Introduction: International talent management research – a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach

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International talent management has become an important, and even critical topic for scholarly discussion, policy debates and the business community. Talent management has emerged as a core rhetoric in the domains of contemporary human resource management and people management, driven primarily by the experience of the phenomenon in the business world (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015). In tandem, the notion of talent management has become a legitimate academic field, evidenced by an increasingly vibrant and burgeoning literature and scholarly canon (Cascio & Boudreau, 2016). However, the phenomenon-driven extant field has led to theoretical fragmentation (Collings, Scullion & Vaiman, 2015). Notably, the field has evolved significantly over the last decade. There have been several books centring on talent management (Al Ariss, 2014; Collings, Mellahi & Cascio, 2017; Collings, Scullion & Caligiuri, 2018) and a number of dedicated special issues in academic journals such as *Journal of World Business*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management* and *Human Resource Management Review*, among others.

Why do we need this new *Research Handbook of International Talent Management*? We argue that talent management research still tends to be lacking theoretical underpinnings, especially from a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and comparative perspective and, moreover, through a broader geographical coverage around the globe. Scientists, including social scientists (Trewhella, 2009; Van Noorden, 2015), are urgently encouraged to adopt a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to tackle societal and economic grand challenges facing the global economy today. This rationale justified our belief, efforts and commitment in producing this research handbook. The aim of this handbook is to respond to this gap by assembling a rich range of leading researchers, scholars and academic thought-leaders to debate and advance the conceptualization and understanding of international talent management – a multifaceted area that covers multiple domains of management and organization studies.
STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THIS RESEARCH HANDBOOK

This research handbook consists of 15 chapters broadly categorized into three parts across several sub-domains of management and organization studies, including entrepreneurship and innovation, international business, human resource management, cross-cultural management, public management and public policy. In so doing, we hope to move this important and promising line of scholarly inquiry on international talent management forward from a multidisciplinary perspective with the intention of casting light on stimulating the intellectual discussion via cross-fertilization. Furthermore, we embrace the notion of the ‘West-meets-East’ perspective (Liu & Almor, 2016) by adopting a comparative approach to obtain collectively a nuanced and contextualized understanding of international talent management research.

Part I: International Talent Management, Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Part I engages with the entrepreneurship and innovation literature by examining why, how, and to what extent international talent management can contribute to innovation and entrepreneurship activities. In the extant talent management literature, this sub-field of entrepreneurship and innovation remains a less explored territory.

In Chapter 1, Baglieri, Cinici and Crupi offer interesting insights by juxtaposing talent management and innovation management literature streams. By performing bibliometric analyses and visualization techniques, their findings illuminate the evolutionary trajectory of talent management literature from 2008 to 2018 and demonstrate the extent to which talent management literature connects and interrelates with innovation management strands. Against the backdrop of digital society and the knowledge economy (Teece, 2010), digital transformation and innovation can have a profound impact on the future of business and talent management (Zeng, 2018). By mapping out these two distinct yet related literature streams, Chapter 1 points out a promising line of scholarly inquiry by connecting talent management with innovation research.

Chapter 2 expands the mainstream innovation research by reaching out to the relatively nascent and dynamic literature stream on servitization (Baines & Lightfoot, 2013). Servitization has been deployed by traditional manufacturing firms to enhance their competitive advantages, either through expanding their services offerings or gaining servitization portfolios by collaborative partnerships (Liu et al., 2019; Xing et al., 2017). In order to deliver the promises of servitization, accessing talent becomes
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the key and essential task. In Chapter 2, Opazo-Basáez, Vendrell-Herrero and Bustinza empirically examine the ability of firms to access qualified talent and how this affects their strategic orientation by studying 285 servitized companies from seven different industries, located in five different countries. The evidence reveals that companies that have ready access to qualified talent for servitization tend to servitize at higher levels. Chapter 2 is one of the first studies that connect talent management with innovation and servitization, thus exemplifying a fruitful line of scholarly inquiry with good potential for both talent management and servitization literature.

Chapter 3 focuses on entrepreneurship activities by highlighting a unique talent pool, namely the serial entrepreneurs. Serial or habitual entrepreneurs start multiple businesses and often they can serve as a role model for other aspiring entrepreneurs in an entrepreneurship community. By building upon the business incubation literature (Mian, Lamine & Fayolle, 2016) and the emergent ecosystem literature more broadly (Adner, 2017; Jacobides, Cennamo & Gawer, 2018), Myint, Vyakarnam and Huener use Cambridge (UK) as the empirical setting and make the argument that serial entrepreneurs can serve as ‘incubators’, as they are individuals with inspiration and leadership who can mobilize resources during the process of incubation. They can generate a lasting impact for incubation and entrepreneurship ecosystems over several decades. Chapter 3 also sheds light on the importance of serial entrepreneurs, as high-profile talent can impact on the scaling and growth of entrepreneurial ventures (DeSantola & Gulati, 2017).

In Chapter 4, Redlich and Lattemann focus on the influence of talent management on creativity from the design-thinking perspective (Beckman & Barry, 2007; Dunne & Martin, 2006). Design thinking has received significant attention from scholars and practitioners in recent years and has good potential to address important societal and economic challenges. However, the cognitive aspect of individuals and talent can significantly influence the process and outcomes of design-thinking endeavours (Liedtka, 2015). Therefore, cultivating the mindset becomes essential to leveraging the power of design thinking. Similarly, embracing curiosity may help organizations to encourage talent to identify and discover innovative ideas by exploiting the potential of talent at their disposal (Gino, 2018).

Part II: International Talent Management and International Business

Part II centres on the connection between talent management and international business, especially multinational enterprises (MNEs). Although the existing body of knowledge on talent management has examined various
aspects of talent management in the domain of international business and MNEs (Collings, Mellahi & Cascio, 2018), our collection contains several distinctive characteristics, both theoretically and geographically. As acknowledged, talent management is a crucial challenge for emerging market multinationals (EMNEs) venturing abroad (Liu & Meyer, 2018), and expatriates have been identified as an important talent pool (Meyer & Xin, 2018). However, the approaches to managing expatriates of EMNEs effectively is yet to be further understood (Zhu et al., 2018).

In Chapter 5, Fan, Su and Yan examine this topic by drawing upon the institutional work theoretical lens (Lawrence, Leca & Zilber, 2013). Using a cross-case qualitative comparison research method, they identify six forms of global work and demonstrate the variation and complexity of global work undertaken by expatriates in EMNEs dynamically shaping home and host institutions.

Continuing the notion of global work, Chapter 6 examines global work arrangements in a unique organizational setting, namely the born-virtual organization. A departure from the conventional virtual organization (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram & Garud, 1999), the born-virtual organization connects with the born-global firm literature (Glaister et al., 2014; Liu, 2017). In Chapter 6, Vecchi draws on the qualitative analysis and illustrates how the born-virtual organization has implemented global talent management, such as distributed work in virtual teams, to fulfil global work arrangements.

As a closely related literature to expatriate management (Baruch, Altman & Tung, 2016), inpatriate management, a process dealing with the relocation of foreign subsidiary employees to corporate headquarters, remains a less understood alternative international assignment type (Stokes et al., 2016). In Chapter 7, Portniagin and Froese conduct a comprehensive literature review, and summarize the key factors of successful inpatriate assignments at their different stages, including before, during, and after the inpatriate assignments. Their analysis provides implications for future research in answering the challenges stemming from the implementation and utilization of inpatriation.

By connecting cross-cultural management and talent management, Ashta, Stokes and Hughes in Chapter 8 investigate the lived experiences of Japanese expatriates in India and examine tension in communication between Indian and Japanese employees and the influence of the economic and social contexts. Using a comparative perspective, this revealing analysis suggests that while there is evident communication friction in the Japan–India context, the extent of this does not necessarily differ dramatically from other cross-cultural dyads. Their findings challenge the prevailing theories developed in Western contexts and join the indigenous
management research debate (Xing & Liu, 2015). Recognizing and appreciating the role of context may be conducive to examining the assumptions and boundary conditions of established expatriate and talent management theories while generating new theoretical insights (Liu & Vrontis, 2017).

Chapter 9 connects talent management with corporate governance (Aguilera et al., 2008). Ezzamel and Zhao examine the compensation disparity between the highest-paid director (HPD, typically the CEO, president, general manager or chair of the board) and directors below him or her, and director turnover. Based on a sample of over 2500 Chinese listed companies from 2005 to 2014, they find that higher compensation disparity between the HPD and other directors has no impact on the turnover of HPDs, but this high compensation disparity is associated with higher non-HPD turnover. Further, directors are more likely to leave when they are underpaid compared to the industrial benchmark. This analysis offers some empirical evidence to bolster the importance of monetary motivation for retaining talent, although financial incentive should not be regarded as the only important cause when considering the moral motivation of talent (Ariely, Bracha & Meier, 2009).


Part III focuses on talent management, sustainability and public management, a much less explored sub-field in talent management. In Chapter 10, Spraul, Hufnagel, Friedrich and Brill examine the role of the sustainability manager and explore the pathways to cultivating such talent for organizations, large and small. In the context of envisaging, articulating and achieving UN Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), sustainability constitutes an essential component for organizations to develop and sustain competitive advantages. Companies may strategically use sustainability management or corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a branding or recruitment instrument to win the ‘war for talent’ (Bhattacharya, Sen & Korschun, 2008). Considering the behavioural microfoundation of sustainability (Cooper et al., 2017), moral motivation of talent may drive their arrival at, and departure from, organizations. Importantly, effective communication of CSR plays a critical role in relation to talent management (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010).

In Chapter 11, Kreismann and Talaulicar highlight the importance of the development of ethical competence of talents by connecting the literature on talent training and business ethics management. By providing the theoretical foundations in moral development, Chapter 11 outlines different design dimensions of ethics training with empirical insights about
the effectiveness of such training programmes. In so doing, it points out where future research directions show promise.

Chapter 12 expands global talent management into the higher education sector by investigating the experience of Singapore. Singapore has been recognized as a rising centre for global innovation hubs (Kao, 2007), Liu’s analysis on global talent management in Singapore may explain why its higher education sector can become globally competitive in a relatively short period of time. The most crucial asset in the higher education sector is talent, ranging from students, to faculty, to senior management team. Either building university capability organically by developing the talent pool, or searching for an alternative pathway externally in substituting the university capability, depends largely on the local situation and institutional contexts (Liu & Huang, 2018).

Using a comparative perspective, in Chapter 13 Lee and Rezaei compare talent strategies in the public sector in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Drawing from both literature review and policy documents, they exhibit the commonality and distinctive characteristics in government-related programmes in terms of attracting, selecting and cultivating talent for the public sector. The talent management in the public sector adds to the conversation about the relevance of context for talent management by embracing a pluralistic approach (Thunnissen, Boselie & Fruytier, 2013).

Staying in the context of Asia, while shifting the attention to China, Fang in Chapter 14 examines the impact of government policies on talent attraction in China. Using two theoretical frameworks, human capital and the resource-based view of the firm, Chapter 14 traces the historic evolution and current state of talent management policies and practices in China. As the largest emerging economy, China’s experience might offer some helpful and insightful inference for other transitional economies (Wang & Liu, 2016). Against the rapid economic growth and societal development in China, the talent management landscape is changing at a fast pace, and necessitates a careful reconsideration for MNEs, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and entrepreneurs.

Last, by incorporating an inclusive approach and critical perspective, in Chapter 15 Griffith analyses the contested nature of the notion of talent management by examining the definition of talent, theoretical frameworks used in talent management literature, and the diffusion of talent management from the USA across the globe. Importantly, in the same notion, the meanings and implications of talent management can vary significantly across different contexts. Using international recruitment and retention in the UK National Health Service (NHS) as an illustrative example, Chapter 15 reinforces a pluralist and inclusive view on talent management.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research handbook has assembled a vibrant and dynamic community of leading scholars on talent management in the global context. We hope our book can add additional value to the existing body of knowledge, inspire and sustain scholars’ interests, and foster the further growth of this important academic field. When reflecting upon the process of preparing this research handbook, we believe we have accomplished the goal of drawing together interesting work that charters promising territory for future research endeavours for early-career researchers and PhD students as they embark on, and pursue, their academic careers. Talent management itself as an academic field is an important topic, and it could become even more intellectually stimulating and challenging when connecting with other disciplines and literature streams. This book offers a novel attempt to elucidate the multidisciplinary nature of talent management and encourages future scholarship to continue pursuing these forms of inclusive and multidisciplinary approach. When recalling Professor James G. March’s statement that scholarship is not a job but a calling, we wish to inspire you, our readers, to reflect and act upon a scholar’s quest (March, 2018) with curiosity, creativity and rigour.

REFERENCES

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Introduction


