

CONCEPTUALIZING TALENT IN THE WORLD OF WORK

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Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to our conceptual understanding of talent in context of Talent Management (TM), which achieved strong attention in Human Resource Management (HRM) during recent years. But, further research is needed for the achievement of commonly accepted definitions and conceptual boundaries regarding talent as a term. For this purpose, four highly recognized conceptualizations of talent in working context, published between 2007 and 2013, will be discussed in this paper. This is combined with publication of study results on individual talent characteristics for strategic company success and strength-profiles of talents from different age groups provided by the authors for large companies in the German Metal- and Electronic (M&E) industry.

Keywords: Talent management, talent, talent conceptualizations, talent characteristics, talent strengths, talent profile

INTRODUCTION

The fundamental question ‘What is talent?’ is still unanswered in TM literature (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013) and stringent definitions are still missing (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013). The “ongoing

confusion about the meaning of talent is hindering the establishment of widely acknowledged TM theories and practices, thus stalling scholarly advancement. In addition, the lack of construct clarity might lead to a lack of confidence in the conclusions that can be drawn from the existing literature” (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013, p. 291). Researchers therefore call for more in-depth theoretical considerations regarding the nature of talent which is necessary in order to overcome theoretical ambiguities in TM and finally contribute to more effectiveness of TM in practice (Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013). This paper aims to contribute to that call by discussing examples of talent conceptualizations (see Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley 2011) strongly recognized in TM literature (see e.g., Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013).

CONSIDERING HISTORICAL REFERENCES ON THE TALENT TERM

The term ‘talent’ is thousands of years old and leads back to the ancient Greek word ‘talanton’ or the Latin ‘talenta’, which was used for a unit of weight or money. The word ‘talent’ originally was utilized by Greeks, Babylonians, Assyrians and Romans (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Tansley, 2011) and synonymous for the amount of 25.86 kilogram weight, mostly silver, sometimes also gold (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013). This relation was the start for talent as a monetary unit (Tansley, 2011).

Very well known in Bible context is the parable of Matthew in the New Testament (25: 14-30) about a man, going to a journey and entrusts his assets to his servants in the way of giving them five, two and one talent of silver according to the ability of each one. The servants with five and two talents doubled it because of hard working and trading. The servant with one talent was afraid of losing it and buried it in the ground. After his return the master rewarded the working servants with their individual gains and advised the servant who buried the coin to hand it over to the servant who has the most. According to Tansley (2011: 267), “since the New English Bible translates the Greek word talent into the word capital, this parable can be seen as one of the causes for HRM scholars using the term human capital as synonymous to talent” (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013, p. 292). The meaning of the parable “conveys that talents—whether they are interpreted as monetary units or natural abilities—are valuable and should not be wasted, and this moral still applies today” (Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013, p. 306).

In the 13th century the meaning of talent changed to desire or character traits (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Tansley, 2011) and talent was seen either as the feeling that makes a person want to do something (e.g.,

an inclination) or the natural qualities of a person's character (e.g., a disposition) (Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013). During the 14th century, talent stands for natural ability or aptitude (Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013). In the 15th and 16th century talent was related to treasure, riches (Tansley, 2011) or a person's mental ability or endowment (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Tansley, 2011) for personal use or enhancement (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013). By the 17th century talent was "related to a special natural ability or aptitudes and faculties of various kinds" (Tansley, 2011, p. 276) such as mental power or abilities (Tansley, 2011). In the 19th century "talent was viewed as embodied in the talented—hence, a person of talent and ability" (Tansley, 2011, p. 267). Within the 20th century further terms in context of talent originated e.g., a talent scout or spotter since the 1930s, related to a person who is searching for new talents e.g., in fields of music or sport (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013). In contemporary debates about talent, multiple kinds of talent are considered to exist in certain individuals from their day of birth (Tansley, 2011). For instance, in British English today, talent is also a synonym for sexual attractiveness of people (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013).

Finally, the different references show, that talent always was related to preconditions for the enhancement of individuals live, either by personal character traits (e.g., talent as special abilities) or by articles of value (e.g., talent considered as amount of silver or gold) (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Tansley, 2011). These aspects represent the significant role of talent from the past till this day.

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF TALENT IN WORKING WORLD

There are different conceptualizations on the talent term provided in TM literature (see e.g., Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley 2011), which will be explained consecutively. In one hand talent is considered with a more narrow, economic approach (see e.g., Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley, 2011) on the other hand, talent is contemplated in broader context, including further fields of academic literature for instance, domiciled in psychology (see e.g., Dries, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013).

For Tansley (2011) Talent in working world is defined generally organizational-related, tremendously influenced by industry sector and kind of work, having implications on group-level, mostly straightened to an individual and modifying over time aligned with organizational priorities (Tansley, 2011). At organizational level, talent should be defined by considering the specific organizational context such as available or needed skills. This will lead to more organizational value than trying to implement definitions used by other organizations (Tansley,

2011). The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) found out, that there are tremendous differences regarding the talent definition in a small company, local authority or multinational enterprise (Tansley et al., 2007). For instance, at Gordon Ramsey Holding talent is understood as ‘creative flair of chefs’, at Google a talent is described as competent, ‘ideas person’ or ‘challenger who thinks outside the box’. At PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP talents are those who demonstrate willingness, intelligence and energy to face challenges in order to create distinctive business results. They can be related to management or leadership tasks in several functions and areas (Tansley, 2011). On a group level the determination of talent has for instance a “paradoxical nature” (Tansley, 2011, p. 270) related to positive effects e.g., recognizing strengths of talents and giving them access to resources but also negative effects, for instance it can lead to increasing resentments of co-workers not being considered as talents with impact on their performance (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Tansley, 2011).

At individual level talent is related to different single aspects, which make talent for instance ‘special’ or ‘unique’ or easy to demonstrate without any efforts (Tansley, 2011). Talent in organizations can be considered from different perspectives, such as behavioral characteristics (e.g., a ‘can-do’ attitude), knowledge, skills (e.g., ability to create new knowledge), competencies and cognitive abilities, such as a flexibility to create a mindset needed for different organizational requirements (Tansley, 2011). Others understand organizational talent as “a complex amalgam of employees’ skills, knowledge, cognitive ability and potential. Talent in an individual needs to be recognised as a complex and dynamic mix of such key characteristics” (Tansley, 2011, p. 271). As mentioned above an organizational talent is related to certain behaviors as a key element. Leadership behaviors are widely recognized as important in TM literature (Tansley, 2011). For Tansley (2011) considerations based on an ethical stance of behaviors play also an important role e.g., related to subordinated employees for “understanding the behaviours that people bring to the business and where you can really use them to develop the business and move the business forward” (Tansley, 2011, p. 271).

A further perspective within the perception of individual talent is the combination of high performance and high potential (Tansley, 2011). Based on a study conducted by the CIPD (see Tansley et al., 2007) and related to over 100 detailed face-to-face interviews with senior executives, HRM leaders and professionals of various kinds of organizations in Great Britain, talent as high performance is linked most often with characteristics, such as outstanding levels of expertise, leadership abilities, creativity and the initiative to demonstrate a ‘can-do’ attitude built on self-confidence (Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley, 2011). The performance levels are related to the nature of work and the requirements of the organization. For example in private

sector companies like Google high level of expertise and creativity play a decisive role (Tansley, 2011), whereas in public sector organizations leadership behaviors were recognized as important characteristics for high performance (Tansley, 2011). Furthermore, Tansley (2011) point out that some organizations have a “strengths-based view of talent” (Tansley, 2011, p. 273). In this case talent is considered as individual strengths, for example feelings or behavior which is linked with job success (Tansley, 2011).

Atan and Stapf (2017, in this paper) conducted a study regarding TM in the German M&E industry based on the above mentioned study results provided by CIPD (see Tansley et al., 2007). It is contributing amongst others to the call for more demographic data (e.g., on younger and older workers) in TM (see e.g., Tansley, 2011). The utilized sampling method is based on a weighted random-sample drawn from a German business register. It was carried out in 2013 by IW personnel panel, which is managed by IW Consult, the research company at the Institute of the German Economy in Cologne. The survey is based on 542 responses of Human Resource (HR) decision makers invited to join by e-mail. As a result, for large companies (250 and more employees) leadership abilities, initiative and ability to learn reached the highest levels of importance for the achievement of strategic company success. In addition, the importance of these criteria will increase the most within the further medium-term development (see table 1).

Table 1: Criteria for strategic success in large German M&E companies

Characteristic	Importance (Very high importance in %)	Medium-term development (Continuing increase of importance in %)
Leadership abilities	33.9	53.4
Initiative	32.2	38.1
Ability to learn	28.8	47.5
Capacity for teamwork	28.0	28.0
High levels of expertise	28.0	22.9
Creativity	11.9	35.6

Source: IW Consult (2013, in this paper) based on Tansley et al. (2007)

The strength-profile (strengths and rather strengths) of talents lower 45 years is straightened to ability to learn, capacity for teamwork, high levels of expertise and initiative, whereas creativity and leadership abilities are represented to a minor extent (see table 2).

Table 2: Strength-profile for talents lower 45 years in large German M&E companies

Characteristic	Strengths in %	Rather strengths in %
Ability to learn	44.8	46.9
Capacity for teamwork	31.2	50.0
High levels of expertise	25.0	54.2
Initiative	35.4	36.5
Creativity	20.8	47.9
Leadership abilities	4.2	37.5

Source: IW Consult (2013, in this paper) based on Tansley et al. (2007)

The strength-profile of talents aged 45 years and beyond (see table 3) is aligned with high levels of expertise, leadership abilities, initiative, capacity for teamwork followed by ability to learn and creativity.

Table 3: Strength-profile for talents as of 45 years in large German M&E companies

Characteristic	Strengths in %	Rather strengths in %
High levels of expertise	67.4	26.3
Leadership abilities	21.9	49.0
Initiative	18.8	51.0
Capacity for teamwork	11.5	56.3
Ability to learn	12.5	40.6
Creativity	12.5	36.5

Source: IW Consult (2013, in this paper) based on Tansley et al. (2007)

TM literature provides several examples to characterize features related to high potential employees (e.g., Aráoz, 2005; Martin and Schmidt, 2010; Ready, Conger and Hill, 2010; Tansley, 2011). Aráoz (2005) for instance characterize three main components of potential:

1. Ambition.
2. The capability to learn from experiences.
3. Specific abilities, directed to be future-oriented, strategic, leadership- and results-oriented.

Tansley (2011) describes three features designated to a high potential employee:

1. Ability – Combination of innate attributes (e.g., patience) and learned skills (e.g., technical knowledge).
2. Aspiration – Individual desires (e.g., prestige or financial rewards).

3. Engagement – Emotional commitment, such as the extent to which employees believe in their organizations.

Martin and Schmidt (2010) studied 20.000 employees identified as ‘emerging stars’ in 100 global organizations within a project of 6 years. According to that successful high potentials need to demonstrate a degree of the following characteristics:

1. Ability – Intellectual, emotional and technical capabilities.
2. Engagement – Individual connection and commitment related to the own company.
3. Aspiration – Demand for perception, improvement and future rewards.

Ready, Conger and Hill (2010) surveyed high potential programs of 45 companies by 12 interviews with HRM directors, vice presidents and high potentials. The organizations recognized 3 to 5 percent of all employees as ‘high potentials’. The authors (Ready, Conger and Hill, 2010) identified four factors which distinguish high potentials:

1. Drive to excel – Ambition to make hard choices.
2. Catalytic learning ability – Prove and absorb new ideas in order to transfer them into successful concepts.
3. Enterprising spirit – Search for productive methods, leave career comfort zone for chancy new positions.
4. Dynamic sensors – Quick decisions and sense for time management.

Table 4: Commonalities and differences on high potential employees

Characteristic	Reference
Abilities	Aráoz (2005); Martin and Schmidt (2010); Ready, Conger and Hill (2010); Tansley (2011)
Ambition, aspiration	Aráoz (2005); Martin and Schmidt (2010); Ready, Conger and Hill (2010); Tansley (2011)
Engagement	Martin and Schmidt (2010); Tansley (2011)

Commonalities and differences regarding the above described conceptions are shown in table 2. The conceptions have in common, that specific abilities (e.g., intellectual or managerial capabilities) and ambition or aspiration are decisive for most authors (Aráoz; 2005; Martin and Schmidt, 2010; Ready, Conger and Hill, 2010; Tansley, 2011). Further authors (Martin and Schmidt, 2010; Tansley, 2011) highlight engagement standing for emotional commitment as key characteristic as well.

A further conception for explaining talent in working world is differentiating between object and subject approaches on talent. The object approach is related to talent as

characteristics of people e.g., talent as natural ability, mastery, commitment or talent as fit (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013). Talent considered as natural ability is described e.g., as outstanding intelligence, creativity or exceptional personal skills in certain domains, for example in music, sports or scientific domains (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013). The majority of HR scholars and practitioners represent the meaning that talent is innate or impossible to learn or teach. Others state talent is not really possible to manage and organizations should therefore focus to enable people on talent. Contrary to the talent as natural ability approach talent as mastery is related to a certain practice on a continuously superior performance level for instance in sport or scientific discipline but also based on learning experiences and training efforts. Talent as commitment is dedicated to both, first a commitment to an incumbent's employing organization and second to one's work. Decisive in this context are motivation, passion or interest for personal goals, such as a certain department project. A last kind of object approach is talent as fit related to a person's individual talent and the working context, in other words the right position, time or place (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013).

The subject approach is related to inclusive and exclusive approaches to talent (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010). Both approaches have in common, that they are not position-related (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010). The inclusive subject approach is focused on all employees of an organization e.g., all employees are talents. The main criticism on the inclusive subject approach is the similarity to typical human resource processes provided to all employees, such as development and retention activities (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010). The exclusive subject approach is focused on both, talent as high performers and talent as high potentials (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013) e.g., "the top 10 percent in terms of performance or potential" (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013, p. 297). Criticism on the exclusive subject approach for instance is that evaluation of performance and potential is not always related to objective indicators (e.g., level of turnover in sales) and mirrors in addition estimations by line or top management or the assumption of past performance forecasts future performance being usually a bottom for talent identification (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013).

Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries (2013) examined in their literature review five streams on talent: talent considered as giftedness, individual strength, (meta-) competency, high potential and high performance. Only the last three ones (competency, high potential and high performance) are to be seen in context of working, the other two have to be analyzed in several other thematic relations for example, educational sciences or psychology. Talent as giftedness

mostly is embedded within the educational research domain and has to do with individuals who show incredible performance levels in disciplines like music (such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart), sports, scientific fields or other areas. Giftedness as term is not commonly defined. The most existing literature on giftedness research is focused on children or adolescents for example, if special proficiency is innate or acquired (Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013). Talent considered as strength is an emerging research field located in positive psychology. Strength can be described for example as having potential for excellence or the characteristics of a person which allow performing on highest levels. Competencies and meta-competencies are related to certain capabilities of talent. Competencies are e.g., knowledge, skills or characteristics whereas meta-competencies are associated with e.g., emotional intelligence, general intelligence or learning agility. It is suggested that knowledge and skills can be improved by most people, whereas characteristics stay relatively constant. High potential as a form of talent is a widely mentioned in TM literature and commonly seen as individual feature which potentially become converted into future performance. High performance stands for a direct impact of talent to individual performance or in a wider context to organizational performance (Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Tansley, 2011).

Dries (2013) identified six theoretical perspectives on talent e.g., talent as capital, talent as individual difference, talent as giftedness, talent as identity, talent as strength and talent as the perception of talent. The first mentioned perception, talent as capital, is grounded in Human Resource Management (HRM) literature, the other five ones (e.g., talent as individual difference or talent as giftedness) are domiciled in different fields of psychology, such as industrial-organizational (I/O) psychology. TM is usually considered from a HRM perspective. Including aspects on psychology literature contribute therefore to a broader picture on theoretical talent perspectives (Dries, 2013; Huselid and Becker, 2011). Talent in HRM is conceptualized by capital and authors (Farndale, Scullion and Sparrow, 2010; Sparrow, 2009) suggest to consider talent via four lenses of capital: human capital (e.g., level of competencies, knowledge); social capital (e.g., current and future resources for activities in social networks); political capital (e.g., reputation, which enable to achieve support for finalizing activities); and cultural capital (e.g., attitudes, which positively influence the social structure of an organization in the long-term and become standard in speaking terms) (Dries, 2013). Talent on a human capital perspective embraces a resource-based view (RBV) of a company, which is related to the contribution of organizational members to their company as decisive point of consideration. Lepak and Snell (2002) developed a fundamental theoretical framework within the RBV, considered as a HR architecture model. The conception postulates that human capital of any organization can be split into two determination factors, value and uniqueness. Value is related to the potential of

human capital regarding its contribution to core competencies and competitive advantages of a firm. Uniqueness is focused on the degree to which the human capital of an organization is would be difficult to replace in sense of availability in the labor market or possibility being copied. Dries (2013) therefore concludes that talent related to the human capital perspective within an organization is valuable and unique either. In the I/O psychology, particularly in the fields of performance appraisals and personnel selection, talent is recognized on an individual differences perspective, like expert knowledge, cognitive skills and personality. Educational psychology literature recognizes talent as giftedness. Talent at this approach is focused at least at one specific ability domain, such as goal orientation in sports which places a person to the top 10% a corresponding age group. Vocational psychology literature pronounces the identity of talent e.g., a strict and stable self-understanding of goals and interests. Positive psychology literature aligns talent with strengths, e.g. characteristics of an individual which support the achievement of best results. Social psychology literature, particularly related on social cognition, circumscribe talent as the perception of talent. At this perspective the dynamic processes of building expectations and attitudes towards talent are in the foreground of consideration more than the initial content of talent itself. These perspectives can be used for the development of theories, methodological advances and future empirical studies (Dries, 2013).

CONTRASTING CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF TALENT IN WORKING WORLD

All conceptions (see Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley, 2011) summarized in table 5, have in common that they primarily highlight individual characteristics (e.g., knowledge, skills or competencies) as a source of talent which traditionally have an important role in HRM. In contrast to the perception of Tansley et al. (2007) and Tansley (2011) the majority of approaches (see Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013) consider talent also as a 'gift' (Dries, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013) or a 'natural ability' (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013) and combine their conceptions therefore with relations to social science or psychology. Further differences for instance are related to combinations of individual attributes and further features, such as internal factors (e.g., organizational priorities) and external factors (e.g., industry type) (Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley, 2011), talent approach (e.g., object or subject approach) (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013) or labor market aspects (e.g., possibilities to replace employees) (Dries, 2013).

Table 5: Contrasting conceptualizations of talent in the world of work

Reference	Characteristics	Contrasting feature
Tansley et al. (2007); Tansley (2011)	Mainly focused on individual attributes (e.g., skills, knowledge or competencies), organizationally specific, influenced by industry-type, work-nature, group-level implications, dynamic and related to organizational priorities	Individual attributes and relations to internal and external factors
Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz (2013)	Object approach: talent as characteristics (natural ability, mastery, commitment or fit); Subject approach: inclusive (all employees are talents) and exclusive talent approaches (talents as high performers and high potentials)	Individual attributes and relations to talent approaches
Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries (2013)	Talent related to competencies, high potential, high performance as main HRM perspectives as well as talent as giftedness and strengths	Individual attributes and relations to educational sciences or psychology
Dries (2013)	Talent as capital (as main HRM perspective), individual difference, giftedness, identity, strength and perception of talent	Individual attributes and relations to psychology and I/O psychology

LIMITATIONS

Facing the above mentioned approaches for conceptualizing talent in working world (see Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley 2011) some authors (see Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley, 2011) move away from focusing only an individual point of view by including also considerations on group-level (see Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley, 2011) or the adoption of an inclusive talent approach focused on all employees (see Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013). For this reason these perspectives provide at least a partial counteract for the predominant perception and general overestimation of talent on individual level (see Boxall and Macky, 2009; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Facing the lack of empirical data around the discussed talent conceptualizations (see Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley 2011) it is at this point of consideration too early for profound statements and recommendations for instance, regarding their feasibility and aligned outcomes in HR practice. Suggestions therefore remain at a fundamental level. According to

that organizations should explore the content of talent before engaging in TM (Festing, Schäfer, Scullion, 2013; Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley, 2011), especially in context of their requirements and situations (Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley, 2011). For these substances a corporation-wide common understanding is necessary in order to avoid misunderstandings in management practice (Tansley et al., 2007).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Described conceptions (see Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley 2011) approaching talent by several aspects (see table 5). Hereby, beside individual characteristics (e.g., skills or knowledge) mentioned in every approach the inclusion of several further factors (e.g., talent on group- or workforce-level) finally lead to different approaches regarding the perception of talent in the world of work.

How individual characteristics for the achievement of strategic company success are seen in managerial practice is provided by recent research of Atan and Stapf (2017, in this paper). According to that for larger companies in the German M&E industry leadership abilities, initiative and ability to learn rank at highest levels of importance and will further increase within medium-term development (see table 1). The study either reveals that talents of different age groups are aligned with different strength-profiles. Thus, talents below 45 years are ranked at highest levels regarding their ability to learn, capacity for teamwork, high levels of expertise and initiative, whereas creativity and leadership abilities are represented to a minor extent (see table 2). Whereas talents aged 45 years and beyond (see table 3) are aligned with high levels of expertise, leadership abilities, initiative, capacity for teamwork followed by ability to learn and creativity.

To define talent for the purpose of TM is recognized as one of “the most pressing topics for further research” (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013, p. 298). This paper contributes to this overall aim by reviewing examples on this purpose (see Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley 2011). The current stage of research for the definition of organizational talent is at an early phase so that scholars (see Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013) entitle their approaches for instance, as “first attempts to address the definition of talent within talent management” (Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013, p. 318). It is therefore suggested in professional literature to explore talent in further organizational settings (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013) such as talent in for-profit or non-for-profit

organizations or characteristics of talent in different industry cultures and sectors (Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013).

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