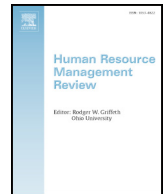


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Talent management and the relevance of context: Towards a pluralistic approach

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to contribute to the development of a broader, more balanced approach to talent management that will help in studying and implementing talent management across different contexts. The paper starts with an overview of the advances made in previous reviews and studies with respect to three central themes: the definition of talent, intended outcomes of talent management, and talent management practices. We identify the one-dimensional and narrow approach to the topic as a main limitation of the existing talent management literature. Through the use of theories from the organizational theory and the strategic HRM domain, we add new perspectives and develop a multilevel, multi-value approach to talent management. In so doing, we offer an in-depth discussion of the potential economic and non-economic value created by talent management at the individual, organizational, and societal level.

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1. Introduction

Talent management has been one of the most debated themes in human resource management (HRM) theory and practice in recent years. Next to leadership development, value-based recruitment and performance management, talent management is seen as one of the key human resource themes and challenges by leading multinational companies such as IBM and Shell (Paauwe, 2007). Business leaders expect that the intensifying competition for talent will have a major effect on their companies. In spite of the economic recession, they regard the search for talented people as the single most important managerial preoccupation for this decade (Deloitte, 2010; Guthridge, Komm, & Lawson, 2008).

Articles published in the popular and practitioner press, as well as consulting companies, pay a great deal of attention to talent management and how to win the 'war for talent' (Iles, Preece, & Chuai, 2010; Vaiman, Scullion, & Collings, 2012). Over the course of the past decade academics have produced a considerable amount of publications on talent management as well. This, however, does not imply that all talent management scholars speak the same language. Consensus on the meaning and underlying principles of talent management is lacking. In their 2006 review, Lewis and Heckman stressed the point that talent management, as a field of study was still in its infancy as it lacked a clear and consistent definition of its core construct as well as a clearly defined scope and a conceptual framework based on empirical research. In 2009, Collings and Mellahi came to the same conclusion. Yet, a few years later, Collings, Scullion, and Vaiman (2011) observed some progress regarding the establishment of a definition and conceptual boundaries of talent management, and concluded that the field was moving from infancy into adolescence. The authors state that many, mainly US-based, scholars have contributed to this advance.

However, Collings et al. (2011) reported a biased approach to talent management in their review of the literature. Specifically, they noticed a dominant influence of the US context on the debate, because of the adoption of Northern American thinking and research by the US based scholars (Collings et al., 2011). In addition, Powell et al. (2012) identified a strong focus on the private

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sector and on multinational companies in contemporary talent management literature. These observations raise the question of whether current assumptions and concepts in the talent management literature, which are strongly embedded in the context of multinational, private, and US-based organizations, are appropriate for describing and studying talent management in organizations in other contexts, such as small and medium enterprises, public organizations, and organizations located outside of the US. Consequently, Collings et al. (2011) urge the need for new influences “[...] as the field moves into adolescence it is important that insights from beyond the US context influence the debate. This is not a critique of the significant contributions which have emerged from the USA, but rather a call for a counterbalance from different perspectives and traditions” (p. 455).

In this paper we will respond to the call of Collings et al. (2011). The main aim of this paper is the development of a broader, more balanced approach to talent management that takes into account the importance of context, and of the different actors involved. This approach to talent management will support the study and implementation of talent management practices in a wider range of organizations than has been the case to date. The paper starts with an overview of the achievements so far in the existing academic talent management literature and research. Subsequently, we scrutinize these advances with a critical eye, and discuss possible limitations of the dominant views expressed in the talent management literature. We move on to add new perspectives originating in organizational theory and strategic human resource management (SHRM), thus placing talent management in a broader perspective. These new perspectives are then integrated into a multilevel, multi-value approach to talent management. In so doing, we offer an in-depth discussion of the potential economic and non-economic value of talent management at the individual, organizational, and societal level. From all of the above, we formulate an agenda for future talent management research, suggesting new directions for empirical research in a wide range of organizations with the ultimate goal of advancing academic knowledge about talent management processes and success factors.

2. Mapping the field of talent management: achievements so far

Recently, Thunnissen, Boselie, and Fruytier (2013) conducted a literature review in which they analyzed 62 academic publications on talent management (published between 2001 and 2012). The authors conclude that, up until 2012, most of the academic publications on talent management have been conceptual, approaching the field from many different angles. Talent management literature is built on a broad range of academic traditions, including SHRM (e.g., linking strategy to the management of valuable talents), international HRM (e.g., managing talent in a multinational and/or cross-cultural context), and organizational behavior (OB) (e.g., linking talent management to career development and management development). Thunnissen et al. (2013) also conclude that, although progress is being made, there is still only a limited amount of empirical research on talent management (as was the conclusion of Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Rather, the academic literature on talent management focuses on (1) the conceptualization of talent and talent management; (2) the intended outcomes and effects of talent management; and (3) talent management activities and practices (Thunnissen et al., 2013). In the following paragraphs we will give a short overview of the existing literature on each of these themes.

One of the key issues in the talent management literature is answering the question ‘What is talent?’. To advance the study of talent management, consensus on the conceptualization of talent is important, both for scholars and practitioners (see also Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries & González-Cruz, in this issue; Tansley, 2011). Today, no unanimous definition of talent exists. Opinions differ on whether or not to differentiate the workforce and, if so, according to which principles. There is also a debate on the question of whether talent is innate or acquired, and the extent to which it should be characterized as potential or as manifested performance (see also Dries, in this issue; Meyers, Van Woerkom & Dries, in this issue; Tansley, 2011). Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (in this issue) propose that two dimensions are of importance in defining talent in the context of the world of work. The first dimension makes a distinction between talent as people (subject approach) and talent as characteristics of people (object approach). The *subject* approach to talent management focuses on valuable, scarce, inimitable and difficult-to-replace individual employees. It reflects the basic assumptions of human capital theory as described, among others, by Lepak and Snell (2002) in their HR architecture model. Scholars supporting the *object* approach, on the other hand, regard talent as individual attributes, such as abilities, knowledge, and competencies. This approach is related to the AMO paradigm (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000), which proposes that employee performance is a function of the employee’s ability (A), motivation (M) and opportunity (O) to perform (Boxall & Purcell, 2011). The second dimension of Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (in this issue) makes a distinction between inclusive (i.e., all employees) and exclusive (i.e., a specific employee group) approaches to talent management. Sparrow, Hird, and Balain (2011), as well as Stahl et al. (2012), point out that organizations use both the inclusive and exclusive approach, although the exclusive approach seems to be most preferred. Taken together, the two dimensions (subject–object and inclusive–exclusive) generate a number of plausible talent management models—for example, a small defined talent management model (exclusive–subject approach) that focuses on a select group of high-performing and/or high-potential employees; or a broadly defined talent management model (inclusive–object approach) that encourages every employee to fulfill his or her potential. Empirical research is required to test the prevalence and utility of these different models in practice.

A second key issue in the talent management literature is the operationalizing of the intended outcomes and effects of talent management. According to most scholars in the field of talent management the main objective of talent management is to achieve organization related goals. At this organizational level, several types of outcomes and effects are discussed in the academic talent management literature. First, some authors describe outcomes at the level of the HRM subsystem. According to this type of approach, talent management should be aimed at fulfilling the quantitative and qualitative needs for human capital, thus narrowing the supply–demand gap organizations are confronted with (e.g., Beechler & Woodward, 2009; McCauley & Wakefield, 2006). Others claim that talent management should contribute to overall firm performance (e.g., Cappelli, 2008; Cheese, Farley, &

Gibbons, 2009; Collings & Mellahi, 2009), and therefore stress the importance of the strategic fit of talent management practices and activities (e.g., Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005; Christensen Hughes & Rog, 2008; Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2011; Stahl et al., 2007, 2012). Both short-term (e.g., profits) and long-term goals (e.g., gaining sustained competitive advantage) emerge as objectives at the organizational level. Goals at the level of the individual employee are distinguished as well, in particular employee motivation, commitment and engagement. Motivation and engagement are mostly presented as means to achieve (high) individual performance, and through that high organizational performance (e.g., Cheese et al., 2009; Christensen Hughes & Rog, 2008; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). This type of approach builds on the assumption that a highly engaged workforce produces better business results than a disengaged one (Cheese et al., 2009).

The third key issue in the talent management literature involves talent management practices and activities. A wide variety of practices and activities is addressed in the academic talent management literature. Overall, scholars tend to focus mostly on (1) recruitment, staffing and succession planning, (2) training and development, and (3) retention management. How to handle the exit and turnover of talent, and possibly even take advantage of it, is hardly an issue in the talent management literature. Most of the reviewed practices and activities linked to talent management are common HR practices, now applied to the notion of talent management or to the management of 'excellence' (Burkus & Osula, 2011). Special attention is paid to talent pools, the pros and cons of recruiting high-performing employees from outside the organization versus the development of high-potential or high-performing employees from the inside (i.e., buy or make talent), and the importance of positioning the organization as an appealing employer (i.e., employer branding) (e.g., Cappelli, 2008; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Pfeffer, 2001; Stahl et al., 2007, 2012). Most scholars do not prescribe specific practices or activities, but merely claim that talent management should be aligned with the internal and external environment of the organization (e.g., Sparrow et al., 2011; Stahl et al., 2007, 2012). Many authors thus promote a 'best fit' approach to talent management although some best principles with a broad application are presented (e.g., Stahl et al., 2007).

In sum, over the course of the last decade talent management has received a great deal of attention in the academic literature. Scholars from a broad range of academic traditions, such as strategic HRM, international HRM, and OB have contributed to the debate. These different lenses have each in their way contributed to our current understanding of the various important aspects and issues concerning talent management. The definition of talent and talent management, its intended outcomes and effects, and talent management practices and activities are key issues. Even though the field has evolved, scholars did not succeed in establishing unambiguous definitions of talent and talent management. Talent management is a relatively young academic field that lacks a solid base of empirical research to test and validate core conceptual ideas. Therefore, we can conclude that the field is partly still in its infancy, with some progress towards adolescence.

3. A critical view of the talent management literature

Although the field of talent management is built on a broad range of HRM and OB theories, in most academic publications talent management is approached from a single perspective. The academic traditions are rarely integrated or linked and put into a broader perspective. In addition to being one-dimensional, the dominant views in academic talent management literature are too narrow and biased. We see these issues as crucial gaps in the academic talent management literature. In the following paragraphs we expand upon these critical remarks.

First of all, in the literature talent management is often narrowed down to (the impact of) a limited set of HR practices and activities. These practices and activities refer to what Boxall and Macky (2009) call employment practices, i.e. "[...] all the practices used to recruit, deploy, motivate, consult, negotiate with, develop and retain employees, and to terminate the employment relationship" (p. 7). However, according to Boxall and Macky (2009) any HRM system should encompass both employment practices and work practices. Work practices, from their side, involve the organization and structuring of work in the organization, including opportunities for employees to engage in problem solving and change management regarding work processes. Yet, in the literature work practices are hardly ever taken into account as talent management practices. According to the study of Stahl et al. (2007), job rotation and challenging assignments are in fact seen by organizations as useful instruments by HR practitioners, but are seldom used because of the strong tendency of managers to give priority to their own unit, rather than to focus on the interests of the organization as a whole. In addition to the lack of attention to work practices, the contemporary talent management literature hardly acknowledges the notion of the impact of processes and practices that fall beyond the control of the HR function (such as leadership, organizational culture and communication) on organizational performance (Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001). The talent management literature thus consistently overestimates the importance of human capital, or talents, and the potential impact of a narrow set of employment practices.

Second, the academic talent management literature adopts a unitarist approach. The organization is typically presented as a unified actor, in which all actors systematically and unanimously work together to reach organizational goals, such as organizational flexibility and profitability. Top management, line management and HR are all attributed a significant role in talent management (e.g., Burbach & Royle, 2010; Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010; Garrow & Hirsh, 2008; Stahl et al., 2007). The underlying assumption is, however, that all of these organizational actors share mutual goals and interests. In this respect, the term alignment (of the needs of the organization and its employees) is often used (e.g., Garrow & Hirsh, 2008; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Just a few scholars refer to the potentially conflicting goals and needs of different internal stakeholders. For example, Martin and Schmidt (2010), and Guthridge, Komm, and Lawson (2006) discuss management's short-term orientation and its tendency towards 'silo thinking'—i.e., a focus on the interests of one part of the organization rather than the whole. In addition, the employee is presented as an object to be managed by talent management, leaving their needs and goals underexamined.

Scholars in the field of talent management also seem to assume that organizational–traditional careers are still the norm—i.e., careers characterized by upward mobility and long-term full-time employment in one and the same organization. However, organizational career systems have witnessed major changes in recent decades. The proactive role of the employee in shaping his or her own career (reflected in concepts such as the boundaryless career, the protean career, and multidirectional career paths) is steadily gaining influence in the field of career management (Baruch, 2004; Biemann, Zacher, & Feldmann, 2012; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). These insights are largely neglected in the talent management literature; exceptions are the publications of Dries and others on the careers of employees identified as high potentials (Dries, 2011; Dries & Pepermans, 2008; Dries, Van Acker, & Verbruggen, 2011).

Third, the current talent management literature can be characterized as managerialist, comparable to criticism of the field of human resource management (see for example Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010; Delbridge, Hauptmeier, & Sengupta, 2011; Paauwe, 2009). More specifically, talent management literature reflects a belief in systems, instruments and tools that can help managers and HR professionals solve the talent management challenges the organization is confronted with. Talent management is presented as a tool to manage the talent, in the sense of both people and characteristics present in an organization, effectively so that individual and organizational performance is under control and can be improved. Underlying this instrumental and rational point of view, we identify an economic orientation towards the intended effects of talent management. Cappelli (2008) explicitly states that talent management exists to support the organization's overall objective, "which in business essentially amounts to making money" (Cappelli, 2008, p. 3). In his view, firm performance is narrowed down to meeting financial and shareholder needs. Many scholars in the field of talent management seem to support his view (e.g., Cheese et al., 2009; Stahl et al., 2007).

4. Adding new perspectives

The one-dimensional and biased approach to talent management may be suitable for studying and implementing talent management in multinational and private organizations, but it is probably inadequate to describe talent management in, for example, public organizations or small enterprises. In the following paragraphs, we will argue that it is necessary to broaden the existing one-dimensional and narrow approach to talent management into a more pluralistic one. A pluralistic approach implies the use of multiple perspectives at the same time: "using theories in concert" (Greenwood & Miller, 2010, p. 82). According to Greenwood and Miller (2010) scholars in the field of organizational theory, in their need to understand complex organizations, have narrowed their scope of interest from organizational-level phenomena to understanding parts of the overall organization. The authors acknowledge the growing complexity of organizations, but they claim that focusing on a single aspect of the organization, disconnected from the full pattern, is not an adequate way to gain understanding of complex organizations and their functioning in relation to their environment. They make a plea to refocus on the organization as a whole again, and to use multiple theoretical lenses together to fully understand the nuances and complexity of an organization and its behavior. We support this recommendation and believe that a pluralistic approach, using multiple lenses or frames, is most likely to lead to an enriched and complete view of organizations and the talent challenges they face.

To put talent management in a wider perspective and to build a broader, more balanced theoretical framework, we will introduce new viewpoints which take into account the organizational context and its interrelated actors. Many of the theories and models cited here originated in organizational theory, and are already generally accepted within the field of strategic HRM (e.g., Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Paauwe & Boselie, 2007). Nevertheless, they are still quite uncommon in the field of talent management. Below, we present three new perspectives that are to be seen as extensions to the existing literature on talent management. An overview of the new perspectives is presented in Table 1. Subsequently, we will discuss to what extent the existing talent management literature pays attention to these alternative views.

4.1. Focus on both the employment and the work relationship

The first critical argument we raised in this paper was that in many talent management publications the scope is narrowed down to (the impact of) a limited set of HR practices. In line with Boxall and Macky (2009) we argue that this scope should be broadened from a narrow focus on practices to a focus on the people in the organization and their work (Boxall & Macky, 2009). The importance of people to organizations in today's knowledge economy is widely recognized. Exactly this sense of importance has put talent management high on the strategic agenda of CEOs and management (Deloitte, 2010; Guthridge et al., 2008; Paauwe, 2007). In an organization, the employee and the organization—in its role as an employer—enter into "a cooperative framework for the supply of

Table 1
Identification of limitations in the existing talent management literature and new perspectives.

Limitations: one-dimensional and biased approach	New perspectives
– Focus on a narrow set of HR practices	Focus on people and their work—i.e., both on the employment and the work relationship (Boxall & Macky, 2009);
– Unitarist approach: Organization presented as unified actor unanimously working to obtain organizational goals	Consider the influence and well-being of actors at multiple levels; Organizations are neither purely instrumental systems (i.e., system-structural view) nor purely political arenas (i.e., action theory approach) (e.g., Bourdieu, 1988);
– Managerialist view: Instrumental point of view and economic orientation	Consider the multifaceted value creation of talent management: Impact of economic and institutional pressures on value creation by the organization and HRM (e.g., Kalleberg, 2009; Suchman, 1995).

labor services” (Marsden, 2004, p. 674), i.e. an employment relationship. Basically, this relationship is an exchange relationship. The employer wants employees who contribute to the production of goods and services. Therefore, the relationship needs to be productive, minimizing the costs and risks to the organization. The employee offers his or her time and capabilities to the organization, expecting financial and non-financial rewards in return (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2003).

However, the employment relationship is more than just an economic exchange. As Tsui and colleagues state, it rests on the logic of social exchange: employees reciprocate in ways comparable to how they are treated by their organizations (Hom et al., 2009; Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997; Tsui & Wu, 2005). If an employer invests in the well-being of its employee (for example, by offering job security and developmental opportunities), the employee is willing to do more than the prescribed tasks and shows extra-role behavior, such as helping co-workers. This refers to what Marsden calls (2004) the informal rules and non-codified elements of the psychological contract. Boxall and Macky (2009) expand the organization–employee relationship beyond the usual employment relationship, and add the work relationship. This expansion enables organizations to apply a wider set of practices and activities than the limited set of practices discussed in existing talent management literature, even activities beyond the control of the HR department.

Although there is a tendency in the current talent management literature to emphasize employment *practices*, the employment *relationship* itself is not an issue that is widely discussed in the talent management literature. In fact, only a handful of talent management publications pay attention to the employment relationship. Cappelli (2000, 2008), for instance, refers to the economic aspects of the employment relationship. He discusses how organizations can gain control over insecurity in the employment relationship, and how they can maximize organizational flexibility while maintaining increasing employee performance (Tsui et al., 1997). Other authors do not explicitly mention the employment relationship, but do pay attention to the psychological contract, which has to be managed effectively to retain talented employees (Blass & April, 2008; Garrow & Hirsh, 2008; Höglund, 2012; Sonnenberg, 2010). To date, the work relationship has attracted hardly any attention in the talent management literature.

4.2. Consider the influence and well-being of actors at multiple levels

In our critique of the existing talent management literature, we also described the literature as unitarist and predominantly orientated towards systems and instruments. This approach in the talent management literature fits the system-structural view in organizational theory. The system-structural approach considers an organization as a system that consists of interrelated elements, and that interacts with its environment (Astley & Van der Ven, 1983; Nadler & Tushman, 1980). The structural elements are interrelated in such a way that they serve the achievement of shared organizational goals in a highly instrumental fashion. The basic components of the structure are roles and functions. Human beings occupy these roles and therefore must be carefully selected, trained and controlled to meet the requirements of the position they occupy. The system-structural view of organizations is challenged by scholars who believe that organizational behavior is strongly influenced by the needs and preferences of different actors inside and outside the system (Astley & Van der Ven, 1983). One of the schools is better known as the action theory approach. According to action theory, organizations are continuously constructed, sustained and changed by different actors' definitions of the situation. The goals, preferences and views of these actors can differ, and even be conflicting (Christensen, Laegrid, Roness, & Rovik, 2007). Pluralists in organizational theory stress that an organization is neither an instrumental system, nor a political arena (e.g., Bourdieu, 1988). According to their pluralistic view, the system affects the actors and vice versa.

Adopting this pluralistic view towards talent management entails an expansion of the system-structural view on talent management and admitting that the needs, preferences and beliefs of stakeholders beyond management have an impact on the employee–organization relationship and its outcomes. Most importantly, talent management should include the preferences and intensions of the other leading figure in the employment relationship: the employee. Moreover, an organization is not an isolated institute. It interacts with its environment. The environment also puts constraints and demands on the relationship between the organization and its employees, for example in legal terms. Organizations must try to incorporate and respond to these demands (Christensen et al., 2007). In sum, the employee–organization relationship should be productive, contribute to employee well-being, and fulfill the norms, values and expectations of its environment (Paauwe & Boselie, 2007).

Neither the well-being of the individual employee nor the well-being and expectations of society receive a great deal of attention in the academic talent management literature. When employee and societal well-being are addressed, it is because they are believed to have a positive effect on organizational performance, as we have already argued in previous sections of the paper. The effects of talent management on the societal level are addressed by a few scholars. For instance, Boudreau and Ramstad (2005) challenge the traditional shareholder value paradigm by introducing the argument that organizations should strive for sustainability. Besides financial viability, sustainability includes goals such as diversity, social responsibility, supporting human and employee rights, protecting the environment, and contributing to the economy (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005). They point out that sustainability rarely appears in strategic HR plans, or in talent management strategies. In their paper about ‘marshalling talent’ Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) link talent management to community results. In their view, an increased community reputation enables organizations to attract better employees. General societal well-being is, even in the article of Ulrich and Ulrich, not (yet) mentioned as an equal outcome of talent management; rather, it is all about the associated benefit of improved organizational performance.

4.3. Consider the economic and non-economic value of talent management

Our final point of critique was that talent management literature can be described as managerialist. It accentuates the economic side of work and represents economic value and objectives such as performance, effectiveness and efficiency. Institutional theories in the organizational theory domain stress that many dynamics in the organizational environment do not stem from material and technical imperatives, but rather from 'non-rational' processes such as cultural norms, symbols, beliefs and rituals (Christensen et al., 2007; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Suchman, 1995). According to the New Institutional School, "organizations operate within institutional environments where they are confronted with socially created norms for how they should be designed and how they should function. Organizations must try to incorporate and reflect these norms outwardly, even if they do not necessarily make the organization's activities more effective" (Christensen et al., 2007, p. 57). In other words, along with rational and economic oriented values, moral and social values related to ethical, political, and religious ideals affect organizations as well. These values put pressure on organizations to respond to them in terms of social and moral outcomes—i.e., to create non-economic value—in order to gain legitimacy and to increase the probability of their survival (Paauwe & Boselie, 2007). More specifically, both economic and institutional pressures have an impact on HRM and on the organization–employee relationship (Boxall, 2007; Kalleberg, 2009; Kostova & Zaheer, 1999; Paauwe, 2004; Paauwe & Boselie, 2007; Suchman, 1995). This discussion of the potential impact of moral and social values on organizational objectives and behavior in the organizational theory literature raises the question about the manner in which the field of talent management addresses non-economic (i.e., social and moral) value. Up until now, with the exception of a few remarks on sustainability (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005), little attention has been paid to the potential non-economic value of talent management, either at the organizational, the individual, or the societal level.

5. Talent management and context: a multilevel, multi-value approach

In the previous section we proposed that talent management serves several 'masters' and should satisfy multiple goals. We can make a distinction between the economic and non-economic value of talent management at the individual, organizational and societal level. In this section we will develop our ideas in more detail, and discuss to what extent the current talent management literature addresses the potential economic and non-economic value created by talent management at these three levels. An overview is given in Table 2

5.1. Value of talent management at the individual level

First, we will pay attention to the value of talent management at the level of the individual employee. Here, we examine the needs and goals of the (talented) employee that should be fulfilled in the employee–organization relationship. In 2012 Kalleberg and Marsden published a longitudinal study on work values and job preference orientations among workers in the US. The authors define work values as "the characteristics that workers find most important in their jobs" (Kalleberg and Marsden, 2013, p. 255). They asked employees to rank high income, job security, short working hours, chances for advancement, and a sense of accomplishment—fully acknowledging the absence of other important job characteristics in their research design, such as the relation with co-workers and a degree of autonomy. Kalleberg and Marsden (2013) found changes in workers' job preference orientations over the past three decades; while a sense of accomplishment and importance was consistently rated the most preferred work aspect, the emphasis participants placed on jobs that pay high incomes and provide more security has steadily increased.

The job preference orientations examined by Kalleberg and Marsden (2013) can be categorized into economic and non-economic outcomes or value of talent management, respectively (at the employee level). From an economic perspective, the individual employee wants to see his or her efforts rewarded by financial or other material rewards, such as income. Moreover, the employee wants his or her need for job security to be fulfilled, now and in the future (Kalleberg & Marsden, 2013; Oldham & Hackman, 2010).

From a non-economic point of view, employees attach major importance to work that is meaningful and challenging, matches personal interests, and gives a feeling of accomplishment (Kalleberg & Marsden, 2013; Oldham and Hackman, 2010). According to Oldham and Hackman (2010) an individual has growth needs and social needs in addition to more economic needs. Growth needs refer to the desire for personal accomplishment, learning, and career development. Social needs involve the desire for significant relationships and interactions with others at work. A resourceful work environment thus provides employees with

Table 2

A multilevel, multi-value approach to talent management.

	Individual level	Organizational level	Societal level
Economic value of talent management	Financial rewards Job security	Profitability Organizational flexibility Efficiency and effectiveness Competitive position	Economic condition and (inter)national competitive position of an industry, region, or country
Non-economic value of talent management	Meaningful and challenging work Growth and social needs Fair and just treatment	Legitimacy	Social responsibility—i.e., contributing to the social/moral development of society

opportunities to fulfill these non-economic outcomes (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008; Oldham & Hackman, 2010). It offers possibilities for cooperation with colleagues, provides learning, development, and promotion opportunities, and challenging work conditions that match its employees' personal interests and motives.

An organization can only demand productivity from its employees if it takes proper care of their needs (Paauwe, 2009). This implies that employees are treated fairly and with due consideration for their well-being (Paauwe, 2009). According to Greenberg (1990), "social scientists have long recognized the ideals of justice as a basic requirement for the effective functioning of organizations and the personal satisfaction of the individuals they employ" (p. 339). Therefore, we posit that just and fair treatment is an important non-economic outcome of talent management at the individual level (see also Gelens et al., in this issue). Colquitt, Coolon, Wesson, Porter, and Yee Ng (2001) define an act as 'just' if most individuals perceive it to be so. The literature on organizational justice makes a basic distinction between the fairness of outcome distributions and allocations (i.e., distributive justice) and the fairness of the procedures used to determine the outcomes and distributions (i.e., procedural justice) (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1990). Colquitt et al. (2001) add the importance of the quality of the interpersonal treatment people receive whilst procedures are implemented (i.e., interactional justice). A meta-analysis by the same authors shows that perceived justice has a positive effect on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, performance, employee trust, and organizational citizenship behavior.

In the current talent management literature, the economic value created by talent management at the individual level is indirectly addressed. Rewards and incentives are seen as relevant talent management instruments, although scholars have warned about the limited and negative effects of an overreliance on rewards because 'people who come for money will leave for money' (e.g., Pfeffer, 2007; Stahl et al., 2012). The potential non-economic value of talent management for the employee is a minor topic of discussion in the talent management literature, as well. If the talent management literature does address the individual employee level, it tends to emphasize employee growth needs—but again, these are primarily discussed as a mediator between talent management initiatives and organizational performance. Just a handful of scholars have addressed the importance of fairness and justice in talent management, especially in approaches where the workforce is differentiated into a group of talents and a group of non-talents (i.e., the exclusive approach) (e.g., Frank & Taylor, 2004; Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). It is believed that this type of 'exclusive' approach promotes inequality between employees (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., in this issue) and thus, perceived injustice (Gelens et al., in this issue). After all, in these types of talent management system the organization invests more time and money in attracting, developing, and retaining the employees within the talent pool than those outside of it. Pfeffer (2001) criticizes the focus on top performers. In his opinion, this will lead to a 'self-fulfilling prophecy in reverse': those labeled as less able become less able, because they are asked to do less and get fewer resources, training and mentoring. Although Mäkelä, Björkman, and Ehrnrooth (2010) and Vaiman et al. (2012) do not explicitly pay attention to fairness and justice issues, they do address the unequal treatment of employees in talent management, because managers make decisions based on limited and subjective information (they refer to 'bounded rationality').

5.2. Value of talent management at the organizational level

Boxall and Purcell (2011) identify three critical HR goals: (1) labor productivity, (2) organizational flexibility, and (3) social legitimacy and employment citizenship. According to Boxall and Purcell (2011) productivity and flexibility reflect the business agenda. They are needed to sustain profitability and economic survival over time. But, the authors argue, organizations operate within societies, making use of human capacities that citizens and the state have nurtured and generated. Therefore, the organization is also concerned with its standing as an employer in society, or with its 'employment citizenship'. Boxall and Purcell (2011) claim that legitimacy should be an employer goal alongside the more market-oriented ones. Legitimacy refers to the acceptance of an organization by its environment, and is of vital importance for the continued existence and success of an organization (Kostova & Zaheer, 1999). Legitimacy can be described as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Suchman (1995) divides research on legitimacy into two streams. The first is the strategic tradition, which adopts a managerial perspective and emphasizes the ways in which organizations instrumentally manipulate and deploy evocative symbols in order to gain societal support so that organizational goals can be obtained. The second is the institutional tradition, which accentuates the way a set of constructive beliefs from the institutional environment puts pressure on the actions of the organization. These pressures can limit the organization's room to maneuver in terms of decision-making.

In previous sections of this paper we already addressed the dominance of economic goals of talent management at the organizational level: increasing workforce flexibility, profitability, organizational performance, etc. Legitimacy, in contrast, can be classified as an important non-economic outcome of talent management at the organizational level. In the contemporary talent management literature legitimacy is an underexplored topic. However, a few authors have discussed topics related to legitimacy, most notably employer branding. The notion of the importance of employer branding and the formulation of an employee value proposition—as discussed by scholars such as Stahl et al. (2007), Christensen Hughes and Rog (2008), Jansen and Van der Pool (2009) and Martin and Groen-in 't Woud (2011)) are primarily derived from marketing models, with the intention of positioning the organization as an appealing employer in order to recruit and retain the best and most talented employees. For example, Stahl et al. (2007) advise companies to see their recruits as customers and to use sophisticated marketing analysis tools to identify key competitors so as to determine which corporate attributes matter most to specific recruits and to understand how to reach those 'customers'. The question is whether we should interpret employer branding as conforming to institutional pressures, or rather, as a way to appeal to market pressures and to keep ahead in the war of talent. According to Deephouse and Carter (2005) organizational legitimacy and organizational reputation are related concepts, but there are also important differences. Legitimacy emphasizes the social acceptance resulting from adherence to social norms and the expectations of stakeholders in the organization's environment,

whereas reputation refers to comparisons among organizations on various attributes. Legitimacy is necessary to survive as an organization. Having less of a reputation, however, does not threaten the organization's continued existence as long as the organization's legitimacy remains unchallenged (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). The way employer branding is addressed in contemporary talent management literature corresponds to Schuman's strategic view on legitimacy, and is in line with the general tendency to approach talent management in a managerial and instrumental way.

5.3. Value of talent management at the societal level

The external environment—i.e., society at large—is confronted with the consequences of the way organizations manage their employees, and their employment and work relationships (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2003). In addition to the production of goods and services, organizations offer employment opportunities to citizens and affect the distribution of income in a region (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2003). For that reason, we argue that talent management affects societal well-being as well. To obtain insight into the relevant aspects of societal well-being we turn to the literature on corporate social responsibility (CSR). The pyramid of Carroll (1991) encompasses several important elements of CSR and distinguishes four components: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. He states, “[...] the total corporate social responsibility of a business entails the simultaneous fulfillment of the firm's economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. Stated in more pragmatic and managerial terms, the CSR firm should strive to make a profit, obey the law, be ethical, and be a good corporate citizen” (p. 43). According to Carroll (1991), historically the economic and legal responsibilities of the organization were seen as an organization's most important value. Later on, ethical and philanthropic functions of organizations also assumed a significant place: “Although economic and legal responsibilities embody ethical norms about fairness and justice, ethical responsibilities embrace those activities and practices that are expected or prohibited by societal members even though they are not codified into law” (Carroll, 1991, p. 41). Achterberg and Vriens (2009) indicate that there is a difference between adapting to societal or institutional pressures ‘because you have no choice’ and because it helps to realize organizational goals (they call this ‘isolating corporation’), and the incorporation of societal values because one truly wants to contribute to a society in which citizens can develop themselves (Achterberg and Vriens call this ‘inclusive incorporation’). Organizations accepting full social responsibility choose to go beyond viability and aim to contribute to societal development (Achterberg & Vriens, 2009). In their 2011 article on how to reinvent capitalism, Porter and Kramer (2011) even go one step further and state that: “[...] The solution lies in the principle of shared value, which involves creating economic value in a way that *also* creates value for society by addressing its needs and challenges. Businesses must reconnect company success with social progress. Shared value is not social responsibility, philanthropy, or even sustainability, but a new way to achieve economic success” (p. 65).

The components of the pyramid of Carroll (1991) can be used to divide the potential value created by talent management (at the societal level) into economic and non-economic value. The ethical and philanthropic component could be seen as a non-economic outcome that can be achieved through talent management. The question is to what extent talent management can contribute to the social and moral development and growth of society, creating conditions for its citizens to live, as Achterberg and Vriens (2009) call it, a fulfilled life. It appears that in the existing talent management literature, both the economic and non-economic values of talent management at the societal level are a non-issue. Instead, the mainstream talent management literature emphasizes the recruitment, development and retention of talents that benefit the organization. Potential positive and negative effects of this type of approach on society are, overall, neglected. Specifically, little attention is paid to the responsibility of organizations for ‘non-talents’ (i.e., employees not identified as talented) and their opportunities in the external labor market. What can an organization do to contribute to the personal and professional development of ‘non-talents’ within their workforce, so they can take up a fulfilling position elsewhere in society without risking unemployment or loss of income? Currently, this is not a topic of interest in talent management literature.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The aim of the present paper was to contribute to the development of a broader, more balanced approach to talent management that will help in studying and implementing talent management across different contexts. To that end, we have presented a multilevel, multi-value approach to talent management clarifying the potential economic and non-economic (i.e., social and moral) value created by talent management at three levels: individual, organizational, and societal. The non-economic value of talent management, as well as the value of talent management at the societal level is a new area in the academic field of talent management. We argue that in conceptualizations of talent management, the preferences and needs of individual employees as well as those of society at large should be modeled as being equivalent to organizational objectives. Besides the economic value, theory and research should also address the potential non-economic (i.e., moral and social) value of talent management at the three levels (see Table 2).

This paper is highly conceptual, and its ideas must be tested and validated in more depth through empirical research. A first suggestion to advance the field of talent management is to expand talent management research beyond the scope of multinational and private companies and explore the talent management challenges and issues faced by public, non-profit and voluntary organizations, as well.

A second avenue of research would be to examine the value of talent management at the level of the individual. Besides financial rewards and job security, we expect that most employees prefer a challenging job that meets their growth and social needs, and that they desire to be treated in a fair and just manner. The question is whether talented employees have the same needs as employees who are not regarded as talented. The study of Dries and Pepermans (2008) provides some insight into this issue, but more research is needed to expand our current knowledge base. It is also necessary to explore whether talent management practices and activities actually contribute to the satisfaction of the needs and goals of the individual employees or

not. Special attention should be paid to the impact of an exclusive approach on the realization of individual well-being, both of the people inside and outside of the designated talent pools. In that respect, we recommend studying fairness and justice issue related to talent management (see also Gelens et al., in this issue). Hence, our suggestion for further research on the value of talent management at the individual level is to interview and/or survey employees rather than HR professionals or managers when studying talent management—the latter group being the most commonly targeted research population in existing talent management research.

At the organizational level, the talent management literature highlights the economic value of talent management. We have introduced legitimacy as a key non-economic, social outcome at the organizational level. Legitimacy is underexplored in talent management literature and research so far. As a third avenue for further research we propose investigating, through empirical research, which legitimacy issues are vital in the field of talent management, how organizations respond to those issues, and if (and how) they are capable of balancing the economic and non-economic value of talent management at the organizational level.

The value of talent management at the societal level, both economic and non-economic, has not been studied to date, nor discussed in the field of talent management. In future research these societal outcomes might serve as a starting point for further exploration. A fourth avenue for further research thus involves the following question: What is the value of talent management, both economic and non-economic, at the societal level, and how do organizations take societal well-being into account in their talent management policy and practice?

Although presented separately in this paper, the different levels and outcomes of talent management are often interrelated. The broader, more balanced and pluralistic approach to talent management proposed in this paper takes into account the economic and non-economic value of talent management at the individual, organizational, and societal level simultaneously. Nevertheless, an optimum at all levels is impossible, in light of the expected tensions and conflicts between the economic and non-economic value at the three levels (Deephouse, 1999). For example, the need for flexibility on the side of the organization can clash with the individual need for job security. According to Marsden (2004), “employers may be able to impose short-term, unstable employment on vulnerable groups on the labor market, but for those with marketable skills and talents, this can only be done at a cost, such as compensatory higher pay” (p. 674). The search for balance between the multiple goals at the multiple levels could be the ultimate aim, in line with a more strategic balanced approach as presented by Deephouse (1999). However, empirical research might show if the multiple goals of talent management are in fact conflicting, and if and in what way organizations manage to balance them.

We are aware of the fact that our argumentation shows a tendency to support a talent management approach that focuses on an inclusive approach (i.e., an approach in which all employees are included in an organization’s talent management strategy), while the literature indicates that the exclusive approach to talent management is more frequently found in HR practice (Sparrow et al., 2011; Stahl et al., 2012). It is not our intention, however, to promote the inclusive approach. Rather, the challenge faced by HR practitioners, as we see it, is to design and implement a talent management system that has the characteristics of an exclusive approach, but also takes care of the needs and preferences of the employees not included in the talent pool. The balanced approach presented in this paper therefore proposes strategic talent management in combination with strategic *non*-talent management (i.e., a differentiated HR architecture, also proposed by Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

Finally, the field of talent management needs to be grounded in mature theoretical frameworks. Even more so, the field is in urgent need of more empirical research to develop and test the existing frameworks currently found in the conceptual literature. Up until now the talent management literature has been built on assumptions and hypotheses. Research needs to address the question of how organizations actually define talent, and investigate the typologies that are dominant in organizational reality, as well as the effects of those typologies on, for example, employee well-being (see also Dries, in this issue). We are also in urgent need of more knowledge about the roles and impact of various stakeholders, beyond HR and management, on talent management policy and practice. Gaining insight into these issues will not only help advance talent management as a field of academic study, but will also arm HR practitioners with more knowledge to handle talent management issues faced by their organizations.

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