

Discernments to Be Revisited For Sustaining Talent in Changing Times: A Miscellany of Views by Industry Experts

Hema Harsha

Research Scholar, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE), Manipal, India

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I. Introduction

Business dynamics and current challenges have compelled organizations to revisit the fundamentals of how they manage talent and this is laying new edifices to Talent management philosophy. Identifying High Potential (HiPots) and developing a multi-tiered, multi-segment Talent development engine leads to an accelerated growth of talented people (Meenal Jadhav, 2016). The present economy is fueled by a talent-driven environment as it is proved that Talent breeds innovation. Exceptionally talented people have the innate ability to ideate and innovate and maintaining a long term relationship with such exceptional talent is the foundation on which an organization thrives. What differentiates an organization with high impact talent management practices from others is creating an ecosystem which facilitates innovation and having a competitive workforce with relevant skillsets and a Talent mindset within the whole system.

For every organization aiming at long-term success, managing the talent of key employees is very critical and a challenging task too. Talent management practices which focuses on organizational as well as individual development have to meet newer challenges by creating and maintaining a supportive and people-oriented organization culture while meeting the requirements of shifting times. New practices have thus evolved with models focusing on leadership development, employee engagement, and improved employee performance. Backing this, business processes have matured to keep pace with changing technology and its impact on every functional area is evident. The permeation of technology is seamless in all functionalities, be it selection process using hiring algorithms or using big data analytics to navigate the skills gap. Though some of the traditional practices are prevalent in many organizations, it is imperative to relook at those practices which were the outcome of World War II (Cappelli, 2008).

Building a highly competitive knowledge-driven workforce will be the strategy of every sustainable organization. This paper delves into understanding the changing perceptions in regard to talent management and challenges which an organization needs to prepare itself for, in order to sustain talent.

II. Talent and Talent Management in Organizations

Ulrich and Smallwood (2012), explored the option of segregating Talent into four groups to draw simplicity in understanding talent. First, one being 'C-suite executive', the leaders who are generally high performers who demonstrate extraordinary ability to accomplish, engage others and deliver steady results.

'Leadership cadre' is second in line, who are the key cohorts representing the top leadership and fulfilling the C-suite agendas. The third group is the "High Potential" population, which accounts for 10 to 15 percent of the total employees, and they are the probable candidates to become future leaders. The last group is 'rest of the employees' in the organization. This grouping facilitates the leaders to focus their time and energy appropriately based on the prominence, contribution and involvement of the groups. Investment of resources, money and time on these four groups involves making the right choice for the four stakeholders, i.e., employees, customers, executives and investors. They developed a formula for Talent and that is **Talent = Competence * Commitment * Contribution**. All the three being multiplicative, they are considered to be the most crucial ingredients to be identified and improved upon in talented people. Having the skill, will, and purpose in the right alignment ensures potential growth of Talent in the right perspective.

While the selection of talented people is the key, identifying and enabling leaders and fostering a culture of learning, knowledge building and an open climate for inbreeding of talent should be an essential component of organizational culture. Managing Talent includes components like Identifying, Acquiring, Developing and nurturing, and retaining talented people in every organizational setting. This ensures in building a robust workforce leading to an organization's success. Organization's core competencies and position specific competencies influence talent management decisions. After an exhaustive report by McKinsey in 1997, talent has become a critical driving force not just in the knowledge-driven environment, but in the labor-centric market

as well. The best of talent put together can achieve the extraordinary. Though rhetoric, senior executives reaffirm that talent matters, acknowledge greater investments in talent building and device new interventions for talent development and nurturing. They also stress the need for a high level of commitment towards organizational productivity and growth which includes employee engagement and empowerment. Creating opportunities for talented people within an organization to collaborate with extraordinary talent existing outside an organization multiplies the capabilities of these individuals. (John et al 2010). This espouses building competencies which will be relevant for now and future.

Large organizations with a focus on sustainability are investing in holistic education, training and developmental interventions, both for the employees within and the community in which it exists, which in turn leads to generating a sustainable talent pool. With changing demographic patterns, generating a sustainable workforce with the requisite skills and competencies, providing them with opportunities to keep their skills abreast is a bigger challenge for organizations. Talented leaders play a major role in building talent creed and emulating a culture of talent in all the systems in an organization. Leaders at various levels in an organization act as stimulants in motivating and nurturing talent.

With the business world changing very rapidly, organizations compete to have the most talented people. Thomas Friedman, in his book "World is Flat" remarks that to determine an individual's opportunity in life, talent is more important than geography. Companies, in order to beat the competition, are always scouting for talented people (both internally and externally) to assume higher positions, thus gaining a competitive advantage over others. A new approach towards managing talent is to build a talent mindset within the organization. Companies have remodeled their strategies related to identifying, acquiring, nurturing, engaging and developing talent. This approach of talent management succeeds with outstanding leaders who can develop talent creed in the organization (Berger et al 2016)

2.1 Blend of Talent in Scientific research and Innovation

Globalization has driven organizations towards rapid developments in scientific discoveries and innovations. The past decade has witnessed innovation taking the center stage in an organization's global competitiveness, and the trend is expected to continue in the next decade as well.

The last two decades has seen phenomenal growth in the field of science, technology, innovation, and development. India is in the forerun to make the dream of many great leaders of modern India come true, who envisioned the role of Indians to be meaningful in the community of nations while being second to none in the field of technology and advancement.

Scientific Research institutes are primarily involved in science and its wide-scale application in society. Scientific knowledge and its application capabilities of a nation play a major role in deciding its power amongst other economies. Contribution of the scientific research community is an inseparable component of a nation's growth and development. A humungous epistemology available is the authority on the diversified growth in every field of science and research. With the technological influx, advancements in the area of research have enhanced the quality of the outcome and the reach as well. Scientific Institutes thrive on the rich capabilities of the human resource in their organizations to innovate and evolve. Leveraging such capabilities and competencies should be of paramount importance to such institutes.

III. Objective

The main objectives of the study are:

- a) To comprehend Talent management practices in scientific institutions.
- b) To identify the dimensions which influence Talent Sustainability in Organization

IV. Literature Review Methodology

An online search across several databases like Google Scholar, Emerald, Science Direct, Research gate, and Shodhganga was conducted. Books and journals like Human Capital, NHRD Journal, HBR Journals were referred to gain insight into the subject. For the purpose of this study, articles, research papers, white papers and thesis related to the topic were systematically gathered. Based on the content, papers were segregated and reviewed under various headings like the definition of talent, talent management, nurturing talent, retaining talent, changing workforce, talent sustainability and leaders for sustainability.

4.1 Literature review

Stefko and Sojka (2014), conducted a detailed study into the definitions of Talent and Talent management. They brought in a clear distinction between HRM and Talent management, relating to the higher end needs of Talent in comparison to human resource in general. They propose that emergent HR practices should be aligned with Talent management practices. **Corporate culture** is considered as the source of sustainable advantage, upkeep of talent management practices and processes and integrating them into all the

systems in the organization, alters the total outlook of talent. While ensuring that the practices and processes are in action, evaluating those systems, both in terms of quantitative as well as qualitative terms, will provide conclusive results about their effectiveness. Cultivating a talent mindset should be a cascading top-down approach, thus aligning talent management with overall business strategy, HR strategy, and Organization culture.

Sireesha and Leela(2014), aims to reflect on the findings of various authors and researchers and ultimately lists out ten fundamental principles to manage talent effectively. Emphasizing the criticality, acronym ROAD (representing Respect, Objectives, Awareness, Dialogue) is considered to be the key to effective talent management. Due respect to employees, clarity in relating the goals and objectives, increased awareness about one's behavior affecting performance, and developing an inclusive talent management strategy through dialogue with the employees are considered to be some of the effective practices. Along with these critical four, maintaining accountability and measuring outcomes/impact are the measurement driven approaches to ensure the real differentiator of talent management. The study concluded that building adaptable skills to ensure sustained leadership along with performance and potential measure, based on one's past experience and behavior, predicts the future performance of a talented employee.

Dhanabhakym and Kokilambal(2014) explored talent management practices across four major industries – Banking, Manufacturing, IT and Health care, drawing commonality in the practices among these industries. Practices in the area of talent hiring, selection, training, and development, succession planning, compensation and performance management were found to be on similar lines. Every industry wants to possess the best talent in their organization and retention of talented people is one of the main issues for every organization. Different approaches have to be applied to manage talent at different levels. They established that the concept of "One size fits all" doesn't work for efficient talent management practices within an organization. They draw a conclusion that with changing times, increasing competition and scarcity of right talent, innovative approaches to talent management will gain importance in the years to come.

Tamanna(2015) has explored the major challenges which corporates world over encounter in retaining and sustaining talent. A comprehensive descriptive analytical study of HR practices, challenges and other issues of companies in Bangladesh was done which led to a series of findings. It was found that successful organizations have participative decision systems, conducive work environment and pay equity. Among the companies considered for the study, which included both local as well as multinational companies, there was similarity in remuneration policies, developmental initiatives, working standards, performance management systems, and growth opportunities. Maximizing the bottom line and preparing leaders for future roles is part of strategic human resource management system. In their findings, they establish that, with brain drain at its helm, the biggest challenge was retaining the right talent. Talented people were moving out to other nations in search of opportunities with a greater challenge.

Anand and Sophia(2015) in their empirical study on "Creating a dynamic and sustainable talent ecosystem", conducted a survey on what organization with high impact talent management strategies do differently to identify the elements of talent sustainability. They observed that a talent mindset is very essential for any organization which does well in sustaining talent. Respondents for the survey included 371 HR practitioners from different industries, and the study concluded with identifying five critical elements of talent sustainability, along with five critical roles and behavior associated with it. The Board of Directors, who are also called as "**Talent Overseers**", consider talent sustainability as an essential practice in an organization. CEO and Senior leaders who form "**Talent Orchestrators**" have to display commitment and engagement through their supportive behavior towards the practices. "**Talent Influencers**" who are the Line managers are the ones who are in close proximity with knowledge and talent available in various individuals in the organization. HR Leaders who are the "**Talent Accelerators**", are instrumental in helping business leaders in calibrating talent and making the right decisions. Ultimately it is the "**employees**" themselves, who can relate to their specific career growth and the developmental needs, express, learn and grow, thus building an ecosystem which supports talent sustainability.

They concluded that there should be a clear understanding of the impact of talent management practices at all levels of the business in the organization. Using the right metrics to measure the effectiveness of talent management practices enables an organization to decide on the right practices. Developing a talent mindset in the organization involves not just the HR department, but all the employees in the organization.

Harshita and Bhanupriya (2012), elucidate talent management as a strategic advantage in the present competing environment. An organization's capability to hold the right talent is reflected in its potential growth and success. They list out certain criteria for an employee to be considered as a potential source of competitive advantage for an organization. An employee to be quantified as talented should possess unique skills, knowledge, and ability and his/ her contribution should add substantial value in one's own area of work. Such talented employees can excel in key roles and cannot be substituted. While explaining the role of top management in creating strategic advantage through effective talent management initiatives, they insist on

building a winning environment which creates a sense of belonging among the employees. For optimizing talent, a talent mindset which explores ownership and accountability results in increased competitive capability of the organization.

Shaveta et al (2011) attempt to draw the causes and cost of attrition, strategies for retaining talent and approaches to talent optimization. Four companies from different industry were chosen, keeping in mind the commonality in their HR practices. Using factor analysis, the reason for the identification of retention strategies was found as the most significant factor with 26.21 percent of the total variance. Strategies for retention and retention bonus were identified as the significant second and the third factor with 23.39 and 21.52 percent of total variance explained. Talent retention, which is of great concern for most of the organizations, needs an approach which identifies the causes and draws out the right strategies. There is no universal tool to address talent retention. Every organization has to devise its own approach, taking the cost factor into consideration and build motivating systems which are compatible with organizational and individual goals.

Coro Strandberg (2015), explores the competencies future leaders who lead sustainable talent management should possess. With an increase in the war for talent, global organizations have to reinvent the wheel of talent management. Retooling of talent management systems becomes imperative in leading an organization towards future success. The organization has to define mission critical skill sets by embedding them into Organizational competency models. Leaders, who play the pivotal role, must possess **sustainability competencies** and that becomes the crux of Organization performance. Forward thinking companies should include five sustainability competencies. They are System thinking, External Collaboration, Social innovation, Sustainability literacy, and Active values. Identifying the gaps in leadership development programs, building sustainable leadership qualities builds a talent pipeline of future generation leaders. The authors propound that top talent investment companies invest in fostering these five competencies, which will pave way for both commercial as well as societal success.

Isfahani and Boustani (2014), investigated the association between talent management, employee retention, and organizational trust. The descriptive study involved a random sample of 200 respondents who were the staff of a University. Independent variables included Talent management, succession planning, organizational trust, job experience, training, coaching, mentoring, and career management. A positive correlation was found between the independent variables and the dependent variables. Organizations regardless of their size and industry can emulate talent management practices under the broader HR functions which formulate functions for line managers to the executive heads.

Challenging work opportunities, Career progress, relationship with other employees, equitable and fair pay, and encouraging and supportive management are the top five employee retention elements. In this regard, managers have a very prominent role to play, specifically in understanding what motivates people, ensuring continuous learning opportunities and treating every employee well.

Oracle white paper (2012), highlights the six technology-enabled best practices for talent retention. Technology tools capture and feed talent information, which empowers the manager for faster decision making, thus resulting in greater job satisfaction and higher employee engagement. The study elucidates it as follows:-

- a) Recruiting right people by setting clear criteria about knowledge, skill, attitude, ability and culture fit that is expected on every role. Using automated skills-based matching systems to match the role with candidate improves the efficiency in hiring process.
- b) Creating visibility of corporate goals and objectives to enhance line manager's efficiency, by advocating talent management systems (web 2.0 supported) which are intuitive and have easy user interface.
- c) Regular performance reviews and constant feedback are critical contributors to employee engagement. Using intuitive goal monitoring system, bidirectional feedback and review systems (like Microsoft Outlook), facilitates regular feedback and monitoring support.
- d) Career opportunities and challenging and meaningful work top the list of most desired drivers for employee engagement and retention. 89 % of the respondents voted for organizations that are better technologically equipped which caters to self-service career planning and activating tools and techniques.
- e) Internal talent mobility drive using automated search systems maximizes fill rate of open roles. Online promotion of open roles and matching of profiles against the roles reduces the risk of mismatch in internal mobility.
- f) Staffing and deployment strategies can be continuously measured and improved using talent management analytics. Robust workforce analytics application with personalized dashboards allows the user to seamlessly interact with data warehouse thus facilitating quicker response to situations.

The authors conclude that by providing systems and solutions, which are easy to use and communicate, talented employees get greater visibility into their contribution towards achievement of both short term and long term organizational goals and individual goals as well.

Blass and April(2008) in a large scale research work involving 20 big organizations emphasized five dimensions as a framework for mapping, developing and planning talent for the future. The five dimensions underpin an individual's career development along with self-development leading to a focused change for future requirements. The five dimensions included **Development path, Development focus, Support, Influence on career and Connected conversations**. Once high potentials are identified, customized developmental activities are chalked out stringing together meaningful experience in pursuit of building character and skill. The outcome of the survey revealed that opportunities like secondments, shadowing, mentoring and coaching though available in the Organization, was not leveraged by respondents, probably due to the silo mentality of self, and/or line managers. Knowing where the organization is headed to enables alignment of developmental processes with strategic priorities. Providing the right support to the talent pool either by paternal approach or competitive approach depends on the type of culture prevalent in the organization.

Douglas et al (2014), based on a study of three companies – one each from USA, India, and China, the three major economies, with a geographical presence in many countries, have identified some key parameters which influence talent management strategies. They observed that the mechanics behind successful talent strategies is the focus on supporting and driving the business strategies of companies where the integration of the talent strategies with the business plans is seamless. In addition, they also stress that the commitment from the top executive team is critical for this business focused talent strategies. The talent management value chain is guided by four guiding principles, with the major responsibilities being – talent planning and recruitment, ensuring a high performance culture, prioritizing leadership behaviors that matter, developing employees, talent reviews and succession planning, and lastly, networking and collaboration tools. Their study also reveals that professionals look forward to growth, excitement in their assignments, and interesting careers as essential ingredients of a game changing talent strategy. These companies have a sense of collective pride, while also respecting individuals need to grow.

White Paper by Dimension Data (2012) lists finding and retaining talent as one of the top reasons challenging business leaders, and they attribute it to a variety of reasons. Potential employees evaluate the sustainability of the company as an assurance for their own professional engagement longevity, and the pride of associating with a company which is socially and environmentally conscious. The paper stresses that necessity of engaging in innovative ways of attracting and keeping employees and collaboration tools offers an answer. With the employees moving from telecommuting to teleworking, collaboration tools help organizations select talent because of their skill sets, obviating the locational disadvantage, and at the same time encourage a healthier work-life balance for the employees. A global organization provides the convenience of being able to get in touch with others in a variety of ways from a multitude of locations.

V.Exploratory Pilot Study

5.1 Talent and its sustenance – A Medley of views

As a part of a preliminary study, qualitative research methodology with an in-depth interview was adopted to gather data and arrive inductively at factors critical for the study. A structured questionnaire was administered to ten professionals - both from research institutes and other industries. This diversity in respondents was chosen to compare the concept of talent in various organizations and arrive at the common factors which are used to define talent. Of the ten, seven responded to the questionnaire and five amongst them were interviewed. The other two could not be interviewed due to their non-availability. For the interview, a structured interview schedule was prepared. Respondents are highly acclaimed and talented people serving at very senior positions in esteemed research institutions and corporates in Bengaluru. The work experience of the respondents ranges between 15-30 years in their respective organizations. Five respondents are from three different scientific research institutes, two are from IT Industry holding positions of Head, Global Learning and Development and HR Head of leading companies in Bengaluru.

This exploratory study was undertaken to understand and identify various factors which influence Talent, its growth and sustenance in their present organizations. A battery of questions was generated in relation to hiring strategies, developmental activities, nurturing processes, retention tactics, Leadership influence, Organization culture, and other Talent sustenance approaches. The interviews and responses to the questionnaire were analyzed and the key approaches to talent nurturing and sustenance that emerged from the interviews were coded and categorized under different headings to bring clarity.

5.2 Key findings:

- Talent is defined by mapping the real time skills needed to grow business, which is identified by scouting for those individuals who possess these skill sets. Once identified, these individuals are interviewed by various levels of management to map their intrinsic needs, which is then leveraged to acquire them.
- Efforts are made to identify and nurture talent in all the organizations considered for the study. Procedures and systems facilitating this are institutionalized and systematically executed.

- Training is provided after identifying the need in order to build the skills and capabilities of individuals to meet the organizational requirements and also the individual expectations.
- All three respondents from scientific institutions and two from corporate agreed that leaders groom, hand hold and mentor potential talent (High potentials) after they are identified.
- Most of the organizations had similar nurturing interventions which involved empowerment by engaging in highly competitive tasks, challenging assignments and international assignments. One respondent mentioned that nurturing is not always a “top down” approach. In case of technical capabilities, “Reverse mentoring” is an intervention for developing capabilities of seniors.
- All respondents from scientific institutions indicated that the role of HR department in identifying and nurturing high potential talent was minimal and it was predominantly done by the leadership team.
- An environment conducive for learning and knowledge sharing was identified as the key factor for sustaining talent in the organization. Identifying the competencies needed for the future, developmental activities are planned incoherence to it. Both the organization and the participant are equally involved in the process of learning and growth.
- Autonomy at the workplace is restricted to exploring opportunities to exploit one’s own competencies and abilities within the framework of organizational policies. Respondents from private organizations were more open to autonomy in idea generation, innovation, technology development, and execution.
- Talented people are valued highly in all the organizations, the aspect of talent creed being imbibed in a different manner in different organizations. One respondent emphatically remarked that considering the full organization to be like a family and emulating family values and beliefs into the system brought in a feeling of oneness.
- Transparency in communication, a culture of collaboration was prevalent in all the organizations. An organization providing a platform to voice one's opinion was appreciated while keeping the core value system in place.
- Respondents confirmed that leaders and leadership roles as the backbone of talent building and sustenance. Some leaders are considered as role models who reflect the values and beliefs of the organization.
- 80% of the respondents mentioned that the leaders walk the talk when it came to creating a learning environment, by willingly learning from their peers and juniors.
- Those engaged in disseminating knowledge were recognized and provided opportunities to interact with other professionals by nominations to conferences and conducting training in other companies.
- All the respondents spoke positively about the career and succession planning practices in their respective organizations. Most of them appreciated and highlighted the fact that they are associated with a “Learning organization” and took pride in that.
- With changing times, and changing requirements of the employees, the respondents conveyed that there is a dire need for newer and evolved systems which will ensure in holding on to the relevant talent for the present and future.

Key takeaways for talent management leading to sustenance:

- Talent should become an integrated mindset in the organization rather than being an exclusive part of the HR process.
- Leaders should actively engage in identifying right talent in individuals and encouraging them to leverage their strengths for mutual benefit and growth.
- Technology driven Talent management practices are the driving forces behind talent sustenance.
- Creation of an Organic Talent ecosystem is the solution for building a competitive workforce.
- Dimensions identified to be the key influencers of Talent sustainability include Organization culture and strategy, talent acquisition, development and engagement, critical talent identification, performance management, career and succession planning, retention and sustenance, leadership, learning, and knowledge network.

VI. Conclusion

Based on these findings, the dimensions and associated variables for the study are identified. This will further enable in exploring the effect of every dimension on sustaining talent in organizations. It is understood that along with talent management practices which play a prominent role in driving the significance of talent within the organization, building a robust knowledge base by interacting with other knowledge partners is the need of the hour. Leader's role in identifying and nurturing talent goes a long way in ensuring a robust talent pipeline of potential leaders for the future within the organization. With evolving changes, HR people must adopt newer interventions and collaborate with the leaders at various levels to build a talent driven organization. Nurturing the right person with relevant talent becomes crucial for every organization with a broader vision and clear goals for the future.

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