TALENT MANAGEMENT – SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

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Abstract

Talent management (TM) has attracted the interests both practitioners and scientists, particularly since 2001, when Michaels et al.(2001), proclaimed "the war for talent". Unfortunately, the discourse arouse in the context of meaning of talent also and the world of science face the absolute, undisturbed freedom in talent definition creation. That abovementioned heterogeneity of implementations and settings creates the recent TM literature diverse and unclear. To address this gap, there has been proposed a systematic literature review of 101 articles published in 51 peer-reviewed high-quality academic journals and 28 books, 13 chapters and 2 conference WoS, Scopus and BazEkon indexed papers from January 2000 to June 2018. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate utility of scientific efforts in the context of talent management defining, and its impact on human resources management development.

Keywords: *effectiveness, human performance, management, organization, talent.*

1 INTRODUCTION

In several publications in the area of human resources management, talent is operationalized as the *capital* (Cascio et al., 2014). According to the opinions voiced by Sparrow et al. (2015) and Graeme et al. (2016), talent is to be perceived through four "perspectives" as human capital that is embodied in the individual's capability to categorize, a productive economic value, social capital, political capital and cultural capital. The perspective of human capital involves an approach from a certain base of resources that is possessed by organizations with the main emphasis on employees' contribution. Additionally, an analysis of literature on human resources management justifies a statement that the manifestation of talent in the working environment is determined not only by external factors but also by concealed, evolving and intervention components which, according to Pfeffer (2016) also play a significant part in this process. These researchers also tend to accept a subjective evaluation of talent while making an effort to gain confirmation through an implementation of multi-source constructs (e.g. 360°) and, in this manner, they reflect the significance on an adaptation of an individual talent and its interpersonal context. Given this scenario, the momentum is appropriate to address an updated state of TM literature. In recent years it has been observed increased interest in this field by both practitioners and academics all over the world, and TM research, particularly more recent, is diverse and fragmented to the high extent not only in terms of issues explored, but for methodologies implemented, paths and contexts of adaptation also. As a consequence, it determines a heterogeneous and complex body of literature in terms of both subjects and quality level. This situation was primarily described by Dries (2013) reviewing recently published high-quality journals with talent as the core topic. Hence, my review differs from previous ones for a few reasons. At first, contrary to most previous reviews, I do not aim to follow the talent evolution from the beginning to now, but the latest achievements in the TM field. Therefore I put the impact on a high number of TM related papers (...) published in a short period of time – from January 2000 to June 2018, taking into consideration years from 2016 to 2018 not yet analysed in other reviews. Moreover, I implement a structured and systematic approach, according to Tranfield et al.'s (2003) procedures for the systematic literature review, which allow through careful process to

indicate high-quality journals recognized as relevant by TM community. Additionally, in the study I concern of searching for the common elements of talent management definitions established in the high-quality journals. These features allow this study to offer significant contribution in TM field. This study provides a comprehensive picture of latest trends in TM literature throughout the comparison and classification TM papers referring to important features, such as: journals, where TM papers are published, papers' authors, year of publication and implemented talent management definitions. On this ground, this review not only offers the detailed overview in the context of number of TM articles in the perceived period of research, journals that have dedicated a great number of papers to TM, authors' contribution to theoretical and organization based research, but follows into more detailed approach to talent and TM also. It provides new context of implementation and research issues and their content evolution referring to the main scientific problems explored in recent years and new ones addressed. This is the first review that takes into consideration the utility of TM literature in order to providing a precise description of which theoretical approaches are adopted in particular TM studies, attempt to search for general talent definition that could be widely accepted in academic literature. Using the existing theories to analyse/indicate TM issues is extremely important, as they enable to increase the level of understanding of dynamics determined with complexity underlaying a certain phenomenon. Underlying this comprehensive state-of-art of recent TM literature, this review identifies gaps in knowledge, in the context of theoretical perspectives use, research principles and content of TM studies. Author claims, in the opposition to papers presented earlier, where there is a common believe that 'TM is in a mature phase', that TM conception follows the trajectory to distraction. Finally, the abovementioned gaps found as a result of analysis of recent TM literature, represent a foundation to provide and discuss important ideas for future research. Summing up, three Research Questions (RQs) guided this review: (RQ1) Is there a common, widely accepted definition of 'talent' in scientific and organizational literature, (RQ2) Is there both an academic and organizational consensus in 'talent management' defining and understanding, (RQ3) What are suggestions for future studies. The article is structured as follows: the next section includes the methodological approach used for constructing the SLR. After that, it is reported the analysis of collected data (to answer RQ1 and RQ2) and, starting from that, the research gaps were indicated. Then, the critical discourse is implemented in the context of results, providing suggestions for future research on TM (RQ3). The last section reports conclusions.

2 METHODOLOGY

The study follows the methodology described by Tranfield at al. (2003), Macpherson and Jones (2010) and Boell and Cecez-Kecmanowic (2015) as a systematic literature review. This approach is recognized by great number of authors (f.e. Spina et al, 2013; Wang and Chung, 2014) as including many advantages in relation to traditional unstructured reviews. Moreover, establishes a background to objectively identify, select and evaluate articles and, consequently produces a synthesis depicts the depth of knowledge in the field, as an outcome that allows to minimize bias errors, improve the quality of the review process, confirm their validity throughout replications of precise steps and synthetize the field literature (Watson, 2015). Additionally, SLR is perceived as a versatile approach, adopted in recent studies published in high-quality scientific journals (Danese et al., 2018). As described in Wang and Chung (2014), the structure process was implemented according to the sequence of stages described below and summarized in Figure 1.

2.1 Conceptual boundaries

The first step it was defining the object and boundaries of the review in the context of the RQs (Denyer and Buchanan, 2013). This task was particularly complex referring to talent defining and management, because this field is wide and, over the years, more and more doubts have arisen in the line of this conception. As a consequence the semantic confusion occurred leading to heterogeneous terms and definitions. Therefore there was decided to take into consideration studies referring to organization based talent and talent management, including talent identification and implementation, talent development, talent retention and talent rejection. Hence, my review consist of several types of talent oriented articles.
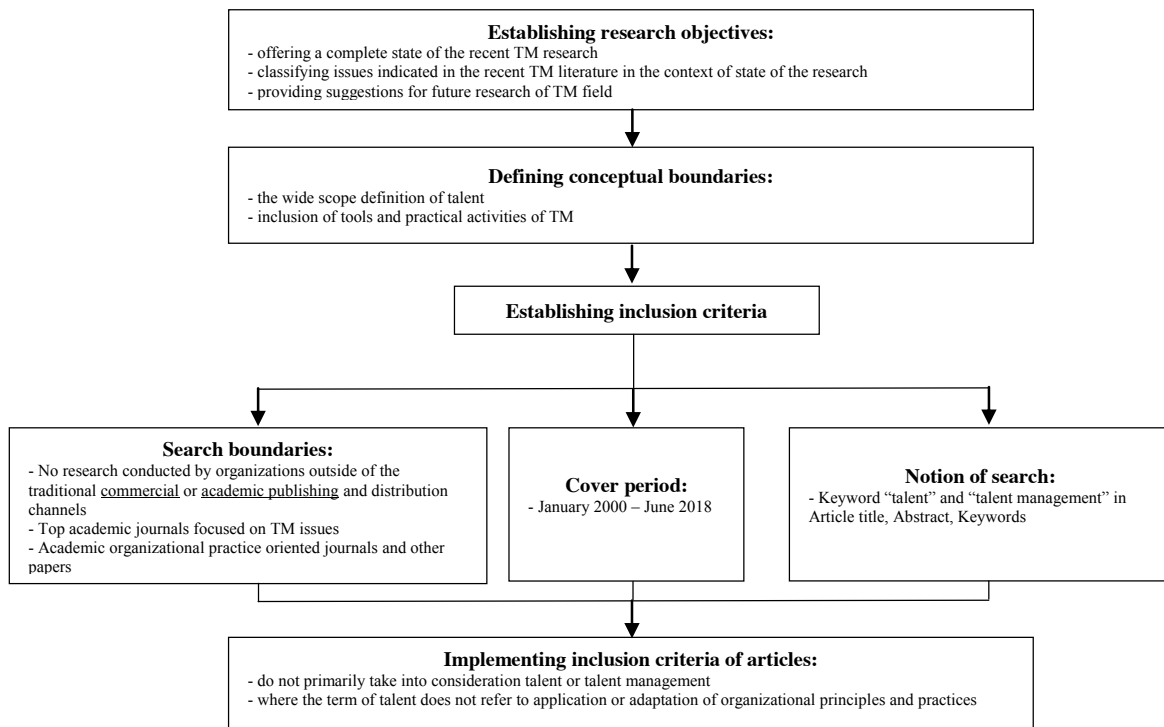
Establishing research objectives:
- offering a complete state of the recent TM research
- classifying issues indicated in the recent TM literature in the context of state of the research
- providing suggestions for future research of TM field

Defining conceptual boundaries:
- the wide scope definition of talent
- inclusion of tools and practical activities of TM

Establishing inclusion criteria

Search boundaries:
- No research conducted by organizations outside of the traditional commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels
- Top academic journals focused on TM issues
- Academic organizational practice oriented journals and other papers

Cover period:
- January 2000 – June 2018

Notion of search:
- Keyword "talent" and "talent management" in Article title, Abstract, Keywords

Implementing inclusion criteria of articles:
- do not primarily take into consideration talent or talent management
- where the term of talent does not refer to application or adaptation of organizational principles and practices

Figure 1. A scheme of SLR process
Source: Own study

2.2 Data collection and analysis

The purpose of this step was to establish a comprehensive database of talent management articles that offers the overview of main features in the line of recent talent literature and its utility to extract data for further analysis. To reach that, the inclusion/exclusion criteria were assumed (Table 1), regarding the selection of journals and articles within. In the end 144 positions were put under revision from January 2000 to June 2018 (see Table 2).

Table 1. Inclusion/exclusion criteria

	Inclusion/exclusion criteria	Rationale
Selection of journals (initial number: 638)	- English peer-reviewed journals only - High grade journals (WoS, Scopus, BazEkon), books and conference papers - Journals which focus on TM or have shown an interest on TM last year with one TM article relevant for academics at least published (minimum) - Organization oriented journals, books and conference papers where TM importance is	The aim was to identify peer-reviewed journals and other papers with the highest scientific value and research interest in TM Although this point does not meet the abovementioned criteria, it seems be authorized to claim these

	widely recognized	papers can be useful to provide a more complete picture of TM both from the academic and practitioner approach.
Selection of time range	- From January 2000 to June 2018	This interval was established in the aim to capture the broad scope and latest trends of TM
Article/text selection form sampled journals/other papers	- TM related articles/texts using the keyword 'talent' and 'talent management' in 'Article Title, Abstract and Keywords'	As the field of interests is very broad and heterogeneous, it was considered the term of talent and talent management as keywords sufficiently general to capture sufficient portion of the papers on talent management
	- Exclusion criterion: all the papers (articles, book etc.) did not primarily focus on TM (business, management, economy fields) were excluded (51 journals, 28 books, 13 chapters and 2 conference papers satisfied criteria)	This criterion is coherent with the boundaries of my SLR

Source: Author's own study
After selection all the papers were red carefully in the context to find and organize the data.

After the paper selection, the text of all were carefully red in order to indicate and organize the data referring to the classification variables: 'Year of publication', 'Topic of research', Research methodology', 'Sector of research'. The whole process was performed in order to ensure the highest level of accuracy and reliability, as claimed by Wang and Chug (2014).

3 TOWARD A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF TALENT DEFINING AND TALENT MANAGEMENT LITERATURE

This section addresses RQ1 and RQ2 and provides a theoretical framework which organizes recent talent research problems basis on the subject literature. To reach this aim, as described in Methodology section, two issue sections were established. First of them was testing whether there is a common definition of talent, the latter relates to searching for an academic and organizational consensus in 'talent management' defining and understanding.

Boudreau and Bright (2015), argue the organization should take efforts also in the context of achieving social objectives, including sustainable development that takes into account such parameters as diversification, social responsibility, support offered to issued related to the personnel, environmental protection and contribution to the economy. The authors indicate that sustainable development is rarely included in the HRM strategic management system including, in particular, talent management. This aspect was previously emphasized by Ulrich and Ulrich (2010), who related talent management to social effects as an increase of the perception level of the brand in the local community makes it possible to recruit individuals who are of a greater value to it (Stahl et al., 2012). Nevertheless, even in the publications by the authors quoted above, social well- being is not positioned explicitly as a derivative of talent management as it is, similarly as in the Capelli's construct (2008), related to the organization's efficiency that is determined by the financial result.

It is also Mellahi and Harris (2016) who argue that effective talent management determines indirectly in a positive manner the organization's level of efficiency by increasing motivation and the personnel commitment in the organization. What is more, the aforementioned commitment and adaptation are categorized as the intermediate goals of talent management (Cascio, 2014; Graeme et al., 2016), as an increase of the level of the employees' determination generates a higher efficiency of the organization in the context of productivity,

customer satisfaction and retention. Frank and Taylor (2004), in turn, postulate a dynamic approach to talent management, one that is characterized by variability through the influence of the environment on the acquisition, retention, motivation, fair treatment and development of talents. The aforementioned processes, in the authors' opinion, constitute the core of the concept. Further, as postulated by Garrow and Hirsh (2008), there occurs a direction dualism as to the issue of talent management definition: the former one is based on dichotomy, which is also observed by Gelens et al. (2015), and related to the pool of talents and the related inclusion or exclusion of individuals; the latter one emphasizes an identification of the transfer processes, that are of a key importance to the organization, of individual competences on the organization's efficiency, which is confirmed by Konecki (2008), who claims that those employees should be focused upon in relation to talents who have possessed the ability to create new ideas and values that are useful to the organization, to solve problems or take risks, while leaving no room for defeatism. In the author's opinion, a reflection of the organization's culture and climate constitutes a favourable environment for the performance of tasks. This process-related approach to talent management is also presented in the study by Capelli (2008), who identifies five resultant functions: search for potential employees, recognition of their personality related potential, an implementation of ability multiplication processes stimulation, motivation to work towards the good of the organization's community, search for optimal ways to use the abilities of talented individuals. This constitutes an "elite" approach to the issue as it focuses not only on potentially talented employees (the author does not accept an assumption that all employees possess talents). The aforementioned approach also includes practical inclinations: it shows a set of organizational activities aimed at a maximum use of the employee competences. These activities, however, are characterized by numerous limitations and may constitute a certain forecast only. Talent management is perceived here also as a set of *sensu largo* HRM practices, which includes recruitment, efficiency measurement, succession, development and diversity (Cairns, 2015). Even though this approach is chiefly based on processes, it omits important aspects of the organization related to retention, remuneration, dismissal; hence, it constitutes a set of postulates that have not been empirically verified. A similar, yet much more exhaustive approach is presented by Collings and Mellahi (2009), who determine talent management through the perspective of the identification of key positions in the organization, ones that make it possible to gain and maintain competitive advantage based on the activity of talented people. The authors emphasize the connection of talents with professional missions; they indicate precisely the directions and areas of the professional activities of the personnel while focusing on strategic aspects and human capital, which was also emphasized in the study by Abrudan and Matei (2009). These authors argue that talent management constitutes a determinant for the organization's development, which is realized in the areas of the recruitment and retention of employees with the highest competence level, by providing them with an environment to achieve the highest results, training and promotion in the organization.

4 DISCUSSION

In the case of talent management practices, in over 70% of the available literature, references to these were identified. The abovementioned authors emphasize the significance of recruitment, employment, development and retention in the process described, in a global perspective in particular, one that is used in international corporations. Stahl et al. (2012) have confirmed that in the majority of the organizations they examined, the field of talents is implemented. The individuals assigned to them constituted an object of special treatment aimed at an acceleration of their efficiency and development seen in the categories of succession and career path in a broader organization's context. This initiates a reorientation from a vacancy approach to a prospective approach. The advocates of this include Capelli

(2008), Stahl et al. (2012), Collings et al. (2011), Mellahi and Collings (2010), McDonnell et al. (2011). In the opinion of the authors quoted, institutions ought to categorise their potential employees as customers and to implement sophisticated marketing models (including the tools or recruitment and talent development). They note that what is also required is the existence of mutual cultural match between the organization and the employee. Stahl et al. (2012), Cascio (2014), as well as Graeme et al. (2016) accept the existence of a relationship between the employer's reputation and commitment; nevertheless, they make a reservation that this cause and effect relationship needs to be covered by further research.

In the context of trainings and personnel development, Stahl (2014) emphasizes the importance of the involvement of line managers as well as the use of open recruitment systems for seeking talents inside the organization. The author, however, notes that biased and inward oriented thinking involves a risk; the same is true about other researchers in the context of the creation or purchase of talents (Capelli, 2008; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Ulrich and Ulrich, 2010; Burkus and Osula, 2011; McDonnell and Collings, 2011; Pfeffer, 2016). It is also McDonnell and Collings (2011) who postulate that an equilibrium needs to be maintained between the resources of talents obtained from the inside and outside of the organization. Capelli (2008) developed the notion of the "talent on demand" in order to control the size of the gap in the demand/supply chain. The author emphasized the importance of a search for an optimum between the level of external recruitment and training and the development of one's own labour resources.

5   PRESENT LIMITATIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON FUTURE PERSPECTIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF TALENT MANAGEMENT

Considering gaps found from the analysis of the recent TM literature, this section intends to identify some trajectories for the future research in TM (RQ3). The author has been engaged in showing threats in the present direction of TM research development. The view that the field is moving towards a long winding road to nowhere has been adopted. The trajectory so far can be viewed as overwhelmingly negative, in the context of advancing TM knowledge. On the organization ground, there is a separate approach to TM, which is usually designed and implemented as one-dimensional (effectiveness) narrowed and biased (Thunnissen and Gallardo, 2017; Janowski, 2017). There is little proof of taking into consideration the needs, preferences and expectations of different parties from inside and outside of organizations, as well as contextual factors and the role of actors in a specific context on the conceptualization and implementation of TM. Scholars and organizations adopt different approaches according to the meaning of talent, TM objectives and outcomes. In addition to this, Thunnissen et al. (2017) claim the current conceptions of TM are questionable, because of their US based private company roots that are not applicable to the non - profit as well as small and medium enterprises. Moreover, the current TM research focuses on a single aspect of the organizational environment, including market share, income and other effects of the supply – demand gap on the human capital availability for the organization, while other key factors are ignored or underexplored. TM is also criticized for its lack of consideration of contextual indicators such as labour legislations, including agency relations, sector differences, nature of business, size of the company, unions etc. This opinion is echoed by Schuller et al.(2017), Meyers et al. (2013), who suggest spreading the notion of talent including environmental, organizational and cultural characteristics. Yet, there is a need for caution because talent is a notion used with many examples in a very loose way that may have negative repercussions for both the theoretical and practical advancement, which is the bedrock of establishing a critical research field. Moreover, scholars need to establish the definition boundaries and put the impact on the creation of TM as a sustainable field of research that enriches not only academic understanding and theorization but which helps to bridge the frequently highlighted

practice gap (Janowski, 2018). If the field is to advance to be brought closer together towards a more common paradigm and it is this where the Author urges scholars to be more precise – there is no room for complacency about the quality and quantity of primary TM research. The Author retains the postulate, during future empirical research, to particularly emphasize the need to trace significant inroads in talent defining and the depth and breadth of the methodologies employed. Further, there is also a need to move forward to conduct more generalizable studies. There is much scope for this kind of work in this area. Yet, the basic challenge is the above-mentioned lack of boundaries that exist in the literature. Without the clarification of constructs, it will be extremally difficult to conduct research with high levels of validity and reliability.

6   CONCLUSIONS

Based on the literature studies conducted, it seems justifiable to claim that there is a fundamental lack of consensus as to the meaning of "talent" in the organizational environment. Talent may designate anything as desired by a company owner, an organization's manager or a scholar, as each and every one of them have their own view as to what is to be inferred from this meaning (Ulrich, 2011; Huang and Tansley, 2012, Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). The majority of the abovementioned publications related to this semantic field fail to offer an explicit and precise definition of talent as they focus of a scholarly interest (Lewis and Heckman, 2006, Schuller et al., 2017), or a proportion of the number of those organizations that have systematically implemented talent management (Warren, 2006). The exact situation is true of those studies where talent management definitions have been introduced. Frequently, they fail to present a scholarly based definition of talent itself (Capelli, 2008; Duttagupta, 2005; Pascal, 2004); they do not indicate which of the specific practices are included in the notion of talent management (Ashton and Morton, 2005; Sloan et al., 2007). In the author's opinion, this initiated a discourse that has been continuing till this day as to whether talent is to be referred to people or human characterizations; as to whether talent is connected to a greater extent with the assignment/work performed, potential, competence or commitment; as to whether talent is a natural ability or it is rather related to mastery gained through practice, which has translated onto an ongoing confusion, which hinders an establishment of an acceptable definition and practices of talent management, thus retarding scholarly progress. Furthermore, lack of precision in the formulation of this construct may lead to an uncertainty as to the reliability of the conclusions that follow from an analysis of the literature related to the subject (Hensel, 2017), which contributes to further multiplication of ambiguities as to what talent precisely is. Another conclusion is that the literature related to talent management, even though it is diversified in the structure of the ideas that form it, is rather of a normative nature. In reality, the assumptions that form the basis of the individual approaches to talent, are frequently "sold" as objective facts, even though so far little empirical evidence as to their accuracy has been provided by academics and HR practitioners (Illes et al., 2010; Boudreau et al., 2015). In accordance with the results of the analysis performed, in the organizational environment, talent is conceptualized in two ways: objectively and subjectively. In the objective approach, talent is perceived as exceptional abilities and bases demonstrated by a given person. It is important to note that various sub-approaches in the objective approach need to be perceived as complementary rather than additive, with a particular consideration of commitment and adaptation which, in the opinion of Ulrich and Smallwood (2012), may never be used as the sole indices of talent, but they should always be seen as complementary ones when measuring abilities. Moreover, in the organizational environment, usually no distinction is made between native and acquired elements of talent; rather, talent evaluations focus on the identified efficiency (Pfeffer, 2016). In the pragmatic approach, it seems justifiable to claim that the

nature-upbringing debate comes down to semantics (Tansley, 2011, Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). However, the alleged belief demonstrated by decision makers in organizations as to the extent to which the person's characterization is constant in contrast to being flexible, has proved on many occasions to determine to a significant extent talent evaluations performed (Heslin et al., 2005). For this reason, it seems of a key importance to the organization to take a clear position as to the scope in which they wish to concentrate their efforts in the context of talent management: on talent identification or rather its development (Meyers et al., 2013). Although the objective approach to talent demonstrates a more precise adaptation to the etymological meaning of talent (Dery, 2014), the subjective approach seems to prevail in the organizational practice (Iles et al., 2010), while the strategy rooted in workforce segmentation (Becker et al., 2009) based on an identification of the pool of the most efficient performers and/or individuals with the highest potential seems to be most frequently implemented in the organizational practice (Gelens et al., 2013). Even though there are many advocates of the inclusive approach to management based on strengths (Vosburgh, 2016), it remains unclear as to in which scope the inclusive approach to talent is justifiable considering the fact that the notion of "talent" internally implies an ability or results that are above the average (Gagné, 2000; Ulrich and Smallwood, 2012). Hence, the selection of the approach is legitimized through its mission and organization's culture. In this context, it is proposed for the objective and subjective approaches to talent to interpenetrate in this sense that the objective approach determines what personality characterizations are to be sought when identifying talent, whereas the subjective approach provokes an important discussion as to its validation (Keating and Heslin, 2015). In my opinion, most of the talent management interpretations presented above picture the aforementioned process as a transformation: talented people are acquired from the organization's environment, then they are subject to HRM practices aimed at "obtaining" an individual with those characteristics that are desirable by the organization. In this context, three main problems appear: the measurements of the effects of talent management, the type of practices implemented and, as indicated above, the definition of talents that are required to achieve the organization's objectives. This constellation of problems, as the every approach contained in the literature is disputable to say the least, it is the main factor that puts at risk future research validity and reliability. According to author's research, the only way to breakthrough the abovementioned impasse is to establish scientifically and organizationally oriented definition of talent, as a results of common efforts of scientists and organization managers.

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