Fashion, fad or fruitful new direction for HRD? A critical analysis of talent management

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Abstract
Talent Management or TM is a term that has recently come into prominence in HRD, yet most publications have been in the practitioner press and it has not received much critical analysis or empirical study. This paper raises a number of questions for TM, such as what is talent and how is the term socially constructed; does TM challenge egalitarian views of HRD are constructions of ‘talent’ and TM gendered or at odds with diversity/EO programmes; is talent the main driver of organizational performance; and is TM just a management fashion or fad? The paper proposes a more collective, social capital view of TM, and implications for further research are discussed.

Introduction: HRD and talent management

‘Talent Management’ (TM) has recently attracted attention from HRD academics and practitioners; many books, articles, and surveys have been published and consulting firms attracted by its market potential. Sandler (2006) and Stkoystad (2004) identify TM as top of the list of critical HR issues for organisations, whilst IDC (2005) projects TM to be the next core competency for HR, and Boudreau and Ramstad (2005) contend that TM constitutes a new paradigm for HR. Berger (2004) claims that TM will become the primary responsibility for the HR departments of the future; traditional HR activities will be outsourced, directly transferred to employees through the use of technology, or delegated to line managers. HR functions that remain will mainly deal with talent issues and the nurturing of a work climate that fosters and stimulates talented individuals through tailored employment packages. For Bersin (2007), TM has brought real business meaning for HR professionals as the ‘steward of the organisation’s talent management process’ (p. 15).

In recent years, TM has become a common phrase, but it did not appear until the late 1990s, when McKinsey & Company first coined the term in their report, later book, the ‘The War for Talent’, which exposed this issue as a strategic business challenge and a critical driver of corporate performance (Michaels et al 2001); the proposition that the success of organizations is at least partly dependent upon a group of ‘super performers’ has proven influential, especially with top managers.

Technological change, changing business models, the ‘knowledge economy’ and globalization of markets have increased the demand for highly skilled people. Meanwhile, workforce ageing and an inadequate supply of young talent have created a supply gap in many labour markets. The creation, development and retention of a ‘talented’ workforce, which is more mobile and informed than ever before, has increasingly come to be the focus of HRD strategies and attention. Due to demographic shifts, organizations across the globe have faced a major and potentially long-term struggle to fill job vacancies with appropriately skilled employees. Associated with these demographic shifts, the nature of the psychological contract has changed. Talent shortages have meant that the labour market has swung back towards the job-hunter’s advantage (though it may swing back again in any recession).
However, there are many gaps and omissions left for further theoretical development, not least because of TM's novelty; is TM just a re-packaging of old ideas? Some believe that TM is simply a repackaging of old ideas with a fresh name (e.g. Adamsky, 2003), whilst Cappelli (2008) points out that many practises associated with TM such as assessment centres and 360 degree appraisal, were developed in the 1950s, when stable bureaucratic careers in large organisations were the norm. Moran (2005) however argues that TM is not just another fashionable term; it is more than the latest management fad, because it is crucial to business success. Duttagupta (2005) has also observed that ‘TM is a lot more than yet another HR process; the talent mindset is not just another HR fad’ (p. 2).

There is much practitioner-focused literature and activity, but perhaps surprisingly, the concept of TM has not attracted a corresponding amount of critical scrutiny, with relatively little empirical work on the effectiveness of TM strategies and into the issues arising from them (Lewis and Heckman 2006, Iles 2007, 2008, Collings and Mellahi 2009).

Critical questions include:

- What is talent? how is the term socially constructed in a range of social, cultural and organizational contexts and why do these constructions differ?

- Does TM challenge egalitarian models of HRD, presenting a differentiated/segmented view of the workforce in which particular talents are more highly prized than others? ‘Talent’ is a relative term; talents exist in relation to the ‘untalented’, or ‘less talented’.

- Are constructions of ‘talent’ and TM strategies gendered, or at odds with equal opportunity/diversity discourses, strategies and programmes?

- Is ‘talent’ the main driver of organisational performance?

- Is TM just a management fashion or fad?

This paper will discuss these questions, beginning with a discussion of what is meant by ‘talent’ and ‘talent management’ before critically analysing tensions between talent management and diversity management and the contributions of individual ‘talent’ to organizational performance, before concluding with a discussion as to whether TM offers anything substantive to HRD, or is a management fashion or fad.

1) What is Talent?
The CIPD (2007) study of TM in the UK claims that TM requires HR professionals and their clients to understand how they define talent, who they regard as “the talented” and what their typical background might be. Many organizations prefer to formulate their own meaning of talent rather than
accept a universal or prescribed definition. Thus, they tend to have different
talent targets. Whilst talent can be categorized as valuable, rare, and hard-to-
imitate, specific prescriptions regarding ‘talented employees’ are unclear, and
there is no universal definition of great talent. The definitions-in-use of talent
will depend on an organization’s business strategy, the type of firm, the
overall competitive environment, and so on. Therefore, it is often argued that
definitions of talent should be tailored to individual organizations.

2) Does TM challenge egalitarian views of HRD?

An influential perspective on TM sees the talent defining process closely allied
with the identification of ‘key positions’ in the organization (Huselid et al 2005).
The starting point is to identify strategically critical jobs (‘A positions’); just as
effective business and marketing strategy requires differentiating a firm’s
products and services in ways that create value for customers, an effective
HR strategy also requires workforce differentiation. Focussing on A players
alone, the ‘exclusive-people’ perspective, may not lead to high-performance if
such players are not in strategically-important positions, not necessarily
revealed by hierarchical title or level of difficulty in filling positions, but
exhibiting wide variations in work quality (customer service in some firms,
heads of clinical trials in others). Whilst failing to attend to B positions, such as
pilots in airlines, may have great risks, investing in them to the same extent as
A positions does not offer the same return. People in A positions should then
be guaranteed maximum opportunities for their development, and a perfect
match of A players and A positions is expected to lead to ‘A’ performance.
Given the limited financial and managerial resources available in most
organizations to attract, select, develop and retain top performers, companies
simply cannot afford to have A players in all positions; thus, a ‘portfolio’
approach is recommended, which involves placing the best A employees in
strategic positions, good B performers in support positions, and eliminating
‘nonperforming’ jobs and C employees that do not add value, or outsourcing
such positions.

This perspective emphasizes ‘workforce differentiation’: A, B, and C players
should get disproportionate attention and investment. Such a perspective is
often linked to emerging perspectives on ‘employer branding’ (eg Martin
and Hetrick 2006, Barrow and Mosely 2005) to describe how organizations
market their offerings to potential and existing employees, communicate
with them and maintain their loyalty to the ‘employer brand’, a set of
attributes and qualities that makes an organisation distinctive, promises a
particular kind of employment experience, and appeals to those people
who will thrive and perform best in its culture (CIPD 2009). Jenner and
Taylor (2009) suggest that employer branding has arisen due the power of
brands, HR’s search for credibility, interest in employee engagement, and
labour market conditions, including the ‘war for talent’. An employer brand
helps organizations compete effectively for talent, and enhances
engagement through recruitment, and retention; the organisation is
perceived positively by existing, potential and former employees as a good
place to work. The brand should inform approaches to HRD, through
recruitment and attraction, induction, communications, performance
management and career development, identifying how the current brand is perceived by different stakeholders through surveys and focus groups, identifying its distinctive ‘value proposition’, and applying this through recruitment and induction/HRD processes and materials and other talent-attracting programmes including web-sites.

The value-proposition describing what the organization both stands for and requires links to earlier work on the ‘psychological contract’, and some organizations may develop more segmented approaches. As employees are not homogenous, the value proposition can be tailored to segments, with different elements of the proposition emphasised to different employee groups, such as different generational groups or job types and locations. One example is the offer of different ‘flexible benefits’ packages reflecting different employee segment needs and interests. Often such ‘segments’ might be defined in terms of age, or ‘generational diversity’. However, researchers have not investigated this in depth, and what HRD approaches are appropriate to manage it effectively, a striking lacuna because the experience and skills of older workers means they have the potential to make a particularly significant contribution to an organisation and also because it is clear that age discrimination persists. The legal profession for example depends on personal networks, built up over time, and on the reputations and experience of individual solicitors. Despite this, solicitors’ firms, and in particular those in the corporate sector, tend to encourage early retirement. At the other end of the spectrum, they are highly reluctant to take on legal trainees who are older than mid to late 20s (Sommerlad, 2006, 2008).

In addition, there has been work (mostly in the USA) on generational differences in values, aspirations and motivation, drawing distinctions between ‘veterans’ attracted to workplaces offering stability and valuing experience, baby-boomers placing a high value on participation, ‘generation Xers’ at ease with insecurity, but requiring work-life balance, and ‘nexters’ or the ‘I generation’, intolerant of unfair discrimination (eg Torrington et al 2005). Much of this research has employed marketing perspectives towards these generational groups, with implications for branding, recruitment and selection, and HRD. In addition, most research has been American, so its relevance to the UK has not been established, and it has often failed to take into account intersecting differences such as class, age, race/ethnicity and gender in developing broad-brush generalisations over generational differences.

As Tansley (2009) points out, not only is there not universal acceptance that taking a generational segmentation view is practical, but it raises issues for Equal Opportunities (EO) and diversity. Appealing to one target segment potentially acts as a dissuader to other segments; this focus on ‘brand promise’ may raise issues relating to unfair age or gender discrimination, an issue not apparently experienced to the same degree by organisations targeting products to different generations. This raises the next critical issue for TM, its relationship to diversity and EO.
3). Are constructions of ‘talent’ and TM strategies gendered, or at odds with equal opportunity/ diversity discourses, strategies and programmes?

Effective equal opportunity/ diversity management programmes have historically been used to provide a legally defensible position against charges of illegal discrimination. Further, current legislation places a duty on employers to implement diversity and equality strategies; diversity practices are no longer only concerned with statutory compliance, and with EO (Kossek et al., 2005). An extensive range of studies suggests that a diverse workforce, chosen on the basis of merit, brings many positive benefits (Maxwell et al., 2001); diversity management entails not only recognising but also valuing and harnessing workforce differences, so that individual talents are fully utilized in meeting organizational goals. Thus, while EO was primarily driven by legislation, diversity management is driven by the business case.

A diverse workforce will be characterised by multiple, intersecting differences: for instance, age, gender, marital status, social status, disability, sexual orientation, religion, personality, ethnicity and culture. The variety of beliefs, understandings, values, worldviews, attributes and unique forms of knowledge which result have been shown to improve the quality of management decisions and provide superior solutions to organizational problems (Wilson and Iles 1999), in particular contributing to organizational success by enabling wider access to increasingly diverse markets (Cox & Blake, 1991; Iles, 1995), enhancing innovation and improving corporate image and reputation (Kandola, 1995, Cassell, 1996, Brammer et al 2009). It is widely recognized that effective diversity management can be achieved through using appropriate HRD strategies (Litvin, 1997), and, further, that diversity management should be at the heart of HRD architecture, practices and policies. Leadership and administrative heritage influence the nature and form of careers offered to both men and women (Truss, 1999). Recent research shows that women leaders are often offered more precarious leadership positions, such as the ‘glass cliff’ of being offered precarious leadership positions (Ryan and Haslam 2005,2009; Adams et al 2009), and are still disadvantaged in professional services firms (Kumra and Vinnicombe 2008). Male leaders also appear to be changing, with more expressing a desire for a better work-life balance (Cornelius and Skinner 2008), and work-life balance debates need to take into account minority ethnic women’s experiences (Kamenou 2008).

Recent years have also seen a re-thinking of traditional leadership models and an emphasis on a ‘shared’ or ‘distributed’ model (Iles and Precece 2006). In contrast to the quintessentially male sole ‘heroic leader’, these models entail a shift to a more collective approach to working and are often associated with women, leading to predictions that leadership roles are becoming feminised. Other trends have also encouraged the belief that it has become increasingly possible for women to attain elite positions: the disintegrative impact of recent socio-economic upheavals on traditional social categories has supposedly led us into a post-modern world of multiple identities conducive to individual mobility projects.
However, the statistical evidence suggests that it continues to be difficult for women to become leaders; in fact some sectors actually show a decline. Various factors may explain this persistent inequality. Not everyone has the same access to resources for self-making; the self who is free to engage in almost untrammelled agency appears to be a reconstituted version of the (male) rational actor whose reproduction depends on the traditional private/public binary. Thus the historical exclusion of women and their association with caring undermines their authority claims, and their inclusion in leadership positions-and talent pools?- continues to be equivocal.

Further, the eclipse of welfare capitalism has increased the burden of social reproduction; working patterns have not only remained structured in terms of masculine characteristics, but under neo-liberalism the working day has grown longer, and such market values as aggressive self promotion have flourished. Recent interest in talent management/ employee branding may reinforce this focus on autonomous leaders, on merit/talent, and on enhancing and legitimising workforce segmentation.

The possible tensions and contradictions between TM and diversity or EO programmes have sometimes been recognised in the literature. For example, CIPD (2007) report that a major issue for Derby City Council was that, in common with much public sector employment, it had a commitment to open access to all jobs through external advertising; giving special opportunities to the identified 'managerial talent pool' that had been already been given leadership development opportunities challenged long established principles and practice on EO and diversity. However, it recognised that the talent pool had to be utilised, otherwise it would impact negatively on employee retention and motivation; there also needed to be a more proactive approach to developing existing internal capability in order to address the current lack of women on the senior management team and the under representation of ethnic minorities in managerial roles. An Equality Impact Assessment was therefore conducted for the Head of Service Succession Pool and targets set to increase diversity at this level.

4) Is ‘talent’ the main driver of organizational performance?

The above discussion raised debates over the ‘heroic’ autonomous leader and individualistic conceptions of ‘talent’ and ‘leadership’; Martin (2007) similarly argues that assumptions about the contribution of individual employee knowledge and skills to performance need to be questioned. Alvesson and Svenningsson (2003: 961) point out that normative leadership research sees ‘the leader as consistent essence, a centred subject with a particular orientation’; however, leaders are not ‘the autonomous, self-determining individual with a secure unitary identity (at) the centre of the social universe (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: 98). Yukl (1999: 293) suggests that ‘an alternative perspective would be to describe leadership as a shared process of enhancing the collective and individual capacity of people to accomplish their work roles effectively…the leadership actions of any individual leader are much less important than the collective leadership provided by members of
the organisation’. For House and Adtja (1997: 457) ‘leadership involves collaborative relationships that lead to collective action’. ‘Leadership development’ has however tended to be equated with ‘leader development’, focusing on the training and development of the individual competencies, skills and attributes of the leader.

Iles and Preece (2006) raise similar concerns about the focus on ‘human capital’ rather than ‘social capital’ in leadership development; Day (2000) develops a similar argument about the conceptual confusion between leader development and leadership development, arguing the need to link leader development, based on enhancing human capital, and leadership development, based on creating social capital. Unlike ‘leadership competencies’, social capital cannot be regarded as a commodity, and one sole actor or ‘leader’ cannot have ‘ownership rights’.

This distinction between leaders and leadership (Grint, 2005; Boydell et al, 2004) can also be applied to ‘talent management’; this too needs greater emphasis on more collective and contextual processes, and should not be conflated with developing individual talent. TM is thus re-oriented to building capacity in anticipation of unforeseen challenges, and the analysis of the complex interactions between the ‘talent’ and the social and organisational environment. TM is therefore a social process engaging members of a community, an emergent property of social interaction in context involving using social/ relational processes to help build commitments among members of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). The focus is on building networked relationships that enhance cooperation and resource exchange and social capital, based on relationships created through interpersonal exchanges (Bourdieu, 1986). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) see social capital as having three dimensions: structural (social interactions, assessed by network ties and formed by commitments), relational (rooted in networked relationships, such as trust and trustworthiness) and cognitive (resources embodied in shared representations and collective meanings, such as cultures and shared visions based on common values). Though human capital ‘talent’ development does impact on organizational performance, it is important to consider also social and organizational competence.

This is confirmed by Groysberg et al (2004) who found that when professional service firms hired ‘Stars’, often their performance plunged, the team’s performance declined, and the organization’s market value fell, as performance is not just attributable to individuals, but to groups, context, external social networks, company resources, systems and processes. Investing in individual talent alone may neglect major repairs to the organization as a whole, and encourage arrogance and elitism among the ‘talent pool’. A focus on individual talent, reflected in hero worship and excessive executive pay, may also breed narcissism, over-reliance on financial incentives and ruthlessness. As ‘Talent’ is not fixed over time, TM may encourage a focus on hiring outsiders at the expense of developing insiders. Since talented people often recruit in their own image, this may restrict what counts as talent and organizational diversity.
Our final question is whether TM is fundamentally different from traditional HRD, or is it just a management fashion or fad?

5) Is TM just a management fashion or fad?

Modes, vogues, fads, fashions, rages, and crazes have frequently revolutionized many aspects of cultural life. Abrahamson defines management fashion as ‘a relatively transitory collective belief disseminated by management fashion setters that a management technique leads to rational management progress’ (1996a: 257), whilst Carson, et al., (1999: 321) define fads as ‘managerial interventions which appear to be innovative, rational and functional and are aimed at encouraging better organisational performance’.

For Abrahamson (1996b) aesthetic fashions need only appear beautiful and modern, but fashionable management techniques are also expected to appear both rational (efficient means to important ends) and progressive (new as well as improved relative to older management techniques). Managers cannot adopt management techniques for apparently irrational motives; norms of technical progress create expectations that management must progress towards ultimate ends, and old management techniques are expected to be replaced by newer and better ones.


For Abrahamson (1996a), management fashions can differ in scope and duration; rapid, bell-shaped swings in the popularity of management techniques can only be labelled as ‘management fashion’ when products of a management-fashion-setting process involving fashion setters and fashion followers. Abrahamson (1996a: 257) defines management fashion setting as ‘the process by which management fashion setters continuously redefine both their and fashion followers’ collective beliefs about which management techniques lead to rational management progress’. ‘Fashion setters’ or ‘fashion leaders’ produce and disseminate discourses that make management techniques appear fashionable and their users legitimate (Abrahamson, 1996b): management consultants, business schools, and business press organisations as well as academic gurus, consultant gurus, and hero managers. ‘Fashion followers’ translate these fashionable techniques when such discourse becomes fashionable (Abrahamson, 1996 a). The management fashion-setting process covers creation, selection, processing and dissemination phases; fashion setters sense incipient preferences guiding fashion demand, and create management techniques accordingly. These are not necessarily more technically efficient than those in use: they may represent old techniques invented previously and forgotten, but now
reinvented or rediscovered by fashion setters (‘old wine in new bottles’). Setters highlight or even exaggerate performance gaps which can only be closed by them, frightening managers by revealing possible managerial demise, such as losing ‘the war for talent’ (Michaels et al 2001). Fashion setters may describe promising futures for managers by presenting cases of successful companies currently using such techniques.

Management fashions can feed managers’ appetites for individuality and novelty, symbolizing individuality and innovativeness and distinguishing those managers and organisations that are progressive and those that not (Simmel, 1957) through ‘collective status seeking’. For Nohria and Berkley (1994: 128), ‘Adopting ‘new’ ideas became a way for companies to signal to the world that they were progressive, that they had come to grips with their misguided pasts, and that they were committed to change’. For Røvik (2000), fashions can be interpreted as reliable tools to improve performance, or as symbolic icons. When organisations encounter problems, or gaps between actual and desired performances, managers will enthusiastically look for new methods to address those problems; new techniques can be perceived as solutions to critical problems. Ernst and Kieser (2002) argue that management fashions not only symbolize corporate image, but also individual managers regarded as innovative and modern. For Carson et al. (1999), some firms implement fads primarily for the sake of reputation and status enhancement through differentiation, whilst Abrahamson (1996b) argues that collective status seeking is a major motive for organisations to adopt management fashions.

Fashionable concepts are characterized by conceptual ambiguity (Kieser, 1996), which can help make concepts applicable in many situations, and acceptable to different parties (Ortmann, 1995). Swan (2004: 308) points out that this ‘malleability’ and ‘plasticity’ and the ways in which meanings are re-articulated across different domains can make ideas even more popular. When a particular concept like TM gains rapid attention, different interpretations may develop, a prerequisite for a concept to ‘flow’ (Røvik, 2000) and broadening the size of the potential market. Different adopters can interpret core ideas, eclectically selecting appealing elements to organize their own version of the concept for their own purposes. Managers do not blindly adopt and apply management fashion as presented, but produce new contents and associations; different adopting organisations can thus each develop their own version of the concept, as seems to be happening with TM in the UK (eg CIPD 2007).

Thus the institutional environment and imitation processes seem important factors in management fashions; institutional determinants on firms’ decision-making processes on HRD and TM therefore need to be considered. DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) ‘New Institutionalism’ emphasises legitimacy, the embeddedness of organisational fields, and the centrality of classification, routines, scripts and schema; organisations become increasingly similar to each other through isomorphism, a constraining process forcing one unit in a population to resemble others that face the same set of environmental conditions (Ordanini et al 2008; Tempel and Walgenbach 2007). Competitive isomorphism assumes rationality, market competition, niche change and
fitness measures, and is most relevant in free and open competition. Organisations compete not only for resources and customers, but also for political power and institutional legitimacy, and for social as well as economic fitness. Coercive mechanisms stem from political influence and the problem of legitimacy: influences come from social partners, labour legislation and government. Normative mechanisms, associated with professionalization, refer to the relation between management policies and the professional background of employees in terms of educational level, job experience and craftsmanship; the degree of professionalization affects the nature of the management control system and its related practices. In many cases, the influence of the professions is as powerful as the state. One influence source is from formal education, such as universities and professional training institutions, key actors for developing organisational norms. Another is from professional networks, such as professional and trade associations, which could help define and promulgate normative rules about organisational and professional behaviours, creating a pool of individuals who not only share common expectations, but also occupy similar positions across a range of organisations and possess a similarity of orientation and disposition that may over-ride variations in tradition and control that might otherwise shape organisational behaviour. Normative isomorphism can be reinforced by the process of filtering personnel, as many professional career tracks in organisational fields are closely guarded at entry level and throughout career paths; individuals who take the same positions tend to be very similar in terms of education, skills, work experience, action mode and even ideology.

Mimetic mechanisms refer to imitations of the strategies and practices of competitors as a result of uncertainty, or of fads. When organisational technologies are poorly understood, goals ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty, organisations may model themselves on other similar organisations perceived to be more legitimate or successful. Therefore, modelling can be a response to uncertainty (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Later, fashionable managerial techniques may be ‘diffused unintentionally, indirectly through employee transfer or turnover, or explicitly by organisations such as consulting firms or industry trade associations (DiMaggio and Powell, 2002, p. 172).

In Figure 1 the three institutional mechanisms of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) can be translated into the field of TM, showing how such mechanisms influence HRD strategies, goals and policies, including TM.
Organizations may tackle uncertainty by adopting concepts such as TM, but may also remain ‘disengaged’ so that the concept does not greatly affect routine operations, such as general HRD processes. Organisations can superficially accept new concepts while refusing to make fundamental changes to practical operations.

TM does therefore show aspects of a management fashion or fad, appearing both rational and progressive, a rational as well as progressive managerial technique and an effective ‘tool’ to facilitate improvements. In addition, there is a lack of clarity regarding the definition and scope of TM, and such ambiguity is another important feature of management fashions (Ortmann, 1995; Kieser, 1997; Swan, 2004; Rovik, 2000), because it allows ‘interpretive flexibility’ on the part of those adopting new ideas, greatly increasing the scope for diffusion and market opportunities for ‘fashion setters’ such as consultants to promote diffusion by claiming specialist expertise in interpreting and resolving such ambiguity. HRD practitioners and consultants may promote TM as the latest flavour of the month, irrespective of its relevance or practicality.

Conclusions and Implications
This paper has raised a number of critical questions that need to be asked about TM. These include analysing how talent and TM are socially constructed; exploring whether TM challenges egalitarian models of HRD; critically analysing whether constructions of ‘talent’ are gendered and whether TM is at odds with EO or diversity programmes; whether talent is the main driver of performance; and whether TM is a fad or fashion. It concludes that talent and TM are socially constructed and mean different things to different...
organisations; that many popular models of TM, based on marketing perspectives, do challenge more egalitarian models of HRD in adopting an explicitly differentiated perspective on the workforce; that such models do challenge traditional views of EO and diversity management, potentially supporting gendered views of talent; that individual talent, and by implication TM, have been over-rated as a driver of organizational performance; and that TM shows many characteristics of a management fad or fashion. It argues that a more collective, contextualised, social capital view of TM may be more useful.

A number of questions remain for further analysis, including:

1) What is driving companies to adopt TM? Is it really the ‘war for talent’ that all are claimed to be experiencing?
2) What was lacking in ‘traditional HRD’-eg a lack of a segmented/differentiated approach to the workforce?
3) What are the ‘problems’ for which TM appears to be a ‘solution’, such as a new mindset, new perspectives and techniques?
4) What is the real driving force for adopting TM? Is it HRD’s search for status, legitimacy and credibility? Or is this merely a (welcome?) side-effect?
5) To what extent does TM convey substantive, as well as symbolic, meanings? For example, in addition to solving ‘real’ problems, does adopting TM also bring positive re-branding and reputational effects such as ‘employer of choice’, which may of course in addition also generate ‘real’ benefits in terms of employee recruitment and retention?
6) what are the effects on identity of being labelled in or out of the ‘talent pool’?
7) To what extent does adopting TM strengthen corporate identity?
8) To what extent are MNCs ‘fashion setters’ and others such as local businesses especially SMEs ‘fashion followers’?
9) Who are the ‘fashion setters’ during the propagation and adoption process of TM? What role do consulting firms, academics, business schools and journals play in the adoption of TM?
10) What influences companies to adopt TM? Is it coercive, such as influence from headquarters in the case of MNCs, or government initiatives; normative such as professional background or membership of professional/ trade associations; or mimetic?
11) Who are the ‘fashion followers’ in terms of TM, actors who translate fashionable techniques when the legitimating discourse becomes fashionable?
12) How does the ‘fashion-setting process’ work in TM?

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