Exploring talenting: talent management as a collective endeavour

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to show appreciation for the collective endeavour of work practices based on varying degrees of dependence, interdependence and mutuality between at least two people. Such dependencies have to be concerned with how talent is used and how this use is an interaction between people, a process called talenting. The aim of this paper is to provide a method to explore talenting.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper provides a brief overview of recent debates relating to talent management (TM). This paper argues that TM seldom pays attention to work practices where performance is frequently a collective endeavour. A mapping method is explained to identify work practices and obtain narrative data. This paper provides a case to explore talenting in West Yorkshire Police.

Findings – In total, 12 examples are found and 3 are presented showing the value of various forms of dependency to achieve outcomes.

Research limitations/implications – TM needs to move beyond employment practices to work practices. There is a need to close the gap between traditional TM employment practices, usually individually focused, and work practices which are most likely to require a collective endeavour.

Practical implications – There needs be ongoing appreciation of talenting to add to TM activities.

Social implications – This paper recognises a more inclusive approach to TM based on work performance.

Originality/value – This paper, to the best of the authors's knowledge, is probably the first enquiry of its kind.

Keywords Police, Talent management, Collective endeavour, Dependency and interdependency, Talenting, Work performance

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

Talent management (TM) has been recognised as a key theme of human resource management (HRM) (Paawe, 2007). Despite doubts about whether TM represents anything more than a repackaging of human resource practices (Chuai *et al.*, 2008), in many organisations, it is seen as an "essential management practice" (CIPD, 2015). However, surveys of practice suggest that TM is based mainly on an exclusive categorisation of employees which runs the risk of demotivating those who are not seen as part the TM process (CIPD, 2013) or considered for programmes aimed at those identified as high performers (or HiPos) (Lacey and Groves, 2014). There are also concerns about the managerialist focus of TM based on a narrow view of organization performance and the implication of a unitarist underpinning ideology (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013; Farndale *et al.*, 2010). In combination, these tend to produce an over-concern with individuals as the unit of analysis and the possessors of talent and how specific HR practices are used to recruit, motivate, develop, retain and terminate individual employees.

Some writers such as Boudreau and Ramstad (2005) and Collings (2014) have argued for the need a more sustainable view of TM that moves beyond narrow measures' financial outcomes and shareholder value to consider an organisation's responsibility to society and the views of a variety of stakeholders. Collings in particular suggests that a focus on employees as stakeholders as a feature of a more pluralist understanding of TM can enhance organization sustainability through the creation of value that benefits all stakeholders. Devins and Gold (2014) contribute to this line of discussion by arguing for an appreciation of the collective endeavour of work practices which moves attention to the performance of work which usually requires conjoint action (Spillane, 2006) based on varying degrees of dependence, interdependence and mutuality between at least two people. Referring to this as sustainable talent management and development, they argue that such dependencies have to be concerned with how talent is used and how this use requires an interaction between people. We propose to call such a process, talenting, to indicate its fluid nature based on interactions. The purpose of this paper is to explore, perhaps for the first time, how talent is used in interactions between people in the performance of work and the value added by such processes. That is, instead of a focus on individuals and associated HR practices that form TM, we consider work performance as a collective endeavour and the process of talenting. To do this, we will provide a method to explore this process in a collaborative project with the West Yorkshire Police. The paper will begin with a brief overview of recent debates relating to TM. We will then explain the background and methods used in our project and the findings. We will finish with a discussion of the value obtained.

War, talent and talenting

Since the "war for talent" was declared by Michaels *et al.* (2001), the term talent has gained widespread use, but there does seem to be some confusion and variation in its meaning and use. A decade later, some would argue that talent can be defined and used in any way people want based on their ideas on what the term talent covers (Ulrich, 2011). However, there are some discernible patterns in evidence. During the 2000s, it was inevitable that any concern with the recruitment, selection, development and career management of anyone in organisations would fall under the heading of HRM and that terms such as "succession management" or "workforce planning" could be used to

connect to TM through systems and policies for practices such as "talent pipelines" and "talent pools" to form a TM architecture (Tansley *et al.*, 2007; Sparrow and Makram, 2015). For some, TM represented another opportunity for HRM practitioners to find credibility and status as professionals but also with a concern that it represented a repackaging of HR practices as "old wine in new bottles" (Chuai *et al.*, 2008). Another view, identified by Lewis and Heckman (2006), considers talent more generically but with two possibilities. First, talent has to be managed against the levels required for performance but especially those who are high performing and have high potential. This might require employees to be differentiated or graded at particular levels (A, B or C players, etc.) with those at lower grades at risk from termination (Axelrod *et al.*, 2002; Guthridge *et al.*, 2006). Second, talent could be seen as a route to high performance based on the efforts of everyone (Walker and Larocco, 2002), and it is HRM's job to bring out "the talent inherent in each person, one individual at a time" (Buckingham and Vosburgh, 2001, p. 18). TM can be seen as open to all employees, providing a path for career development for everyone. This can also allow more attention to relationships between people and the organisation of work in teams (Cerdin and Brewster, 2014). Knowledge workers such as software developers and designers need to be retained in a "smart" version of TM (Whelan and Carcary, 2011).

A further view is provided by Collings and Mellahi (2009, pp. 306-307), who suggest that the TM strategy needs to begin with identifying the "pivotal positions" as those which have strategic importance in providing an above-average impact in an organisation. Such positions can be filled through the development of a talent pool that provides for "high potential and high performing incumbents". Huselid *et al.* (2005, p. 1) also consider the first move as the identification of "A" positions as critical jobs which have significance for an organisation's strategy. This requires a clear strategy and the identification of strategic capabilities which provide an organisation's competitive advantage. The purpose of TM activities is to fill positions with what Huselid *et al.* call the "very best employees".

Whatever view is adopted, it becomes important to unravel the meanings and definition that are used for talent at work. Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2013, p. 293) provide two distinctions. First, a "talent-as-object" approach where talent is considered as the exceptional characteristics of people and conceptualises talent in terms of measures of ability including mastery of practice, natural ability and commitment to work and/or organisation. In addition, characteristics have to fit the context, they have to be right for the position, place and time. Second, a "talent-as-subject" approach considers talent as people who have skills and abilities. This provides a further choice between understanding talent as everyone (inclusive) or as an elite subset of employees (exclusive). The inclusive talent-as-subject approach seeks to view every person as talented. It is based on the principle that each person has strengths and can create added value for the organisation given the right development opportunities. By contrast, the exclusive talent-as-subject approach seeks to segment the workforce by identifying select groups of people based on ranking in terms of capability and/or performance. This rests on the principle that key individuals or stars are necessary for organisation success (Groysberg, 2010) and that investment in them is most likely to result in higher returns to the organisation (Bothner *et al.*, 2011). This is probably the norm in most organisations (Ready *et al.*, 2010) and is reflected in most TM research and policies (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015), even though there is just as much likelihood of

demotivating those who are not ranked as within the talented or identified as a high performer or HiPo (CIPD, 2013; Lacey and Groves, 2014).

From whichever approach is considered, both conceptually and practically, it is individuals who are usually assumed as the units for attention where talent is seen as a "form of human capital" (Iles *et al.*, 2010a, p. 182). Further such individuals, through the various HR practices and positions within various TM frameworks (boxes, grids, pools, pipelines, etc.) are meant to fall in line with the organisation's purpose and values, finding shared mutual goals and usually set by senior managers. Therefore, it seems that TM, like HRM before it, with its individualist meanings, becomes accommodated within an underlying unitarist assumption about workplace relations and a managerialist orientation (Farndale *et al.*, 2010; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013, p. 182). As Iles *et al.* (2010a) point out, such a perspective on TM neglects the importance of the development of social capital in organisations based on teams, groups and other collective activities which develop "bonds, bridges, trust and networks" between people. This links to a further critique of TM which arises when we consider the difference between employment practices and work practices (Boxall and Macky, 2009). The former includes those practices used to attract, recruit, select, appraise, train and reward employees, usually as individuals. However, work practices cover how work is organised, structured, enacted and supported as employees exert effort to achieve particular rewards. What becomes clearer is that TM seldom pays attention to work practices, but this is important because so much of what happens at work is not individually based; workplace performance is frequently a collective endeavour. For example, Sparrow and Makram (2015) have recently pointed out that it is not just "star performers" that create value but their exchanges with others which moves the consideration of TM from individuals to a more collective understanding. This requires a unit of analysis beyond individualisation in the form of roles and positions. Instead we need to consider units of dependent and interdependent relations based on mutuality where what we will call a process of talenting occurs.

Interestingly, the term talent has origins in the Greek word "tálanton" meaning a "balance or sum or money", and the Latin word "talenta", plural of "talentum", also meaning a sum of money. It was during medieval times that the sense was extended to ability. However, persisting for a moment with the notion that talent is concerned with units of value, we can see how it is put to use in the well-known Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30. In the parable, a man goes on a journey and gives his servants various amounts of talents. Then:

> He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

What is important is how the two servants who worked in relationship with others through trade were able to make use of their talents and increase outcomes. However, the servant who did nothing, gained nothing except the wrath of his master – "You wicked and slothful servant!".

In the Bible, parables are used to provide lessons, based on a concrete reality from which higher meaning can be derived. It is in this spirit that we want to work with the term *talenting*, which we define as:

> The process of the complementary exchange of skills and knowledge between at least two people that enables dependent or interdependent work practice.

We see the need for such a definition so as to provide focus for the attention we wish to give to work practices as processes. This is to make clear a difference from more stagnant notions of characteristics of people in the "talent-as-object" approach or people who have skills and abilities in the talent-as-subject' approach. We want to argue that, in either case, nothing happens unless those with the talent enter into relationships with at least one other person who is complementarily responsive.

We suggest that talenting lies beyond the object/subject distinction (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013) as an inter-subject process or talenting-as-inter-subjecting. In making this move, we seek to develop the noun, talent, into a gerund so as to allow the nominal properties of the word talent to feed a verbal projection that considers how a process consisting of dependent and interdependent actions is working (Baker, 2005).

However, to appreciate the working of talenting, we have to give greater emphasis and inquire into work practices, which gives more prominence to social and organizational capital factors such as networks, teams, cultures and work routines (Iles *et al.*, 2010a; Groysberg *et al.*, 2004). Over the years, there have been many attempts to study work practices. One recent example is the concern with distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006), where it is suggested that work performance is frequently a collective endeavour based on conjoint action requiring varying degrees of dependence, interdependence and mutuality. Further, over time, through repeated interactions, value is added to relationship and becomes accepted as tacit knowledge, but this is also recognised as a key feature of learning and knowledge creation (Beckett and Hager, 2002). This is the potential for study of work practices using a lens of talenting and provide a link to the original meaning of the term, talent. It also provides an antidote to the repeated focus on individuals, usually at senior levels or as part of the HiPo talent pools (CIPD, 2013). In adopting the talenting lens, we are also rejecting the unitarist view in favour of a more pluralist understanding which accepts different goals and preference of those involved in work practices through a collective endeavour (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013).

Writers such as Iles *et al.* (2010a) and Iles (2013) pose important questions relating to issues that TM is meant to solve, the focus of TM practices and who is identified as talented as targets for TM and who is not. Related to these, Sparrow and Makram (2015) pose the question, what is the value of TM? In this paper, we seek to provide different answers to these questions.

Method

To explore how talenting occurs requires an inquiry into working practices, involving the organisation and structuring of work (Boxall and Macky, 2009). There is considerable value to be gained from doing so, as talenting as a collective endeavour is likely to be hidden from top-down approaches used in many organisations. Further, there is significant potential for learning through the discovery of various forms of tacit knowledge that arise from repeated patterns of dependent and interdependent work relations (Beckett and Hager, 2002). Thus, even if initiated by someone identified as talented or otherwise, it is only when knowledge is shared, complemented and incorporated into practice that its value can become evident. For the value to persist and be enhanced, it must then be supported or protected by organization structures and

system. This is not an easy process however, as has been recognised by debates relating to operationalizing the resource-based model of HRM (Paauwe and Boselie, 2003; Bowman and Hird, 2014).

In Figure 1, a mapping approach for an investigation into talenting is outlined, to be completed by a group that have sufficient interest in doing so. According to Huff and Jenkins (2002), maps provide a visual representation allowing a visual way of thinking, allowing mappers to establish a landscape or domain by framing the subject of consideration. In doing so, mapping makes things in the subject more obvious by naming the most important entities or activities that exist within the domain providing a means to make sense of what is going on and potentially providing the creative opening of something new. This simultaneously places the entities or activities within two or more relationships so that implications can be considered and facilitates images where people can adopt different positions on the map, consider the implications and suggest options for movement and change. In adopting a mapping approach, we adapted the method suggested by Ambrosini and Bowman (2002) who saw causal mapping as a way to elicit knowledge of tacit routines so that managers could understand how their organisations worked.

Starting from a view that "We have the Talent for Success", the Factors that justify such a statement are revealed, followed by the activities that support the factors. This allows, for each activity, identification of examples of work practices involving collective endeavour. From this, particular practices can be selected for a visit by members of a group from which they can collect data in the form of stories of practice.

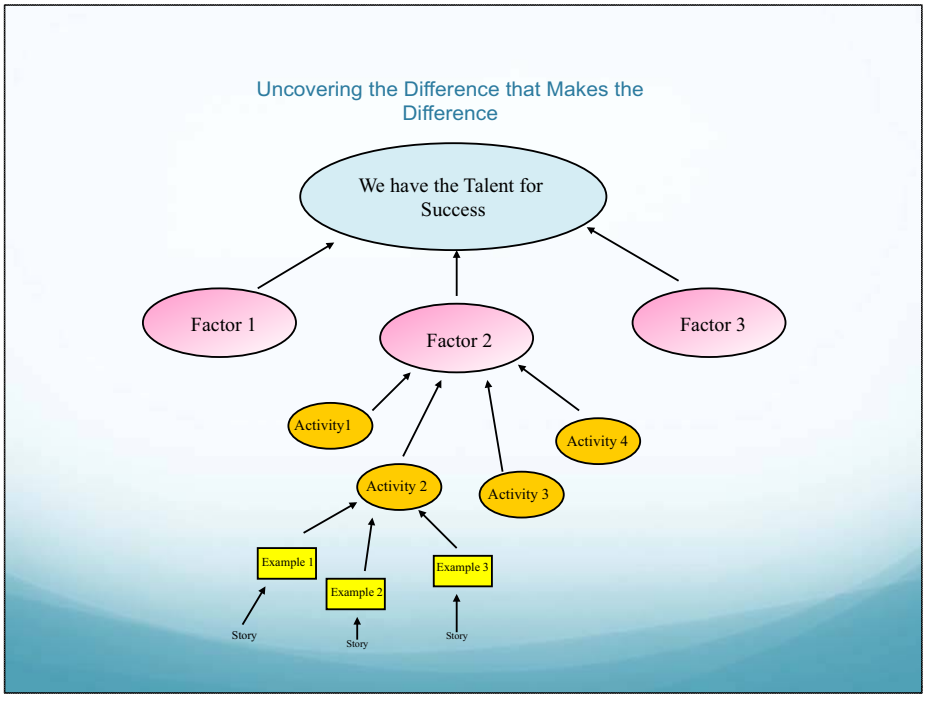

Figure 1.
Mapping to reveal talenting in work practices

The use of a story-telling approach to data gathering allows the meaning of human experience in the interpretation of events to reflect context and the purpose of events. Stories, as a key feature of narrative modes of thinking, provide a means to understand the social worlds of human interaction (Bruner, 1986). As Fisher (1987) argued, stories are an interpretation of ideas, actions and events connected by a plot configured into a whole. Because our focus of talenting is to demonstrate the value through collective endeavour, stories from its practice would, through the expression of a rich language, allow such value to become evident (Gergen, 2009). By focusing on the story, investigators are able to find others involved in the work practices by initiating and developing a conversational approach which would allow them to present their representations of reality and for this to be appreciated and valued. Once recorded, the stories can be shared and used for further analysis.

Case

Our inquiry into work practices using the lens of talenting is set within the West Yorkshire Police (WYP), located in the north of England. It is the fourth largest police force in England with around 5,000 police officers and 3,600 support staff including police community support officers. WYP serves to protect around 2.2 million people living in the five metropolitan districts of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield, which also form five divisions of the force. In recent years, as part of the general public sector financial policy in the UK, WYP has had find large savings.

Like most other organisation's, WYP's approach to TM is focused on individuals.

A recent policy document (WYP, 2015) defines talent: "as those individuals who can make a difference to organisational performance either through their immediate contribution, or in the longer term by demonstrating the highest levels of potential".

The document suggests that TM is concerned with: "identifying, releasing, and guiding untapped potential in people".

Importantly, WYP claims to take an inclusive approach to TM by considering all staff based on measurement of current performance and potential to improve. The identification of the talented is given to leaders and line managers and those identified are able to join a talent support scheme, and participants who join are expected to remain on it for three years, with no guarantee of career enhancement. One of the problems that the scheme now faces is that, in a period of financial constraint, there are fewer opportunities for promotions and this could render the talent pool stagnant. The inquiry was not meant to challenge the current approach to TM. Instead, we hoped to complement it by identifying how value was being provided through collective endeavour.

Following an adverse staff survey at a time of severe budget cuts and an ongoing national dispute relating to conditions of service and pension, a culture shift project was formed. During this project, based on a combination of action learning and appreciative inquiry (Gold, 2014), we recognized that further support for the process could be achieved by showing an appreciation for talenting. To do this, a small team of interested participants from within WYP was invited to join a short-term project. As experienced members of staff, the research group were in a good position to adopt an emic approach, as they were already embedded in the cultures which they were seeking to understand (Goodenough, 1970). The group included two principal officers from non-uniformed staff sections (HR and workforce planning), one of whom was female, and two chief

inspectors from two different divisions in WYP. They were therefore voices from different parts of WYP, each with different purposes, interests and values. However, they all had an interest in how the staff could be appreciated and developed. All had good experience of working in WYP and had good access to different divisions and groups within WYP and, most importantly, were interested in promoting the culture shift based on an accentuation of good work and practice. They were supported by a university academic who also designed the project and completed the data analysis, results of which were reviewed by the whole team.

The following workshops were held:

(1) Workshop 1:
- agreement of understanding of key terms – talent, talenting, work practices;
- mapping practices; and
- agreement on practices for inquiry based on collection of narrative data.

(2) Workshop 2:
- share understanding of knowledge of practices; and
- agree new practices for inquiry.

(3) Workshop 3:
- share understanding.

Findings

Mapping practices

At the first workshop, after preliminary consideration of the project's purpose and the key difference between talent as an individualised feature and talenting as a process of collective endeavour between at least two people, the mapping exercise was completed. It is shown as Figure 2.

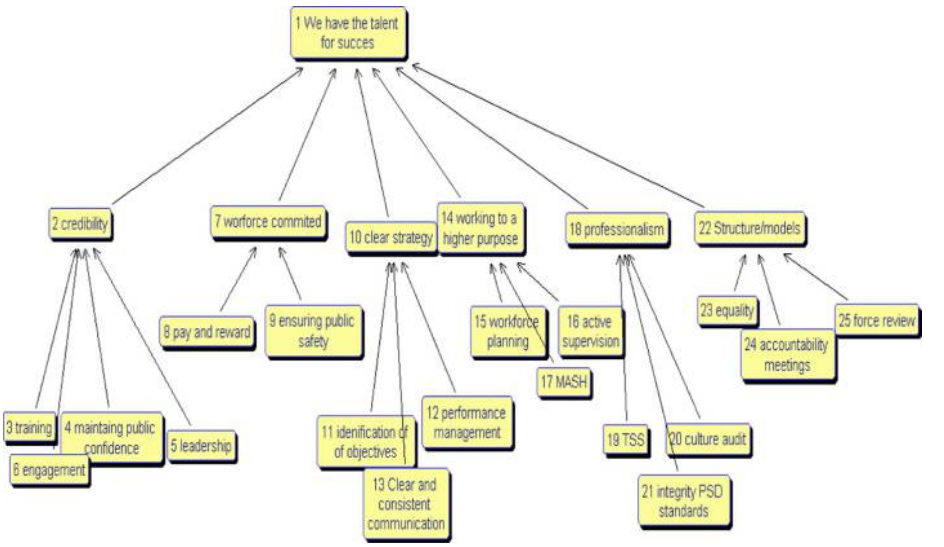

Figure 2.
Initial mapping

Starting with the claim that "We have the talent for success", six factors were revealed to support it[1]. It is interesting that the factors declared show a pattern of values such as credibility, professionalism and working to a higher purpose, in combination with enabling factors of clear strategy, structure/models and committed workforce. A brief discussion also revealed that while values were embedded, they were also subject to variation and flux. For example, professionalism was seen as valuable and related to the possibility of progression through the ranks. While it was possible to avoid starting at ground level, even external applicants with degrees needed to serve probationary periods. Working to a higher purpose had traditionally centred on full-time police officers but recent austerity measures were changing the balance between full-time officers and "volunteers" such as special constables and community support officers.

This first stage of mapping revealed the multi-dimensional nature of successful police work and how difficult it was to explain how it was done. Further, given the size of the organisation, it was difficult to see how a top-down approach could lead and manage across the whole Force. Indeed, a recent culture audit in WYP had shown problems between top and bottom of the force and disconnection, low trust and low engagement between leaders and staff at all levels[2].

Each factor was then used to stimulate the naming of activities in which work practices were taking place that gave existence to each factor identified. This revealed 18 activities, but it was accepted that this did not provide an exhaustive list. Indeed, the size of the Force would suggest that there were many silos, communities and work areas that were not fully understood or appreciated.

From the list, each person chose two activities to explore to find examples of work practices. The key questions to pursue were:

Q1. How is the work done through dependent and interdependent actions – talenting?

Q2. What is the quality and value of that work?

Q3. What are the results achieved?

By posing these questions, a work practice could be understood, recorded and presented to the group in story form.

Storying practices

In total, we gathered stories of 12 work practices based on an agreement to use the map generated to consider various practices from across WYP. Our interest was in the collective endeavour in evidence that demonstrates talenting-as-inter-subjecting. Table I shows the variety of practices identified.

In what follows, we provide examples of three stories with a degree of interpretation based on the working of dependencies between actors but also through the provision of data as story, some of the valuational features that are present to show its points and make it tellable are considered (Labov, 1972).

Story 1. Factor: Credibility.

Activity: Maintaining public confidence.

Work practice example: Solving street robbery crime.

The story concerns how various groups within the Force responded to a spate of street robberies. A key point being is how, contrary to reports of "anecdotal incidents" of teams

Factor	Activity	Practice
Credibility	Maintaining public confidence	Street robberies
Credibility	Training	Coaching
Credibility	Training	Protest liaison training
Credibility	Leadership	Leadership development
Credibility	Engagement	Mental health (MH) awareness training
Workforce committed	Ensuring public safety	Missing person investigations
Workforce committed	Ensuring public safety	Child sex exploitation
Clear strategy	Identification of objectives	Strategic assessment
Clear strategy	Identification of objectives	Meeting of the IAG
Working to a higher purpose	Workforce planning	Integrated strategic workforce planning method
Professionalism	Talent support scheme	Development programme
Structure/Models	Equality	Equality and diversity practice

Table I.
Identification of work practices

"not assisting each other", there was "a really positive, collaborative response from all teams and departments 'doing the right thing'".

It begins with a brief preamble, which sets the context and introduces characters. However, what becomes clear is that the characters in this story consist of collective units of groups and teams of people; no individuals are presented other than particular suspects and a generalised notion of officers. The units are Response Teams 1 and 4, A Dog Unit, Team 1 Rural, Neighbourhood Police Teams (NPT), Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and Reactive CID. Also participating were "complainants" and the "suspects".

Officers from Lates' Response Team 1 attended and took initial details from complainants who were unknown to each other but had both been approached by the same suspects.

The officers identified the scene of the robberies and requested a Dog Unit (central support) to attend and for further units to make to the area. Officers from Team 1 Rural (a neighbouring geographical area) came in to help with area searches and on identification of the second complainant went to deal with him.

(*There have been recent anecdotal incidents of neighbouring teams not assisting each other, so this is encouraging!).*

Descriptions were obtained and broadcast to officers from Response and NPT (separate teams) in the area.

A short time later, PCSOs from Team 1 NPT shouted up that they had observed three males and a female who fitted the descriptions given and that they were following them. They gave a commentary and other officers from NPT and Response attended.

One of the males ran off but was detained nearby. One of the suspects was found in possession of the complainants' property. The complainants were brought back to the police station and officers from Reactive CID (statements are usually tasked to uniform by CID, so their assistance was appreciated) took their statements. Officers from nights (the next shift coming on duty) – Response Team 4 – conducted the house searches for the suspects.

Overall a really positive, collaborative response from all teams and departments "doing the right thing".

From a talenting perspective, based on dependencies and interdependencies that enact work practices, we can see that once the details from complainants have been taken by Lates' Response Team 1, this information becomes a resource that can seek to energise other units. Lates' Response Team 1, in the terms suggested by Malone *et al.* (1999) is seeking to set up a flow dependency where the practice of one collective unit provides a resource to be used by others. The request for other Response Teams and NPTs are all efforts to create a coordinated sequence in which the performance of the work practice by Response Team 1 creates sequential tasks for others (Spillane, 2006) that need to be completed interdependently. Further, as trained and skilled officers, Lates' Response Team 1 has to ensure that the flow dependency required includes a resource that is the right thing, in the right place and available at the right time, referred to Malone *et al.* (1999) as usability, accessibility and prerequisite dependencies. The request to the Dog Unit is an opportunity for what Malone *et al.* refer to as fit dependency, where a differing work practice is combined with others. Further, "a Dog Unit" is differentiated by its non-specific label and its connection to a "central" service, contrasted with other units which are located in the geographic location of the incident.

The response from Team 1 Rural is viewed positively, in light of the view expressed about "neighbourhood teams not assisting". Here we find an example of negative encoding which is often used to express a particular value. In this case, it is a contrast to the "anecdotal incidents" (Quirk *et al.*, 1985). The involvement of Team 1 Rural may not have been initially expected, and their decision to join the flow dependency seems be an example of spontaneous collaboration (Gronn, 2002).

As the story moves toward key section, or complicating action (Labov, 1972), new units work with the same information create a shared dependency as it is included in their work practice. The PCSOs add their information, setting a new flow dependency for NPT and Response which produces the arrest and then the spontaneous collaboration from Reactive CID. Then, the dependency flows to Response Team 4.

In the last line of the story, the teller, with the intensifier of "really", provides an evaluation of the result by emphasising the positive response (Quirk *et al.*, 1985) before summarising the story's coda in the last few words, "doing the right thing", presented in scare quotes to indicate the teller's attempt to place this summary as a key valued endpoint. It is a vague and generalized phrase, which is used to summarise the value that is evident in the story and to make this recognizable to the reader (Predelli, 2003).

This particular work practice comes from the front line of policing and through it we can see, when it works well, that talenting is embedded and necessary. It would be particularly difficult to point to any particular individual or even a particular unit as more talented than others. It is the vital dependencies that produced the valued result.

Story 2. Factor: Structure/model.

Activity: Equality.

Work practice: Equality and diversity practice.

In this example, the determination of a formal policy of equality is enacted in nesting of interdependent processes. Once again, individuals are not mentioned explicitly and the participants are The Equality Gold Group, The Equality Silver Group, Equality Bronze Groups, Independent Advisory Groups, Community Groups, other key stakeholders including partner agencies, Human Resources, Force Improvement Group and North West Practitioner Group. Importantly, with such a wide range of interested

participants in the practice, there are bound to be a variety of interests and intentions that need to be reconciled through interdependence.

The first line sets the scene and reveals the formality of the practice.

Equality and diversity is delivered through formal structure and governance.

The Equality Gold Group determines the strategy and direction of the Force. They are supported by the Equality Silver Group, the members of which are responsible for turning the strategy into actions and ensuring that it is delivered.

In addition to this, locally there are Equality Bronze Groups that are based at a district level. These groups work with Independent Advisory Groups, Community Groups and other key stakeholders including partner agencies.

Human Resources have responsibility for workforce diversity with the Force Improvement Unit having responsibility for externally facing equality and diversity, e.g. hate crime.

Shared action plans covering both the external and internal elements are in place to ensure that the overall strategy of the Force is delivered. We also work as part of a North West practitioner group that means that we share best practice with other police forces across the country.

The story begins as a not untypical and top-down approach to equality and diversity. As in the previous case, through the resource created by Equality Gold Group, a flow dependency is set in motion. There is at this point a clear route delegation and devolution through Equality Silver to Equality Bronze. Gronn (2002) refers to the working of such structures which endure over times as institutionalised practice which allows collaboration between groups and individuals. Not explicitly stated, but such groups are likely to be centred around the concertive mechanisms of committees.

However, the resource from the formal structure then becomes available to other groups. At district level, and WYP has five such districts, there is interaction between Equality Bronze Groups within the Force but others outside the Force who are not formally part of the institution. While details are not provided, the practice of working with external groups allows a sharing dependency to be developed based on an exchange of information and understanding. As will be shown in the next case that considers an Independent Advisory Group (IAGs), such groups allow the Force to "measure the temperature of the community". It is also possible that this further resource from outside the Force now flows inside for consideration by the Force Improvement Unit.

The story comes to a conclusion which highlights two results of the interdependences; first, the development of shared action plan and second, the sharing of "best" practice with other forces.

While "hate crime" is the example given, what is also interesting that if we refer back to the one of the questions posed by Iles *et al.* (2010a) and Iles (2013), "What is TM meant to solve?", the shift of attention to work practice and the collective endeavour of talenting-as-inter-subjecting produces a whole new array of possible answers in the same mould.

As mentioned above, the next case considers the work of an IAG as a joint collective endeavour between the WYP and others.

Story 3. Factor: Clear strategy.

Activity: Identification of objectives.

Work practice example: Meeting of the Independent Advisory Group (IAG).

An Independent Advisory Group (IAG) is a consultative mechanism which allows the police and communities to work together in a facilitative environment and which allows a holistic approach to generating transparent and cohesive working practices which serve both to inform and reassure the community and its representatives. Thirteen panel members meet up with the police on a bi-annual basis; they are willing participants and up-to-date with current issues. They come from a variety of backgrounds, including OAPs, ex-council employees and neighbourhood housing panel members, for example. Partnership Working Area Inspectors for the district are now being encouraged to become part of the recruitment process to maintain an effective membership and to plan ahead to optimise representation.

Police professionals, usually at the most senior level possible for the district, explain the agenda'd items to the group which are usually issues challenging the police's thinking and/or performance and equally those which affect the community's perception of the police. The value lies in obtaining independent, and rationalised perspective(s) to develop a holistic response and approach which meets everyone's needs as far as is reasonably practicable.

This forum, for example, allows a sensible and proportionate challenge to topical (e.g. stop and search) police tactics/policy and from which reassurance can be provided along with tasking future work. Community members can input ideas as to what would work for them, i.e. "designing systems from the outside in", as well as satisfying the core requirements of the police i.e. preventing crime and disorder.

Updates on work which have been completed, changes in community perceptions, raised or decreased community tensions, feedback on local policing style and performance will all routinely be discussed at the IAG and, at its most fundamental, this is intrinsic to establishing and maintaining/improving trust between those who work for and with the police and the communities it seeks to serve and protect.

In this case, there is an extended preamble which provides the context and identification of the participants. An interesting feature is the encouragement of inspectors to be involved in recruitment to "optimise representation".

The second paragraph provides the connection to the collective endeavour. The invitation to collaboration is provided by the "agenda'd items" so that "independent and rationalised perspective(s)" can result in an "holistic response". The invocation of the term holism, used twice in the story, seems to be the principal value. It is a term that is closely connected to systems thinking with a deeply historical path from ancient Greek philosophy through to Kant and Hegel in the eighteenth century. It is underpinned by a view that the path to truth or what is right is through the recognition of the interdependence of parts that are connected systemically. The relation of parts serves the purpose of a whole (Jackson, 2003). Thus, the talenting in this practice seeks to bring multiple voices to bear on both the issues challenging the police's thinking and/or performance and the issues which affect the community's perception of the police.

While we could expect any issue, including the example "stop and search", to provide differences, the idealism suggested by holism is supported by a language of rationality (Gergen, 2009). In pursuit of this, the story makes an explicit reference to the "the value" of the process, based on "independent, and rationalised perspective(s)" which enables the trade-off between police and community thinking and perceptions. Police work is inevitably risky and dangerous, involving consideration of the safety of work undertaken both for police officers and members of the community. Finding a point of

reconciliation between different views of this work requires a process to construct a joint meaning which could be accepted so as to "meets everyone's needs", based on an orientation of "as far as is reasonably practicable". This allows recognition that there is risk and danger in the work of the police but there also needs to be some signal to the community of the limits for how the work is done and the importance of accountability (Turner and Tennant, 2009). The reciprocal efforts to create a flow of dependency is highlighted by the use of quotation marks in the phrase, "designing systems from the outside in".

In the final paragraph, the value of this particular work practice is given emphasis with a link to a policing motto in the last four words, *to serve and protect*.

Discussion

A key feature of this paper has been to cast a critical eye over TM policies and practices in many large organisations where there is a tendency to focus on particular individuals who are identified as high performing and/or have high potential to perform. Recent research from CIPD (2015) tends to support the continuation of an emphasis on the objective of TM as the development of high-potential employees as future leaders. A further differentiation can be found when the focus extends to an elite or star group of employees, based on an assumption that, compared to others, their performance can be "exceptional over time" (Aguinis and O'Boyle, 2014, p. 315). As such, it is those defined as talented who benefit from the range of employment practices that form the TM architecture. The linking of the purpose of TM for providing leaders can lead to what has been called methodological individualism (Hodgson, 2012) based on the assumption that an understanding of individual motives, interests and behaviours provides the best explanation of events such as workplace performance. If individuals are assumed as the unit for attention through the various employment practices, it is likely that TM will fall into the same difficulties that have beset HRM in showing a link to performance outcomes. As Purcell and Kinnie (2008) have indicated, such a link is ambiguous and is best considered in multi-relational terms to accommodate internal and external social, economic and political factors (Fleetwood and Hesketh, 2006).

If the link between TM employment practices and performance outcomes is problematic, the move into the territory that separates them has to consider work practices (Boxall and Macky, 2009) where so much that happens is based on a collective endeavour of dependent and interdependent relations between people, who may have been identified as talented or not. Whatever their status, individuals have to form or move into such relationships to be able to produce desired work outcomes. It is this exchange process that we have sought to consider in our invocation of the term talenting. In offering this new term as a gerund, derived from the noun talent, we bring more attention to processes of work practices found in work routines, teams, networks and cultures (Iles *et al.*, 2010a; Groysberg *et al.*, 2004). This also allows the TM field to form links with recent interest in process approaches to researching practice found in strategy (Jarzabkowksi and Spee, 2009) and leadership (Raelin, 2011). Talenting therefore invites researchers to move their interest from individual agents with particular attributes and skills of the identified talented – the concern of employment practices – to the "trans-individual social practices" (Chia and McKay, 2007, p. 226) – that constitute working life, involving both the identified and hidden talented.

Of course, the difficulty here is locating and considering the wide range of work practices that occur with teams, groups and internal and external networks. Increasingly in response to competition, technological and informational advances, market contraction and expansion and public expenditure cuts, organisations have introduced a variety of ways of working and structures. These serve to reinforce difficulties in locating a clear view of an organisation as a single entity (Sandelands and Drazin, 1989), especially for those in positions whose vision of the practice of work might be obscured such as leaders and other managers, including training and development professionals. It is a reminder that organisations might be better understood, metaphorically through images such as what Czarniawska-Joerges (1993) called "nets of collective actions" which are difficult to recognise. However, as Sparrow and Makram (2015, p. 261) suggest, for the advance of the field and to enable it to respond to key challenges facing organisations, TM needs to address the issue of value. In doing so, they point to the need to consider both the value created by individuals and also the "collective exchanges of surrounding talent". It is for such reasons that we have, in this paper, started to consider, a view of TM through the lens of talenting using a causal mapping technique (Ambrosini and Bowman, 2002) to consider the identification of activities containing work practices and the use of story-telling to understand the social worlds of human interaction (Bruner, 1986) that reveal dependent, interdependent and reciprocal efforts (Devins and Gold, 2014).

For those involved in training and development, there are some important opportunities in switching their gaze from individuals as the concern for TM to collective units and talenting. The approach adopted in this paper has revealed an understanding of processes within which talenting occurs and its collection in the form of a story provides an articulation of what can be called local knowledge or knowledge from the front-line of policing (Griffiths *et al.*, 2016). While not a pure form of tacit knowledge, such knowledge does fall into one possibility for such knowledge which might normally be concealed (Collins, 2001). However, the process allowed sharing and the articulation of knowledge that can become beneficial for innovation and effectiveness (Arnett and Wittman, 2014). In addition, such knowledge, if captured, can be shared with others and then incorporated into actions, and over time, institutionalized through "systems, structures, procedures and strategy" (Crossan *et al.*, 1999, p. 525). Mintzberg *et al.* (1998, p. 195) have also highlighted how learning from the practice of work and its articulation can be incorporated into strategy. Local knowledge from talenting, like "weeds in a garden" which take "root in all kinds of strange places", contrast with the top-down and formal views of making strategy. As was evident in one of the stories reported in this paper, increasingly it has become important to consider life beyond formal boundaries. Work practices in many areas of work require collaboration between different organisations both at a formal level but also below the line of recognition. Through the practices, talented people from different sides with different interests have to find ways of working dependently and interdependently. As they do, forming talenting relationships, each party adds to their own knowledge but also to the value of the relationship between them as a form of social capital development. Certainly in policing, such a view is now recognised as a vital feature in tackling complex community and society issues (Weisburd *et al.*, 2015).

Leaders can also benefit from participating in the collection of talenting stories, and this can and perhaps should be included in leadership development programmes.

Indeed, such a feature might enhance the role of human resource development professionals and increase their influence with leaders (MacKenzie *et al.*, 2012), allowing them to come closer to work practices, challenging their prejudices about who is talented and who is not.

Of course, in advancing the notion of talenting, we recognise that there are limitations. First, talenting is just one way of considering work practices and its dependent and interdependent manifestation. The field Organisation Studies and related sub-fields have long considered the working of groups, teams and relationships across functional and organisational boundaries. In addition, the recent interest in distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006) has allowed focus to look beyond individualised conceptions of leadership. Raelin (2011), for example, has developed the idea of leaderful practice based on collective working, influence and leading. However, give the prominence that continues to be given to the individually talented through employment practices, and the differentiation from those who are not, talenting represents a fresh way of considering work practices that have always been there.

Another limitation is the mapping approach we have developed with a reminder that maps are not always the territory. The map that was produced by the group in this paper was bound to be limited to their understanding. However, this did not prevent us from making a start and, if anything, the process revealed a multitude of possibilities for talenting, the exploration of which was constrained by the time available. For the group, a further limitation was the way that current TM polices in WYP were embedded. Indeed, WYP's TM scheme was chosen as one of the work practices, and ironically the examination of the work practice revealed it to be a collective endeavour based on interdependencies between different groups within the Force, e.g. Human Resources, Protective Service Operations, Training and Development and Districts. The challenge remains on how findings from a consideration of talenting can complement more traditional TM policies and architectures.

A final limitation is that in completing a search for talenting, the work activities identified and selected may have been overly positive. What is likely to be less prominent and even hidden are stories of dependence and interdependence that represent deviant or apparently negative practices (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). However, deviance and negativity are just as possible among those considered talented, especially those who might occupy leader positions (Board, 2010).

In this paper, we have tried to shift the attention from employment practices in TM to work practices and one of the reasons for making this move has been to stretch the meaning of TM beyond the managerialist and unitarist positions adopted in most organisations, whereby TM is part of the package of tools to manage people, the talented, as individuals (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013). A crucial research question arises as to whether these dominant positions can be challenged in organisations, especially at times when the disparity and inequality engendered by employment practices is coming under scrutiny (Cobb, 2015)? A second question arises from the recognition that the field of TM needs to progress. Will the field remain fixated on employment practices and especially those that feed an exclusive TM orientation? We argue that this is the easy way out but we are not advocating a wholesale switch to talenting in work practices. Our position is one of both/and, seeing the need to complement traditional TM with an understanding of talenting. For training and development professionals, we set the question: Can the value of talenting be appreciated and the value used to increase and enhance their influence in organisations?

Conclusion

In this paper, we have taken a pluralist view of TM, and thereby recognised the differing goals, preferences and views of different stakeholders within WYP. Using an adapted mapping process, we identified a wide range of working practices from which we have presented three examples in the storied form. The importance of this approach is displayed in the way the stories provide a glimpse of the processes of value creation value and capture in TM (Sparrow and Makram, 2015). However, it has to be recognised that this approach was still scratching the surface but even on the limited evidence that was found and storied, it was recognised that collective endeavour and talenting were central to WYP's efforts to fulfil its purpose. Further, when considered as process, it almost becomes impossible to attribute successful outcomes to particular individuals; rather it is the dependences and reciprocal relations that provide the coordination and collaboration required. This is not to de-recognise that there will also be occasions when individuals in WYP can be given the credit for outcomes; it is just that to polarise TM around individuals only is also a distortion of what is vital for work practice.

However, there remains considerable work to do to ensure that the resources devoted to the recognition of individual talent can also be devoted to understanding the value of talenting as a collective endeavour. This will also allow a move egalitarian and less elitist view of TM (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). We therefore advocate that both practitioners and researchers who are interested in the advance of TM adopted complementary policies and practices that allow the identification and development of talented individuals through employment practices as well as the working of talenting in work practices. This paper provides one approach to considering the latter.

Finally, if we consider some the key questions posed by Iles *et al.* (2010b); Iles (2013) and Sparrow and Makram (2015), we can suggest that:

- The problem TM is meant to solve is how to provide recognition for the collective endeavour that is typical in most organisations.
- The focus of TM practices needs to shift towards the multitude of work practices if they can be found.
- The target for TM needs to be on the multiple participants who work interdependently.
- By shifting attention to the unit of collective endeavour, the way value is created and captured can be appreciated and its exploitation considered.

We suggest that the future of TM needs to embrace these possibilities.

Notes

1. Numbers in the map are the result of coding that accompanies the software, Decision Explorer, but have no other meaning.
2. A copy of the report available is at www.westyorkshire.police.uk/sites/default/files/files/reports/wypx_report_final_170714.pdf (accessed 26 April 2016).

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