Conceptual Problems and Practical Negative Effects of Talent Management for Organizational Outcomes: A Critical Discussion

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Abstract: In this paper, one of the 'new' buzzwords in Human Resource Development (HRD) field in the last decade is presented and discussed. It is observed that in fact one of the versions of talent management (TM) which is the most widespread is not only undermining the raison d'être, scope and assumptions of Human Resource Management (HRM) as a research field and organizational practice, but also underestimates and even trivializes the contribution of teamwork for organizational outcomes. Even more alarming than this is the fact that it goes against the organizational justice and ethics components and advancements that have been the output of the valuable HRD discussions in particular and business ethics discussions in general. As the critical works on TM is rare, the current article tries to support and complement those works for a broader understanding of HRM research field and practice with regard to TM.
Keywords: Talent, talent management, management theory, critical approaches to management, stakeholders' view

Yetenek Yönetiminin Kavramsal Sorunları ve Örgütsel Sonuçlar Üzerindeki Olumsuz Etkileri: Eleştirel Bir Tartışma

Öz: Bu çalışmada, İnsan Kaynakları Gelişimi alanında son on yıldaki 'yeni' moda sözcüklerden biri sunuluyor ve tartışılıyor. Yetenek Yönetimi'nin en yaygın kullanımda olan sürümünün gerçekte bir araştırma alanı ve örgütsel pratik olarak İnsan Kaynakları Yönetimi'nin varlık nedeninin, kapsamının ve varsayımlarının altını oymakla kalmayıp takım çalışmasının örgütsel sonuçlara olan katkısını küçümsediği ve hatta önemsizleştirdiği de gözlemleniyor. Bundan daha alarm çaldırıcı bir nokta ise şu: Yetenek Yönetimi, özellikle, değerli olan İnsan Kaynakları Gelişimi tartışmalarının ve genel olarak

iş etiği tartışmalarının bir çıktısı olan örgütsel adalet ve etik öğelerine ve ilerlemelerine karşı çıkıyor. Yetenek Yönetimi'ne eleştirel bir açıdan bakan çalışmalar nadir olduğundan, bu makale, bu çalışmaları, Yetenek Yönetimi'yle ilişkili olarak İnsan Kaynakları Yönetimi araştırma alanının daha kapsamlı bir kavranışı için, desteklemeyi ve tamamlamayı amaçlıyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Yetenek, yetenek yönetimi, işletme kuramı, işletmeye yönelik eleştirel yaklaşımlar ve paydaş bakışı.

Introduction

Talent management has been one of the 'new' buzzwords in Human Resource Development field in the last decade. In this paper a number of conceptual problems associated with Talent Management, its applicability in different settings and cultures, negative effects of talent management practices over a set of organizational outcomes are presented and discussed. While human resource management (ideally) promotes egalitarianism among staff, talent management is in favor of employee segmentation. The focus of the latter is a select few rather than all employees (Latukha, 2015). A starting point for such a discussion will naturally be the definitions.

Swailes (2013) defines talent as "*the current capability or future potential of an employee to deliver exceptional performance in relation to what the organisation wants to achieve*" (Swailes, 2013, p.33) while Raman et al. (2013)'s definition stresses the top management's role and the strategic positions:

> top management's deliberate and organized efforts to optimally select, develop, deploy and retain competent and committed employees who bear significant influence on the overall performance of the   organization (Raman et al., p.336).

Although the relevant literature usually complains of ambiguous and inconsistent multiple definitions of talent and talent management across scholars and organizations (e.g. Borisova et al., 2017; Jyoti & Rani, 2014), it has to be kept in mind that talent is a socially constructed concept as discussed by Wiblen (2016). Thus, it is contextual and very much open to interpretation. Furthermore, not all the talents are under the spot in talent management discussions. A person can be talented, but that talent may not be useful for the organization. Secondly, as talents are domain-specific, all staff can be considered as talented in various domains (Swailes, Downs & Orr, 2014).

Baqutayan (2014) endorses the definition of talent as "*an individual with special competencies*" (p.2291). However, this is not a precise and tangible definition allowing us to clearly classify the staff into talented and non-talented groups. Conceptually moving the notion of 'talent' to mean 'talented people' needs to be

noted as well. Egerová et al (2015) reminds a relevant distinction to characterize this: 'Object' approaches to talent view it as a human characteristic while the 'subject' approaches consider it as the talented people (Devins & Gold, 2014). Furthermore, an input approach to talent focuses on abilities and motivations of talented employee while an output approach considers the performance rather than its antecedents (Mensah, 2015).

Wiblen (2016) classify talent identification approaches into 3 categories: Intuitive, individualized and systematic. Intuitive approach is informal and unstructured. It is based on hunches in contrast to explicit and rational decision making. This approach leads to all sorts of errors in decision making for talent identification. Individualized approach focuses on talented individuals with the assumption that talent is an individual characteristic ignoring the influence of the context. Finally, systematic approach holds a strategic conception of talent management whereby the focus shifts towards strategic positions rather than talented individuals.

In this context, Borisova et al. (2017) present and discuss 4 different conceptualizations of talent: talent as aptitude which implies its innateness, talent as "*a set of certain knowledge and valuable skills*" (p.33) which can be learned, talent as performance which refers to current successes at work and talent as potential which corresponds to future possibilities.

Minbaeva & Collings (2013) present and discusses "7 myths of global talent management". The first myth is about the role of HR department in talent management. According to Minbaeva & Collings (2013), talent management is usually considered to be a top management task rather than an HR task. They contend that this may not be necessarily true. They propose that talent management tasks should be undertaken both by top management and HR department. Askhenas (2016) on a '*Harvard Business Review*' article, from another direction, states that assigning talent management tasks to HR only makes managers less careful and responsible about their role in talent management.

Secondly, talent management is not only about talented people. It can and should preferably be about strategic positions. Minbaeva & Collings (2013) advise to focus on strategic positions in an organization rather than talented people in talent management practice. The third myth presented and discussed by Minbaeva & Collings (2013) is about filling all positions with 'A players'. It is not necessary to have A players in all positions and practically speaking, talent is a scarce resource. Employing A players in non-strategic positions would be a financial overburden for the company. Furthermore, it may well be the case that only some of the positions, but not all of them require talented staff. The fourth myth concerns portability of talent. Converging with Warner (2016), Minbaeva & Collings (2013) argue that talent can be organization-dependent. In other words, instead of a personality trait, it can be a contextual/situational variable. There are differences even in local branches of

global companies that do not allow transfer of talents within the company. Talents are not necessarily portable (Collings & Mellahi, 2013).

As to the fifth myth, according to Minbaeva & Collings (2013), talent turnover is not always negative for the organization, as talent mobility is quite common in the global age. As to the sixth myth, Minbaeva & Collings (2013) state that it is hard to draw a line between talent management and overall HR tasks. Finally, they question the fairness of talent decisions. These unfair decisions may be due to incomplete information, time pressures, managers' limited cognitive abilities etc. Minbaeva & Collings (2013) adds other factors to this list for multinational corporations, as distance brings out extra challenges for a company operating in various countries.

In their discussion of talent philosophies, Meyers & Woerkom (2014) identify 4 different understandings of talent: "*(a) rare (exclusive) or universal (inclusive), and (b) stable or developable: the exclusive/stable; exclusive/developable; inclusive/stable; and inclusive/developable*" (Meyers & Woerkom, 2014, p.192). The implications of each are the following: If talents are exclusive and stable, then HR has to "*[i]dentify, attract and retain talented individuals*" (Meyers & Woerkom, 2014, p.194). Here 'exclusive' means only a small group of people are talented and 'stable' means talents are not qualities to be developed. If talents are inclusive and stable, then HR has to "*[i]dentify and use the talents*" that everyone has (Meyers & Woerkom, 2014, p.194). If the talents are exclusive but developable, then HR has to "*develop individuals with potential*" (Meyers & Woerkom, 2014, p.194). Finally, if the talents are inclusive and developable, HR has to "*offer development to everyone*" as "*[e]veryone can become a talent through training*" (Meyers & Woerkom, 2014, p.194). In reality, exclusive approaches are more common than inclusive ones (Swailes, Downs & Orr, 2014). Adhering to the exclusive version, Church (2013) makes a similar distinction between talent management and organizational development (OD):

Talent management is fundamentally about segmenting talent into unique groups (e.g., high potentials, global players, future GM talent, etc.) to be treated differently given scarce development resources. O D, on the other hand, at least historically, has been about focusing on development of all employees and changing the broader social system overall (Church, 2013, p.42)

The disadvantage of an inclusive talent management program would be its costliness (Lacey & Groves, 2014). Secondly, not everybody would be willing to join the program. Some of the staff may have other priorities. Rather than opening exclusive-minded expensive programs to everybody, it would be better to ensure fairness in the organizations in various ways and focus on talent management of strategic positions rather than talented people. Additionally, another issue arises in the exclusive version of talent management: The cutoff points need to be decided. In other words, what percentage of staff would be deemed talented (e.g. 5% or 20%) needs further discussion (Wiblen, 2016).

If talent is mostly innate, if it is not a learned quality, there is no way those non-select majority could progress. In this context, Al Ariss, Cascio & Paauwe (2014) recommend viewing talent as a relational construct rather than an individual quality, as employee's, employer's, manager's and organization's perceptions of talent and incongruence among these do matter. An example for research from the perspective of the managers is Kim, Lee & Rhee (2015) that investigate leader's talent management ability rather than talent management practices in general. This leadership variable is found to be positively associated with organizational commitment and job satisfaction of subordinates and negatively related with employee turnover intention. As this research is based on employee's ratings of their managers in terms of talent management ability, it is more reliable than top-down research findings.

Conceptual Problems in Talent Management

Yet, there are many issues to be addressed before talent management programs are implemented: Will talent management match organizational hierarchy? In other words, will those on the top be considered as the most talented without further investigation? If that is the case, the notion of 'talent management' would only bolster the existing hierarchy and it is nothing new. Instead of bringing out change, it may block change (cf. Warner, 2016).

What if some of the staff appear to be non-talented just because they are not assigned to the best fitting position in the company? If the company does not provide any opportunity for people to show their talents due to structural limitations, managerial biases and even institutional discrimination, the whole idea of talent management would collapse. Another question that is not answered yet is about how many kinds of talents we can identify.

Here is another relevant question: Is the emergence of the notion of 'talent management' a by-product or a companion of certain reality shows in which participants were asked to show their talents ("The All Star Talent Show", "Britain's Got Talent" etc.) In other words, is the cultural industry bolstering talent management practices?

Turnover rates raise another issue: Often low turnover rates are considered to be an indicator for success of talent management programs (Altunoğlu, Atay & Terlemez, 2015). What if the staff prefers to stay in the company for other reasons (such as physical proximity between the company and home or due to difficulties to get a job in other companies)? Extraneous variables are rarely taken into consideration.

Some researchers appear to discuss and research 'talent' or 'talented staff' as if they are identical with qualified/skilled staff (e.g. Chatterjee, Nankervis & Connell, 2014; Nankervis, 2013). Can it be the case that some of the talented people are not qualified et al, e.g. not educated properly for the key positions?

Another usage of the term refers to human capital theory (e.g. Hassan, 2016) which implies that the notion of talent management is not brand new. Preece, Iles & Chuai (2011) argues about whether the term 'talent management' is another fad in management. The fact that many similar terms appeared in HRM literature justifies the argument. However they find that far from being a fashion trend, companies believe in usefulness of talent management practices for their organizations. That is why the notion of talent management can't be explained completely with reference to management fashions and the so-called 'term marketing' (Preece, Iles & Chuai, 2011). Furthermore, we need to take note of the fact that several convincing papers (e.g. Church et al., 2015; Church & Rotolo, 2013; Festing, Schäfer & Scullion, 2013) were published after Preece, Iles & Chuai (2011). Nevertheless, Huang & Tansley (2012) follow a similar idea when they criticize the weak theoretical foundation and 'rhetorical obfuscation' of talent management literature and practices. It appears that the success of 'talent management' practices can be partially explained by selling and persuasion value of the term.

Another closely related term is succession planning or replacement planning (Rothwell, 2011) although it includes not only talented staff and strategic/critical positions, but all staff and positions. Rothwell (2011) proposes that replacement planning is about critical positions, not about all positions; but he still distinguishes replacement planning and talent management as the former revolves on filling the critical positions while the latter focuses on attracting, developing and retaining talents, thus goes beyond the scope of the former. In that sense, replacement planning can't be considered as a substitute for talent management (Rothwell, 2011). Borisova et al. (2017), on the other hand, list replacement planning and succession planning as two of the three levels of talent management. However, let us also note that their understanding of talent management is inclusive. Finally, another neighboring research area would be career management research. The focus of career management is at individual level, while that of talent management is at organizational and strategic levels. Secondly, career management is designed to be less organizationally continuous compared to talent management (De Vos & Dries, 2013).

Thunnissen, Boselie & Fruytier (2013), in their comprehensive literature review on talent management research conclude that most of the relevant research is narrow-minded and adopt a one-dimensional approach and top-to-bottom managerialist orientation. In most of the research, key issues such as employee well-being, employee engagement, and before all employee agency are not considered (Thunnissen, Boselie & Fruytier, 2013). Organization's, employer's and employee's goals are considered to be identical which is rarely the case in real life. Managerial and employee perceptions in fact differ with regard to talent management (Khdour, 2016).

Furthermore, in an exclusive version of talent management, those deemed non-talented would have different goals, interests and expectations compared to select fews as they will be marginalized by talent management practices which shows again and again that the employers and employees rarely share a common goal, interest or motivation. Lacey & Groves (2014) add to this argument by rightly claiming that the exclusive version of talent management that focuses on high-potentials and ignores others run counter to the whole idea of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and fair treatment of employees. According to them CSR activities and exclusive talent management are incompatible which brings forth what they call as 'corporate hypocrisy'.

Although employers usually think that they are successful talent managers, employees don't agree with this (Forbes, 2017). Averbook (2015) and Sterling (2016) recommend personalization for talent management professionals as talented staff is not uniform. They may have different skills, views, motivations etc. Furthermore, Brook (2017) warns against a particular focus on strengths, as the staff will not feel responsible for areas of non-strengths. Areas for which the staff has no talent at all are as important as those that match their talents.

Another conceptual issue involves applicability of the notion of talent management and related practices in different organizations and contextual settings. For example, in a number of studies (e.g. Akar & Balcı, 2016; Rudhumbu & Maphosa, 2015; Thunnissen, 2016; Van den Brink, Fruytier & Thunnissen, 2013; Wu, Nurhadi & Zahro, 2016), the notion of talent management has been applied to university settings. This application creates a particular form of conflict if Human Resources Department or an equivalent non-academic unit holds the power and authority to decide who is talented and who is not as well as how talents would be promoted and rewarded. There are a number of problems associated with authorizing HR professionals rather than academic faculty to do the recruitment, promotion and other HR-related academic tasks. Such an authorization feeds and buttresses corporatization of universities which is expected to be ideologically and financially independent of the political and corporate power. Corporatization as such leads to talented young graduates and 'early career' researcher to leave academic work and to move to private sector. Similar to Cooke, Saini & Wang (2014)'s findings for certain industries, all constituents of the academia can be deemed talented as it is hard to get a job at universities. If that is the case, the whole idea of talent management would be invalid for institutions of higher education. A similar case is the professional sports teams which are composed of top talents (Swailes, Downs & Orr, 2014).

Egerová (2013) proposes the notion of integrated talent management whereby organizational values and strategies are integrated in the talent management practices. This paves way for a more favorable organizational climate for talents to prosper. Egerová (2013) also states that managerial engagement and support are keys for successful implementation of a talent management strategy.

Likewise, Dobrian (2015) advises to have a clear career path for the advertised positions as a talent retention strategy.

Another conceptual issue about talent management rests on the idea of the potential. Although talent is expected to be something about the future potential, the evaluations systems which are usually based on managerial judgment revolve on past performance (Lacey & Groves, 2014). Thus, Lacey & Groves (2014) recommend the use of assessment systems that tap the potential such as those based on learning ability. Secondly, to alleviate the problems associated with a single manager's defects as the decision maker in talent management, they suggest the formation of talent review committees (Lacey & Groves, 2014). Another way to address these problems would be through self-nomination, but ultimately, there would be others at the higher ranks of hierarchy to make the decisions which does not exclude the possibility of decision biases and errors. Thus, all these measures are not completely immune to improper practices such as favoritism.

A more fundamental conceptual problem about talent management involves to what extent talents are perceived to contribute to organizational success indicators. Collings (2014) states that "*organizations often overestimate the contribution of key talents and as a result overinvest in them relative to others*" (s.312). Drawing his ideas from findings in movie and sport industries, he further states that the cost of hiring talent does not necessarily match the financial returns to the company. Converging with Collings (2014), Gelens et al. (2014) is cautious about such a misconceived understanding of talent management, as this would lead to the so-called 'crown-prince syndrome' whereby the chosen employees become arrogant and no longer care about team work and organizational-level considerations. This moves us to a discussion of talent management and teamwork.

Talent Management in Practice and Teamwork

Most of the talent management research concentrate its effort to study talent management practices in large companies which are of course expected to be knowledgeable about latest trends and fads in human resource management. However, when it comes to small and medium sized organizations, the situation is completely different. In their comprehensive study of talent management practices among a number of Spanish companies, Valverde, Scullion & Ryan (2013) discover that almost nobody in the selected companies know or have a clear, comprehensive idea about talent management. Furthermore, they are in fact practising talent management components without naming it as such and in fact avoiding such labels as another attempt by consultants to make money from the companies. The researchers conclude that it is possible to do talent management without naming it (Valverde, Scullion & Ryan, 2013) which questions the overall usefulness of the notion.

The virtues of teamwork are replaced with celebration of individualism in talent management practices. As if this is an action film, the focus moves towards a single savior man (usually man, rarely woman) with super powers (Superman, Captain America, Batman, Spiderman etc.) rather than teams, groups and organizations. However, the feats of human civilizations have been attained thanks to the institutions and organizations the human kind has formed. Contrary to this factual truth, talent management research paying attention to teamwork processes is rare. An exception is Oltra & Vivas-López (2013) where talent management is studied with regard to teamwork, organizational learning and knowledge assets. They contend that a well-coordinated team that consists of non-talents may sometimes outperform uncoordinated individual talents. Furthermore, they insist that organizational learning and knowledge assets associated with it are distributed, which means individual talents as units of analysis in talent management research is not only a simplification, but it is also misleading. The mainstream talent management research exclusively relying on individual talents is mismanaging the scarce human resource development funds by spending a lot for individual talents rather than building effective organizational structures, teamwork, organizational sense of belonging, employee empowerment and other more meaningful organizational variables which would boost the productivity in the long-term. Building these positive elements would help the company to move forward as if nothing happened, in case of individual talents' turnover (Oltra & Vivas-López, 2013). In such a rare occasion in talent management research, Oltra & Vivas-López (2013) put forward the notion of team-based talent management drawing our attention to mostly understudied topics such as talent-enhancing team composition and group-level learning.

Another exception is Devins & Gold (2014) which focus on low-paid jobs which is in fact, globally speaking, constitute the majority of the jobs offered and opt in favor of a more collective-based model of talent management. They call their approach as pluralist and multi-voiced converging with Thunnissen, Boselie & Fruytier (2013). Devins & Gold (2014) propose the notion of sustainable talent management and development as an alternative inclusive approach. This necessitates an evaluation of talent management practices with regard to organizational justice and ethics.

Talent Management, Organizational Justice and Ethics

If the notion of talent management would be implemented in a way to exclude most of the staff (let's remember the cut-off problem mentioned before), then this will have implications for organizational justice and ethics (Gelens et al., 2014; Sheehan & Anderson, 2015). Those chosen will view the organization as just, while that will not be the case for those not chosen (Gelens et al., 2014). By moving

majority of the staff into believing that they work in an unfair organization, talent management practices inflict more harm than offering benefits to organizations. Gelens et al. (2014) are right to discuss the notion of power distance in that sense. It is surprising to see that research on talent management in connection with Hofstede's dimensions is an understudied topic. However, obviously Hofstede's model has implications for talent management, as it unfolds some of the extraneous variables that mainstream talent management research ignores: For example, there would be differences in the way talent management programs are perceived in organizations that are high vs. low in power distance, high vs. low in collectivism/individualism etc. This is also something noticed by Guerci & Solari (2012) in their research on talent management practices in a number of Italian companies. As Gelens et al. (2014) point out, the perceptions rather than actual practices only is crucial to unfold the links between the effects of talent management practices over organizational variables such as job satisfaction, employee's commitment, turnover intention etc. An organization that is perceived to be unfair by the employees would suffer, as such a perception will threaten organizational and group cohesion.

In its exclusive version, talent management practices may demotivate staff that are labeled as 'non-talented' (Thunnissen, Boselie & Fruytier, 2013) and feed a negative self-fulfilling prophesy whereby those labeled as 'non-talented' would perform worse and worse. They will be distressed, discouraged and generally marginalized which will be reflected in lower rates of productivity (Lacey & Groves, 2014). Swailes (2013), in this context, asks the right question: "*How does the talent programme benefit employees who are excluded from it?*" (Swailes, 2013, p.41)

The chosen few are getting better treatment, but for non-selected majority the work conditions are either same or getting worse due to mismanagement of the organization's scarce funds for human resource development. Those non-selected are rarely offered a career plan. Low-paid job holders are trapped in their low-paying jobs (Devins & Gold, 2014) as the talent management practices concentrate their efforts mostly on strategic positions. They are excluded from elitist talent management practices; as a result, talent management becomes instrumental to bolster the existing class inequalities in society overall.

Another problem about talent management arises when long-serving staff is side-stepped by younger and less experienced newcomers that are recruited as high performers. This leads to staff resentment and lower staff morale which disrupts organizational harmony. Furthermore, the valuable contributions of other constituents of the society and the organizations are ignored and in a way demeaned. E.g. if we don't have good cleaners in an organization, the work will be disrupted. Although cleaning is not central to any business, its absence will hamper any business activity.

Another relevant key issue is about who would determine who are talented (Sheehan & Anderson, 2015). As briefly mentioned previously, the existing

evaluation systems are not prepared for certain defects. For example, those close (or familiar) to senior management rather than meritocratically appropriate ones may be viewed as talented (Warner, 2016). Fairness is not guaranteed and Swailes (2013)'s question needs to be answered: "*How are we distinguishing between popularity and talent?*" (Swailes, 2013, p.41) The situation is even more complicated in small and medium sized organizations where family members and friends are recruited for and assigned to key positions without any consideration of merit (Valverde, Scullion & Ryan, 2013). The top decision makers would of course designate those family members and friends as talented within the given evaluation systems. Another point that is striking enough to take note of in this context in Valverde, Scullion & Ryan (2013)'s findings is that when favoritism is the norm rather than meritocracy in talent evaluations, the key point is no longer ability or knowledge, but attitudes. This type of companies accordingly designates those that are the most obedient as the most talented.

Another related point concerns workplace diversity: Talent management practices can turn into a threat for workplace diversity. Huang & Tansley (2012) observe that who are viewed as talented by the organization is kept secret, as declaration of this 'corporate secret' may have negative consequences for those not chosen. Furthermore, those chosen can be negatively affected as well, since they are treated as staff obeying any practice imposed in a top-down manner (Huang & Tansley, 2012). In other words, even being included into the talent pool does not bring staff empowerment. In practice, then, the talent management programs expect and bolster corporate obedience for those chosen as well as those not chosen as they lose the feeling of job security and organizational attachment. The first collateral damage would be for the notion of work-life balance, whereby the chosen would suffer from overwork, while the ones not chosen are encouraged to overwork to feel secure about their tenure. Huang & Tansley (2012) also claim that the top management justifies talent management practice not only for the selected few, but for all the staff by stating that there is a war for talent out of the organization and that these programs need to be implemented to succeed in this dog-eat-dog business world. Diverging with this justification and accompanying attempt to conceal the true nature of work life, the employers and employees do not share the same motivation to work.

The unfairness openly or secretly promoted by talent management practices needs to be discussed with regard to gender distributions at top positions as well. Swailes (2013) warns against gender bias and selection bias in talent management, however all sorts of biases based on social exclusion can be listed here. Likewise, Bruning & Cadigan (2014) stress the fact that among top managers, women are a minority which will definitely have implications for talent management.

To salvage talent management against these fairly reasonable attacks, Collings (2014) recommends reconfiguration of talent management with a more inclusive stakeholder perspective, as talent management programs are not

necessarily for the benefit of the employees per se, but shareholders only. The well-acknowledged, widespread dogma that as the organization prospers, so do the employees needs to be debunked. The notion of talent management was not proposed to boost employee well-being, but rather for the purpose of reaping out more benefits and profits from talented people as well as from those not considered to be talented. It is an ethical decision to portray stakeholders rather than shareholders only in the talent management equation. Talent management, in its exclusive version, is accordingly flawed, as it clashes with business ethics. Thus, an inclusive and pluralist reconfiguration of talent management is necessary.

Collings (2014) critically discusses the dire work conditions with pays lower than living wages in WalMart and McDonalds as misleading cases where financial success does not go in tandem with the employee well-being. The employees of these low-cost leaders are not considered to be talents, but they are the ones who create shareholder's pay by working with low wages. As a good case, Collings (2014) discusses Costco which offers more decent wages and which holds more positive relations with other stakeholders including suppliers and labor unions.

In this context, let us also note the absence of labor unions in talent management research. It appears that while talent management practices are recommended to be applied to any organization, mainstream talent management research prefers non-unionized workers. The mainstream research assumes that the labor is not unionized and that white-collar employees are more talented than blue-collar ones. Consideration of labor rights, organized labor and some other relevant notions are virtually non-existent in talent management literature. Devins & Gold (2014) challenge this and point out the importance of unions and worker councils for employee well-being.

According to Warner (2016), the implementation of talent management programs encourage conformity and fear, as those who can fit in a social system are deemed talented. Social systems are setting the norms which dictate who could be considered as talented. Thus, without a proper understanding of the social context and related variables, the notion of talent management can be misleading and detrimental to the organizational performance. Compliance associated with talent management may hinder creativity (Warner, 2016). Talents in certain examples, are bound by the company structure as discussed in a previous section. A talented staff successful in a particular company is not necessarily successful in another one. That means when looking for talents, companies should also think about the elements that constitute their company structures (Warner, 2016). Job fit is another significant variable in that respect (Phillips, 2014). Staff assigned to positions that don't match their skill set will not be provided with an opportunity to exhibit their talents. There will also be differences in private companies and public organizations as the former would endorse a more instrumentalist ethics while the latter would be familiar with duty ethics (Swailes, 2013). In the same vein, Ingram (2016) shows the role of creativity as a mediator between talent

management and organizational culture. Organizational culture is the key for the effective practice (Lopamudra & Acharya, 2015). Furthermore, the role of cultural factors such as individualism-collectivism needs to be considered (Swailes, 2013). That is why, research on talent management practices in non-Western contexts may be valuable for a more comprehensive understanding of the concept and its applications.

Talent Management Practices in Non-Western Contexts

In the first years of talent management research, one of the criticisms for the relevant literature was its Western focus and especially Western-oriented understanding of industrial relations and human resource management. The imposition of Western models, theories and frameworks on non-Western contexts as if 'the Western' is universal is a reasonable point to slam. However recently a number of studies (e.g. Biygautane & Al Yahya, 2014; Chen et al., 2016; Fang, 2014; Furusawa, 2014; Hejase et al., 2016; Kim, Lee & Rhee, 2015; Maamari & Alameh, 2016; Marjani & Safaee, 2016; Nafei, 2015; Pereira & Fontinha, 2014; Piansoongnern, 2014; Reis & Quental, 2014; Singh & Sharma, 2015) researched the notion and relevant practices in non-Western contexts and contributed to the theoretical and practical discussion. Thus, this criticism is no longer applicable. However, it is true that talent management is almost never conceptualized and researched with reference to a set of cultural variables such as individualism-collectivism and power distance, as stated above.

Cooke, Saini & Wang (2014) in a study comparing talent management in Chinese and Indian companies come up with the following factors that influence talent management: Characteristics of the workforce, paternalistic culture, political ideology, value of education, role of the state in education, ownership, industrial sector, market/economic forces and individuals. Furthermore, definitions of talent varies in China and India ranging from universalist, inclusive (which proposes that everybody has talent as explained in a previous section) to selective elitist (which matches a selected group of talented staff) (Cooke, Saini & Wang, 2014). The inclusive definition is common in "*high-tech or knowledge-intensive firms (e.g. consultancy businesses, design firms, and R&D organizations)*" (p.228), as these areas require hiring of highly talented people. Cooke, Saini & Wang (2014) list the following as the "*HRM practices reported to be used in respondents' organizations for talent management*" (p.231): Recruitment and skills sourcing, financial incentives, training and development, performance management, intrinsic rewards, setting role models, job rotation, improving working conditions, communication and employee involvement (Cooke, Saini & Wang, 2014, p.231). More research is needed in this sense. As a final note, we need to consider not only non-Western contexts, but also non-Western public organizations for a broader understanding of talent

management. Among public sector talent management schemes in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, Poocharoen & Lee (2013) mentions "*scholarship schemes, training schemes for high-potential officers, and special pay scale for those identified as a talent*" (p.1185). To sum up, cultural differences should be taken into consideration in talent management practice.

Conclusion

As discussed throughout the paper, the exclusive version of talent management which is usually lauded in the relevant literature is conceptually and practically problematic. It has the potential to harm the organizational outcomes that are based on employee satisfaction, morale, engagement, agency, sense of organizational fairness etc. Furthermore, these discussions ignore the fact that majority of the global work force is employed in low-paid jobs which questions the applicability of the notion of talent management in general. Additionally, its usefulness for non-Western contexts, different industries, job types and organization sizes needs to be elaborated through further research. Finally, different approaches and frameworks to study talent management would enrich the field as well as bring about a more critical and realistic understanding of the conceptualization of talent and its management and relevant practices.

The notion of talent management itself is naturally biased in favor of those at the top, white collar employees and non-unionized workers. Those already on the top are usually considered to be talented, which has implications for the pay structure. CEOs who fail their companies are generously rewarded for their 'excellent' performance. Secondly, the talent management discussions often assume that white collar employees are more talented than blue collar employees, implicitly endorsing the mental vs manual labor divide. Talent is usually considered to be a mental construct closely following this divide. Thirdly, the discussion of the talent management models with regard to unions is quite rare. Thus, it is often assumed that the subjects of these models are unorganized. In their shareholder approach, a major stakeholder such as trade unions is not even counted. The idea of talent management further widens the wage differentials and therefore social inequality at a larger scale, through these three points, ie by favoring those on the top of the organizational hierarchy, white collar workers and atomized labor. An overall wage increase to raise employee welfare in general is always in conflict with generously paying for a select few, considering the limited financial resources of an organization.

To conclude from an industrial relations point of view, talent management practices are detrimental for organizational justice and ethics. They destroy fairness and perceived justice in the organizations. A set of organizational variables such as organizational cohesion, organizational commitment etc are under threat. Talent management practices are stressful, demotivating and discriminatory for many of

the employees. They promote, encourage and reward obedience and compliance rather than creativity and workplace diversity. Furthermore, who would be considered as talented and accordingly invested on is a moot issue; various biases interfere with decision making including gender and ethnic biases; and favoritism, social exclusion and other unfair practices are not out of equation. A number of variables such as organizational attachment, job satisfaction, turnover intention etc. will be negatively affected at individual level as well.

The mainstream HR research often conceals or ignores the fact that the motivations and interests of employers and employees are not identical. In many of the companies, high performance is not rewarded. If I work hard, my boss will get richer, not me. An exclusionary talent management model will reward those on the top for hard work of those at the bottom of the hierarchy. As a final point, we can state that we need more pro-labor research on mainstream HR conceptualizations such as talent management, as those conceptualizations are usually biased by excluding those at the bottom of the hierarchy.

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