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Special issue of International Journal of Human Resource Management. A contextualized approach to Talent Management: Advancing the field

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Rationale and aims

Nowadays, there is little doubt that Talent Management (TM) is a hot topic not only for practitioners but also for scholars. According to Collings, Scullion, and Vaiman (2015), it is one of the fastest growing areas of academic work in the management field over recent decades. However, despite the increasing scholarly attention during the last years (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo, Nijs, Dries, & Gallo, 2015; Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier, 2013) many questions remain, particularly, those related to what happens in practice, and, above all, why. In fact, there is little knowledge about how TM is conceived, implemented and developed within organizations, not to mention about its outcomes.

TM is usually designed and implemented following a one-dimensional, narrowed and biased approach (Thunnissen et al., 2013). Indeed, there is little proof of having taken into account the organizational context and the needs, preferences and beliefs of different actors from inside and outside the organization that have an impact on the organizational behavior and its outcomes (some exceptions are: Buttiens, 2016; King, 2015; Thunnissen, 2016). Yet, in a recent review of the empirical literature on TM, the authors found that although research has been conducted in a broad variety of contexts (i.e. countries and organizations), the impact of contextual factors as well as the role of actors in a specific context on the conceptualization and implementation of TM has been largely neglected (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016). Sidani and Al Ariss's (2014) contribution is one of the rare examples in examining the impact of institutional drivers on the way the organizations in the Gulf Cooperation Council adopt and implement TM practices. While scholars and organizations adopt different approaches towards the meaning of talent, TM goals and TM outcomes, the impact of organizational configuration (i.e. information on organizational size, sector/industry and scope)

is hardly considered in empirical research. In fact, the internal context is the one most neglected in TM research.

Despite the advice on a 'best fit' approach to TM (e.g. Garrow & Hirsh, 2008) and the consensus reached regarding the contextual relevance of TM (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015), it is clear that articles fail to use the organizational context to explain how organizations conceptualize talent and TM, what happens in the implementation process, and the effectiveness of the implementation. This can be probably explained by the fact that TM research has largely evolved premised on a biased approach due to the dominant influence of the Northern American thinking and research (Collings, Scullion, & Vaiman, 2011) and the strong focus on the private sector, particularly, on multinational companies (Powell et al., 2013). In line with this, the most recent literature reviews (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015) confirmed that the Anglo-Saxon dominance in TM research and the focus on multinational companies is still a fact.

Thunnissen et al. (2013) question whether the current concepts and assumptions of TM, originated largely from, as mentioned above, multinational, private, US-based organizations, are applicable to other types of organizations (e.g. public or non-profit organizations or small and medium enterprises) or organizations in different contexts. Besides an alignment to the organizational strategy (strategic fit) and internal fit, an organizational and environmental fit is often underexplored (Thunnissen et al., 2013). And if the environment is considered, current TM research focuses on a single aspect of the environment: the labor market (i.e. the general impact of developments and trends in the labor market on TM and the effects of the supply–demand gap on the availability of human capital for the organization), whereas other competitive and institutional mechanisms are underexplored. Indeed, TM can be criticized for its lack of attention to contextual factors, including national differences with regard to labor legislation, sector differences, the nature of business, the size of the firm and different employee groups. Several authors (Collings, 2014; Dries, 2013; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2013) echo this criticism, and suggest considering environmental, organizational as well as cultural characteristics when defining talent and designing and implementing a TM approach.

We consider it is timely to help this growing field that it is far short from maturity to evolve by filling one of the gaps that could contribute to advance in the global understanding of TM in practice. Hence, this special issue (SI) aims to assemble a high-quality set of papers, which improve our understanding of how contextual factors impact the conceptualization, implementation and effectiveness of TM. The context can be used several ways, e.g. to frame the relevance of the study, to interpret results or even by using theoretical frameworks in which the contextual factors and variables are incorporated. Some research questions, which might be addressed in this SI, include (but are not limited to):

- How talent and TM are conceptualized in organizations? Do organizations adapt their conceptualizations to the specific organizational needs and contexts?
- How do factors in the internal and external context affect the conceptualization of talent and TM in an organization?
- How do factors in the internal and external context affect the implementation of TM within organizations? For example: What is the impact of organizational culture on TM implementation? What is the impact of institutional and market pressures on the development of a TM strategy? What is the impact of team characteristics on the implementation of TM? What is the role that employees' perceptions play in TM implementation?
- What is the impact of contextual factors on outcomes at the employee and organizational level?
- How the Person–Environment fit should be taken into account in TM?

As such, we welcome *original empirical (both qualitative and quantitative traditions) research* and *theory development papers* that focus on the impact of context on TM as potentially appropriate contributions for this SI. We would particularly welcome papers from regions, industries and type of organizations which have to date been underrepresented in debates on TM.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes for contributors

- The format of the paper must follow the guidelines of the IJHRM: <http://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?journalCode=rjih20&page=instructions>
- Interested authors should email the full manuscript through Scholar One submission system (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rjih>) on or before July 1st, 2017.
- All submitted papers will undergo a full double-blind review process. Final acceptance of articles is contingent on the review team and journal guest Editors' judgments of paper contributions on four key dimensions:
 - (1) *Contribution to the SI topic*: Does the article extend our existing understanding on how contextual factors impact on conceptualizing talent and TM, on the implementation process, and, also, on the perceptions of employees and on TM objectives?
 - (2) *Empirical contribution*: Does the article offer new and unique findings? Are the study design, data analysis and results rigorous and appropriate

for testing the stated hypotheses or research questions? Is the theoretical framework used to contextualize their research appropriate?

- (3) *Theoretical contribution*: Does the article offer new and novel ideas and insights, or meaningfully extend existing theoretical frameworks?
- (4) *Practical contribution*: Does the article contribute to improved TM conceptualization and/or implementation?

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