Talent development: status quo and future directions

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Abstract

Purpose – There is a critical need to understand current talent development (TD) practices as well as developing a contemporary paradigm that will support a radically different future for TD. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the existing literature on TD, explore the fundamental role of TD in organizations and identify gaps for future directions.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper reviews the literature on TD.

Findings – Following themes are identified in selected TD articles: varied TD definitions, theoretical perspective for investigating TD, TD practices and effects and implications on training and development. The literature review identifies two levels of TD practices: organizational level and individual level.

Practical implications – The field of TD is rapidly changing because of the accelerating integration of technology and information into daily work environment. There is a critical need to understand current TD practices as well as to develop a contemporary paradigm that will support a radically different future for TD. Scope and boundaries of TD need to be set, so that practitioners can apply the right practice at the right time.

Originality/value – The paper presents the conceptual boundaries of TD in the current existing literature and identifies the gaps.

Keywords Knowledge management, Training, Talent, HRD, Talent development

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

Employees are the most valuable asset of a company, especially in today’s digital economy. A large body of literature has focused on the relationship between human capital and its contribution to economic growth at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels (Florida et al., 2010; Garavan et al., 2012; Ibeh and Debrah, 2011; Mehdiabadi and Li, 2016). Recruiting, managing, retaining and developing the employees are key processes to an organization’s ability to provide high-quality products and services. In today’s economy talent is not only critical but also scarce. “The demand for talented young recruits in the worldwide labor markets still outstrips what the university outflow is able to supply” (Pruis, 2011, p. 206). The shortage of talent becomes more apparent to organizations as they are severely impacted by it. Hence, the organizations need to acknowledge the value added by highly skilled employees. Over the last two decades, global talent shortage has intensified through rapid globalization, digitalization of businesses and industries as well as technological advancements. The scarcity of talent has led to the challenges such as a critical need for talent development (TD) and ability to strategically manage the talent (Aziz et al., 2016; Thite et al., 2014). Organizations need to identify their need for talent and develop strategies to retain employees who will best help them secure a competitive edge. While being scarce, talent is also expensive and difficult to replace, which are the major reasons the attraction, development and retention of talented employees are often high on the agenda of businesses targeting sustained growth and prosperity (Mehdiabadi and Li, 2016). Digitalization helps companies in customizing products as per customer needs, changing business values and increasing focus to meet customer expectations for product quality and service standards. However, digitalization is also pushing organizations to change faster (McFarland and Jestaz, 2016). Companies generally identify human talent as their most critical asset and any strategy to move the business ahead should start with developing human capital.
Developing employee skills results in significant benefits for any organization (Grant et al., 2014; van Zyl, 2013). The major benefits of TD include successful achievement of business strategy, competitive advantage and revenue as it supports employee competencies and workforce planning (Pruis, 2011). Maruska and Perry (2013) argued that, from employee perspective, TD enhances employees’ self-motivation and self-organization to create enduring value, helps employees look at their career from a new perspective and helps create an environment that welcomes innovative ideas. The authors stated that twenty-first century employees want recognition for their talents and not just for meeting the targets. Aziz et al. (2016) explained the struggle for TD in the Malaysian banking industry and argued that investment in developing internal talent paid dividends in the longer run. Thus, recruiting, developing and retaining the top talent for skilled positions is critical and a struggle as well for companies across industries.

TD is typically used and operationalized within the context of talent management (TM), which is a popular research topic in human resource management (HRM) and human resource development (HRD). Garavan et al.’s (2012) argued that in the field of HRD, TD was a sub-part of TM. Ibeh and Debrah (2011, p. 43) also supported this notion. Similarly, Dessler (2009) suggested that TD is the main function of TM. Further, definitions position TD as a critical part of TM process in the organization. For example, Garavan et al. (2012) defined TD as focusing “on the planning, selection and implementation of development strategies for the entire talent pool to ensure that the organization has both the current and future supply of talent to meet strategic objectives and that development activities are aligned with organizational talent management processes” (p. 6). TM has generated a remarkable amount of interest in practitioner and academic researchers since 1997 when McKinsey consultants offered the phrase – “War for Talent” (McKinscy and Co., 1997). McKinsey declared the prevalent practices of TM as failure (1997) because of under management. The study not only created a new management concept to describe organizations’ most precious assets, but also changed the organizational perspectives around talent practices in terms of both management and development (Kunasegaran et al., 2016). However, Garavan et al. (2012) argued that “TD is still a under-developed and under-researched concept” (p. 14). Mehdiabadi and Li (2016) also support the insufficient attention toward TD.

There are other questions raised related to the underdevelopment of TD concepts such as whether the organization should focus on providing TD opportunities to a specific employee group to gain organization success or should the focus be on all the employees. Boudreau and Ramstad (2005) emphasized focusing on a specific employee group that has the potential to result in the highest value to organizational strategic success. There have been two paradigm shifts in the field of talent which Boudreau and Ramstad (2005) identified as talentship and sustainability through organizational effectiveness. They defined talentship as broadening HR services beyond making decisions and identifying “pivotal talent pools” (p. 129), which means identifying and developing a pivot talent pool that contributes to the strategic success of an organization. Similarly Kesler’s (2002) used the analogy of a successful baseball team, which is built upon a “deep bench strength and skillful movement of exceptional players throughout the system” (p. 32). The author argued that the organizational success strategy should be similar to the baseball strategy and should focus on developing employees rather early in their careers and moving managers across the businesses to broaden their competencies. However, more empirical studies are required to validate this analogy.

Despite the popularity of TD, the concept has not been researched as extensively as TM (Garavan et al., 2012; Mehdiabadi and Li, 2016). While there are a number of literature reviews on TM and its sub-parts, TD literature has not been reviewed and organized to the same extent. This paper presents a literature review of the research on TD. The objective of this review is to organize the research on TD, and the impact of TD on organizations and individuals. We begin by reviewing the most-cited definitions of TD, the theoretical perspectives invoked to empirically examine TD and its impact and how TD has been operationalized. Next, we review the prevalent practices of TD and the fundamental role of these practices at organizational-level and individual-level outcomes. We conclude this review by offering an agenda to guide future research in expanding the breadth and depth of our knowledge on the theoretical foundations and practical applications of TD.
Research significance

The literature on TD needs to be critically reviewed because of many unanswered questions, and a general lack of clarity on both the theoretical and operational definitions of talent. The review in this paper provides a better understanding of TD and its fundamental role in organizations and identify gaps for future directions. This literature review also talks about future direction of research on TD and discusses how the future research should be grounded in theory in order to adequately study multiple dimensions of talent including development, management, assessment and evaluation.

A literature review of TD has been conducted focusing on the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the TD definitions mentioned in the literature?

RQ2. What are the different theoretical perspectives in TD literature?

RQ3. What are the TD practices discussed in the literature?

The study of different TD definitions will help provide a consensus definition of TD. An understanding of different theoretical perspectives in TD will assist in the formulation of a TD architecture that can be employed in future research. The review of prevalent TD practices will enable HRD practitioners to select the best practices to implement in their organizations.

Criteria for Inclusion

The literature review focuses on peer-reviewed articles retrieved through online databases, such as PsychINFO, Wiley Online Library and Business Source Complete. Entire databases were searched and no specific time period was selected. The search was conducted by having “talent development” in the title of the article. PsychINFO provided 105, Wiley Online Library provided 33 and Business Source Complete provided 41 total results of peer-reviewed articles. However, 96 articles from PsychINFO, 25 articles from Wiley Online Library and 22 articles from Business Source Complete focus on gifted education or sports TD. This review does not include these 143 articles. The remaining 36 articles had three duplicates. Apart from the three databases, a search was done in HRM journal and six articles were identified. Additionally, nine more articles were reviewed from backward research to support several facts and theories mentioned in the article. Hence, 48 articles have been selected for this paper. Table I outlines the literature reviewed in this paper.

Definition and theoretical framework of TD

TD has been defined through multiple approaches by both researchers and practitioners. Mehdiabadi and Li (2016) indicated an ambiguity in the TD literature that the scope and boundaries of TD are not clear. However, TD is neither defined as narrowly as training and development (Bhattacharyya, 2014) nor as broadly as TM (Garavan et al., 2012). Most of the definitions consistently considered TD to be an integral part of TM. Walker (1974) explained the distinction between TM and TD long ago by stating that the HR planning process was composed of three distinct elements (forecasting, programming and evaluation); and TM is the second element that includes attributes such as organizational, occupational, performance and development. As TM lacks a unanimous definition and theoretical background in the literature, so does TD. TD and TM both have a common integral factor – talent; which needs to be clearly defined before conceptualizing these concepts. However, depending on the academic disciplines of the authors, different approaches to define talent exist in the literature. For example, Bhattacharyya (2014) defined talent as mental power and inherent potentiality whereas Florida et al. (2010) equated talent to human capital that can be measured by educational attainment. Simonton (2001), on the other hand, argued that talent is a multidimensional, multiplicative and dynamic process. Like the definitions for talent, existing definitions of TD use two distinct perspectives – individual perspective and organizational perspective. While defining TD through multiple approaches demonstrates its interdisciplinary nature, this may pose challenges both in studying and practicing TD. The practitioners and researchers may solely focus on defining talent and may lose sight of the distinct elements of the TM system in the organization.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s) (year)</th>
<th>Definition of talent, TD, or TM (if provided)</th>
<th>Theory (if mentioned)</th>
<th>Design/methodology/approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aziz et al. (2016)</td>
<td>“Talent can be defined as two types of talent: first is new talent which consists of raw talent. Second is existing or trained talent, encompassing experienced talent that wants to upgrade their current level to the next level.” (p. 11)</td>
<td>Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) theory</td>
<td>Structural equation modeling (SEM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandura (1982)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Self-efficacy theory</td>
<td>Microanalytic research strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhattacharya (2014)</td>
<td>“Talent is an inherent potentiality of all of us.” (p. 92)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Descriptive research paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boudreau and Ramstad (2005)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Descriptive research paper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boykin (2000)</td>
<td>“The term talent refers to high-level performance, skill, understanding, or knowledge that is predicated on an age-appropriate standard of excellence” (p. 7) “Development is construed as connoting multiple processes of student change.” (p. 8)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Descriptive research paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandler et al. (2010)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Descriptive research paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D’Amato and Hannum (2009)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dai and Speerschneider (2012)</td>
<td>“Talent development is a process involving prolonged formal and informal learning in one or multiple domains, with highly committed efforts, deliberate practice and extended problem solving and self-improvement, resulting in a unique set of specialized knowledge, skills and dispositions responsible.” (p. 181)</td>
<td>Cope-and-Grow Model formulated in a grounded theory approach</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dessler (2009)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dries (2013)</td>
<td>The author refers to Reily’s (2008) definition and define TM as “a mélange of different concepts strung together without a clear statement of what is meant by talent and how we might manage it”</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunnigan et al. (2013)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellison (2004)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida et al. (2010)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Export base theory, creative case theory and Perroux growth pole theory</td>
<td>Path analysis and structural equations modeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gagné (2004)</td>
<td>The author refers to Feldman’s (1986) definition and define talent from a cognitive-developmental perspective is the potential for constructive interaction with various aspects of the world of experience”</td>
<td>Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) theory</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garavan et al. (2012)</td>
<td>TD focuses on the planning, selection and implementation of development strategies for the entire talent pool to ensure that the organization has both the current and future supply of talent to meet strategic objectives and that development activities are aligned with organizational talent management processes. (p. 6)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant et al. (2014)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Mixed-method approach using questionnaires and three case studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hicks (2008)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Empirical approach using questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hughes and Rog (2008)</td>
<td>The author refers to Lewis and Heckman’s (2006) three conceptions of TM – TM is collection of HRM activities, TM is synonymous with HR, and TM is sourcing, developing and rewarding employee talent</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibeh and Debrah (2011)</td>
<td>The author refers to Evans et al. (2002) definition and defined TD as a process that involves developing leaders via several processes</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Empirical approach using questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Hicks (2008) defined TD from an organizational perspective and argued that “the purpose of a learning and talent development (LTD) function in organizations is to develop the skills of the workforce to execute strategic priorities” (p. 71). Tavis (2008) explained TD with different segments, such as talent strategy, acquisition, development, engagement and retention.

Table I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s) (year)</th>
<th>Definition of talent, TD, or TM (if provided)</th>
<th>Theory (if mentioned)</th>
<th>Design/methodology/approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacobi et al. (1987)</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>Conceptual paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Janson (2015)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
</tr>
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<td>Johnson (2014)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Descriptive research paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kesler (2002)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunasegaran et al. (2016)</td>
<td>The authors refer to Garavan et al.’s (2012) definition and defined talent as an individual who possesses unique managerial competence</td>
<td>Person–environment (P–E) fit theory and organizational support theory (OST)</td>
<td>Empirical research approach using structural equation modeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence (2015)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maruska and Perry (2013)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McFarland and Jestaz (2016)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McPartland et al. (1998)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehdiabadi and Li (2016)</td>
<td>The authors refer to several definitions of talent, TD and TM provided in the literature</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercurio (2015)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Behavioral commitment theory, transactional commitment theory, obligatory commitment theory and attitudinal commitment theory,</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newbold (2010)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Case study approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panda and Sahoo (2015)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Empirical approach using multiple regression analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porath (2013)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pruis (2011)</td>
<td>Talent in this regard appears to be seen as an exemplary skill that some people possess</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Conceptual paper about author’s work with clients in industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasmussen and Rasmussen (2015)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Gardner theory</td>
<td>Case study approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seopa et al. (2015)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Empirical approach using questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simonton (2001)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tansley (2011)</td>
<td>The authors refer to several definitions of talent provided in the literature</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tansley et al. (2016)</td>
<td>TM comprises of systematic activities -attraction, identification, development, retention and deployment of individuals with high potential who are of particular value to an organization</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Case study approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tavis (2008)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thite et al. (2014)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Institutional theory</td>
<td>Case study approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>van Zyl (2013)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Empirical approach using less restrictive production function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor and Hoole (2017)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Self-determination theory and social exchange theory</td>
<td>Quantitative approach using questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker (1974)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watt (2012)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Performing arts theory</td>
<td>Conceptual paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuen et al. (2010)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Self-efficacy theory</td>
<td>Quantitative approach using questionnaires</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ibeh and Debrah (2011) agreed with Evans et al. (2002) definition of TD which considers TD as an integral part of TM, and involves developing leaders via processes, such as coaching, feedback, training and mentoring. Using an organizational perspective, Garavan et al. (2012) provided a broader definition of TD which “focuses on the planning, selection and implementation of development strategies for the entire talent pool to ensure that the organization has both the current and future supply of talent to meet strategic objectives and that development activities are aligned with organizational talent management processes” (p. 6). Panda and Sahoo (2015) argued that TD is considered “a planned acquisition, development, retention, engagement and deployment of talent in an organization” (p. 16). The authors also presented a hypothesized model of TD which listed several TD practices such as performance appraisal, training programs and knowledge sharing. Boykin (2000) offered two separate definitions: talent as “high-level performance, skill, understanding, or knowledge that is predicated on an age-appropriate standard of excellence,” and development as “cultivating, fostering and bringing talent to fruition” (p. 7). Most of these definitions focus on various structured TD practices implemented in the organization to enhance employee personal skills. Gagné (2004) defined TD from an employee perspective as “a dynamic process in which natural abilities are transformed into aptitudes that are appropriate and necessary for particular occupations” (p. 125) arguing that the transformation in employee behavior is a result of learning, whether through training or informal learning. Bhattacharyya (2014) also presented a TD definition from an individual perspective which stated that TD involves refinement and development of one’s mental power, aptitude, ability and natural capacity.

Operationalization of TD also lacks clarity because of TD’s varied definitions and scope. Kunasegaran et al. (2016) operationalized TD as a long-term development in order to examine TD’s impact on workplace adaptation in organizational change situation. Furthermore, lack of consensus definitions of talent, TM and TD in the literature makes it difficult to theorize the TD concept. TD literature does not provide a precise TD definition, making it difficult to generalize the findings. Absence of an operational definition of TD may also result in a weak HRD infrastructure. For the purposes of this paper, we are considering TD as an element of TM process dealing with development and assessment of the hired talent. TD helps in building a central talent pool in organization which will not only perform effectively but also play integral part in sustainable organizational success.

**Theoretical perspectives for investigating TD**

The literature review revealed that studies associated with TD did not result in the development and support potential theoretical frameworks for TD. Lack of theory-based approaches in the existing literature indicates that theory only plays a small role (and is sometimes absent) for much of the TD research (Dries, 2013).

Existing studies associated with TD mostly utilize cognitive theories, which mean the “focus is on specific requirements of a domain and the abilities and efforts needed for advanced development” (Dai and Speerschneider, 2012, p. 182). Kunasegaran et al. (2016), on the other hand, applied theories associated with human psychology specifically person–environment fit theory for their workplace adaptation model. The theory is used to investigate the employee stress levels. Watt (2012), however, drew from the performing art theory of education to study the contribution of assessment process toward TD arguing that the assessment processes, such as direct feedback, play a part in TD.

Aziz et al. (2016) proposed that TD has its origins in Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) theory, proposed by Gagné (2004) model. The DMGT model is based on the reasoning that the TD concept is built upon three distinct foundations, i.e. talent, university infrastructure and curriculum. DMGT model provides a specific representation of TD within the higher education context. Rasmussen and Rasmussen (2015) drew attention toward Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligence to support the multidimensional or bimodal view of talent. Gardner’s theory categories and highlights talent in different modules or domains rather than one specific ability (Gardner, 1999). Rasmussen and Rasmussen (2015) applied Gardner’s theory to study the relation between success in school and various demographic background factors such as culture, education. Bandura (1982) introduced self-efficacy theory that states that self-perception
or beliefs of efficacy affect one’s performance efforts to do a certain task. Using the self-efficacy theory, Yuen et al. (2010) developed the CAREER and TD Self-Efficacy Scale (CTD) to evaluate students’ self-efficacy for personal development. The authors concluded that TD is a result of training as well as self-learning.

Lack of a solid theoretical framework that explains various dynamics, processes and functions in TD warrants future studies to theorize TD concept. Having a theoretical framework in TD will help organizations to develop a TD architecture tailored to the companies’ needs.

Discussion and impact of TD practices

TD research so far has largely been focusing on organizational-level and long-term development of the employees (Chandler et al., 2010; Hicks, 2008). Some of the most popular practices that have been investigated include mentoring and coaching (e.g. Chandler et al., 2010; Dai and Speerschneider, 2012; Ibeh and Debrah, 2011; Kunasegaran et al., 2016; Newbold, 2010; Pruis, 2011), and training programs (e.g. Bhattacharyya, 2014; Ellison, 2004; Panda and Sahoo, 2015). Mentoring and coaching practices are relatively low-cost and result in job satisfaction and higher performance for both the mentor and the mentee (Chandler et al., 2010; D’Amato and Hannum, 2009). TD practices have also been examined as a significant predictor of organizational success (e.g. Panda and Sahoo, 2015; Pruis, 2011). An empirical study by Panda and Sahoo (2015) on two manufacturing companies concluded that strategically emphasizing on various TD interventions, such as performance appraisal, training programs and knowledge sharing leads to organizational success. Panda and Sahoo (2015) examined several TD interventions and offered a model of TD that leads to the organizational success. The proposed model is inferred from previous studies and represented an outline of TD process. The model includes TD interventions, such as performance appraisal, training programs, career development and knowledge sharing. Panda and Sahoo (2015) used these TD interventions to measure their impact on organizational success.

Feedback, ratings and review process are among other prevalent practices of TD that have been studied in the reviewed publications (e.g. D’Amato and Hannum, 2009; Garavan et al., 2012; Lawrence, 2015; Pruis, 2011; Watt, 2012). Studies have explored TD as a predictor of individual development too (e.g. Ibeh and Debrah, 2011; Janson, 2015). Unsurprisingly, benefits of TD practices from employees’ perspective such as employee job satisfaction (e.g. Chandler et al., 2010; Panda and Sahoo, 2015), turnover (e.g. Bhattacharyya, 2014; Dunnagan et al., 2013), organizational commitment (Mercurio, 2015; Seopa et al., 2015) and organizational trust (Hughes and Rog, 2008; Tansley, 2011) have also been investigated within the context of TD.

Additionally, career outcomes such as promotability (e.g. Chandler et al., 2010; Tansley et al., 2016) and workplace adaptation (Kunasegaran et al., 2016) have been examined as distal outcomes of TD. Similarly, Garavan et al. (2012) identified four types of TD programs including formal training programs typically offered within the organization, mentoring and coaching, job-based learning experiences through job rotations and informal/incidental learning opportunities.

Based on the literature review, we categorized the formal program and relationship-based developmental experiences as instrumental outcomes. The instrumental outcomes include skill and competency-based development programs, employee development programs, sponsorship, coaching, mentoring and psycho-social support. Tansley et al. (2016) coined the new term, “talent development gamification” “as an analytical tool to consider how young talent are supported by development interventions in their inter-subjectivity as they learn how to survive and win in talent selection games” (p. 490). Johnson (2014) also talked about the role of technology in TD field by providing an example of the talent review process (TRP) tool. Watt (2012) points out that ballot of debate programs can be successfully used as the assessment of TD.

The literature review provides information on several TD practices. The TD practices are developed to achieve either financial goals or performance advancement, or often times both (Mehdiabadi and Li, 2016). However, there is no information on what practices should be used while developing short-term and long-term task based skills and behaviors. The evaluation processes for above mentioned TD practices are also absent in TD literature.
Operationalization of TD

TD requires a systematic effort of the entire organization, and its utility and implications for organizational success is widely recognized. More than two-thirds of the studies included in this review emphasized the importance of TD practices used in organizations. Furthermore, the studies reviewed here discuss diverse perspectives related to generations in the workplace, TD practices, pay scale categorizations, epistemic beliefs, organizational success and talent mobility (Boykin, 2000; D’Amato and Hannum, 2009; Porath, 2013). Apart from the positive outcomes and importance of TD, studies also discussed the challenges faced by HRD professionals while implementing TD practices in companies. Garavan et al. (2012) raised a question whether TD should focus on developing technical or generic competencies or both. The authors also argued that generic competencies development is more challenging than technical competencies development because generic competencies are considered to be holistic and interweaved. Jacobi et al. (1987) studied the challenges faced while selecting the appropriate assessment instruments for TD. They argued that TD outcomes include affective as well as cognitive development. They further added that selecting appropriate assessment instruments for assessing cognitive outcomes is a challenge for HRD practitioners.

Bhattacharyya (2014) studied TD processes in two Indian Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSE) and described budgetary challenges faced by these two organizations while implementing the TD practices. The case study revealed that the two CPSEs were less focused on TD and had not allocated sufficient funds to build their human resources capacities. Furthermore, he argued that despite being public sector enterprises, both the companies invested in building firm specific talents rather than investing in the development of social capital. TD practices do not have an inclusive approach, and are more inclined toward managerial employees. Bhattacharyya (2014) explained that the inclusive approach does not mean as restricting TD practices only for the managerial employees, but rather extending them to all organizational members’ cross-sections the company.

The challenges associated with implementing TD practices are not limited to the indecisiveness of who to develop, what competencies to focus on and how to assess TD practices. There are other challenges such as identifying and selecting appropriate number of skilled employees to deliver TD processes through performing roles of trainers, coaches or mentors (Garavan et al., 2012). Garavan et al. (2012) also highlighted the specific gender challenge in relationship-based TD while matching mentors and mentees.

McPartland et al. (1998) discussed challenges faced during the implementation of a TD program in Patterson High School at Baltimore, Maryland. These challenges include the obstruction of the development of positive relationship between teachers and students because of being a too large and impersonal school, the lack of diversity among students’ abilities and a weak or a lack of a connection between students’ personal goals and interests with their assigned courses. The challenges discussed in this case study are relevant to any large diverse organization. Boykin (2000) added another perspective to the challenges faced while implementing TD. Boykin (2000) highlighted two transactions in TD implementation – selection of an appropriate TD model, referred as a paper transaction and implementation of selected TD model, referred as a human transaction. The author posited that there is a challenge in being sensitive to the difference between the two transactions and understanding that human transaction is complex because of human social dynamics. Garavan et al. (2012) revealed that the paradigm is shifting toward self-directed TD activities. Onus on the individual is posing significant challenges for the organization such as developing self-directed TD activities, and building the bridge between self-development activities and organizational goals. Thite et al. (2014) probed the challenges HRD professionals face while facilitating TD practices. They used the example of Indian and Chinese markets to explain that there is reluctance to develop a global workforce. The study revealed that HRD should focus more on nurturing local talent so that they get a competitive global advantage. The literature review indicated that the implementation of TD is more crucial than planning and selecting the appropriate TD practices. However, there is a lack of systematic research on addressing the challenges discussed above to, successfully select, plan and implement the TD practices.
Gaps of TD literature

As a result of our review of existing literature related to talent, TD and TM, we have identified a number of gaps that would inform both HRD researcher and practitioners. First, there is a lack of a consensus TD definition. Existing literature clearly indicates the lack of a unanimous TD definition among HRD scholars and practitioners while different views toward defining and identifying talent exist in the literature. This makes it difficult to theorize and generalize the findings from research on talent and TD. Second, there is a lack of emphasis on the evaluation of TD practices. TD literature talks about TD practices and their impact on individuals and organizations. However, there is a dearth of literature discussing the evaluation of TD practices. Third, there is a lack of research linking TD practices and business strategy. It has been argued that successful TD practices help in achieving business strategy (McFarland and Jestaz, 2016; Pruis, 2011). However, the relationship between business strategy and TD practices has not yet been empirically demonstrated in HRD literature. Fourth, there is a lack of attention to communication and technology. The role of technology as an influencer of TD has not yet been empirically studied. Technology can accelerate and streamline the TD process (Johnson, 2014), additionally, technology may enable implementation of TD practices such as talent review in a cost-effective manner. However, the potential impact of technology, both as a cause and a consequence of TD, requires further investigation. Similarly, there are no prior work discussing the role of communication in TD implementation and evaluation.

The literature review also highlights that from HRD practitioners’ perspective, many important questions remain unanswered, including:

- What processes should they apply to identify talent?
- Should they “develop” or “transfer” talent?
- Should they adopt an “exclusive” or an “inclusive” approach to identify their talent needs in order to determine how to acquire such talent?

Future research directions

The existing literature reviewed in this study revealed that the unclear concepts of talent, TM and TD lead to vague and obscure TD practices. Considering that TD is critical for organizations, we stimulate future research in a number of ways. The paper draws attention of researchers and practitioners to the fact that TD concept is not adequately defined. A major challenge in the literature is the lack of a consensus definition of TD and its related concepts – talent and TM. We argue that researchers interested in TD should draw heavily on the construct of talent and TD. More empirical research is required to define and operationalize the TD constructs.

The review argues that the TD concept is not fully developed and is still in its early stages. The authors highlight that more empirical research is needed to better understand TD in relation to the context in which it takes place. Additionally, it is recommended that future research should focus on developing theoretical underpinnings of TD, and evaluate TD’s contribution to organizational and individual development.

Dunnagan et al. (2013) reported various statistics of talent mobility, types of talent that have moved over the years, and issues raised by talent mobilization. We believe that future empirical studies should investigate whether the talent mobility is a cause or a consequence of uneven TD. In addition to the talent mobilization, organizational change is another prevalent area. An important gap in TD literature is the deficiency of studies focusing on the relationship between TD and organizational change (McFarland and Jestaz, 2016). More empirical studies are required to validate the relationship between TD and organizational change.

The reviewed articles suggested that TD practices impact organizational financial performance (Florida et al., 2010; Garavan et al., 2012; Ibeh and Debrah, 2011; Mehdiabadi and Li, 2016). However, we call for future research, which identify ways to demonstrate the impact of TD on organizational management practices. While the literature provides elaborate details on how TD practices impact individuals and organizations, there is not sufficient empirical evidence on the impact of TD on organizational management practices. The articles also suggested a significant
relationship between TM and TD; and, hence, necessitate deeper inquiry into these processes and the relationship between them. We propose that future research should focus on how HRD functions are linked and impacted by TD.

Johnson (2014) highlighted the role of technology in TD by providing an example of the TRP tool. Technology accelerates and streamlines the TD process, while helping in implementation of TD practices such as talent review in a cost-effective manner. However, the potential impact of technology, both as a cause and a consequence of TD, requires further investigation. Future research might also draw on changing technology and its impact on TD, as the interaction of the employees (or talent pool) with the changing technology must be considered as a future research area to truly understand how to implement and utilize the benefits of technology pertaining to TD.

A key requirement for an effective TD practice is that it should be linked with the business strategy and culture of the firm. This review identifies that no previous studies exist where cultural impact on TD has been assessed. Research about the inclusion of cultural aspects in TD might allow more comparative analysis to be included in future studies as the characteristics and worldviews of talent pool will vary across cultures.

Based on the importance of TD highlighted in the paper, scholars and practitioners should engage in further empirical studies to identify ways to develop global TD. We propose that future studies need to develop more comprehensive global TD frameworks that explain how external environmental factors affect TD. Several studies have examined TD in different countries (e.g. Dunnagan et al., 2013; Lawrence, 2015) already; however, a global framework of TD has not been fully explored. Finally, to better understand TD, identifying the boundaries of TD in a training context could be an important future research direction. We believe that these directions are critical in developing a theoretically sound TD framework.

Implications for HRD practitioners

This review of literature presents a number of implications for HRD practitioners. First, it will help determine talent and TD definitions. Based on the literature review, we argue that a consensus regarding the definition of talent and its influence on the TD planning and implementation process is needed to be reached. HRD practitioners would benefit from answering a number of critical questions before actually designing TD process, including who needs to be part of talent development process; whether TD should process focus on technical, generic or both of the employee competencies (Garavan et al., 2012); whether the pace of TD process be accelerated or traditional (Bhattacharyya, 2014); and whether the TD process needs to be focused on organizational or individual needs, or both. Second, TD can be integrated into the business strategy. HRD practitioners, McFarland and Jestaz (2016), suggested that TD practices be aligned to business strategy and that people be made aware of TD as a strategic priority. It is important to calibrate TD goals with business strategy to effectively meet the current and future talent demand. TD practices need to be diverse to cater both long-term and short-term organizational goals. And, third, all stakeholders in the TD process should be identified. The role of HRD practitioners has grown due to globalization and technological advancement. HRD practitioners need to be more strategic and global in their outlook and approach (Thite et al., 2014). However, HRD practitioners are not the sole decision makers in TD process. TD process requires other stakeholders such as executives, managers and employees. Roles of each stakeholder in TD process need to be defined and understood. It is suggested to clearly identify all the stakeholders and make them accountable for their roles. It takes a village to develop talent (Chandler et al., 2010, p. 49). Therefore, involvement of entire stakeholders is critical in the process.

Conclusion

Literature focusing on development concept of talent is limited as compared to other parts of TM such as recruitment and retention. While TD practices both at the organizational and individual levels are not limited to training, there is a strong consensus among scholars that training is an
integral component of TD process in the organization (Bhattacharyya, 2014; Ellison, 2004; Panda and Sahoo, 2015). However, further research is needed to demonstrate training effectiveness on TD efforts.

The literature review reveals that there is no consistent perspective toward talent. This inconsistency is a major reason for lack of a consensus definition of TD in literature, thus making it difficult to theorize and generalize the findings from research on talent and TD. This literature review provides an understanding of several existing TD definitions and reasons behind these definitions, which would assist the organizations in defining TD. In addition to developing a concise definition of TD, organizations would also need to identify key characteristics of talent germane to their own circumstances. The literature review also highlights that, from HRD practitioners’ perspective, many important questions remain unanswered, such as: what processes they ought to employ to identify talent, whether they should “develop” or “transfer” talent and whether they should adopt an “exclusive” or an “inclusive” approach to identifying their talent needs in order to determine how to acquire such talent. An exclusive approach would imply considering few employees as talented employees whereas an inclusive approach would highlight the assumption of considering the entire workforce as potential talent. That is whether the firms should merely focus on developing talent or explore utilizing potential talent available to the organization.

The review provides researchers with a roadmap of TD concept so far, and suggests path forward. The literature review corroborates that future TD research can focus on finding answers to who should be developed, to what degree and which TD practice fits best (Garavan et al., 2012). We believe that examining the best TD practices to develop certain skills and competencies will be a significant development in TD concept. HRD personnel who develop TD practices will be able to adapt the study’s information to plan topical and relevant practices suited to the company. Since this literature review points out that limited empirical studies are available on TD practices such as mentoring, coaching and training; future research can examine effective TD practices used in large and small corporations and non-profit organizations, and their impact on organization goals.

Based on this literature review, we argue that the TD approach is different from leadership development and career development approaches because TD includes personalized development of individuals including abilities, skills, aptitude and motivations. TD focuses on identifying and implementing both the individual and organizational-level abilities, interests and objectives. The review also suggests that TD needs to be interconnected with other HRD activities such as talent attraction and retention for organizational success.

References


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