

Talent Management

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Series editors: Vlad Vaiman and David Collings

This series focuses on talent management, one of the fastest growing areas of research in the areas of business and management. As a topic, it bridges a number of core management areas, including human resource management (HRM), organizational psychology, strategy, and international business.

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Talent Management: A Decade of Developments

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2022

Editorial matter and selection © 2022 David Collings, Vlad Vaiman and Hugh Scullion.
Individual chapters © 2022 The authors.
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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80117-835-8 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-80117-834-1 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-80117-836-5 (Epub)



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Foreword

When I became the EIASM Executive Director, the Talent Management team – Prof. Vlad Vaiman, Prof. David Collings, and Prof. Hugh Scullion – was the first academic group I engaged with. And what an inspiring team of outstanding scholars they happened to be! This team has truly global scope and includes an impressive circle of leading academics with complementary talents who are dedicated to our community: together they are efficient, dynamic, and rigorous as well as warm and welcoming. Working with the Talent Management (TM) team has had a profound effect on me personally.

During the past decade, TM has been one of the fastest growing areas of research in human resources (HR), organizational behavior (OB), and business and management. The EIASM Workshop on TM was launched on April 16–17, 2012, when this theme first emerged, and when its significance was first recognized by the wider academic community. The objective of the workshop was “to create a forum for academic exchange of empirical qualitative or quantitative research in the area of talent management.” Since its inception, the goal was indeed to provide a greater depth in understanding of the role and importance of TM within organizations and to explore synergies between research and practical perspectives on contemporary TM. The original chairpersons, Prof. Vaiman, Prof. Collings, and Prof. Scullion, were the linchpins of the development of a community whose contributions to the academic area of TM can now be observed with respect. This excellent new book contributes very explicitly to the recognition of their accomplishment, and we are deeply grateful to these three individuals for their dedicated commitment and continuous dynamism.

EIASM’s mission is to foster and support high-quality impactful research and doctoral studies in management, governance, and related disciplines. The European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management has dedicated itself to raising the profile of European management research with respect to other established scientific disciplines, as well as the business world. For 50 years, EIASM has been the European network of networks for researchers and doctoral students in management and governance. The TM team continues to provide a strong contribution to academia as well as EIASM’s highly impactful service to the academic community at large.

Established in 1971, EIASM celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, and it is a great pleasure to observe the outcomes of the original Talent Management Workshop. Today, we can clearly see the results which include the rejuvenation and renewal of EIASM academic teams as well as the contributions of individual

scholars, who are deeply committed to the shared mission of benefitting the entire academic community. We can only rejoice in the many accomplishments and achievements of the members of the EIASM Team Management community over the past decade, among which is the Emerald Publishing's book series on Talent Management. We all send our best wishes for future editions, which I am sure will reveal many new achievements, as the perspectives of this book highly suggest.

Prof. Jerome Chabanne-Rive
EIASM Executive Director

Preface

Talent Management is a series of books edited and authored by some of the best and most renowned researchers in the field of talent management (TM). As its name suggests, this Emerald series focuses on TM, one of the fastest growing areas of research in the areas of business and management. As a topic, it bridges a number of core management areas, including human resource management, organizational psychology, strategy, and international business. The series features monographs and edited collections exploring both research and practical perspectives on contemporary TM. The main aim of the series is to provide a forum for the publication of novel perspectives on talent and TM from across disciplinary divides. It also provides the opportunity to explore new and innovative issues and topics in this area in greater depth.

This Emerald series, *Talent Management*, is intended to serve the growing market of global scholars and practitioners who seek a deeper and broader understanding of the role and importance of TM in organizations. The series focuses on key areas of TM practice as well as analyses at different levels from individual to societal. With this in mind, all books in the series provide a thorough review of existing research and multiple examples of companies around the world, wherever applicable. Given the nature of the subject at hand, the authors and editors of the books are global in their scope and the leading scholars in their respective areas. They bring exceptional knowledge of, and expertise in, the issues of TM they address, and in some instances, the authors are the forerunners of their topics. We feel very fortunate to have such a distinguished group of academics involved in this series.

Having emerged from the practitioner literature in the 1990s, the evidence base in terms of TM research was truly materialized in the late 2000s and subsequent years. The launch of the EIASM Workshop on Talent Management in 2012 coincided with this surge in research interest, and thus this volume – appropriately titled *Talent Management: A Decade of Developments* – is a valuable record of the development of our understanding of TM at a critical time in its evolution. The workshops provide a dedicated forum for the foremost scholars and practitioners in the field and an outstanding generation of new scholars whose research is located in the talent space to come together to consider the key questions which the area faces. Building upon a decade of the EIASM Workshops on Talent Management, this volume brings together leading voices on TM to reflect on the current status of research in their respective areas of expertise. Their chapters

summarize key developments in our understanding of TM over the past 10 years and highlight some priorities for research and practice moving forward.

It goes without saying that the publisher and editor are vital partners in making this series possible. In particular, we want to express our sincere gratitude for the work of our former series editors, Niall Kennedy and David Mulvaney, as well as the current editor, Nick Wallwork. They all have been very encouraging of the *Talent Management* series and instrumental in providing the necessary support to us and the authors and editors in the series. Together we are all very excited about the *Talent Management* series and hope you find an opportunity to use and benefit from *Talent Management: A Decade of Developments*, as well as all other published and upcoming books in the series!

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March 2022

Chapter 1

Talent Management: A Decade of Developments

David G. Collings, Vlad Vaiman and Hugh Scullion

Introduction

Talent management (TM) has become a mainstream area of research in the fields of business and management over the past decade or so. It is now a mainstay as a research topic in leading academic conferences, and papers on TM regularly appear in high-impact academic journals. However, in the early days of the evolution of the area, there were limited opportunities for scholars to disseminate their emerging research ideas on TM. Many skeptics viewed it as a management fad with limited theoretical or empirical value. It was with these and other challenges in mind that the European Association for Advanced Studies in Management (EIASM) workshop on TM was created as an arena for scholars to disseminate their research on the topic of TM, conceived in a broad way. It was also envisaged as key to developing a network of international scholars with shared interests in the emerging area of TM. Indeed, [Gallardo-Gallardo, Nijs, Dries, and Gallo \(2015\)](#) explicitly pointed to the role which the EIASM TM workshops, combined with journal special issues, played in the growth of a scientific community dedicated to the area of TM. As Chairs, we are particularly proud of the reputation that the workshops have gained as a developmental network. The balance between established scholars, who are among the leading academics in the area, and emerging researchers and doctoral students contributes greatly to the dynamic and engaging discussion at our annual workshops.

This volume represents a retrospective on the first decade of the EIASM workshops on TM. Given that academic research on TM did not gain any traction until about 2008 at the earliest (e.g., [Vaiman & Vance, 2008](#)), and it was the early 2010s before publications increased beyond 20 or so per year ([McDonnell, Collings, Mellahi, & Schuler, 2017](#)), these workshops coincide with a hugely important decade in the evolution of academic research in TM. Indeed, [Gallardo-Gallardo et al. \(2015\)](#) described TM as an embryonic field from the period 2008–2011, with

2011 constituting the beginning of the growth stage of the field. Thus, the timing of the launch of the workshop was very much aligned with this important stage of development.

There is little doubt that the area of TM is as important now as it was when it emerged from practice at the turn of the current century in response to the challenges which firms in the United States and elsewhere were facing in attracting and retaining critical employees (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). While the specific challenges may have evolved, talent shortages remain a critical issue for organizations globally, and organizational leaders continue to report talent challenges as impacting on their ability to deliver on organizational objectives.

Scoping the Field

Unsurprisingly and consistent with discussions in the wider area of TM, a key theme in the earlier workshops in the series was around the conceptual and intellectual boundaries of the area. Indeed, the lack of an agreed theory of TM was identified as something which inhibited the early development of the area (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). As Lewis and Heckman (2006, p. 139) concluded only a couple of years previously, there was “a disturbing lack of clarity regarding the definition, scope and overall goals of talent management.” Indeed, based on a review of scholarship through 2012, Thunnissen, Boselie, and Fruyter (2013, p. 1749) concluded that the majority of the literature remained focused on responding to the question of “what talent management is.” This assertion certainly resonated with the discussions at the early years of the EIASM workshops.

In tracing the evolution of the intellectual boundaries of TM, we point to a number of trends. First, it is arguable that this early research did not build enough on the earlier foundations laid in parallel literatures (for useful reviews, see Cappelli & Keller, 2014, 2017; Sparrow, 2022). That said, Lewis and Heckman (2006) identified three key conceptualizations of TM in the mid-part of the first decade of the 2000s. First was simply about replacing the label human resource management (HRM) with TM. This trend did little to help the academic credibility of TM, with many considering TM simply old wine in new bottles. Second, the stream shifted the discussion of succession planning from a well-established approach of planning career moves against an organizational chart over time to a more dynamic approach to succession based on forecasting staffing needs and developing talent pools to meet these future needs. The former was designed for a relatively stable environment and careers which unfolded in single organizations (see Cappelli & Keller, 2014) but proved less useful in more dynamic contexts and where individual careers unfolded across multiple organizations. The talent pool approach draws many important insights from the literature on supply chain management (Cappelli, 2008).

The third key area of focus was on the management of “A players,” often referred to top grading, which was premised on the insights from forced distribution of performance where a limited number of employees can be classified as A players, or stars, the majority as B players, or solid performers, with an additional

percentage identified as C players. The objective was to manage the performance curve by managing the C players up or out and pushing the curve to the right (Grote, 2005; Michaels et al., 2001). While this approach was legitimized by key proponents such as Jack Welch at General Electric (GE), the idea of forced distribution upon which it is premised has fallen out of favor in recent years owing to criticisms around *inter alia*, the negative impact it has on teamwork, biases in rating and ranking performance, and overly focusing on performance with limited consideration of how that performance is achieved (Collings, 2017; Pfeffer, 2001).

Collings and Mellahi (2009) identified a fourth theme of influential literature which was premised on the differentiation of critical or pivotal jobs in organizations, building on the work of Boudreau and Ramstad (2007) and Becker and Huselid (2006). These roles are differentiated by the potential to generate a disproportionate output which contributes to the strategic intent of the organization. In other words, by increasing the quality or quantity of individuals in these roles, the quality or quantity of output would improve significantly. This literature shifted the locus of differentiation in TM from the individual employee inputs to the potential for differential output which was a significant change in thinking in TM (Collings, 2017; Huselid & Becker, 2011). A later theme which emerged in the conceptualization of TM concerned (see Vaiman, Scullion, & Collings, 2012) the role of data and analytics in making more informed decisions around investments in talent, in line with wider shifts in the use of analytics in human resource (HR) decision-making (Boudreau & Jesuthasan, 2011).

Hence, it is unsurprising that the early years of the workshop saw a strong focus on developing the conceptual and intellectual boundaries of the area of TM. Parallel discussions in the academic literature at the time mirrored these debates. For example, Dries (2013) described TM as a “phenomenon” owing to the limited available theory to capture its different elements or cause-and-effect relationships, with little agreement on which methodological approach was considered superior to others. In her comprehensive review across six streams of literature, Dries unearths some important theoretical perspectives, discrepancies, tensions, and assumptions which she argued could advance theoretical development.

Frankly, the idea that there needs to be a single definition or framework of TM is not one we subscribe to. However, it is important that scholars are explicit in defining how they conceptualize and operationalize the concept in their own work. In the past, many papers failed to define TM in their work in the area. Pointing to the limitations of failing to do so, Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2015, p. 274) argue that what is

crucial for advancing the field is not so much that scholars should agree on which theoretical frameworks to use, but rather that they make deliberate choices in terms of theoretical framing and apply these consistently within one and the same project.

The literature has broadly evolved along two tracks in terms of conceptual underpinning. The first and arguably dominant focus is on exclusive TM which emphasizes the disproportionate contribution of high-performing and

high-potential employees often in pivotal or critical roles. The second focus has been on a more inclusive approach to TM, which emphasized the strengths which individual employees bring to the workplace and how organizations can build upon those strengths (Swales, Downs, & Orr, 2014). Reflecting the dominance of the exclusive approach, Collings and Mellahi's (2009) definition has been identified as the most-cited definition in the wider TM literature (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015). They define TM as

activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organisation's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high-potential and high-performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organisation. (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 305)

Alternatively, inclusive TM is conceptualized as the recognition that all employees in an organization should be viewed as talent, and that each and every one should be afforded the opportunity to develop and – through ongoing evaluation – be deployed in positions in which they may benefit their organization (Swales, 2020; Swales et al., 2014). Although this approach has its advantages and proponents among scholars, it remains somewhat more aspirational both in academic and in practice. We will touch upon both exclusive and inclusive approaches to TM once again, later in this chapter.

International

The global aspect of TM was one which was clearly evident in our early workshops. This is reflective of the role that some very well-established and high-profile international HR scholars played in the early evolution of the field. This work generally appeared under the label of global talent management (GTM). Three key early contributors in this regard were Randall Schuler, Hugh Scullion, and Paul Sparrow, and later others like Ingmar Bjorkman, Paula Caligiuri, and Paul Evans also became key contributors to debates in the area. These scholars generally drew on their considerable research in the wider international HR in their contributions to the TM literature. It is illustrative that internationally oriented journals such as *Journal of World Business* and *International Journal of Human Resource Management* have played a key role as outlets in the dissemination of TM research (McDonnell et al., 2017). A key theme in the GTM literature has been on understanding how differences in organizational strategy and different national institutional and cultural contexts influenced how talent should be managed across the countries in which multinational enterprises (MNEs) operate (Scullion et al., 2010).

In a key early contribution to this literature, Tarique and Schuler (2010) identified a range of exogenous and endogenous GTM challenges for GTM and further

highlighted key international HR activities that are incorporated in these systems (see also Schuler et al., 2011). In an early empirical contribution, [McDonnell et al. \(2010\)](#) used large-scale survey evidence to explore the use of different mechanisms used by MNEs in Ireland in managing global talent. They also considered contextual factors which influence GTM, identifying larger MNEs and the provision of standardized products and services between subsidiaries as particularly significant indicators of the presence of GTM.

Others considered some of the challenges of GTM. For example, [Kim and McLean \(2012\)](#) highlight three key challenges in developing global talent: concerns about global mobility, the limitations of an ethnocentric strategy, and barriers between the headquarters and subsidiaries. Drawing on the wider international HRM literature, [Minbaeva and Collings \(2013\)](#) reiterate the additional challenges that management on a global rather than domestic scale inevitably involves, which is directly relevant to considerations of GTM. They subsequently identify seven key myths which should be understood in researching and practicing GTM.

Building on earlier research on the role of the corporate HR function ([Scullion & Starkey, 2000](#)), the role the MNE's corporate HR function in GTM has been a key theme in early research in the area. Key early contributions consider the different types of role that the corporate HR function played in GTM ([Farndale et al., 2010](#); [Sparrow et al., 2013](#)). For example, [Farndale et al. \(2010\)](#) proposed four roles linked to GTM effectiveness. They were guardians of culture, champion of processes, managing receptivity, and network leadership and intelligence. In later research, the same author team empirically explored these roles and found support for the four roles while highlighting interdependencies between them ([Sparrow et al., 2013](#)). Building on the links with strategic orientation, [Collings, Mellahi, and Cascio \(2019\)](#) highlighted the role of the MNE's strategic orientation, as global, multidomestic or transnational, and the GTM strategy which they argue in turn influences the performance of the firm. They also explicate the importance of the alignment between headquarters (HQ) intentions and subsidiary implementation of those GTM practices as key to the effectiveness of GTM in the MNE.

More recently, some TM scholars turned their attention to an external environment in which organizations exist and its role in TM. More specifically, organizations, especially those operating internationally, function within one or more very complex and mostly volatile external environments that represent a distinct, contextually based macro talent management (MTM) system. Each MTM system is shaped by a number of political, legal, economic, technological, and sociocultural factors, which in turn influence the organizations operating in those environments and their internal activities ([King & Vaiman, 2019](#)). Since GTM inherently occurs within a broad macro (or extra-organizational) framework, the MTM system is becoming increasingly important to analyze. MTM can be defined as

the activities that are systematically developed by governmental and nongovernmental organizations expressly for the purpose of enhancing the quality and quantity of talent within and across countries and regions to facilitate innovation and competitiveness

of their citizens and corporations. (Khilji, Tarique, & Schuler, 2015, p. 237)

Consequently, MTM is projected to have a considerable effect on GTM and its effectiveness, even though empirical research on the mechanisms of such an impact has been limited to date (see Farndale & Vaiman, in this volume).

Understanding Context

Building on the idea that the TM is strongly influenced by the context in which it unfolds, the impact of context has been a critical theme in papers at a number of our workshops. That said, context has arguably not received the level of attention it deserved in the mainstream literature. As [Boselie and Thunnissen \(2017, p. 420\)](#) argue

In general, the attention to the impact of the institutional context, the organizational configuration, and the characteristics of the workforce on talent management is very weak in talent management research and the literature.

However, as noted, it has been a key focus of discussion at the EIASM workshops. For example, the special issue based on the 2016 workshop was explicitly focused on context ([Vaiman, Collings, & Scullion, 2017](#)). While not exhaustive in its coverage, the papers in that issue provide an insight into the different ways in which context has been considered. For example, [King \(2017\)](#) considers organizational climate as an example of a context that is key in supporting talent development. She explores the importance of understanding employee perceptions and interpretation of TM practices as indicators of organizational priorities. [Makram, Sparrow, and Greasley \(2017\)](#) also focus directly on organizational context and consider how key actors in organization actually understand talent in the context of the particular organizations in which they work. [Daubner-Siva, Vinkenburg, and Jansen \(2017\)](#) consider TM in the context of diversity management. Their framing of the intersection of TM and diversity management through a paradox lens provides a way of developing closer alignment between the subfields of TM and diversity management. Their conceptualization of the “exclusion–inclusion” paradox is used to argue that diversity management and TM reflect contradictory principles of exclusion and inclusion which are challenging for organizations to reconcile. In the same issue, [Gallardo-Gallardo, Moliner, and Gallo \(2017\)](#) consider the context of the networks of scholars working in TM and how these networks are influencing the evolving literature in the area. This represents an often-unexplored context – the evolution of the field of research. Reflecting the ongoing focus on context, it has also been a key theme in the early volumes in the *Emerald Talent Management* series in which the current volume is published. For example, [Jooss, Burbach, and Ruël’s \(2021\)](#) volume focuses on TM in the context of the global hospitality industry. [Michailova and Ott’s \(2019\)](#) volume considers TM in the context of small advanced economies.

More broadly, two sectors which have received considerable attention as contexts in the TM literature are the public sector and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). We point to some key contributions from the consideration of TM in these contexts below.

TM in the Public Sector

As noted above, TM research has largely focused on MNEs and private sector firms with limited attention paid to the public sector context, despite its role as a major employer in most economies (Kravariti & Johnston, 2020). The public sector context is complex and bound by the impact of a number of significant institutional mechanisms or constraints (Boselie & Thunnissen, 2017). These normative and coercive mechanisms challenge public administrators and theory more broadly to understand the differing mechanisms impacting on managerial choices, underlying processes, and outcome choices in the public sector contest (Boselie, Thunnissen, & Monster, 2022). Boselie and Thunnissen (2017) identify three key characteristics of the public sector which are relevant for TM. First, the government is generally viewed as a good employer, reflected in lifelong careers. Second, principles of equality mean that all employees should be treated similarly in public sector organizations. Third, there is often strong legislative protection for public sector employees. These characteristics stand in contrast to many traditions in the private sector. This very much points to greater potential for more inclusive approaches in the public sector.

While developing leadership and management competencies are increasingly important in public sector organizations (Jawali, Darwish, Scullion, & Haak-Saheem, 2021), TM in this context is a largely underexplored field of research. Traditionally, the public sector has been characterized by employment security, lifelong careers, and equal opportunities. However, this model has come under threat due to government cuts and new managerialist approaches such as New Public Sector Management which promotes managerial and efficiency logics, value for money, and a move toward more flexible contracts (Boselie & Thunnissen, 2017). Research suggests that TM is more complex in the public sector and that a major challenge is that the public sector is characterized by goal ambiguity, as goals in the public sector are less tangible, more diverse, and more difficult to measure which makes the implementation of TM more challenging (Blom, Kruyen, der Heijden, & Van Thiel, 2020).

It has been suggested that in the public sector, the inclusive approach to TM may be a better fit with the egalitarian public sector values of equality and fairness (Blom et al., 2020), but studies on public sector TM highlighted that a hybrid approach involving inclusive and exclusive approaches are often employed in practice, and that managing the tension between these approaches is a key challenge in public sector TM (Kravariti, Tsousas, & Scullion, 2022). However, there are equally many examples of more exclusive approaches to talent in the public sector. Foreign affairs is, for example, an area which has prioritized attracting and retaining the very best candidates who could become future diplomats (Boselie & Thunnissen, 2017). Similarly, expatriate employees in high-profile

non- and intergovernmental organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and United Nations (UN) have often been supported with very attractive benefits and differentiated packages (Boselie, Brewster, & Vos, 2013). Indeed, the emergence of shortages of leadership talent in the public sector has led to the growing use of exclusive approaches to fill critical roles (Kravariti & Johnston, 2020). Reviews of TM in the public sector have highlighted the limitations of TM in practice in this context and suggested that TM practices are relatively underdeveloped, poorly applied and can be characterized as ad hoc, fragmented and reactive (Bevort & Poulfert, 2015; Kravariti et al., 2022).

A key challenge for public sector organizations is to align their TM policies to fit the demands of an increasingly volatile external environment (Jawali et al., 2021). For example, developing talent is a key challenge, and there is a growing need to develop agile leaders who can manage effectively in volatile environments and can manage the tensions between traditional public sector values of fairness and equal opportunities and the growth of new managerialist agendas which are gaining prominence in the public sector (Kravariti et al., 2022). The emergence of talent shortages is an increasing strategic TM challenge, but to date, there is little empirical research on public sector talent development strategies (Boselie & Thunnissen, 2017).

Similarly, retention has become more challenging across the public sector due to a number of factors including the erosion of long-term employment contracts and traditional psychological contracts and increased mobility. Public sector organizations are developing retention strategies which focus on career development, flexible working, and work–life balance elements (Kravariti & Johnson, 2020). A fundamental challenge for TM in the public sector is that defining performance can be problematic given the greater diversity of goals and stakeholder groups, and research suggests that TM is more complex in the public sector and suggests that more attention needs to be paid to understanding competing logics for achieving effective TM implementation in the public sector (Grant, Garavan, & Mackie, 2020).

The context of academia is one which has also received some attention. This is a context which can straddle the public and private sectors, but many leading global universities remain public. It is a context where star performers bring profile and impact to universities and where performance differences in grant capture, publication output and impact are often quantifiable and highly skewed. The employment model for academics has become truncated with many new entrants on precarious and short-term contracts, while more established high-profile scholars enjoy tenure and strong employment rights and benefits (Thunnissen, van Arensbergen, & van der Brink, 2022). Indeed, in their chapter in the current volume, Bjorkman, Smale, and Kallio (this volume) consider the very particular context of business schools in universities. Their chapter adopts a critical approach toward an exclusive orientation to TM in the business school context and examines the opportunities of adopting a more inclusive approach in this context. This is an approach which is gaining increasing traction in national systems such as the Netherlands. For example, Utrecht University has developed a model which has shifted the emphasis to open science in its recognition and rewards programs (Woolston, 2021). Despite some important contributions, the context of TM in the public sector remains poorly understood with much potential for further study (Boselie et al., 2022).