard & Lemaire, 2023; Zhang, Su & Liu, 2023). Success and profit-oriented companies focused on new recruitment, selection, and retention methods of valuable employees, as well as on their promotion to key positions (Harsch & Festing, 2020; Björk, Bolander & Forsman, 2022).

The explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language defined talent as “an inborn ability of a person to attain performance in a specific field of activity”, while Dries (2013a) refers to talent as a “unique strategic resource needed to obtain competitive advantages”. Michaels et al. (2001) define talent as “a sum of a person’s abilities (talents, abilities, knowledge, experience, intelligence, thinking, attitude, character) and a highly strategic mind, a leading capacity, emotional maturity, communication abilities, ability to attract and inspire other talented people, entrepreneurial instincts, functional skills and ability to deliver results”.

According to Cappelli and Keller, (2014) and Ansar and Baloch (2018), the term talent management was used for the first time by the American Management Society in 1957 in Dooher and Marting’s paper, “Selection of management personnel”. Casse (1994) used the talent management concept in the paper, “People are not Resources”, describing it as a competitive advantage of organizations, while the research foundation of talent management was developed by the McKinsey consultancy company in 1997 with the introduction of the talent management term in the paper “War for Talent”.

The talent management field of research has developed especially in the last ten years, with a rising number of publications on this topic after 2010, showing that this is a highly valuable area of research (Sparrow, 2021). Current approaches underline the initial conceptual confusions in defining talent management, while demographic changes, globalization, the Internet development, and the economic crises of the past decade led to the need to redefine the current concepts of “talent” and “talent management” and develop new good practices guides in this area (Liu, 2019).

1.1. Purpose of study

Although there are many articles published abroad in the area of talent management, it has not been studied and researched enough in Romania. Based on the content analysis of fifteen articles published in journals and international databases, this study aims to draw the attention of Romanian researchers to the area of talent management, which is in full development, and bring further understanding to the terms of talent, talent management, and talent management practices.

2. Materials and Methods

This study reviewed the literature in the field by overviewing the studies published in research journals and databases. To refine the results, the study used such exclusion criteria as the year of publication between 2016-2021, the English language, and the period of research between May and September 2022. All information used was duly referenced, to ensure compliance with ethical requirements. The study and its findings are harmless.

3. Results

The deficit of the talented labor force at the global level, competitive labor markets, and migration towards better-paid jobs imposed the development of new labor force recruitment and attraction meth-

ods contributing to the success of profit-oriented organizations. Based on the content analysis of secondary sources, we will be presenting the current state of knowledge by reviewing the concepts of talent, talent management, and talent management practices.

Using bibliometric and content analyses, Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016) reviewed 96 articles containing empirical studies published in academic journals between 2006 and 2014. The authors stress that there were before 2012 just a few articles on talent management, being published in a high number of specialized journals. Over 27% of analyzed studies do not contain a definition of talent management, while 46% use the definitions of other authors. As for the definition of talent, 16% of the articles provide an explicit definition, and 29% have no definition for the term.

The authors stress that there are two theoretical approaches to talent management, namely, talent strategic management of talent suggested by Collings and Mellahi (2009) and talent as put forward by Scullion et al. (2010). De Boeck, Meyers and Dries (2017) studied the reactions of employees towards talent management practices departing from two hypotheses: talent management provides opportunities for talented employees; talent management creates differences between talented employees and those seen as untalented. After studying 43 articles, of which, 22 non-empirical and 21 empirical, the authors found that the employees seen as un-talented reacted negatively to talent management practices as their job safety had not been ensured. Before conducting this study, we could not identify any study having as the target group untalented employees, the potential impact of talent management practices on this group could not be identified. The study authors concluded that further observations and empirical research are needed to identify what type of talent management practices is appropriate for each field in compliance with the principles of social ethics.

Bolander, Werr, and Asplund (2017) aimed to present the concepts of talent management by conducting a comparative study of 30 organizations in Sweden using in-depth interviews. The study defined talent management and its features: the subject versus object, inclusive or exclusive, innate or learned, and incoming or outgoing. There were identified five key talent management practices, namely, recruitment, talent identification and development, career management and succession planning, and management of talented employee retention. Four types of talent management were identified from the collected responses: elitist, humanistic, competitive, and entrepreneurial. As the study was conducted only after interviewing the representatives of Swedish organizations, its results cannot be generalized but could be used as a starting point for future empirical research in talent management.

Makram, Sparrow, and Greasley (2017) conducted an empirical study with fifty in-depth interviews of human resources and top managers from five multinational companies in Europe, South Africa, Asia, and Australia. Study participants were asked to provide a personal definition of talent management, describe what value means in their organizations, and how talent management adds value to their organizations. Although the organizations included in the study had implemented talent management practices, it was seen as a branch of human resource management. The definition of talent management provided by study participants was subjective, based on their perceptions with no link to current theoretical concepts, with a limited understanding of the aim, importance, and objectives of talent management for an organization.

To determine the implication of inclusive and exclusive talent management practices, Savanevičienė and Vilčiauskaitė (2017) conducted in-depth interviews in ten Lithuanian companies specialized in banking, trade, energy, transport, agribusiness, consultancy, constructions, production, and technology, which followed six research lines. Study respondents gave their definitions of talent management and mentioned the importance of talent management strategies for organizational performance, showing an interest in inclusive talent management practices oriented towards the development of the company's employees.

Ansar and Baloch (2018) concentrated on defining talent and talent management by analyzing critically the evolution of concepts over time. Starting from the meanings of the definitions of talent since ancient times, the authors established that the term was used for the first time in 1957 by the American Association of Management (Dooher and Marting, 1957) and by the literature in the field in the articles Talent Waste and Developing Executive Talent: a practical guide. The analyzed studies show that talent management definitions are academic, and to reach their objective, organizations create their definitions of talent and talent management.

Starting from the definition of talent management put forward by Lewis and Heckman (2006), Pandita and Ray (2018) analyzed the factors contributing to talent employment and retention in organizations, as well as such talent management practices as talent attraction, development, and retention. The authors conducted a systematic literature review and suggested a model of talent management practices based on the development of criteria for selecting, developing, and retaining an organization's valuable employees.

Salau et al. (2018) carried out empirical research to identify talent management practices used in a top university in Nigeria. There were applied 350 questionnaires to employees working in the organizations for more than two years. The answers were used to identify talent management practices contributing the employee satisfaction and desire to remain in the institution, such as performance assessment, professional development, working environment, etc. The authors also found that the implementation of talent management practices improves organizational efficiency.

Kravariti and Johnston (2020) carried out a content analysis that included over 70 articles, which investigated whether talent management practices used in the private sector could also be implemented in public institutions. The articles showed that there are concepts specific to the private sector, while the less studied public sector developed no definitions for talent or talent management of their own. The authors identified internal and external factors that could influence talent management in public institutions, such as organizational reputation, inclusive talent management, rapid legislation, and political and legal factors. Study conclusions found that more empirical research is needed on public institutions at the global level to prove the utility and necessity of talent management practices implementation.

Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo (2019) provided a critical analysis of 174 articles that included an empirical study on the development of talent management. Data were collected using Web of Science and Scopus databases covering the period between 2006 and 2017. They found that the number of quantitative studies on talent management grew both in academic and professional journals, such as the *International Journal of Project Management*, or other journals in different geographical areas, for instance, the *Asian Business*. They identified 9 key issues slowing down talent the development of talent management, starting from the publication of articles in journals not being linked to the field of study, the use of talent management concept in the title of an article without approaching the topic as such in the article, lack of theoretical approaches, being taken over definitions from other authors that are not supported by arguments, no mention of the methods used in the study, insufficient number of respondents included in the study, studies focused mainly on the private sector, as well as the fact that talent management depends on the context, in the sense that it is applied differently by region, country or organization.

Using a review of forty articles, Mohapatra and Behera (2020) analyzed talent management from four perspectives referring to talent management practices, namely, talent acquisition, development, and retention. The analysis confirms the fact that talent management practices contribute to the identification of talented individuals and their development, and the organization can build a database of talents from which it can choose future leaders. With regards to talent acquisition and retention, the analyzed studies showed that there is a need for the adoption of more performant recruitment and selection methods for hiring the most valuable individuals and that there is a significant relation between talent management

practices and the attraction and retention of highly efficient employees. As for talent involvement and retention, the studies showed that talent management practices implementation intensifies the degree of employee involvement and contributes to the retention of valuable human resources.

Sandeepanie, Dinoka, Sajeevanie, and Prasadini (2020) carried out a systematic literature review of 96 articles published between 1990-2019 to identify and clarify the concepts of talent, talent management, and talent management practices. The study showed that talent management is considered to be similar to good practices in human resource management functions. Due to present confusion in the definition of concepts, it is difficult to identify the significance and importance of talent management for organizations. The authors suggest their definitions of talent and talent management using the concepts taken from Lewis and Heckman (2006) and identify talent management practices that differ by the field of activity of each organization.

Swailles (2020) focuses on the effects of exclusive talent management practices, on the hypotheses that shape talent management, and on the study of employee reactions to such elitist practices. Using empirical studies, current theories, and ethical principles, the author puts forward a definition of talent management and three main hypotheses: the existence of talented individuals, the correct identification of talents in an organization, and the existence of a relation between talent management and organizational performance. The first hypothesis was confirmed as there are talented people in many sectors. The second is confirmed, underlining that specific conditions should be met that could be helpful for managers in identifying and measuring talents in an organization without breaching ethical principles. The third hypothesis shows that the application of talent management practices contributes to organizational performance.

After conducting a qualitative analysis and semi-structured interviews, Tlaiss (2020) investigate the philosophy, approaches to talent management, as well as practices in Lebanon. The study conducted interviews with 21 human resource experts in the field in big organizations in the banking sector, hospitals, hotels, and the retail industry. The interviewees provided their definitions of talent, based on which, we could observe that talent is perceived as a rare strong point differentiating us from others. Depending on the field of activity, respondents supported an exclusively developed talent management philosophy (banking sector and retail industry) and an exclusively stable one (in hospitals and hotels). As for talent identification, there are clear differences in different fields of activity. In hotels and hospitals, all employees are considered to be potentially talented, which is to be expected because the sample employers recruit personnel from the best universities in Lebanon. In banking, talent management is concentrated on talent potential and development, and in retail, it is done by analyzing workplace performance, which then is used to create a database of talents, subsequently being turned into a group with the highest chances of promotion.

Aljbour et al., (2021) carried out a systematic literature review of 120 quantitative articles on talent management practices and determinant factors. The authors do not provide their definition of talent management, but starting from a definition of Silzer and Dowell, (2010) identify in the articles six sets of talent management practices, specifically, talent planning, talent acquisition, talent development, talent performance management, talent involvement and retention in an organization. Also, there were underlined the determinant factors influencing talent and talent management practices, such as inclusive/exclusive, and innate/acquired. People versus positions, object versus subject, talent management versus human resource management, incoming versus outgoing, transferability versus dependence context dependence.

4. Discussion

Starting from the conceptual ambiguity present in the current academic debate, the study aimed to clarify the concepts of talent and talent management, and to identify talent management practices in organizations. Before conducting the study, in discussions and debates with practitioners from public institutions, employees in various departments, as well as with students, we noted that *talent* has been associated with people having special abilities who work in the area of arts and sports, and it has been a novelty to identify talented resources in organizations.

Most articles take over the definitions from the current literature belonging to such authors as Lewis and Heckman, (2006); Collings and Mellahi, (2009); Scullion et al. (2010); Silzer and Dowell, (2010), Collings et. al. (2006), without providing support for the use of specific definitions, or have their definitions extracted from study participants.

We also note that current conceptual ambiguities and lack of clear definitions for the concepts of talent and talent are obstacles to the implementation of talent management practices at the global level. Now, there are insufficient comparative studies of organizations operating in the same field activity but located in different geographical, or of organizations from different areas or cultures that could enable the generalization of current concepts. In this context, organizations formulate their own definitions and talent management practices by field of activity.

All authors agree that more extensive quantitative studies are needed that would prove the utility and necessity of introducing talent management practices in both private and public organizations. The factors influencing talent management in organizations differ from one institution to another by field of activity or by country and should be approached taking into account the needs of each company. (Tlaiss,2020).

5. Conclusion

Although there is no consensus between academics and practitioners regarding the concept of talent and talent management, most analyzed studies define clearly the current talent management practices, stressing that exclusive talent management practices are preferred in the private sector and inclusive ones in public institutions. Insufficient evidence and quantitative research are supporting the usefulness and necessity of implementing talent management practices and therefore a reassessment of current approaches will be needed to lower the impact of the implementation of such practices on organizations and employees.

Beyond confusion and lack of clarity of some concepts, talent management is a complex field of study that will continue to grow day by day by adapting to the needs of organizations and will generate new paradigms contributing to the success of companies and will satisfy the needs of employees working in all sectors.

The limitations of current studies derive from the fact that most included in literature reviews were targeted at top managers in big private organizations in the United States of America. A small number of studies analyzed talent management practices from the perspective of human resource managers and the effects of such practices on organizations or the private life of employees in compliance with ethical principles.

The limitations of this study derive from the low number of analyzed articles and from the fact that this study aimed to clarify the current understanding of the concepts of talent and talent management and other perspectives have not been considered, such as talent management philosophy, determinant factors, types of talent management, etc.

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