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Carrie Louise Foster

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Managing the flow of talent through organizations – a boundary-less model

Carrie Louise Foster

Carrie Louise Foster is based at Business School, Glyndwr University, Wrexham, UK.

Purpose

This paper supervenes Foster *et al.* (2013) *Rethinking Talent Management in Organizations Towards a Boundary-less Model* to reconnoiter how the Boundary-less Talent Model (BTM) can provide a framework for managing the flow of talent through an organization.

The BTM confronts the conceptual norms and current models of talent management, and proposes that there are overlooked and unrecognized domains of talent in existing academic and practitioner literature and offers a schema for the practical application of the BTM.

Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the UK's professional body for human resources (HR), has launched the "Valuing your Talent" project aiming to produce a model for talent valuation as an intangible asset on the organizational balance sheet. This ambition may be thwarted, as only 17 per cent of HR Directors claim to have integrated talent processes (Orion Partners, 2014).

One issue, identified by Foster *et al.* (2013), is that strategic talent management has a narrow interpretation of talent focusing primarily on leadership talent, following the lead from McKinsey's 1997 paper "The War on Talent" (Chambers *et al.*, 1997).

What talent do we value?

Foster *et al.* (2013) concluded that there was no agreed-on definition of talent in extant literature, but proposed that talent is based on perception and context, offering a definition of talent "as knowledge, skills or ability that an individual or organisation perceives as a recognizable capability that has an intrinsic value".

Expounding this definition in talent management models produces a failure to release valuable talent potential and repudiates unrecognized or distinct talent. Talent becomes delineated by homogenized competencies that have to be both something that can be applied over a number of dissimilar roles and at the same time provide distinct capabilities which provide the organization with a competitive advantage.

The result is a contradictory talent process that permits a large proportion of the employee population to have unidentified, unrecognized and underutilized talent.

The BTM explained

The BTM provides a framework that accommodates talent built around the individual and bridges the gap between individual and organizational needs to deliver competitive advantage through a “flexible, creative, inclusive and diverse” approach to developing talent potential (Foster *et al.*, 2013).

Furthermore, the “boundary” for managing the flow of talent goes beyond traditional internal and external organizational boundaries, offering an opportunity for organizations to manage the flow of talent potential which is considered to be outside the “norms” of strategic talent.

The model identifies five types of talent (Figure 1) for the purposes of BTM:

- *Strategic talent* – Recognized talent important to the delivery of strategic organizational objectives.
- *Talent within* – Recognized but not necessarily strategic talent.
- *Expert talent* – Recognized talent that is considered an expert in their field, may be strategic talent if expertise is related to strategic objectives of the organization.
- *Genius talent* – Extraordinary capability that is difficult to replicate.
- *Unrecognized talent* – Talent that may not have been identified by existing talent management processes.

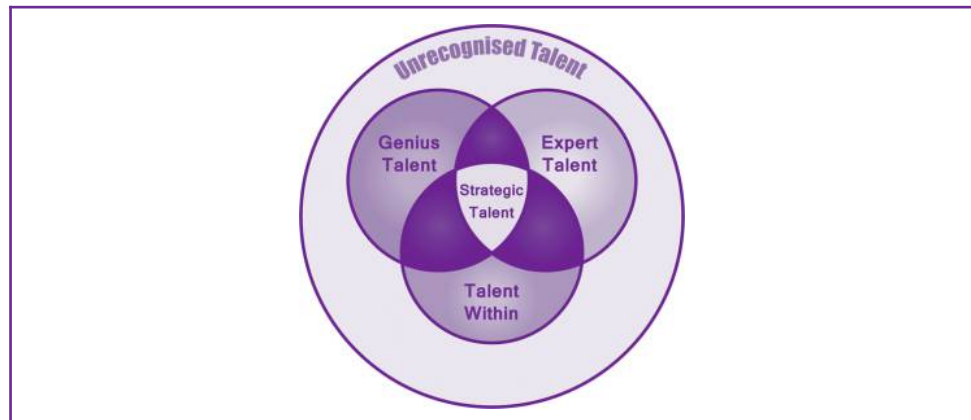
The domains that will be explored for the purposes of this paper will be that of the talent within and unrecognized talent.

Managing the flow of talent – a boundary-less model

The flow of talent begins prior to an individual becoming an employee. There is an exigent requirement for mechanisms in the education system to enable individuals to develop a self-awareness regarding their talents.

Encouraging and supporting individuals to comprehend their talent potential depends on organizations being part of the process, providing exposure to the types of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) sought. There have been previous attempts by the government to align the education system to the KSA organizations claim that they require. Apprenticeship schemes, work placements and internships are part of the solution, but these methods require an individual to have already discerned their talents and have made a commitment to a career choice. Primarily individuals need

Figure 1 A model of boundary-less talent management (Foster *et al.*, 2013)



opportunities to discover their talent leanings. It is therefore proposed that the start point of talent management begins with school children and in the community, not with recruitment as propounded by traditional talent management models.

This pre-employment talent approach is already practiced by football academies, the military and organizations that provide sponsorship for further education and training. The challenge to organizations is that their talent pipeline should not start with employees who are showing promise, but with individuals who are not yet employees but who have the required talent potential for the future.

The benefit from such an approach is not limited to organizations but is societal. Propelling people from an unrecognized talent pool builds an accurate value of talent potential and provides the opportunity for capability to be nurtured, and properly managed, widening the talent pool.

Recognizing unrecognized talent

Pre-employment talent recognition also supports dismantling the barriers between education and the world of work. Many find their first foray into work daunting and struggle to secure employment, with the consequence of an unintended career path that does not exploit talent potential nor develops KSA. It could be argued that inert talent may be responsible for unrealistic job expectations leading to long-term unemployment. Transferring work culture away from “get a job, any job” to one of a thoughtful decision may help young people to get a job they can succeed in. In turn, this develops the nation’s talent potential, motivates individuals to achieve, reduces ill health and combats the organizational struggle with disengagement.

Understanding your talent

Most strategic talent management models advocate the organization defining what talent it requires, but perhaps, the key proposition of the BTM is to turn talent on its head and propose an audit of the talent potential that exists in the organization. Audit techniques may include coaching, mentoring, occupational psychometric testing and KSA reviews. Working from a position of known potential enables the organization to structure the organization based on existing strengths and focus recruitment on talent gaps rather than job role description.

Managing the talent within

The processes required for managing the flow of talent go beyond the norms of workforce and succession planning, building a foundational career map to support individuals in managing career development and transitions.

The invert talent management approach of the BTM allows for the development of career maps based on talent potential and KSA rather than job families or hierarchy. Familiarity with the talent potential of the employee population also enables the development of egalitarian talent processes which promote employee career and personal development interests in conjunction with meeting organizational talent requirements now and in the future.

A further proposal is the development of a career manager role as part of talent management processes. A career manager would provide coaching and mentoring support to help employees in making decisions related to career moves, job assignments, promotions, contract negotiations and development opportunities.

Enhanced talent value maybe created as employees develop their career perhaps as an expert in a particular field, change careers or seek to manage their careers outside the boundaries of the organization they are currently working for.

Transitioning talent out of the organization

Most strategic talent management models ignore the verity that to release talent potential may require a change in organizational setting. But the significance of managing the departure of talent is indistinguishable to recruitment and retention. After decades of layering and business reengineering, most organizations are unable to provide a job for life, even for their most valuable talent. This leads to two possible outcomes. First that the employee gets frustrated and leaves the organization unexpectedly, resulting in damaging talent gaps, or the employee stays but their talent potential remains unrealized.

Such a scenario may have contributed to the Gallup research findings that found 71 per cent of employees are *not engaged* or *actively disengaged*, culminating in a devaluation of talent eliciting reduced levels of performance and possibly negative or destructive behavior by a once exemplary employee (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999).

Managing the exit of talent would negate both these issues. Frank and open discussions with an individual about their aspirations, with an honest appraisal of the succession plan and career map, could instead lead to employees being helped to manage themselves out of the organization. This process would enable the organization to back-fill the position, ensure sustainable employee performance and make exit part of their talent management process.

Conclusion

In traditional models of strategic talent management, a high proportion of the talent within the organization remains unrecognized or outside the norm; it becomes impossible to place a true value on the intangible asset available to an organization from its employee population.

Keywords:

Human resource management,
Talent management,
Talent,
Boundary-less organizations,
War for talent

The BTM offers a framework that aids the flow of talent that enters, progresses through and exits the organization by focusing on talent management by inclusion. This liberates the full value of talent potential and the management of career pathways both internally and externally to the organization. Encouraging the creative use of BTM may enable individuals to contribute positively to society and organizational competitive advantage, adding value and delivering sustainable organizational performance.

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Further reading

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About the author

Carrie Louise Foster is a "Woman of Many Businesses". Her primary business is that of an OD Change Management Consultant and Facilitator of Leadership and Talent Development. In this role, she helps develop organizations, leaders and teams to

dramatically improve the way they think, and thus the way they work and live, using models of human interaction such as group dynamics, emotional intelligence, mental toughness and thinking environment behaviors. As a proven commercial OD practitioner with over 10 years experience, Carrie has a track record of providing OD programs across UK, Europe and Russia that have met both the individual and business needs, while creating goodwill and trust in the development process. Creative, fun and engaging, she is dedicated to enabling people to have the courage to overcome obstacles to perform in order to deliver the organization's purpose and strategy. Carrie has delivered several high-profile OD interventions that have included Aggreko, Britvic Soft Drinks, Urenco Capenhurst, Federal Mogul and Exide Technologies. Carrie Louise Foster can be contacted at: carrie@organisationdevelopment.org

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