
Guest editorial

Re-imagining GTM? Considering the implications of context for research and practice

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Introduction

This special issue was conceived following a personal development workshop (PDW) hosted by the editors at the British Academy of Management Conference in 2019, where we explored the centrality of global talent management (GTM) and international careers to global debates about migration, skills and the future of work. The PDW stemmed from increasing concerns that social, political and economic shifts would impact on the supply of and access to global talent pools, creating significant uncertainty. Since then, there has been further considerable disruptions to the world of work which have forced a reconsideration of the ways in which organisations can source and deploy talent. Changes in the external environment, notably the UK's exit from the European Union, an increasing emphasis on equality, diversity and inclusion combined with the current global COVID-19 pandemic has forced organisations to reconsider their global talent management strategies. Whilst there has been significant research on managing more traditional types of global talent, such as expatriates, there is less understanding to draw from in terms of new types of talent and other forms of mobility. Whilst these were significant issues prior to recent events, they have taken on a fresh urgency and importance in this new context.

The latest PwC Mobility Survey (2020) reveals that global mobility remains a priority for businesses. However, there is likely to be a shift to more remote forms of mobility (Osborn, 2020), offering opportunities to widen access and offering new and different ways of reaching global talent. This has the potential to challenge reliance on established groups of talents (e.g. western skilled workers) and promote more ethical and equitable approaches to talent management.

Ways of working globally are changing, meaning who is considered to be talent, where they are located and how they are deployed is being re-evaluated by organisations (Howe-Walsh *et al.*, 2019). This is against a backdrop of expanding forms of global mobility (Kirk, 2016, 2020) and reported shortages in globally mobile talent (Böhmer and Schinnenburg, 2016). Hitherto untapped sources of talent such as skilled migrants (Crowley-Henry and Al Ariss, 2018; Rodriguez and Scurry, 2019) are being sought to fill gaps in the global workforce although significant social, political and economic shifts are impacting the supply of and access to these groups. The rise in differing forms of expatriation, in particular, the use of company assigned versus self-initiated expatriates has increasingly been of interest to scholars (Dickmann *et al.*, 2018; Howe-Walsh and Kirk, 2020). However, less is known regarding the implications of diversity within these groups including age, gender and Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) (Collins, 2018; McPhail and Fisher, 2015; Hutchings *et al.*, 2016), which has significant potential impact to global mobility.

Whilst there has been considerable research on managing more traditional types of global talent, in particular White western expatriates, there is less understanding of other groups' experiences of being global talent. The papers in this special issue show how there is a need for further research that moves beyond exploring forms of mobility, to that which seeks to problematize the notion of global mobility and global talent, research that investigates these ideas more critically and from differing points of view. Against this backdrop, this special



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issue brings together a diverse set of papers from scholars exploring global talent management in different national, organisational and institutional contexts.

Collectively these papers elucidate how different factors intersect to shape experiences and influence the management of global talent. In doing so, they enhance understanding and advance academic debate both in terms of how we understand contemporary global talent and the changing patterns of work for these groups. In doing so, this special issue challenges established understandings of GTM. We will now provide a brief synopsis of the papers selected for this special issue, highlighting their contribution to these debates.

In the context of wider discussions about longer working lives and ageing populations, Gilbert and Wilkström's paper entitled "Fading away at work: 'I could have left without saying anything' – performing talent management in a multinational organization", argues that employer's under-value their older and less senior global talent. Drawing on empirical research in a global manufacturing organization based in Scandinavia, they find mobility identity is strongly influenced by perceptions derived from social discourses on age and status highlighting how apparently inclusive approaches to talent management contribute to this problem. This paper makes a case for actively linking the identification of global talent with formal and informal talent management practices.

Related to expanding concepts of who constitutes global talent, the paper "Social capital, language and HCs as global talent" by Bala Kuki, Kirk and Ridgway highlights how, contrary to common perceptions, host country nationals (HCNs) may be considered as a source of powerful global talent; especially in cases where expatriates do not speak a common language and HCNs do. The authors argue that a re-imagining of the relationship between expatriates and HCNs can be enabled through HR practices such as providing formal language training to both expatriates and HCNs, embedding networking relationships, buddying schemes or reverse mentoring to enhance social capital accrual of both parties and thus improve performance. In addition, GTM policies should be adjusted to provide definitive career paths and clearer promotion criteria for HCNs.

In a similar vein, drawing on job demands resources theory, in their paper "Delving into the dichotomous trajectory of Indian women flexpatriates using the lens of JD-R Theory", Sengupta, Tewari, Muhyuddin, Patel and Prikshat identify how, despite the demands of the male-dominated society and associated familial demands, Indian professional women are keen to be flexpatriates. This paper highlights how such opportunities offer these women a chance to participate in work-related global mobility that enables them to engage in positive identity work and enhances their personal and professional development. HR professionals and line managers can support this previously untapped source of global talent by ensuring that planning for such assignments is done in advance and that global mobility policies are supportive of the needs of the individual's family.

Speed and Kulichyova's paper "The role of talent intermediaries in accessing and developing refugee talent pools" further extends our understanding of different sources of global talent by revealing how refugees, subject to persecution during war and unrest, are an unrecognised and under-supported source of talent in the international academic community. Through the application of a multi-level relational framework, the authors examine the reasons for and the reality of forced displacement of academics in exile. They argue that this source of global talent can be supported by talent intermediaries to facilitate their global mobility. They also add to the empirical diversity of the field, by highlighting the value of secondary data source analysis for academics and practitioners exploring global talent management.

However, there are challenges in encouraging a broader view of what constitutes global talent and in recognising how these individuals can be supported. As Chen, Tansley and Chou's paper "Towards liminality competence: A migrant's talent identity narratives for re-imagining global talent management" shows. The authors identify how a self-initiated academic migrant,

especially in the current pandemic, has faced both ethnic and tacit knowledge discrimination when relocating globally. The findings from the study demonstrate how the talent identity work of such migrants can be facilitated through targeted talent development interventions which can enable this over-looked source of talent to transition between different global contexts by first gaining so-called *liminality competence* in their home country. This paper not only adds to the methodological diversity of scholarship in the field of talent management but makes a theoretical contribution in considering experience of transition and liminality for global talent and the implications of this for individual identity.

Our final paper by Kravariti, Oruh, Dibia, Tasoulis, Scullion and Mamman entitled “Weathering the storm: talent management in internationally oriented Greek small and medium-sized enterprises” draws on institutional theory to show the influence of context on GTM. Through an analysis of Greek SMEs, they highlight how a tailored approach to global talent management enables SMEs to compete with multinationals for scarce talent. Contrary to existing research, they find an emphasis on individual attributes, in the context of the life cycle of the SME, rather than on specific roles. The paper offers valuable insights for practice that emphasise the need to adopt a flexible and inclusive approach to talent management practice in uncertain contexts.

This special issue thus makes theoretical, methodological and practical contributions to the field by challenging conventional ideas and underpinning assumptions about GTM which dominate existing research and practice. In particular, by encouraging a focus on less obvious forms of mobility and emphasising experiences of groups currently marginalised or invisible in dominant accounts of GTM, the papers selected for this refereed special issue illuminates the diverse and complex characteristics of global talent and GTM. The diversity of the cultural and organisational contexts of the research featured helps to demonstrate how a re-imagining of global talent that accounts for different contexts offers an opportunity to improve organisational effectiveness and performance.

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