

Conceptualising inclusive talent management: potential, possibilities and practicalities

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This paper explores the possibilities and potential surrounding inclusive talent management in contrast to conventional normative treatments. By closely examining the meaning of ‘inclusive’ in relation to talent, the paper moves towards a definition of inclusive talent management which is contextualised in a four-part typology of talent management strategies which offers greater conceptual clarity to researchers working in this field. Our conceptualisation of inclusive talent management is further located in the traditions of positive psychology and the Capability Approach. The practical implications of introducing inclusive talent management strategies are considered.

Keywords: talent management; positive psychology; Capability Approach

Introduction

Talent management is usually positioned as a normative and exclusive practice that focuses on the development of a small proportion of high-performing and high-potential employees in an organisation (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, and González-Cruz 2013). Discourses of exclusive talent management talk about talent pools and talent pipelines, and of a workforce differentiated by ability and contribution (Axelrod, Handfield-Jones, and Michaels 2002; Boudreau and Ramstad 2005; Mäkelä, Björkman, and Ehrnrooth 2010). Indeed, if talent management is not defined as an exclusive and distinctive strategic process, then there seems little to set it apart from human resource management (HRM). However, the talent literature also contains tantalising but passing reference to a contrasting ‘inclusive’ talent management approach (Björkman et al. 2013; Martin, Gollan, and Grigg 2011). If inclusive in this context means an alternative to exclusive, the basic idea of inclusive approaches is simple and appealing; rather than just focus on the talents of a small proportion of high-potential employees, why not focus on the talents of everyone?

While examples of exclusive approaches to talent management are easily found, however, the meaning of inclusive talent management remains ill-defined and vague and concrete examples are rare. One explanation for this situation (Stewart 2008) is that decision-makers struggle with the philosophy and practicalities of inclusive talent programmes such that exclusive forms may dominate simply because they are much easier to conceptualise and implement despite the implications for the majority they leave behind. Cross-cultural research suggests differences in talent ethos and philosophy (Festing, Schäfer, and Scullion 2013; Stahl et al. 2012), and may reflect differences in the meaning of ‘talent’ across different cultures such that the Anglo-American stance of positioning

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talent as relatively high performance and potential is not shared in cultures that are more collective and less performance-oriented (Dries et al. 2013). Exclusive talent strategies struggle for acceptance in the public sector due to fundamental differences in external drivers and internal organisational conditions such as political responsiveness, collectivism and greater bureaucracy, which influence how people are managed including sensitivities to differentiating on the basis of performance (Rainey and Chun 2005). As such, the concept of inclusive talent strategies seems more suited to public contexts (Ford, Harding, and Stoyanova 2010; Powell et al. 2012), given the strength of concerns about potentially discriminatory practices and workforce differentiation although, again, convincing examples are hard to find.

One possible reason why inclusive talent strategies evade detection alluded to above (Stewart 2008) is that inclusive talent management is a chimera, a mythical entity far too implausible to exist. To distinguish talent management more carefully from related areas such as strategic HRM, the field needs better theoretical positioning (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, and González-Cruz 2013) including specific consideration of inclusive, multilevel approaches (Thunnissen, Boselie, and Fruytier 2013). In response, this paper unravels some of the terminology used in the talent literature to show that the concept of inclusive talent management need not be a chimera, but that it does require a fundamentally different interpretation and construction of ‘talent’ if scholars and practitioners are to make sense of it relative to its exclusive counterpart.

The paper proceeds as follows. After first defining the key concepts, we develop a definition of fully inclusive talent management (FITM) which is located in a new four-part typology of talent management and theoretically within the traditions of positive psychology and the Capability Approach. Practical implications of implementing inclusive talent management are considered. Although not connected to traditions of critical theory, through its uncompromising focus on bettering the human condition, the paper deliberately provokes the functionalist tradition that underpins exclusive talent strategies. The main contribution is to provide greater theoretical definition to an elusive but attractive and socially responsible approach to human resource development (HRD).

Defining key terms

Differences in physiological and neurological systems affect a range of skill sets and cognitive abilities across a wide range of activities (Fiest 2013; Kaufman 2013). For this paper, however, the primary concern is with what these differences lead to and how they manifest and are constructed in social situations. Trost (2000, 317) saw talent as, ‘achievement far above average’ implying that talent, as a collective term, in a wide range of fields is found only in the top few per cent in a particular age group in a particular domain. Gagne (2000, 67) defined talent, or specifically what it leads to, more precisely as

the superior mastery of systematically developed abilities (or skills) and knowledge in at least one field of human activity, to a degree that places an individual within the top 10% of age peers who are (or who have been) active in that field.

The crucial concept here is the systematic development of abilities which in work situations is usually delivered through tailored training and development interventions; talent and practice are mutually reinforcing (Fiest 2013, 260). Gagne’s concise definition of talent is useful in two respects. The first is that talent is relative. Talent exists in relation to others so that only those persons possessing high levels of some ability can

meaningfully be seen as talented. The relative nature of talent is bounded by age, hence it is meaningless to compare a talented dancer aged 12 with one aged 18, and the talented child may not continue to develop their talents into adulthood. Second, talent is domain-specific and is displayed in an area that may be very narrow. A talent for musical composition, for example, does not mean that the same person will also be or could become a talented performer if they practice.

Talent management is commonly defined as the accelerated development of a deliberately select proportion of employees, distinguished by their above average performance and promotability, and who have the potential to make substantial further contributions to the business and the alignment of these employees with key (strategically important) roles (Collings and Mellahi 2009; Iles, Preece, and Chuai 2010). Strategies of this kind imply practices that deliberately exclude; that separate people into in-groups and out-groups, and into categories of high and low value. In contrast, inclusive strategies would imply practices which are deliberately comprehensive, which involve curiosity and open mindedness and are infused with an egalitarian philosophy of mind.

This definition of exclusive talent strategies separates talent management from HRM through its emphasis on a minority of employees not the entire workforce, through its focus on personal and career development not the full spectrum of HRM activities, and through its focus on people for so long as they remain in a talent pool not their whole tenure with the organisation. In defining talent management in this way, it is important to note that the pursuit of elitist talent management does not mean that other employee groups in the organisation are overlooked or ignored; although it might do. It does not necessarily mean that the employee–organisation relationship for most employees cannot be characterised by compassion, loyalty and respect (Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn 2003), but it does appear to fit much more easily with cultures in which competition among employees based on their relative potential is valued. Development schemes may exist for other groups but not necessarily labelled as ‘talent’. Furthermore, organisations are free to define and operate talent management in any way they choose, even if those definitions and operationalisations do little to separate them from conventional HRM.

Turning to the meaning of ‘inclusive’, two interpretations need considering. One is that everyone has the opportunity to be included in a talent programme and this may require positive action to equalise the opportunities for disadvantaged or under-represented groups from a range of backgrounds to show their potential. In exclusive structures, there are opportunities to perform at or above a threshold. Those who exceed the threshold will have a differentiated experience geared to their talent development and the majority of others will not. While such approaches can be considered inclusive to the extent that they provide opportunities for all people to demonstrate their talents, this path to inclusion leads straight back to exclusivity because the majority of employees are excluded from the final selection. Inclusivity of this kind means giving everyone the same opportunity to show their potential, but only those who exceed the threshold will be included. Another meaning of ‘inclusive’ is that everyone is deemed to have talent of some sort and should therefore have access to programmes that identify and locate their talent and put it to use. In inclusive talent management, we are providing opportunity via participation, not the opportunity to meet a preset threshold that reflects a vision of talent.

Closing-in on inclusive talent management

Relativistic definitions of talent alone could be considered sufficient to end the search for inclusive talent management. Since talented employees can only exist in relation to others

in the workforce, then, in large organisations, the vast majority of employees cannot be talented, by definition. Therefore inclusive talent management is a chimera; the entire workforce cannot be an ‘all star cast’. But this line of reasoning needs extending. If the horizon is expanded so that the talent in a workforce is compared with the talent available in a wider labour market, then in theory at least, it is possible for an entire workforce to be talented in relation to that labour market if only people who are in the top few per cent of an ability group relevant to their role are recruited. Examples might occur in professional sports teams where only athletes who display the highest levels of performance in their field are recruited such that the whole team is truly talented in relation to all others.

Arguably, it is possible for small businesses to fill all positions with top talent if the particular domain skills are known and in short supply; perhaps in start-up businesses in new technology fields. However, for large, established organisations, the size of the labour market they recruit from must mean that the top 10% benchmark to recruit against can only be approximated. Coupled with the presence of long-serving employees who have not kept pace with the organisation’s vision of talent and whose talents are deemed to have diminished it seems implausible that a large workforce comprising only of people in the top few per cent of ability groups could exist. It seems inevitable therefore that, at a point in time, medium to large organisations will have a workforce that is very diverse in terms of ratings given to individual performance and potential. Organisations can attempt to ‘refresh’ their talent base through restructuring, voluntary redundancy or the increased use of fixed-term contracts which allow the sub-optimum performers to be released easily. Even so, inclusive talent management defined as employing only top talent would appear to be very difficult to achieve in anything but small organisations.

There is, however, another way of looking at talent that needs considering which rests on the assumption that all (or at least most) employees are or could be talented at something, given sufficient training and opportunity. This might be seen as rather optimistic, but recall that talent is highly domain-specific and the domains in which many people might display their talents may not be useful to the organisation they work for. A gifted rose grower may be a very ordinary employee in their office job. As such, an approach to inclusive talent management would be for organisations to make genuine efforts to elicit the talents of all their employees, shifting the HRD emphasis away from performance towards learning. This would enable employees to reveal the full extent of their work-related abilities even if they fall outside the top 10% threshold but at least in this scenario the employees’ abilities are being recognised to the full. **The organisational challenge then becomes one of fitting all employees into jobs which enable their talents, albeit suboptimum in relation to the 10% rule, to connect to those jobs. This way a person’s ability, whatever that may be, is being used to the maximum.**

This approach is what organisations could do for all their employees although in practice, at any point in time, it seems likely that there will be some slippage between the actual and the ideal position. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider those employees who as a result of some assessment are deemed to have little talent of use to an organisation. This might arise from the decline across a person’s tenure of talent previously possessed or simply bad hiring decisions in the past. Employees in this position may be able to perform acceptably in their jobs but their talents that would separate them from others lie dormant or are suppressed. It is necessary therefore to ask organisations to intervene to enable employees in this category to move to positions outside the organisation where their talents will fit far better with some other activity. In this scenario, we can begin to see what inclusive talent management might be like. It is inclusive in that it is concerned with deploying the talents of all employees, in some cases this might mean

constructively helping an employee to exit the organisation, but does not treat everyone as a high performer with high potential.

From this argument, the following definition is suggested. FITM is the recognition and acceptance that all employees have talent together with the ongoing evaluation and deployment of employees in positions that give the best fit and opportunity (via participation) for employees to use those talents. Where an employee's talents are mutually deemed to fall below reasonable thresholds that the organisation has democratically, not arbitrarily, set and adopted, the organisation should assist the employee to deploy their talents elsewhere. Only if this second stage is attempted, can a scheme be considered to be fully inclusive. Inclusive has to mean everyone; no one can be ignored. Seen in this light, FITM adopts a distinctive meaning that distinguishes it from the top-grading strategies that might exist in some small-scale scenarios noted earlier.

The clarification given here is important because it helps to prevent the spread of loose and imprecise terminology in the organisational talent literature. The suggested definition will help academics and practitioners to guide research into the ways that inclusive talent management is being, or could be, implemented. However, it should not be seen as a 'soft-touch'. If an employee does not respond to efforts to identify and deploy their talents to best effect, then it is legitimate for organisations to initiate performance management interventions and it is legitimate for an employee to continue in a job that underutilises their talents so long they want to and so long as their contribution is acceptable to the organisation – but inclusive talent management does compel the organisation to try to evaluate talents in the first place.

The chimeral nature of inclusive talent management is therefore shaped by how talent is defined. Compared to the inclusive approach, conventional exclusive talent programmes are only delivering partial talent management since they only focus on a small part of the workforce although, arguably, a large share of the available talent of immediate use to the organisation. Inclusive talent management requires all employees to be embraced and this raises the question how would inclusive talent management differ from well-designed HRM? The differences are that while HRM would be concerned with all employees all of the time, it would not usually reach so far as to explicitly assess talent (regardless of the job a person does) and actively sort them into best-fit positions in the organisation although some self-sorting will have occurred at the selection stage (Rivera 2012). Nor would it usually be proactive in helping employees deemed to have little fit to utilise their talent in another organisation or vocation that will increase their level of functioning. Redundancy and severance packages along with performance management interventions clearly help employees make a transition between one activity and another but they are a poor alternative to FITM.

A typology of talent management

Even in organisations that do not implement a structured-talent management programme, a hidden talent mechanism seems inevitable. In the absence of strategies to identify and develop talent, it is inevitable that some people will get noticed by line managers because of their contributions and their behaviour. Those who get noticed get tested-out and those who pass the tests will be given more opportunities. This latent strategy emerges out of day-to-day operations and is essentially a strategy that is loaded with politics and value judgements, and which favours people whose abilities enable them to adapt best to organisational conditions. Where deliberate talent strategies are attempted in

organisations, this analysis suggests four forms of talent management with the different forms defined by the scope of talent searching and the scope of employee inclusion.

- (1) *Partial exclusive talent management* is the dominant deliberate form. It is partial in the sense that only small proportions of employees, for example cohorts of aspiring managers, are included. It is also partial in relation to developing the totality of talent that the organisation has access to. It is exclusive in the sense that the majority of employees do not get the chance to be included in search for talent. Conventional appraisal systems are likely to be used to identify potential although additional assessment methods such as panel evaluations, psychometric testing and assessment centres may be used.
- (2) *Partial inclusive talent management* is again selective because only a small proportion of employees is eventually included in development programmes, but is initially more inclusive since talent scanning occurs across a wider range of employees to identify people who match the organisation's models and descriptions of talent. This form and the partial exclusive form can be seen as ways of indirectly getting the best out of the excluded groups through the provision of better leadership which results from immersion of the 'talented' in development programmes.
- (3) *FITM* is as defined above. The organisation puts systems in place to recognise the full range of talent in the organisation and to deploy talent according to job fit which may mean assisting some people to benefit from alternative vocations. This model engages with the totality (the fullness) of talent in an organisation and with the principle that those who need more help to function at their best get the help that they need.
- (4) *Elite talent management* might be termed the 'Ivy League' strategy of only recruiting and keeping people with demonstrable high potential. It is an extension of the idea of 'topgrading', i.e., filling all key roles needed for strategic success with top talent. Fixed-term contracts may be widely used to control tenure of those who fall behind. The need to implement conventional talent management programmes is diminished in organisations pursuing this model since most employees are already at the top of their field. However, relativity is ever-present and, even in an Ivy League strategy, further differentiation into super elites and stars may happen as finer-grained organisational stratification occurs.

We do not suggest that the four forms in the typology are necessarily static. While there will be institutional pressures to design and run talent programmes in particular ways in different sectors, across time it is possible that an organisation may switch between the latent and the partial forms quite readily. The typology offers greater clarity to talent research by giving a finer-grained categorisation that will enable scholars to better classify what they are observing in the field.

Positioning inclusive talent management

This conceptualisation of FITM is located firmly within the diverse definitions of HRD (Hamlin and Stewart 2011). It differs from HRD, however, in that HRD involves planned interventions at individual, group, organisational or national level. FITM, as defined here, is concerned with identifying talent at individual level only and of (re)locating that talent for the benefit of the individual. Only indirectly would FITM benefit groups and

organisations. Our conception fits to some extent in critical HRD as we depart from the dominant performance-driven paradigm; the purpose of FITM is not to appropriate human capital for economic ends (Trehan and Rigg 2011), rather its primary motivation is to enhance human well-being. The benefits of interventions aimed at raising general and firm-specific skills may be realised, via FITM, by better deployment of innate talents and possibly moderate the need for human capital planning. The key difference is perhaps that HRD is usually motivated by changing market conditions whereas FITM is motivated by facilitating scenarios where people can be and do what they value. This focus on being and doing at the individual level leads us to position FITM specifically in relation to positive psychology and the Capability Approach.

Positive psychology

Positive psychology is concerned with the strengths and potential that people have rather than overcoming their weaknesses and limitations. It helps us to appreciate human development and optimal functioning by focussing on dynamic change processes in people (Lopez and Snyder 2009). Like FITM, positive psychology is primarily focussed on applying the particular talents that a person has by providing ongoing opportunities to display them and on understanding the 'best' of the human condition (Dries 2013; Mills, Fleck, and Kozikowski 2013). If organisations can demonstrate that they are sincere in their attempts to enable identification and deployment of each employee's strengths, then a likely response by employees is one of enhanced happiness, fulfilment and well-being among other positive affective states. These feelings relate to improved assessments of the present by people and some, like optimism, affect the individual's assessment of their future (Peterson and Seligman 2003). Fundamentally, FITM would contribute to individuals finding greater meaning and meaningfulness in their work. The mechanism for this would occur by providing greater comprehension of the experiences that they are having and increasing the purpose of work in relation to life goals (Steger and Dik 2010).

Positivity also has ethical implications. If, via strategies for inclusive talent management, positive experiences become more widespread then because the organisation is showing greater responsibility to its employees and nurturing their potential, and attempting to capture 'the highest aspirations of human beings' (Manz et al. 2008, 3), its behaviour becomes increasingly more virtuous. When talent management occurs for reasons of improved organisational performance, then it cannot be considered virtuous because the humanistic developmental actions that go with it are not done for their own sake but for reasons of self-interest (Swales 2013). Inclusive talent management is inherently far more virtuous because it is done to advance the well-being and fortunes of others, even though the organisation may benefit from their enhanced performance.

Inclusivity is a way in which organisations can discharge their obligations to all employees which draws particular attention to minority groups in relation to talent searching (Smith 2001). While definitions of talent are not in themselves discriminatory, the ways that talent programmes are designed and implemented in organisations can be. For example, a multinational company that sees foreign assignments as essential for the development of future leaders (Brooke 2012) could, albeit unwittingly, be discriminating against people who because of some personal circumstance are less likely to volunteer for foreign postings.

Exclusive talent management maps onto the deficit view of human functioning through its reliance on the small proportion of employees who have talents highly congruent with helping to deliver what the organisation wants to achieve. In contrast, a

truly inclusive approach to managing talent captures the Maslowian ideal that people have an in-built need to self-actualise as a route to happiness brought about by the realisation of their full potential (Maslow 1943). While largely overlooked by organisational researchers who have pursued more easily defined and measured constructs, happiness is an important component of the positive movement and is receiving serious academic attention (Fisher 2010; Van de Voorde, Paauwe, and van Veldhoven 2012). Inclusive approaches fit with the positive psychology movement through their emphasis on enabling all employees to flourish. Positive psychology, and by implication inclusive talent management, relies on increasing the amount of hope that employees have in imagining useful and desirable future outcomes (Luthans and Jensen 2002). While hope could be dismissed as a vague construct, a moment's consideration reveals how strong an influence hope can have. Employees who feel that they have no hope of promotion, no hope of getting out of a dysfunctional department or no hope of doing a different job in the foreseeable future are likely to develop feelings of disaffection and withdrawal cognitions.

However, Fineman (2006, 273) questions whether a person's positive inclinations should be taken as 'immutable' as positiveness can be seen as just one expression of the self and positive narratives have 'different meanings and implications in different settings'. While it is easy to see that behaviour such as whistleblowing can be portrayed as heroic or treasonous depending on whose interests are considered, organisational behaviour that enables people to realise the potential of their innate and practiced talents appears to have higher ethical foundation as it is hard to see it as anything other than courageous and virtuous. Another caveat for inclusivity is that positive and negative emotions are 'in a continual, dialectical relationship' (Fineman 2006, 274), such that truly inclusive talent management will not necessarily produce states of happiness for all employees all of the time while their talents are being realised. For example, the process of talent identification may involve some stressful occasions for individuals that lead to negative emotions such as doubt and pessimism that, ideally but not necessarily, metamorphose eventually into energy, belonging and a better understanding of self (Craib 1994).

Capability Approach

FITM also derives conceptual and theoretical support from the Capability Approach which offers radical new insights to the talent arena (Downs and Swailes 2013). The Capability Approach does not get us far in explaining what inclusive talent management is, but it does provide theory for conceptualising it and offers information about how to evaluate inclusive talent management in practice because it proceeds from the idea that people should have the potential to flourish in all aspects of their life, public and private. It can therefore be used both for evaluating existing programmes and the degree to which they might be considered inclusive as well as for developing inclusive talent programmes. The Capability Approach has led to a new way of thinking about policy with regards to human development (The Human Development Approach) which indicates its potential in enabling a different way of thinking as well as alternative practices.

In essence, the Capability Approach concerns itself with the freedoms people have to live lives they value and have reason to value. It is in this sense a normative theory and the freedom to achieve well-being and self-respect is a moral imperative. It does not specify what would be necessary to achieve these things because it recognises difference and diversity and the fact that once people have basic freedoms they may apply them differently. Some people do not want to be labelled high performers and some do, for

example. The choice itself is of secondary importance. Of primary importance is that a range of valuable options should be available to all, whether or not they are realised. The difference between the possible and the effectively realised is encapsulated in two concepts. Capabilities express the substantive freedoms people enjoy to make choices and functionings; ‘the various things a person may value being and doing’ (Sen 1992, 40) and which they have reason to value being and doing (Sen 1999, 75). Nussbaum (2011) further differentiates the concept in order to ‘make the complexity of capabilities clear’ (20–21). In particular, it is important to understand that capabilities ‘are not just abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment’ (Nussbaum 2011, 20). She uses the term ‘combined capabilities’ to articulate these understandings. The notion of combined capabilities clarifies what might be understood in inclusive talent management. They require the presence of ability *and* the creation of the conditions in which abilities may flourish. ‘Personal abilities’ are therefore not discounted and find expression in the concept of internal capabilities. Although the distinction between combined and internal capabilities is not well-drawn, Nussbaum uses it as ‘a useful heuristic in diagnosing the achievements and shortcomings of a society’. She observes that ‘one job of a society that wants to promote the most important human capabilities is to support the development of internal capabilities’ (Nussbaum 2011, 21) and that, ‘it is not possible conceptually to think of a society producing combined capabilities without producing internal capabilities’.

Internal capabilities do not equate to ‘innate powers that are either nurtured or not nurtured’ (Nussbaum 2011, 23). Instead, they are trained or developed, in most cases, in ‘interaction with the social, economic, familial, and political environment’ (2011, 2). The concept of internal capabilities is important to inclusive talent management for a number of reasons. First, it suggests that everyone is capable of development which links it to the underpinning rationale of positive psychology and getting the best out of people. Second, it embraces the need to counter Fineman’s argument about ‘different meanings and implications in different settings’. The importance of context is always/already embedded in the idea of internal capabilities, because they are part of ‘combined capabilities’ which insist on recognition of contextual factors. Third, it reconfigures the *reason* we might want to shift from exclusive to inclusive talent management. In shifting the emphasis away from the needs of the organisation to those of the individual, internal capabilities also, paradoxically, bring out the social responsibilities of the organisation.

Nussbaum has also addressed the idea of basic capabilities, a term which has been understood in various ways at various times. For her, basic capabilities furnish a way of acknowledging that, ‘the idea of innate equipment does, however, play a role in the Human Development Approach’ (2011, 23) not least because the term ‘human development’ suggests ‘the unfolding of powers that human beings bring into the world’ (2011, 23). Indeed, ‘(b)asic capabilities are the innate faculties of the person that make later development and training possible’ (2011, 24). But, importantly, Nussbaum does not see these as ‘hardwired in the DNA’ or as ‘pure potential’ as they are the outcome of the interplay between internal capabilities and environment. They are in a sense a manifestation of the development of combined capabilities.

There is a radical underpinning to the idea of basic capabilities. In a meritocracy, more innately skilled people are treated better (as in exclusive talent programmes) and credence given to the idea that, ‘people’s political and social entitlements should be proportional to their innate intelligence or skill’ (2011, 24). However, in focusing on basic capabilities Nussbaum is stating that, ‘those who need more help to get above the threshold get more

help' (2011, 24). The idea of basic capabilities supports the fundamental tenets of the arguments set out for the ethical basis of talent programmes. If the goal of society/organisations is to treat all people with equal respect, helping those who already have the most is a mark of a society/organisation that is ethically failing. The setting of thresholds and supporting those who are not yet there to reach or exceed it addresses these failings.

Sustainability

Sustainability and exclusive talent management are often associated with economic growth (Ardichvili 2011), whereas inclusive talent management is primarily motivated by welfare not wages and profits. FITM fits with sustainable HRD by encouraging organisations to optimally apply the talents within them to expand the meaningfulness of work. This basic idea is not new (Schumacher 1973), but the dominant focus on economic expansion has led to greater acceptance of workforce differentiation models than of managing talents for individual good as a route to sustainability. FITM in relation to the typology developed above also speaks to diversity. While recognising diversity is not incompatible with differentiation models, there are dangers that differentiation may promote a particular kind of individual. A number of structurally and culturally mediated factors are implicated in seemingly subjective criteria such as gender and personal attractiveness (Biddle and Hamermesh 1998), which inform judgements about what constitutes the talented individual. FITM which connects the flourishing of individuals to that of the organisation has the potential to sidestep these factors since talent is seen to reside in all employees. However, this does not mean that recourse to essentialism and the attribution of particular talents to particular kinds of people (a talent for caring being attributed to women rather than men, for example) are automatically avoided, but the use of the Capability Approach in conceptualising and evaluating talent programmes goes a long way to promoting the kind of vigilance necessary in avoiding these pitfalls. Therefore, sincere efforts by organisations to position talent could reveal how HRD can connect corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethics and sustainability (Ardichvili 2013; Garavan and McGuire 2010), and our contribution to this agenda is to show how inclusive talent management can be conceptualised and contribute to thinking in this field.

Implications

For national HRD

Although the idea of FITM has universal relevance, it requires thinking-through in national contexts. FITM moves away from HRD based on human capital planning to offer instead a moral principle and humanist turn that could begin to shift cultural norms around how people are employed. In the same way that institutional pressures influence how conventional talent management takes shape in different organisations, then attempts to work with FITM will be similarly affected. What it would mean in the resource-rich but overstaffed public sectors found in the Gulf States (Adams and Page 2003; Bulmer 2000) compared to technologically advanced but cost-sensitive industrialised nations seems likely to differ greatly in the detail. Because of its grounding in capabilities, it is implicit that prescriptions are avoided as different things matter to people in different contexts and what matters must be upheld. Sen emphasises that, 'We use capabilities for different purposes. What we focus on cannot be independent of what we are doing and why' (2004,

49). Its realisation in practice, therefore, will depend much on pre-existing social, political, cultural and historic conditions and on geographical location (Lynham and Cunningham 2006), and it remains up to the people involved in different societies to figure out by democratic deliberation how FITM could and should be implemented, if at all. However, the principles of FITM connect to different national HRD priorities and examples include lifelong learning and workplace transformation in Singapore (Osman-Gani 2004), poverty alleviation in India (Rao 2004) and raising performance in South Africa (Lynham and Cunningham 2004).

Practical implications

Notwithstanding the international overlays that would occur, we suggest four general practical considerations simply to provoke further thinking and discussion and to reveal some of the difficulties of genuinely inclusive talent strategies. This list is not intended to be exhaustive and there are probably many more.

First, a range of general talent development programmes is suggested to ensure that everyone has opportunities to develop basic and internal capabilities. With respect to basic capabilities, the challenge would be to set appropriate criteria and ensure that these are met. However, thought also needs to be given to those who already meet the criteria and those who exceed them who should not be neglected. The Capability Approach, to reiterate, is about expanding freedoms so that each person has the opportunity to live lives they value and have reason to value. The notion of criteria and the concept of basic capabilities are therefore not synonymous with holding back aspiration or an indication that those whose valuable functionings are linked more or less explicitly to success, productivity and performance at work require more or less attention. Indeed, because the approach focuses on ends and not means and because the acknowledgement of difference and diversity is a central tenet, ensuring that some are not left behind does not mean dragging others down. The concept of basic capabilities nevertheless reconfigures talent management in such a way as to serve as a model for inclusivity. In terms of internal capabilities, focusing on the responsibility of the organisation to promote the conditions in which personal abilities are allowed to flourish might itself be read as a statement of a FITM programme and suggests both the means and the ends of fully inclusive strategies.

Second, an important part of the talent identification process is enabling people to think deeply about what matters to them and how those values align with organisational values and interests. As such, what opportunities might be provided to employees to reveal these deep insights and what methods might be used to make fair assessments about a person's talent? Some sort of appraisal meeting seems necessary but appraisal would need a shift in focus away from performance and targets towards discussions of what the individual thinks they contribute and has to offer and where that offer can be applied. Candid exchanges of views are required and some 'adult' conversations without prejudice would be necessary to reconcile the views of both individuals and management which may be some distance apart. This requirement of fully inclusive strategies could draw on the approaches used in Appreciative Inquiry as a way forward given that it was a precursor to positive psychology and the strength-based movement (Bushe 2011).

A third implication is that organisations will need to give employees a bigger say in the activities that they want to evaluate or try out. Greater flux is needed to maximise the likelihood of finding opportunities to match the wishes of employees with the needs of the organisation. This intersection is of crucial importance as it influences the rate of best fit, i.e.,

the rate at which employees are located into roles that best match their strengths and potential. As such, there has to be substantial movement of people between jobs or departments at least in the initial stages. This happens normally to some extent, but often only in response to restructuring or when vacancies are filled by formal mechanisms. Job rotation has a long tradition in HRD (Cappelli 2008) and is known for its effectiveness in helping employers to learn about the strengths of their employees in a range of contexts (Eriksson and Ortega 2006). Equally important, rotation is a way of enabling employees to develop their skills and correlates with positive outcomes such as salary and promotion (Campion, Cheraskin, and Stevens 1994). Organisations would need to be more open to greater movement of people between jobs to overcome the ‘stickiness’ that ties people to the same job for too long with the accompanying danger that their talent becomes suppressed. This presents a challenge to many workplaces as, outside high-technology sectors, the extent of job rotation is usually low (Osterman 1994; Pil and MacDuffie 1996).

Fourth, organisations should approach competence frameworks and similar devices for codifying skills with caution because they may act to constrain rather than liberate talent. Although commonplace in partial talent models to encapsulate the skills and attributes most highly prized, their universalist and overgeneralised nature (Capaldo, Iandoli, and Zollo 2006) could act as a deterrent to many employees. To provide a better fit with the more idiosyncratic needs of inclusive talent strategies, organisations would need to be more alert to how a person’s observed talent and their potential are being influenced by operating and supervision practices, which may be sub-standard, and the quality of social interactions with close work colleagues which will influence their contribution and reputation.

These implications challenge the capabilities of HR departments many of which serve largely as technical specialists. We say this because, despite growing evidence that HR practices are associated with performance, the role of HR departments in implementing these practices is weak at best (Guest and Bryson 2009). There has to be far greater involvement of line managers and of groups and teams of employees in agreeing how a fully inclusive talent strategy could begin to function in an organisation. Past research on public and private sector management differences strongly suggests that some specific features of public management, e.g., lower motivation by economic rewards, are likely to moderate the presence of exclusive talent strategies relative to the private sector (Boyne 2002; Buelens and Van den Broeck 2007). Furthermore, organisations with organisational and institutional cultures that are intensely competitive may see an inclusive talent philosophy, despite its moral superiority, as inappropriate and antithetical to the achievement of strategic goals. This more nuanced view does suggest that inclusive talent management will not align with many situations where harder-edged talent philosophies have evolved in response to operating conditions and isomorphism may be seen as better suited to organisational survival.

A further implication concerns the economics of FITM which could be seen as costly and unrealistic at least from within the existing orthodoxy of using people as resources. However, there is a growing body of research connecting human capital and positive psychology to organisational performance (Crook et al. 2011; Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes 2002; Newman et al. 2014). It is also clear that workers respond more positively to HR practices when they attribute management actions to improving their well-being rather than to improving performance (Nishii, Lepak, and Schneider 2008).

Conclusions

The key point of this paper is to suggest that if inclusive talent management is to be treated as a distinctive aspect of the nomological network for talent, and as a separate

topic for research and scholarship, then it requires a clear definition which in-turn requires a particular conception of the notion of talent and how it could be ‘managed’. Rather than being something that is relative to others, as underpins the exclusive approach, talent has to be treated as an absolute characteristic of individuals and as something that needs to be identified and deployed in roles that map onto present and potential talent. Given its emphasis on looking within people rather than between them, a much higher level of self-management will be needed at individual and group level to bring talents to the surface.

FITM fits with Kantian ideals of treating others as one would wish to be treated and of seeing workers as ends not means. While Kantian approaches can be criticised for being unrealistic given the challenges of organisational survival, they can provide strong ethical guidance when considering how people should be managed (Guest and Woodrow 2012). However, an important question raised by this paper, one which is central to understanding the interface between CSR and HRD, deserves further research. It concerns the extent to which the expansion of the freedoms of employees falls inside a reasonable sphere of organisational action. There is perhaps a danger in FITM that, albeit inadvertently, the individual surrenders too far to the corporate mission. As such, where does the organisation’s responsibility for providing development opportunities end and where should it end? Further conceptualisation of the legitimate reach of organisations in terms of developing people should enable better positioning of different talent strategies in the wider debates about HRD and CSR. Two further research areas are suggested. First, the international reach and feasibility of FITM need considering in the light of cross-cultural management theory. How, for instance, could multinational companies running global talent programmes approach FITM in the light of the interplay between substantive national cultural differences and the social acceptance of differentiation and inclusivity/exclusivity? Second, the economics of FITM should be considered and theoretical treatments of labour market functioning could be a starting point.

The concepts developed above should help researchers to more carefully evaluate and classify the diverse talent strategies encountered in organisations. Better classification should lead to better understanding of their relative impacts on individuals and on organisations. Without this greater level of refinement, talent research will continue to suffer from the inconsistent use of terminology which will hamper progress towards a better appreciation of a widespread but still little understood and ethically problematic HRD practice.

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