

Talent Development: Existing Status, Constraints, Scope and Suggested Strategies

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Abstract

Although talent development is increasingly needed in organizations, there is skepticism about its notion in blueprint and reality. This paper probes and extends better understanding into the disparity on the dissimilarities of the notion, meanings and approach to talent development. It also examines the range of tools available to organizations for development. Gaining inferences from a series of research papers, it revealed that talent development is an important constituent of the complete mechanism of talent management. The study underlined why talent development has proved crucial to the success of an organization, whether in prosperity or adversity. The restrictions faced by organizations in the implementation of TD strategy have also been discussed. Though the study is exclusively qualitative in its essence; it highlights avenues for future studies. This study will help training professionals in dealing with certain problems and challenges that lead to the management and development of talent at work.

Key Words: Talent, Talent development, Talent management, Talent development tool

1. Introduction

Human capital is regarded vital for an organization in order to gain edge over its competitors (Price, 2004); an indispensable entity that is available for a premium for organizations and becoming scarce resource (Kim and McLean 2012; Pruis 2011; Lockwood 2006) every passing day. It is illustrated in Talent Shortage Survey conducted by ManpowerGroup in 2018 that reported shortage of talent for the key leadership roles in 67% of the large organizations across the world. These talent 'gaps', 'crunch' or 'shortage' have hindered the business advancement (Collings and Mellahi 2009) by impacting on its operating costs, bottom-line

profitability, competitiveness, service, quality, brand and investment in the longer-term.

Moreover, the issue of the shortage of talent is almost global. Michaels *et al.*, (2001) found that organizations around the world have little choice but to strive for the same group of talented people with the similar tools, tactics, and perspectives employed by many other organizations. This has led to certain unfair and illegal practices like poaching of talents. In an era of internationalization, where talent and intellectualism are preferred as the principal medium of exchange, developing talent has become pre-requisite for making a fortune because it is the talented people who will make your customers choose your brand and support your business.

The notion of developing talent is not new; there has always been a need for talented employees since eternity. But, the crunch for talented employees has only hit the business sector today because of the paradigmshift of human resource. Norma D'Annunzio-Green (2008) revealed that since mobility

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is no longer a concern for “Generation Y” employees due to their propensity towards changing their jobs regularly, talent retention has turned out to be a serious problem for the HR managers. These employees focus more on employability as opposed to employment, thereby exerting pressure on organizations to impart them continuous professional advancement opportunities. Furthermore, a remarkable development during the past years is that employees not anymore dedicate or confide their employment to one employer. They embrace a proactive approach, looking for organizations with the best professional advancement criterion (Mirvis and Hall, 1994; Sullivan, 1999; Roehling *et al.*, 2000; Tanskey and Cohen, 2001). This has led to a worldwide battle amongst corporations for developing and encompassing appropriate talent development mechanisms into their frameworks.

Human resource managers, the world over, have realized that talent development has turned out crucial for business growth (Cook and Macaulay 2009; Kim and McLean 2012). In developing strategies to this end, they burn the candle at both ends and for a little while the development of talent has assumed a significant role for organizational advancement.

All such elements bring forth talent development - as a subject field, at the top of the priority list. However, there are relatively scant and fragmented scholarly papers that centralize quintessentially on talent development (Garavan *et al.*, 2012). It is with this objective that this study was proposed. Studies and researches relevant to the topic were systematically reviewed to further examine this domain.

Analysis of literature indicated that several researchers and academicians have described talent development with an array of ideas and thoughts that identify gaps for a great deal of uncertainty and lack of transparency about what organizations characterize as talent, its applicability and the overall objectives of talent development and thus pose a danger to its implementation. We expect that through the empirical observations accrued from the numerous papers and articles we will clarify the challenges encountered in the development of talent and the difficulties faced by

the organization and its manpower in the direction of a framework based on talent. The paper also critically examines the range of TD interventions available to organizations.

2. Objective of the Study

The prime concern of the present study is to review the prominent and relevant literature of past researches pertaining to talent development so as to probe the notion, meanings and approach to talent development and highlight the constraints confronted by organizations and the employees in the direction of a framework based on talent. The study also examines the range of development tools available to organizations. The aim of the study is also to offer a base for identifying opportunities so as to provide better guidance for further research into this domain.

3. Research Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. Research papers published in the period between 1987 to 2016 are taken into account. Secondary data has been accessed from review of literature as well as from various journals and articles. The articles have been accessed from online databases i.e. scholar.google.co.in, National HRD network, emeraldinsight.com, elsevier.com, sciencedirect.com, researchgate.net, academia.edu and data available in books are collected in order to carry out an in-depth analysis.

4. What is “Talent”?

Collings and Mellahi (2009) claimed that talent contributes significantly to the overall organizational accomplishment. But what is “talent”? A discourse on talent development would be impaired in the absence of an interpretation of the term “talent”. Talent in broad terms relates to the aptitudes, abilities or the art that a person acquires in a certain profession or domain.

Howe *et al.*, (1998), Tansley (2011) and CIPD (2007) revealed that the word ‘talent’ has been used since ancient times; and also stated that it has different understandings and perceptions, all of which depend heavily on situations, persons, and organizations. This is consistent with researches of Iles *et al.*, (2010) who pointed that talent connotes varied meanings to diverse

persons, organizations, establishments, etc. However, (Williams, 2000; Michaels *et al.*, 2001; Tansley, 2011; and Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013) stressed that a distinct knowledge of the meanings, descriptions and notion of the term 'talent' is critical for the progress of establishments.

Principally, talent is often understood from either an **objective** perspective (*characteristics of people as talents*) or a **subjective** perspective (*people as talents*). Some researchers hold an objective perspective of talent, which portrays the characteristics of being talented instead of talented people. Aptitudes (Thijssen & van der Heijden, 2003), proficiencies (Thijssen & van der Heijden, 2003; Ulrich, 2007; Lehmann, 2009; Siikaniemi, 2012) and organizational abilities (Claussen *et al.*, 2014) are few of the key attributes expressing talents from an objective perspective. Michaels *et al.*, (2001) portrayed talent as entirety of an individual's skillsets, his inherent powers, abilities, level of knowledge, understanding, expertise, caliber, rationality, demeanor, behavior, personality and zeal. Talent was defined by Gagne (2000) as supreme expertise of organized and consistently cultured qualities or expertise. On the other hand, some of other interpretations with subjective perspective relate to great-performance workers (McDonnell *et al.*, 2010), highly-promising workers (McDonnell *et al.*, 2010), persons who can produce substantial contribution to the present as well as prospective achievement of the organization (Stewart & Harte, 2010; Morton 2004), individuals who can fulfill present as well as future leadership criteria (Rhodes *et al.*, 2008), and managers as a whole (Sheehan, 2012). Zikmund (2000) described talent as all those individuals who can accelerate organizational effectiveness either by means of their instant endeavour or eventually by displaying the highest degrees of excellence.

5. Defining the Scope of Talent Development

Organizations have been continuously emphasizing that they wish to manage and develop talent. However, researches have shown that the notion of talent development is conceived diversely in various organizations with varying degrees. Few academicians consider it as interchangeable with HRM and the issues

of what talent denotes and in what way organizations need to manage them are yet a matter of discussion (Collings and Mellahi 2009).

There is unexpectedly scant printed papers and articles that focus on global talent development problems and defines the dimensions and outlines the peripheries of the notion (Cohn *et al.*, 2005; Garavan *et al.*, 2009; Younger and Cleemann, 2010; Cook, 2010). It is recognized, nevertheless, that talent development (TD) is a key element of global talent management (Barlow, 2006; Novations, 2009; Cappelli, 2009; Scullion and Collings, 2011; CIPD, 2011; Garavan *et al.*, 2012).

In HRM and HRD publications, talent management (TM) is more than ever being mentioned about (Berger and Berger, 2003; Stahl *et al.*, 2007; Cappelli, 2009; Burbach and Royle, 2010; Collings *et al.*, 2011). It is a prominent, even "imperative" subject across the globe (Barlow, 2006; Birschel, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Berry, 2007; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007). Dessler (2009) viewed TD as a crucial constituent of talent management, which is a bunch of organizational methods and practices (McDonnell *et al.*, 2010; CIPD, 2011) that describes how organizations lure, choose, engage, train and handle employees in an optimized and planned manner (Scullion and Collings, 2011). These two notions are also frequently related to, and occasionally used mutually (Lewis and Heckman 2006) with, career development (Collings *et al.*, 2009), which features a continuing range of training and associated exercises that determine the success and fulfillment of an individual's profession (Dessler, 2009).

According to Evans *et al.*, (2002) talent development aims at evolving leaders through processes such as 360-degree feedback, networking, coaching, training, job assignments, action learning, mentoring and challenging employees. Davis *et al.*, (2007) defined TD as the manner of transforming an organization, its workforce, its various stakeholders, and set of persons within it, by way of meticulously organized and impromptu training, with an objective to have an edge for the organization. Mehdiabadi *et al.*, (2016) defined TD as an all-inclusive system comprising of a

set of principles, tasks, and procedures focused at enhancing the interested and competent employees for the mutuality of individuals, host organizations, and community at large.

According to Garavan *et al.*, (2012) talent development emphasizes on the planning, selecting and execution of development techniques for the talented individuals to make sure that the organization has the present as well as forecasted inventory of talent to achieve business goals and the development tasks are in sync with the talent management programs of the organization.

Thunnissen *et al.*, (2013) stressed that talent development coupled with talent attraction and engagement are considered as the three principal techniques or processes in TM. Pruis (2011) stressed that talent development is a long term, holistic and comprehensive process that keeps the organization stable, progressive and creative. Therefore, Neal and Sonsino (2012) concluded that the existence of the organization counts on their creativity in practices, procedures, products and leadership. Ketter (2010) recommends that as organizations strive in new marketplace with limited resources, talent development remains a requisite for them.

Stahl *et al.*, (2012) asserted that “one of the major issues being faced by the corporates worldwide is to create and maintain a strong pool of talent” and one definite way of creating talent pipeline is in the form of talent development. Govaert *et al.*, (2010) in his study revealed that organizations need to implement talent development systems if they intend to retain their employees. He also stressed that organizations should allow staff members to learn new things and practice what they are well-versed in. Gandz (2006) revealed that talent development practices are usually carried out by establishments to make sure that there is no talent deficit, to assure envisioned progression instead of substitution, and to brand the organization like a talent magnet in the corporate world.

Inclusive versus Exclusive approach toward Talent Development

The inference of inconsistencies in interpretation of talent implies that it can mean whatsoever firms and

establishments would like it to imply (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013) and consequently, this perception of talent decides which set of worker sought to be developed. Few establishments, for example, will involve all grades of employee in their definition of talent, whereas others will concentrate on handpicked ones only.

Iles *et al.*, (2010) have pointed out disagreement regarding what talent may comprise of for the purpose of developing the talent of any individual. Consequently, two approaches to talent development were identified: an exclusive approach which centralizes on crucial tasks, profiles and trains them to perform these responsibilities and an inclusive approach that centralizes on developing all budding staffs; this eventually leads to maximum advantages for the establishments (Pruis 2011).

Talent can be seen as being exclusive to some great-performance workers or as a characteristic that every workers exhibits in a certain degree and that can be cultured and evolved by way of different mechanisms (Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Collings and Mellahi, 2009). Downs & Swailes (2013) asserts that approaches pertaining to talent are usually an exclusive process concentrating on a small fraction of workers in an establishment termed as key players or stars; regardless of the truth that “talent persists at every level of employees, development processes in establishment concentrate mostly on top executive and administrative positions”

Berger and Berger (2003) advocates inclusive approach and believe that every individual has one talent or the other that can be determined and unleashed. Nevertheless, they recommend that an establishment that facilitates talent management effectively classifies workers and emphasize development investments in key, great-performance and highly-promising employees. Baum (2008) stressed that management should apprehend talent from inclusive perspective, to ensure that all employees are considered based on their ability to assume additional duties and assignments and be elevated within their department and in the broader sense organization.

The scientific data advocates a blend of approaches in establishments. A CIPD (2011) survey concluded that several establishments have opted for an exclusive approach which concentrates on grooming top executives only. There has been a great deal of emphasis on huge potential, future stars, prospective managers and go-getter. The exclusive approach implemented by Somerfield Ltd (Cook and Macaulay 2009) assisted the organization in creating a bench strength of budding leaders.

Cook and Macaulay (2009) revealed that a more inclusive approach was implemented by Electrolux Ltd, wherein every staff member is regarded as talented. They recommend that not merely the high promising workers need to be focused upon. Mere concentration on handful employees who are selected, groomed, compensated and taken to next level can result in discouragement and inefficiency of rest of them and they may not get an opportunity to be promoted to leadership positions. Although the McKinsey Consulting Group in the beginning strongly favoured an exclusive technique to developing, currently they recommend an inclusive technique which aims to develop not only "A players" but "B players" as well (Ernst & Young, 2010). Yet, comparatively lesser number of organizations implements inclusive technique. A survey conducted in Public Personnel Management (Reilly, 2008) clearly indicates that inclusive techniques are prevalent in state owned enterprises. Bersin (2010) views this inclusive approach as a kind of talent segmentation but with credit that entire staff members contribute in the organization. Christensen *et al.*, (2010) stated that this kind of approach is in accordance with an innovative perspective. Such approach implies that every employee must be viewed talented in view of his capability for innovative thinking.

To surpass the drawbacks of these approaches, Van der Sluis and Van De Bunt – Kokhuis (2009) advocated the mixed approach that facilitates organizations to derive the benefits of these two models. Ford *et al.*, (2010) further reveals that a mixed approach to development would eventually be most appropriate when it comes to equity, impartiality and staff encouragement.

There is significant discussion about the pros and cons of exclusive and inclusive approaches; but, it is important to realize the manner in which both techniques affect organizational profitability and the commitment of staffs that are ignored in an exclusive technique.

Modus operandi - Make versus Buy approach toward talent development

Brewster *et al.*, (2007) revealed that due to unfair and illegal acts like poaching of talents, establishments have lost some of their talented staffs to their rivals and have been left with an option to either *train or attract* other staffs in order to thrive as well as survive. However, there is no clarity whether organizations should concentrate more on hiring and recruitment or developing of talented employees (Briscoe and Hall 1999). *Make or buy* approach has been an object of continuing discussion among management scholar in the literary works (Cappelli, 2008; Cappelli & Keller, 2014). Pfeffer (2001), as one of the patrons of 'make' approach, cautions that sheer consideration to hire and engage and overlooking the development of talent might weaken the establishment in the long run. Furthermore, according to Garavan *et al.*, (2012), concentrating on procuring talents from the outside is less fruitful in the longer term; on the contrary, establishments must practice the policy of developing talented employees internally, with a view that staff members have sector and business-related know-how and expertise (Lepak and Snell, 1999) so that he remains in competition. Consequently, for the purpose of realizing their mission and goals, establishments have to aim at staff development.

6. Talent Development Tools

Organizations rely on a set of tools for the talent development. The particular technique for organizations is based on strategic goal, learning requirements, availability of resources, etc. Based on McCauley *et al.*, (2010), the kinds of programs utilized to develop talent by organizations may be classified into these distinct groups: developmental assignments, feedback processes, developmental relationships, formal programs and self-development activities.

Developmental Relationships

Bonding and relationships are considered an extremely strong determinant of growth and advancement as these are a great basis of evaluation, obstacles, support and guidance (McCauley and Douglas, 2004; Rock and Garavan, 2006). As stated by Higgins and Kram (2001), developmental relationships are treated as a bonding in which one person cares about the progression of the career of another person. Novations (2009) and CIPD (2011) specified that these are undertaken extensively for developing strong promising talented people. Lombardozzi and Casey (2008) concluded that the techniques in these activities entailed a frequent interaction among definite designer-driven learning actions, learner-driven actions, communication among themselves and learner action and reasoning handling. These activities vary from those which are evolved instinctively in the work station and in different facets of human activity (such as mentors and role models) to such which are deliberately oriented to encourage and promote learning (such as professional coaches and social identity networks). One more extremely prominent technique premised on relationships is the community of practice (Wenger, McDermott, and Synder, 2002; Saint-Onge and Wallace, 2003). They include a set of people, usually from a particular establishment, having similarity in acumen and tasks however engaged in multiple divisions or territories. These people get together for knowledge sharing, to discuss ideal procedures, enrich one another and guide each other since they are confronted with similar kinds of problems.

Developmental Assignments

Pushing employees vertically above in the organization has remained a general approach of exposing them to new problems and difficulties, however the more intentional use of lateral movements and temporary tasks is more commonly an important aspect of employee development practices (McCauley, 2006; Yost and Plunkett, 2009). Job rotations, secondments, project assignments/stretch assignments and job moves (multinational assignments and nation-wide transfers) enable employees to learning through experience – by

handling day-to-day issues and challenges. Evans *et al.*, (2011) revealed that such orientations give employees the chance to discover varied organizational, societal, cross-cultural and work practice scenarios. As a matter of fact, studies have time and again revealed that challenges lead to on-the-job learning (McCauley *et al.*, 1994; DeRue and Wellman, 2009; Dragoniet *et al.*, 2009), which leaders regard as a main source of knowledge (Morrison *et al.*, 1987; McCall *et al.*, 1988).

Action learning team is probably one of the highly organized types of developmental assignments. It is a series of development mechanisms wherein crucial real-life issues pertaining to an organization is addressed. Three types of goals are aimed at: delivering quantifiable business outcomes, conveying learning unique to a specific background, and developing broader management competencies and proficiencies (Palus&Horth, 2004). Meaningful action learning may stretch from implicit, simple learning at job to orientated and substantial-impact learning activities to revolutions of individuals and establishments (Marsick, 2002).

Feedback Processes

While feedback instinctively takes place in the course of human dialogue in organizations, but sincere response regarding one's conduct, abilities, and influence on other people is uncommon and irregular in most of the establishments. For managers to obtain constant, premium-class response, employee advancement mechanisms must incorporate formal feedback practices.

Coleman (1987) defined assessment center as “a series of testing techniques aimed at allowing applicants to display, in normal circumstances, the competencies and capabilities that are crucial to be successful in a particular task”. The results of the assessment center process can be used for employee selection or development.

360-degree feedback employs a meticulously framed tool (questionnaire) and gathers views in an organized manner regarding an individual's performance from a broad set of persons (colleagues, subordinates, clients and other stakeholders). Chappelow (2004) lately

concluded that probably the most noteworthy drift in the domain of employee development in the last two decades might have been the universality and acceptance of 360-degree feedback. People termed it as the most remarkable management innovations in the last 20 years (London & Beatty, 1993; Atwater & Waldman, 1998). This mechanism gives better results if it begins with managers at the *top* of the hierarchy and flows downward all through the organizational structure.

Formal Programs

This technique involves participation to business events, executive education and formal education. Examining its goals, Rothwell and Kazanas (2003) put forward a demarcation between employee education that concentrates on transforming people to assist them groom for job progression *vertically* (up the chain of command) or *horizontally* (across a range of specialized skill) and staff training that is a short-period, transformation endeavor aimed at enhancing productivity at an individual level.

Self-Development Activities

Organizations may provide a plethora of self-activated programs to develop leaders. Books, articles, newspaper, magazines, manuals, journals, reports, publications and online materials act as a primary source of learning and awareness for employee members. Distinguished personalities, eminent speakers, guest lectures, seminar, conference and workshops give an opportunity to experts, wizards and veterans who can share ideas and keep abreast with the recent technological advancements and developments in the industry. Attending seminars, conventions and trade shows also provides orientation to contemporary ideas and concepts and latest developments, as well as networking with like-minded people who are continuous source of learning and guidance. Events that encourage and energize knowledge sharing and dialogue beyond management levels – fireside chats, town hall meetings, staff meetings, conclaves, etc. – can well be considered as an important component of the employee advancement mechanism as these expose employees

to various aspects, strengthen institutional core values, and promote open-mindedness, positiveness and transparency. These flexible chunks of learning are less-time taking, are accessible whenever learning is required, and available in abundance.

7. Conclusions

On the basis of this review of the domain of talent development, a number of tentative inferences can be concluded. Talent development is a considerably under-developed and less-researched topic. It is consistently regarded as an important constituent of talent management process, which in turn is put forward as one of the top most challenges encountered by the organizations these days. Though talent is limited and economic downturn has compelled few organizations to put talent development to the offstage, yet it is requisite for every organization. For talent development to be effectual there is no universally-accepted approach. However, the broad array of development tools needs to be considered to determine its suitability.

From our point of view there is scope in the talent development concept. A universally accepted definition of talent development and its scope need to be further researched. There can be no convincing manner of distinguishing talent, so talented individuals might be unnoticed, or those selected may not have the competence they initially appeared to have. Furthermore, there is one area about which there is no unanimity, and this concerns who all employees of the organization should be taken into consideration for the talent development program. There is proof that the new approaches to talent development are emerging: an earlier focus on exclusive models that intended to identify and develop top management talent (A players) is giving way to a realization that A players need to be part of productive and talented teams, and these teams, consisting of 'B players', can be found at all levels of the organization, and indeed in supplying or partner organizations. Inclusive approaches may therefore dominate in the second decade of the 21st century, much as exclusive approaches did in the first decade. The inclusive, as opposed to exclusive approach

must be implemented. This assures optimum use of talented people and positions organization in gaining an edge over the others. The paper raises a

number of critical issues regarding which employee needs to be developed, to what extent and in which manner.

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