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# Managing Talent - A Review

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**NIDHI SHARMA and R K SINGH**

Department of Commerce, University of Delhi

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*The term talent has become the buzz word. Researchers, academics and practitioners have been using this term more often than not. However, the term has got many connotations based on the context. Talent is very often used as a synonym for employees, it becomes imperative to see whether there is any difference between talent and employees. Understanding the meaning of the term for its better understanding and management is the aim of this paper. Academic writings have been used to see different colors, designs and shades of the term talent.*

## INTRODUCTION

Talent that can help differentiate and compete is critical in today's work environment. Individuals and organizations realize the criticality of talent in order to succeed (Conaty & Charan, 2011). Strategies are to be made around available talent with the aim to get the right people in the right jobs (Jackson & Schuler, 1990). In other words, work and talent fit has to be achieved in order to have sustained 'competitive advantage' (Barney, 1991; Iles, 1997; Tucker, Kao & Verma, 2005) and organizational sustainability (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2012). Considerable investment is made by practitioners in identifying and managing talent (Martin & Schmidt, 2010; Conaty & Charan, 2011; Stahl, 2012) with the belief that combined capacity and will of people is needed to achieve organizational goals (Cheese et al., 2008).

Some professionals use the term 'talent' and 'employee' interchangeably and view entire workforce population as talent (Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001; Walker & Larocco, 2002; Stahl et al., 2012). On the other hand, some see talent as personalistic and selectively found. These practitioners make strategies keeping in view the performance and potentials of the employees as basis for strategizing (Smart, 1999; Michaels, Jones & Axelrod, 2001; Axelrod, Jones & Michaels, 2002). They also develop programs and processes to identify key positions (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

Though, the world of academics and practice has been highlighting the role of talent for success the meaning of construct talent has been differing. It is

this differing meaning has made us to look at different views of scholars on 'talent'. An attempt in this paper has been made to bring some academic work together to help understand the meaning of construct talent.

### TALENT AN INPUT OR OUTPUT?

Talent is found in people, or developed in the organization and as a culmination of efforts? Academics have viewed talent in many ways. It is viewed as an outcome (Jackson & Schuler, 1990; Lewis & Heckman, 2006), processes (Rothwell, 1994; Lewis & Heckman, 2006), as well as decision alternatives (Pascal, 2004; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). It is viewed as an organization's "most important asset" (Ashton & Morton, 2005) which has ability to become irreplaceable (Lepak & Snell, 1999). Talent is viewed as capital as well (Farndale, Scullion & Sparrow, 2010).

Talent has been also been observed by researchers as a construct related to individual's ability. Davis et al. (2007) associate talent with exceptional mental faculty. A more competitive view of talent considers it to be a special ability that enables people to perform better than others in their teams (Gagne, 2000; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries & Gonzalez-Cruz, 2013). Williams (2000) defines talent as an ability of the people to do competitively good work. Williams's analogy is similar to that of Stahl et al. (2012) to whom talent is a value or potential of employees in comparison to others. Such employees are generally termed as high fliers or as "high potentials" (Silzer & Church, 2009) and considered to have the potential to assume leadership roles in the future (Cope, 1998). Taking a broader and inclusive approach (Stahl et al., 2012), talent is seen ubiquitous in every employee with a capacity to leverage it for organizations' benefits.

### TALENT IS FOUND IN EVERYONE?

There are studies categorized as 'subject' approach of talent who corroborate the analogy that talent is

ubiquitous i.e. universally found in everyone (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000; Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001; Peters, 2006; Yost & Chang, 2009; Silzer & Dowell, 2010). Contrary evidences are also available in this approach, where talent is viewed as 'individualistic' and found in few (Gagne, 2000; Michaels et al., 2001; Smart, 2005; Stahl et al., 2007; Tansley et al., 2007; Iles, Chuai & Preece, 2010; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2012).

A counter perspective of 'subject' approach of talent has been put by 'object' approach researchers who view talent as "natural ability" (Hinrichs, 1966; Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001; Davies & Davies, 2010; Silzer & Dowell, 2010; Meyers, van Woerkom & Dries, 2013), "mastery" (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006; Ericsson, Prietula & Cokely, 2007; Dries & Pepermans, 2008), "commitment" (Ulrich, 2007; Weiss & MacKay, 2009; Nieto, Hernandez-Maestro & Munoz-Gallego, 2011; Pruis, 2011; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2012), "fit" (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2004; Ashton & Morton, 2005; Boselie, Dietz & Boon, 2005; Iles, 2008; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Coulson-Thomas, 2012), "capital" (Pascal, 2004; Sparrow, 2009; Farndale, Scullion & Sparrow, 2010), "individual difference" (Hough & Oswald, 2000; Graen, 2009), "giftedness" (Gagné, 2004), "identity" (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999), "strength" (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Wood et al., 2011), and talent is seen as perception of talent (Dominick & Gabriel, 2009).

Taking talent as multidimensional construct Michaels, Jones & Axelrod (2001) say "talent is some combination of a sharp strategic mind, leadership ability, emotional maturity, communication skills, ability to attract and inspire other talented people, entrepreneurial instincts, functional skills, and the ability to deliver results."

Difficulty in defining talent adds to the richness of the subject and notion of talent is to be "appreciated, nurtured" (Boudreau, 2013) and "embraced" and should be interpreted in a given context (Gelens et al., 2013; McDonnell, Collings & Burgess, 2012;

Tansley, Kirk & Tietze, 2013; Thunnissen et al., 2013) enabling practitioners to apply them differentially in varying situations.

Talented people have the ability to deliver superior results in any allocated role; handle change, and consider change as a source of a new challenge. They also have the ability to learn and are inherently curious to expand their knowledge and skill sets. They learn quickly and apply what they have learned in an effective manner. They have high degree of self- confidence, good communication skills and focus. They are problem- solvers rather than just problem- identifiers. They know how to bounce back from failures.

## TALENT AS A STRATEGIC DIFFERENTIATOR

Successful organizations not only compete with others but compete with themselves. They are incessantly trying to out do their previous performance, and continuously innovating to bring better products and services to their customers. It is achieved through identification of talent who is driven by passion and values (Ready et al., 2008; Conaty & Charan, 2011; Stahl, 2012) and fearlessness to develop others continuously (Kotter, 1990; Cappelli, 2008; Ready et al., 2008; Martin & Schmidt, 2010; Conaty & Charan, 2011). Here talent is viewed as strategic differentiator on the counts of cost (Williamson, 1981; Becker & Huselid, 1998; Lepak & Snell, 1999), passion and values they for achieving competitive advantage in the long term (Barney, 1991; Wright, Smart & McMahan, 1995).

The 'subject' approach of talent, which believes talent is found in everyone, has cost as one of the important considerations because nurturing and managing talent which found in everyone inflates cost (Williamson, 1981; Becker & huselid, 1998; Lepak & Snell, 1999). The approach which sees talent as individualistic argues judicious use of the organization's scarce resources for attracting,

deploying, developing and retaining employees for better value addition, productivity and returns (Morton, 2005; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). This approach also supports the argument that such trained employees should be considered to fill key positions that bring strategic advantage (Becker & huselid, 1998, 2006; Gelens et al., 2013) to the organization.

## CONCLUSION

Talent is talked very often and becomes part of the agenda of the practitioners and academics with different notions. It is seen as an input or ability found in everyone as well as person specific. We may conclude that some element of talent is in everyone who is ubiquitous and some are individual specific. The management of talent based on both analogies will have different pecuniary impacts on the organizations. There is some element of talent may be called as input among people which needs to be processed for better results.

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## BIOGRAPHIES

**Nidhi Sharma** is Assistant Professor at Shivaji College, Delhi University. Her interest is in Human Resources in the area of Talent Management. She has published articles in journals of National and International reputation.

**R K Singh** is Deputy Dean, Academic Affairs & Project at University of Delhi. A doctorate on the topic Managing Human Resource Diversity is an educator at India's pioneering institution Shri Ram College of Commerce. He has more than two decades of teaching experience at graduate and post graduate levels. He is recipient of Silver Medal, Best Business Academic Award 2007, conferred by All India Commerce Association. He has been a soft skill trainer for various private & public sector organisations.