

# Talent Management: A Bundle of Hurdles

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## Abstract

Although companies around the world have made talent management a top priority, most human resource professionals and senior executives believe their organisations have not fully resolved the talent management puzzle. The paper investigates if there are any indicators that suggest that talent management is a puzzle. Applying mainly review of academic and popular literature, the assessment is done under five headings and nine propositions are developed that suggest various talent management perceptions, difficulties and applications. It is found that albeit being differentiator between organisations that succeed and those that do not, talent management is saddled with uncertainties, lack of clarity, and misunderstanding, hurdles that need to be cleared to pave way for more effective talent programmes. To overcome these, organisations should avoid one common blueprint to all talent situations, but develop approaches that suit individual talent requirements.

**Key Words:** Talent management; talent perspectives; skills deficiencies; talent process; talent dilemma

## 1. Introduction

Talent shortage is looming and this will impact every organisation without regard to industry, and that this stems from the fact that the skills set possessed by available workers may not match the advanced, more complex skills required by businesses (Buhler, 2008). Buhler (2008) then advises that organisations should take specific initiatives now to better position themselves to meet the challenges of the talent shortage. Busine & Watt (2005) also reveal that at the very least companies can start creating a culture as an employer of choice by accommodating individual differences through flexibility, being proactive in approaching the talent shortage, and continually identifying and offering development opportunities as talented individuals will more likely gravitate towards those organisations that invest in their employees.

According to a research by the Human Capital Practice of Deloitte (see Deloitte, 2005), the impending Baby Boomer retirements, widening skills gap driven by declining educational standards and outdated and ineffective approaches to talent management are combining forces to produce a 'perfect storm' that threatens the global business economy. Citing a survey involving 123 HR executives the research reveals that incoming workers with inadequate skills (70%); Baby Boomer retirements (61%); and inability to retain key talent (51%) combine to pose the greatest threats to business performance. Talent management is however plagued with misunderstandings, uncertainties and lack of clarity, suggesting that the area is not grounded in practice and therefore highlighting why it is seen by many experts as a puzzle (Stahl et al., 2012). The paper is to investigate if there are any elements that suggest that talent management is a puzzle. Using predominantly popular and academic literature, the assessment is made under five headings including talent and talent management definitions; the need for talent management; the root of talent management; talent management strategies and processes, and talent management-diversity integration; and nine propositions developed that relate to various perspectives on, expectations of, and approaches to talent management.

## 2. Talent and Talent Management Definitions

Many authors/researchers such as Cappelli (2008); Harris, Craig & Light (2011); Caravan, Barbery & Rock (2012) have written on talent management. However, the definition of talent has been unclear (Barlow, 2006), if not difficult. In this regard, as admitted by Robertson & Abbey (2003), there is a fundamental lack of clarity about what is meant by talent. For instance, Buhler (2008) admits that organisations cannot compete successfully without talented people; but does not clarify who these talented people are. It is cited by Barlow (2006) that some organisations do forced ranking of people into 'A', 'B' and 'C' as categories of talent but only the few rated 'A' grade are prioritised, while other organisations tend to concentrate on all those in leadership roles or who have the potential to be in such roles. In the mist of talent definition uncertainties, Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod (2001) categorise talent as valuable, rare and hard-to-imitate. They however find it difficult to prescribe who talented employees are.

Managers generally find it easier to say who their talented employees are than to explain what they mean by talent. When managers were asked why someone appeared on their talent list the commonest answer was that they were good performers (Robertson & Abbey, 2003). Probably due to the difficulty in pinpointing what talent is, many authors and managers attempt to describe who talented individuals are rather than what is talent. For instance, Zingheim & Schuster (1999) compare talent to skills and competencies; Paprock (2006) compares it to skills, knowledge and capabilities; Fleming & Asplund (2008) compare talent to skills; while Ambrose (2003) compares it to capabilities. Regardless of the difficulties, these descriptions offer some levels of understanding when considered individually but could be confusing when they are compared. For instance, Fleming and Asplund (2008) distinguish between what is innate (talent) in individuals from what can be changed or acquired (knowledge, skills); while Gagné (2007) distinguishes between natural abilities (gifts, potentials) from systematically developed skills (talent). These distinctions suggest that while Fleming & Asplund see innate/natural abilities as talent as distinguished from what could be acquired or developed (skills), Gagné sees these differently – natural abilities are rather gifts/potentials as distinguished from developed skills (talent). Paprock's (2006) findings add to the confusion when skills, knowledge and talent are identified as different individual characteristics of people, the underutilisation of which causes human resource development (HRD) problems.

The differences and confusion are of worry to Uren (2007) who wonders if organisations are able to identify their talented employees if they don't know what talent is because, "being asked to identify talented individuals from within your team without a clear definition of exactly what it means to be 'talented' is the managerial equivalence of being asked to hit a hole-in-one without knowing where the green is" (p.34).

Proposition 1: *Indicators of talent are unclear and contradictory*

Despite the confusions and lack of clarity about indicators of talent, few definitions of talent are identified. CIPD (2006) define talent as a complex amalgam of employees' skills, knowledge, cognitive ability and potential. According to Fleming & Asplund (2008) when we talk about talent we mean those tendencies that exist deep within us, these are the aspects of personality or behaviour most resistant to change. They conclude that this is a much more precise meaning of the word 'talent' than is generally meant in common parlance where one's natural abilities and traits are considered together with acquired skills, experience and attitudes. Supporting with an example, they explain that if a role is a good fit talent-wise, then any deficits in performance are likely results of lack of skills, knowledge, or experience, all of which can be changed with relative ease. On the other hand, if a role is poor fit, then deficits in performance may be difficult to overcome. This implies that knowledge, skills and experience (acquired) are just used to polish talent (innate, natural abilities) to perform but knowledge, skills and experience will not mean much without talent. This definition of talent adds another dimension to talent management thus; talents are born but not made. Talent is natural and polished for improved performance but cannot be created.

Deloitte (2005) defines talent from 'critical' point of view. Deloitte define critical talent as the individuals and groups who drive a disproportionate share of their company's business performance and generate greater-than-average value for customers and shareholders. 'Critical talent' goes beyond performance as critical talent does not necessarily refer to high performers but represents those individuals who possess highly developed skills and deep knowledge of not only the work itself but how to make things happen within the organisation. Once this is achieved, attraction and retention largely take care of themselves.

These reveal the lack of clarity and uncertainty about the definition of talent. Thus, CIPD's (2006) definition is in a way refuted by Fleming & Asplund (2008) as incomplete because skills, knowledge and potentials are required to polish talent which is rather natural abilities. On the other hand, though Deloitte (2005) support skills and knowledge they cannot be used to define talent – they are just the means to achievement of high organisational performance, which talents do. The definitions and descriptions of talent identified appear to be confusing and lack commonality. Thus, while Deloitte (2005) consider talent from the perspective of what the person can do, CIPD (2006) and Fleming & Asplund (2008) consider it from perspective of what the person has which is subject to further distinction; what one has to be a talent as against what one has as a means of becoming a talent.

*Proposition 2: Talent definition is saddled with uncertainties and lack of clarity*

As with 'talent', the term talent management has also been admitted by many authors as difficult to define. CIPD (2006) admits that in the Institute's 2006 learning and development survey, only 20% of respondents had a formal definition of talent management although 51% of respondents said they undertake talent management activities. Even with the 20% there is generally a lack of consistency in defining talent management. This is supported by Hughes & Rog (2008) that despite the popularity in recent years, a precise definition of talent management remains somewhat elusive. Lewis & Hackman (2006) raise significant concern about both the lack of common definition and the lack of evidence underpinning its practice. Taylor (2008) is not surprised at the lack of definition and believes that this justifies the common problems associated with talent management. Identifying, nurturing and growing the talent you have as critical part of talent management, how can talent be effectively managed if it is difficult to define what should be identified, nurtured and grown?

Lewis & Hackman (2006) identify three primary perceptions of talent management which they describe as *disturbing lack of clarity*. The first perception is that talent management is comprised of a collection of typical human resource department practices such as recruitment, career development, and succession management. This is criticised as superfluous or a little more than the rebranding of human resource management (HRM). The second perception is that talent management focuses on predicting or modelling the role of human resources throughout the organisation based on such factors as workforce skills, supply and demand, and growth and attrition. This perception sees talent management more or less synonymous with human resource or workforce planning.

The third perception focuses on resourcing, developing and rewarding employee talent. Lewis & Hackman (2006) consider this observation as the most problematic, given the contradictory positions that are presented i.e. the focus on a select few versus all employees. From their findings, Lewis & Hackman (2006) conclude that "talent management is not well grounded in research, not distinct from traditional HR practices or disciplines, and is supported mainly by anecdote" (p.143). Hughes & Rog (2008) add to the lack of clarity of talent management definition that many of the policies and practices underlying talent management are synonymous with the various components of HRM (e.g. recruitment, selection, compensation, performance management, development, succession planning). This makes it difficult to distinguish talent management from HRM.

Leisy & Pyron (2009), on their part, define talent management as managing human capital, an intangible resource comprised of people's knowledge, skills and experience, which Morton (2005) believes is not different from HRM. To depart from the rebranding of HRM to define talent management therefore, Morton (2005) describes talent management as a multi-faceted concept that has been championed by HR practitioners, fuelled by the war for talent and built on the foundations of strategic HRM. Even with Morton's definition emphasis is on whose responsibility it is to manage talent; the drivers of talent management; and the role of talent management in organisations without actually revealing what talent management is. All these paint the picture that the definitions lack commonality, therefore fuelling the definition battle.

*Proposition 3: There is a struggle for a common talent management definition*

### **3. The Need for Talent Management**

Considering the lack of certainty about talent and talent management, is there any need for the programme in organisations? Despite the uncertainty, lack of clarity and misunderstanding, many studies support talent management programmes in organisations. For instance, Charan (2010) writes that in the fast-changing global marketplace, where familiar competitive advantages such as market shares, brands and patents are constantly at risk, talent is the differentiator between companies that succeed and those that do not. According to him, "if businesses manage their finances as loosely as they manage their talent development, most would go bankrupt" (Charan, 2010: 24). Charan implies that businesses do not attach the needed seriousness to their talent management as they do to their finances and/or other aspects of business that they believe give them competitive advantage. However, developing people's talent should be seen as the whole of a company since products are all time-perishable but the only thing that stays is the development of skills and capabilities in our people (Charan, 2010). Therefore, as revealed by Ashton & Morton (2005), getting the right people in pivotal roles at the right time should be nothing new to HR professionals, but done differently, talent management can create long-term organisational success and this is very important – creating talent mindset in organisations. Cappelli (2008) affirms that talent management exists to support the organisation's overall objectives.

Which area of human resources risk has the greatest impact on your organisation? And in your judgment, which area of HR risk is most likely to occur at your organisation? These were two questions asked more than 150 global executives from Fortune 1000 companies canvassed in Earnest & Young's 2000 Global HR Risk Survey. In response to both questions and in both cases, the risk area cited most often with substantial margins was talent management (see Leisy & Pyron, 2009). What therefore are the forces that bring talent management to the forefront of today's HR risk concern focus? Some of these forces cited by authors and researchers include ageing workforce and globalisation. Ageing workforce requires organisations to simultaneously manage older workers while attracting Generation Y talent as the baby boom generation is entering retirement (Leisy & Pyron, 2009). Highlighting the contribution of aging workforce (and their increasing retirements) to talent shortage, D'Amico (2008) reveals that unless this mass exodus is managed properly and companies find the right young replacements, there is the risk of a massive loss of collective skills and experience. This is emphasised by Cappelli (2008) that ageing population and inadequate supply of young talents have created a supply gap (between required and available talents) in many labour markets. Globalisation is making 'talented' individuals no longer limited to marketing their skills within one country or region, but they can sell themselves to organisations across the world. In view of these factors contributing to a significant shift, experts worry over the likelihood of intense global competition for talents and therefore generate attention over how talent is recruited, retained, developed and managed (Cappelli, 2008).

However, Uren (2007) intimates that it is not talent shortage that prompts talent management in organisations and requires greater attention, but of prime importance is a business process that is not dependent on any external factors. It is explained that:

The logic behind talent management is straightforward. Businesses are run by people. Processes, technology and capital are important, but it is people who make the decisions. It's people who create value by using these corporate assets to create products and services that people want. This must mean that the better the people an organisation has, the better it will perform. This is the rationale behind talent management – attract, develop and utilise the best brains to get superior business results.

(Uren, 2007: 32)

Nyambegera (2002) is of the same view and states that performance is seen to depend more on effective utilisation of human capital rather than on physical capital. This is because technological and other material resources, in spite of their importance, are generated by the industrious and creative efforts of people, and it is their ingenuity that ensures that these resources are effectively deployed. Thus, without the external factors looming, organisations should still strive for effective management of their employees. Hills (2009) believes that effective talent management process helps people within an organisation cross-skills so that there is well-equipped pool of suitably experienced talent for internal recruitment. The main idea of talent management therefore is the focus on ensuring the organisation is future-proofed – to have the right skills in place to be able to grow and perform in the future that is increasingly unpredictable, but not to wait for future challenges before attempting to mitigate them through talent programmes. As opposed to buying-in talent, managing your organisation's talent means there will be no need to learn how to do things in the organisation – instead they can focus on what they need to do to be successful in their role.

Farndale, Scullion & Sparrow (2010) also depart from the external factors. It is explained that the current economic climate makes it less feasible to talk about war for talent (among organisations). For example, there is unemployment in the Far East (including China); and in East Asia (including India). Especially in Africa, and as termed by Farazmand (2000), there is production of large industrial 'reserve armies' due to foreign direct investments (FDIs) and redundancy exercises with resultant unemployment. Therefore the world is gradually being filled by employable people. However, as observed by Farndale, Scullion & Sparrow (2010), more people on the labour market does not guarantee employers the needed talent. So, although the war for talent may no more be appropriate talent jargon, there is still demand for talent in practice (Lane & Pollner, 2008) which puts burden on organisations to develop in-company. Supporting the internal factor perspective, Stahl et al. (2012) criticise the external factors. They believe even with the changing demographics tighter labour market is possible to be compensated for through productivity increases which are achieved through internal talent considerations. Also, the ageing population and effect on talent supply seems to be just projections and not something impacting on talent management today. For instance, it is revealed that by 2025 those aged 15 – 65 is projected to fall by 7% in Germany; by 9% in Italy; and by 14% in Japan (Stahl et al., 2012). Dr. Jacquelyn Robinson, community workforce development specialist (see Robinson, 2001) sums it up that organisations need to provide the

specialised, job-specific training necessary for employees to cope with the company or industry, and also to take up challenging positions.

Proposition 4: *There is the need for talent management in organisations but there is war over external versus internal factors as key drivers*

#### 4. The Root of Talent Management

It is identified that the need to develop and manage talent is because organisations face skills deficiencies. What are these deficiencies? Defining 'skills' as a combination of abilities and capabilities developed as a result of training and experience, Werner & DeSimone (2006) describe deficiencies that initiate talent management as skills gap; a situation where those entering the workforce are unable to meet current job requirements. Thus, they fall short of skills required to perform in their roles. Werner & DeSimone (2006) give an example that between 25% and 40% of hourly paid employees in the USA exhibit skills gap. This is more of individual skills gap. An example of organisational skills gap was described by Michael Mussallem, CEO and Chairman of Edward Lifesciences, a heart valve company based in the USA as quoted below.

We are evolving into a company that is going to drive more innovation and apply more technology to unmet patient needs. And that is going to require us to do more clinical studies than in the past to be able to demonstrate the value of our products. So as we increase the importance of clinical studies, we see that we don't have a strong enough clinical research function. We need more and better talent in that area, so we have made that a strategic priority.

(Bingham & Galagan, 2007: 33)

Skills gap therefore is the difference between skills required and (lower) skills available. The skills required usually go with what the organisation or individual wants to achieve. The difference between the skills needed on the job and those possessed by applicants is of great concern to human resource managers and business owners looking to hire competent employees. While employers would prefer to hire people who are trained and ready to go to work, finding such people does not solve the skills gap problem entirely. Bloom et al. (2004) emphasise the root of talent management as skills challenge, which they note to include skills gap, skills shortage, and latent skills shortage. They explain skills gap as referring to skills deficiencies of employees, internal to a firm, hence working within the workplace. Skills shortage is defined as a shortage of suitably skilled people available in the labour market. While skills gap refers to skills people need to be able to perform, skills shortage refers to the people who require these skills. The most significant problem associated with skills is caused by latent skills shortage, which is skills challenge that goes unrecognised because the organisation concerned has adapted to cope without these necessary skills (and potentially trapped itself in low skills equilibrium). This is similar to the outcome of Chan & Cooper's (2006) study that much research uncovering the skills gap however concentrates mainly on generic skills without much consideration for latent skills shortage. Talent however should be quality talent (Q-Talent) within any organisation as this has always been the key competitive differentiator (Stringer & Rueff, 2006) and puts companies on competitive edge (Chan & Cooper, 2006).

There are varied skills some of which are subsets of others. While Werner & DeSemone (2006) emphasises skills gap as the basis for talent management needs in organisations, Bloom et al. (2004) consider it as subset of skills challenge and less important skills consideration for talent management programmes. Out of the three skills types mentioned by Bloom et al. (2004) including Werner and DeSemone's (2006) skills gap, latent skills shortage is the most significant. Surprisingly, Werner and DeSemone admit that these skills go unrecognised without identifying what these skills are. Similarly, Chan & Cooper (2006) emphasise the importance of latent skills shortage without identifying what they are. Chan and Cooper paint more uncertain picture when they discover skills gap as the parent skills which might include generic skills and latent skills shortage.

Proposition 5: *The root of talent management is skills deficiency but the type of skills to be developed is uncertain*

#### 5. Talent Management Strategies and Processes

In their research on talent management the CIPD (2006) ask who should be the focus of talent management process. Should development be focused solely on an elite subgroup of future leaders, or on those capable of

progressing through a number of levels on the organisational ladder? The question relates to the exclusive model of talent management (Delbridge, Gratton & Johnson, 2006) which is characterised by a concentration on those one or two segments (or talent pool) of the workforce who are either at the top or identified as having the potential to get to the top by exhibiting high levels of potential or performance. When this is chosen as a mode of managing talent there should be clarity about what makes an ‘exceptional employee’. There is however a different mode of talent management, a more ‘inclusive’ approach as opposed to the exclusive approach. The inclusive approach which is described by Warren (2006) as “a competitive necessity” (p.25) recognises that there are various key positions to fill in any organisation as well as a future pipeline of the appropriate skills required to fill these positions, whatever the level. In the mist of the struggle over where the focus should be, there have been a range of conceptualisations. Most of these conceptualisations of talent fall into one of the following four perspectives (Iles et al., 2010).

#### 5.1. *Exclusive-people perspective*

This is about key people with high potentials and/or performance. This perspective does not take into account positions or titles but a few talented individuals who are viewed as having outstanding competence and ability and are therefore able to enhance the company’s competitive advantage. This talent management perspective has it that not everyone in the company can be considered as talent because of differences in such characteristics as performance, competence, potential that distinguish talented from other employees. A striking feature here is the segmentation of the workforce into talents in whom the company invests scarce resources.

#### 5.2. *Exclusive-position perspective*

This perspective focuses on the identification of ‘key’ positions in the organisation, usually referred to ‘A positions’ – only the ‘right’ staff occupying these positions are deemed talents. As revealed by Huselid, Beatty & Becker (2005) these ‘A positions’ do not necessarily follow hierarchical titles or positions difficult to fill but positions that are of strategic importance and portray a wide variation in work quality.

#### 5.3. *Inclusive-people perspective*

Contrary to the first two that focus on a few (people or positions), this perspective is formed on the premise that everyone in the organisation has talent as they all have roles to play to contribute to organisational success. The belief is that every employee has the abilities, and is therefore required to be given the chance to demonstrate and use such abilities in the workplace. Learning and developmental opportunities are to be given to all employees to fulfil their potentials.

#### 5.4. *Social capital perspective*

The first three perspectives explained above concentrate on individual talent and ignoring the (complex) organisational structures within which individuals work. Those who hold the social capital perspective argue that the three perspectives downplay the social and organisational structures such as teams, roles, network, culture and leadership. The perspective therefore draws attention of talent management experts to social capital.

These four perspectives show how organisations struggle to choose an approach, or how experts find difficulty recommending what should be the focus of talent management programmes. This indecision should be a worry because if organisations and experts can identify the need for talent management but fail to decide on the direction where resources should be channelled to achieve the purpose of the talent process, then it does not worth initiating because resources could be wasted and the purpose defeated.

*Proposition 6: Focus of talent management programmes has been varied and undecided*

Despite the varied perspectives, it is believed that the exclusive person option is the most appropriate as selecting a few potentials and developing them to drive the organisation is the essence of talent management (Uren, 2007); other than that it just becomes synonymous with HRM. However, the task of evaluating employees for their skills development is riddled with dilemmas and emotive decisions that can never be fully reflected in a rational business process. This dilemma arises from the need to differentiate employees in terms of their performance and other characteristics in order to make investment decisions; versus the need to treat employees equally to promote solidarity. Similarly, Iles, Preece & Chuai (2010) recognise that the downside of selecting high potential employees for accelerated development and career path is that the non-selected may feel that they are less valued

and have less access to development opportunities. Round (2009) identifies two dilemmas in talent management which compliment views expressed by Uren (2007) and Iles et al. (2010).

The first dilemma is how to achieve a balance between the motivational impact of letting people know that they have been identified as having the potential and considered for the talent programme versus the demotivational impact when they are not selected. Due to this difficulty in running the people side of talent management – the emotive decision on the part of managers and the moral-dumping news for employees not identified for the exercise – Uren (2007) asks if individuals identified for the exercise should be informed. Perhaps the most hotly debated of all the questions that arise when designing and implementing talent management programmes. Uren (2007) believes that the answer to this question depends on what the organisation believes in. If managers know that employees believe in their potentials and can make decision about their career and their development within the organisation, then they could be informed. However, if the organisation thinks that by being transparent with individuals about their perceived potentials will inflate the expectations of one segment of the workforce, and/or crash the hopes of another, then there is cost to bear in opening up. Organisations need to choose one end of the spectrum – to be or not to be transparent because as Uren (2007) advises, there is no such thing as being little bit transparent.

The second dilemma is mostly applicable during recession or redundancies when organisations have to make a decision between the promise of people being our greatest assets versus wide-scale redundancies because people have become a luxury the company cannot afford. This dilemma could be resolved by an effective talent management system with robust data to enable the organisation put in place effective workable processes for the identification of potentials.

*Proposition 7: Management face dilemma about how to manage communication to the selected and non-selected for talent programmes.*

Whose responsibility it is to manage talent? In the view of McCauley & Wakefield (2006) the prime responsibility is on HR department to build the framework and provide the tools, systems and resources but every manager, no matter the level, plays a role in strengthening the company's overall talent. Clarifying the 'responsibility list', Kamoche (2006) states that, "the idea of tapping into and managing the knowledge that resides in people should be a key responsibility for HR managers as well as line managers and corporate executives" (p.27).

Leisy & Pyron (2009) add that the commitment of senior management is especially important as is organisation-wide communication throughout all segments of talent management. This supports Charan's (2010) position that the starting point should be with top management. To him, top management should see talent as a competitive differentiator and make a commitment to devote time and energy to developing talent. In this regard, Ulrich & Smallwood (2011) caution that leadership matters more than leaders; implying that not just leaders but 'doing leaders' who accept that they should improve their talent efforts and that they must invest in talents.

Ulrich & Smallwood (2011) advise that leaders need to improve and develop themselves. They should continue to innovate their leadership brand because it enhances their business brand (Charan, 2010) and also enables their potentials to learn and grow continuously as well. This highlights Antwi's (2008) account that effective leadership creates climate where people's worth is determined by their willingness to learn new knowledge and skills and grasp new responsibilities, thus continuously re-inventing their jobs. As observed by Kamoche (2006), it is now widely held that human resources contribute to organisational performance, and this will require effective leadership and managerial competencies through the application of human knowledge (Antwi, 2008) but senior management seldom commit to the talent initiative.

Leadership involvement in talent management is even more critical in relationship to retention of talent, which Lewis & Hackman (2006) advocate should be a strategy to justify investments in the talent process. Cappelli (2008) warns that retention should be well managed and should be one of the pivots of the talent management process because, as he puts it, a deep bench of talent has become expensive inventory these days – inventory that can walk through the door, and senior managers should not allow this to happen. For instance, any incentive for retention should have clearly defined objectives, which should be aligned with the overall company strategy, responsibility of top management. In his work for instance, Goss (2010) found that while management ranked career development and organisational culture as 59% and 39% respectively as motivational factors, employees ranked them 23% and 4% respectively (-36, -35 differences). Also, while management ranked base pay and job security as 19% and 10% respectively, employees ranked them 40% and 38% respectively (+21, +28

differences). Believing that such poorly managed retention approach may defeat its purpose, Goss (2010) finds it important that management should be well-informed about the talent process and adopt an approach that incorporates employee views and expectations for talent that fits well into, and are committed to the organisation.

However, leaders or senior management identified as having the greatest responsibilities to see talent management succeed rather than thwart talent efforts in their organisations. Firstly, the skills that helped leaders to become successful at one level may impair their ability to excel to the next level (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2011). For instance, a great contributor in technical role such as designer may entertain the fear that he/she cannot be a good CEO who will need the skills and experience of performing people management role; shape the future of the organisation, among others. This fear makes leaders/senior managers not moving up to ensure free flow of the talent pipeline. Secondly and more significantly, some leaders worry about succession (which is the essence of talent development) that talented subordinates could outshine them and take their place. So why should leaders be committed to a programme that is likely to cause them their seats?

Proposition 8: *Fear of losing their positions to talented subordinates make senior managers less interested in the talent process*

## 6. Talent Management-Diversity Integration

Good people management needs to embrace diversity because making the most of everyone's contribution in organisation is not just a common sense but also vital to organisational success (CIPD, 2010a). This corroborates the view of Gibb (2011) that diversity in talent management is about managing status shift, thus including people who might have been previously overlooked and progressing from historically 'out-group' to 'in-group' in the talent process. The business case for diversity is an important acknowledgement that it is no longer legitimate or profitable to exclude or marginalise women, physically challenged, racial and ethnic minorities and other identity groups from the workplace. This means businesses are required to ensure inclusion and non-discrimination of various identity groups (Kalonaityte, 2010) in the talent process.

However, war for talent means organisations have to compete to find and keep the few talents within them, implying that talent resides within certain individuals and only they are worth concentrating on (Blass & Maxwell, 2012). Exploring a balance between the inclusion and exclusion polarisation, Ng & Burke (2005) believe that it may be that not everyone should be considered 'talent' but everyone should have the same opportunity to be considered for inclusion. By assuming that talent is nurtured but not as result of nature, everyone should be from equal base point. Then ambition, experience, skills etc. determine whether someone is included in the talent pool at any given time.

Touching on the difficulty in achieving talent management-diversity integration, CIPD (2010b) reveal that there are numerous ways that organisations understand or approach talent management and diversity individually as concepts, let alone how they are integrated. For instance, in their study they reveal that three different organisations – Credit Suisse, British Telecom and the London Organising Committee of the 2012 Olympic Games – had different approaches to diversity and inclusion (CIPD, 2010b).

Apart from difficulty of managing diversity and inclusion in the talent management process, CIPD (2010b) in their study also identified many barriers to effectively integrating talent management and diversity. The current talent situation suggests that though businesses are increasingly realising the need and benefits of diversity in talent management, they are either unsure how to implement this, or unwilling to implement it. The diversity initiative can therefore be likened to "a situation of discovering the many tributary streams to a larger body of water but being uncertain about the very nature of the larger body of water" (Kalonaityte, 2010: 47).

## 7. Conclusion

The review and the various propositions reveal how talent management is yet to grow and mature and this explains why some researchers, HR professionals and senior managers see talent management as a puzzle. This paper concludes that the puzzle emanates from the various uncertainties, lack of clarity and confusions surrounding the various aspects of the subject, which are hurdles that need to be cleared for effective talent management programmes. Albeit all these difficulties, talent management is believed to be the main differentiator between organisations that succeed and those that do not. These suggest that senior management of organisations that implement talent programmes should be more proactive in their approaches to the talent

process; while talent researchers have the burden of undertaking rigorous empirical studies as a way of getting the reasons for, and solutions to these hurdles.

The author believes that most of the confusions; uncertainties and lack of clarities result from the fact that experts and organisations attempt to settle on definitions; approaches; procedures – a universal best-fit approach. This could always create difficulties until it is realised that no one blueprint can be applied to all organisational contexts because organisations have varied talent requirements. As resourcing needs, as well as how best to meet these needs vary, talent management will continue to be plagued with battle for commonality, if attempts continue to be made to apply universal approach to every organisation. Therefore, organisations should rather understand the context within which their talent management process fits into organisation's talent needs.

As the hurdles develop because of managers and experts' attempts of hunting for universal best-fit approach, the paper advises that management should identify their organisation's talent needs and decide on the skills to develop; approaches to adopt; returns on talent investments that suit the organisation's context. Despite being globally accepted, talent management would not work if attempt to develop one blueprint for all organisations and industries.

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