

# Business Research Quarterly

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## *Call for Papers for a Special Issue*

### **Talent Management: Quo Vadis?**

Submission deadline: August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

#### **Guest editors**

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#### **Background**

There is a significant and ongoing dialogue about talent management in the academic and practitioner literature. Effective talent management is proposed as one of the critical capabilities that will distinguish successful global firms (Garavan, 2012) and viewed as consequential for our ability to deliver on the potential of the knowledge economy (Tolich, 2005). Calls have been made for the development of a talent science (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005) to underpin and buttress what has been characterised as the dominant human capital topic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Cascio and Aguinis, 2008).

Consequently, the literature on talent management has been growing continuously, though to some in a somewhat haphazard way (Cappelli and Keller, 2014). It has been observed to be built upon a wide range of academic and applied perspectives (Nijs et al, 2014; Tarique and Schuler, 2010), something which may over the course of time prove to be a strength or a weakness depending on our capacity to coalesce dispersed theoretical insights and engage in robust evaluation studies. A recent retrospective analysis of the empirical effort to date suggests that it is “scattered over a wide range of journals” (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). The result is a somewhat fragmented body of knowledge which remains imprecise and characterised by a rather vague, and at the same time, appealing rhetoric (Dries, 2013). Arising from this, there have been calls for a more significant degree of critical scrutiny of the phenomenon (Iles et al, 2010) in order that we might more fully evaluate its true value from a science-practice perspective. Sparrow

and Makram (2015: 249) have recently concluded that because such “different values, assumptions, allegiances and philosophies are being surfaced” in the evolving field of talent management, “answering questions about value” is the core challenge that must now be addressed for the field to develop further.

## Aims and scope

Fundamental definitional challenges lie at the heart of many of the contestations that have arisen to date. Although by now the definition by Collings and Mellahi (2009) is among the most widely accepted in terms of establishing the boundaries of the phenomenon and field, talent management has not yet fully shed its foundational quality. This has brought about commentaries suggesting that it may involve elements of re-branding which will run their course as a management fashion. Additionally, as a portmanteau term, talent management is employed in such a diversity of studies with the result that, though employing the same label, they may not necessarily be studying the same phenomenon. This is something which can be expected to increase as a challenge in the time ahead and may act as a constraint on the coalescing of the field as the umbrella term becomes the chosen point of departure for an increasingly diverse, loosely connected, range of studies of various individual and systems phenomena in different organizations and contexts.

Arising from the definitional challenge is an underlying conceptual ambiguity which may partly be accounted for by the lack of a “stable theoretical foundation” (Thunnissen, 2016) and “overlooked talent philosophies” (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014). There is little doubt that, from a conceptual perspective, progress identifying levels and lenses through which the phenomenon can be observed, assessed and evaluated has been made over the past decade (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Farndale et al, 2010; Farndale et al, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo et al, 2013; Sparrow and Makram, 2015; Tarique and Schuler, 2010), but few would disagree with the premise that more fundamental theoretical scaffolding is merited in order to fully appraise its place in the lexicon of management scholarship. Empirically, a great deal has also been attempted but it does have a bricolage type quality. This has prompted calls for a more evidence based approach (Allen et al, 2010; Briner, 2015). In addition, there have been calls for a more critical perspective on talent management, something which could pay dividend in terms of markedly improving “the quality of talent conversations in organizations” (Lewis and Heckman, 2006, p. 152) and could shape the direction of academic enquiry.

Overall, early criticisms pointing to the disjointed nature of the field remain (McDonnell et al, 2017), questions referring to the “theoretical pedigree, the empirical foundations and the practical implications for stakeholders to the process remain open” (Morley et al, 2015: 3) and “there is limited robust evidence on effectiveness” (Powell et al, 2013: 292). It is also argued that it is a field that is maturing as a result of significant debates about its breadth and focus (Sparrow and Markam, 2015) and it is precisely this growth and development that now provides the opportunity to reflect on the implicit value claims and to take stock of what has been achieved in a critical manner in order to move the field forward.

## Potential Contributions

Against the backdrop of these on-going debates, we invite manuscripts for this special issue which critically reflect on what has been accomplished in talent management. In adopting a more critical perspective, it is important to identify alternative approaches that can help us to understand the phenomena in question. In particular, we are interested in manuscripts that offer deeper insights on appropriate theoretical lenses that unearth the conceptual utility of talent management, along with empirical contributions that clarify and evaluate the operationalisation and the impact of talent management practices, processes and systems in a range of contexts and on different stakeholders. Potential questions that manuscripts for this special issue might address could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- What is the conceptual utility of talent management and what is the evidence regarding the establishment of the boundaries of the phenomenon?
- Which theoretical lenses offer explanatory power in explicating the mechanisms governing talent management approaches and systems?
- How has the body of work on talent management furthered our understanding of the contemporary employment relationship at micro, meso and macro levels?
- What specifically does the adoption of talent management within the organizational setting entail and how has it been witnessed?
- How have constructs and research designs been employed to capture talent management practices and their consequences?
- What contextual exigencies shape talent management processes and preferred practices in different settings and locations?
- Does empirical work support practitioner claims about the value of talent management as a practice-led phenomenon?
- Does a globalised HR architecture distinguish the contribution of the talent management function and enhance alignment in talent management systems?
- What has empirically been established about the unintended consequences of talent management systems and how have they been resolved?
- Has the work on talent management served to advance previously generated insights from proximal fields such as strategic human resource planning and competency based management?
- To what extent have we captured different stakeholder perceptions and priorities in talent management?
- What is the cumulative evidence arising from evaluation studies with respect to the impact of the adoption of talent management on performance?

We are especially interested in critically reflective manuscripts which examine and test key assumptions inherent in the literature to-date. We are open to conceptual and empirical pieces and a range of methods that address these issues and evaluate the evidence base regarding the utility and value of the phenomenon, theoretically and practically.

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## Submission process

Manuscripts submitted to this special issue should be prepared according to *Business Research Quarterly's* (BRQ) guidelines for authors. The special issue will be published in 2018. Original submissions are due by August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Early submissions are encouraged. Submissions must be made online via the Elsevier Editorial System for *Business Research Quarterly* at <http://ees.elsevier.com/brq> and should be clearly marked for consideration in the special issue titled “*Talent Management: Quo Vadis?*”

## Further information

Prospective contributors are welcome to contact the guest editors via email at any point over the duration of this call to communicate their intention to submit and to dialogue about the fit and scope of the manuscript they are preparing for consideration in the Special Issue.

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## About BRQ

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From the very outset, *BRQ* has sought to provide widespread coverage of high quality research in a broad range of topics such as human resource management, organization theory, strategic management, corporate governance, managerial economics, marketing, finance, accounting and operations management. It is therefore a multidisciplinary journal inspired by diversity and open to methodological plurality. Our main concern is that articles have strong theoretical foundations, meet the highest analytical standards, and provide new insights that contribute to the better understanding of managerial phenomena.

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