

Keynote Address



Roland S Persson, PhD, Jönköping University, Sweden

The Few, The Proud and The Brave: Finding, hiring and managing gifted employees in a time of talent wars

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Abstract

The notion of Talent Wars is the invention of worldwide consultants McKinsey & Company and their researchers in describing the scarcity of talent deemed necessary to further global and macro-economic growth during the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Everyone wants to find and employ talent but the general understanding of what talent is, is surprisingly vague somewhat mirroring the definition crisis in Gifted Education. Because of the growing need for talent management to sustain envisioned economic development it has become essential to merge the experience of several fields of application and research to eliminate management practices based mainly on ideology and wishful thinking to make an organizational culture and climate optimal for recruited talent. Gifted education has a fair understanding of who the gifted and talented are and what they need, even though theories and identification models vary considerably. Talent Management, on the other hand, is a relatively new phenomenon but no current model includes the notion of giftedness. Outside education systems the notion of talent is mainly used as a term for human capital relating mainly to the executive leaders of tomorrow. Yet current talent management practice still divides talent into high achievers, low achievers, and several stages in between, but without knowing much of the social and psychological dynamic following different levels of ability and competence well known to most academic scholars in education and psychology. Gifted education has much to contribute to talent management. This keynote will chart this new territory and pinpoint areas of contention, agreement, pitfalls, misconceptions and best practises as culled from Gifted Education, management, as well as from the documented experience of the Google Corporation; one of the World's most successful businesses and most popular employers.

Keywords: Talent management, giftedness, talent, talent wars, knowledge economy, fourth industrial revolution, definition of talent, creativity, innovation

Introduction

The Few, The Proud and The Brave! I have unashamedly borrowed the famed attributes from the United States Marine Corps. No doubt a morale-boosting motto for enlisted American marines, but it also happens to be an apt description of gifted individuals recruited for working life. Such employees are few by statistical necessity. They also tend to be proud of who and what they are having arrived at this pride of self by a life time of courage in a world that has limited tolerance and understanding of them. This paper aims at overviewing the potential promises of gifted individuals in the era of innovation and technological prowess as well as pointing out the organizational obstacles in professional life that they tend to encounter. Organizational hurdles to recognizing talent making them satisfied and productive at work characterize the talent wars of the emerging global knowledge economy (Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001).

The world increasingly *demand*s talent as the guarantee of a growing global economy but, paradoxically, its stakeholders with a vested interest in talent are not in agreement on what talent is and how it should be defined. To provide an overview for understanding the bigger picture, therefore, the following issues need to be addressed: labels and definitions, historical context, the dynamics of giftedness at work as well as known good practices to make these professionals satisfied and happy at work, which includes also the more frequent poor practices known to make them miserable. It follows, that if they are unhappy and frustrated as employees, they cannot possibly be an asset to any organization or company. Negative stress and undue management control effectively curtail any attempt at being creative and innovative (Byron, Khazanchi & Nazarian, 2010; Shaughnessy & Manz, 1991; Talbot, Cooper & Barrow, 1992). The current difficulty seems to be that employers rarely know or understand that their own management behavior is often to blame both for lack of progress and desired growth as they continue to excel in employing management practices entirely foreign to the dynamics of human nature (Persson, 2016).

Labels and definitions

Neither science nor markets agree on what talent is and how it should most appropriately be defined. The different labels applied are varied and sometimes almost inappropriately colorful: A-player, brilliance, cash cow, competence, creative, crown jewel, eminent, excellent, expertise, genius, gifted, high-achiever, highly able, innovative, prodigious, profoundly gifted, star, superkeeper and, of course, to just be ‘talented’. Disagreements are widespread. It follows that the same goes for definitions, functions, education and development as well as understanding the nature of social tolerance and acceptance (Persson, 2014a; 2015).

Markets and the academic world do not see eye to eye on any of this. Markets themselves are divided and so is the academic world. Points of contentions or understandings, however, can be subsumed under mainly one issue: Are the talented many or are they few? If there are many, talent is understood as available to everyone by intentional systematic training and learning. But if there are merely a few in any population, then being talented tends to be understood as at least partly genetically determined. The latter suggests that talent is not an option for everyone no matter how well educated they are or how hard they have applied themselves to become *excellent*; a notion increasingly used of the desired qualities of investible human capital in the global knowledge economy. Excellence, however, tends to express wishful thinking rather than possibilities established by empirical fact (see Persson, 2017a).

An interesting addition to this considerable mix and variety of official and often formal opinions, wishes, facts, and arguments, is the unexpected and somewhat surprising contribution of the Millennials. They have presented the older generation—the Babyboomers—currently in charge of the worldwide labor markets, with a formidable headache or two by not sharing their work ethic (cf. Mangelsdorf, 2015; McCrindle, 2014). In discussing talent with Human Resources students recently, reasonably well versed in research methods and theories relating to talent and giftedness, it quickly became obvious that they construe a paradox which they tend to live by. In the face of scientific evidence most students recognized that talent is per definition scarce, but simultaneously realizing that there is also an advantage in being considered ‘talented.’ They therefore, most unexpectedly, expressed a *demand* to be perceived as talented

themselves. Their reasoning is classically syllogistic and creates an illogical paradox:

Talents are few in numbers,
but I have talent,
therefore, everyone must be talented after all!

This paradox is by no means unique to many of my students. The same logical void is alive and well also amongst more seasoned academics as well as amongst managers and representatives of the markets. Research on this is forthcoming.

Historical context

Talent in terms of extraordinary achievement has always fascinated and sometimes also threatened society. In medieval times doing something too swiftly or too energetically was considered a life-threatening condition. You risked ‘running out of your God-given measure of energy’ if you continued (Grinder, 1985). To perceive the injustices of society making it one’s task to achieve fairness and justice for all has rarely meant a happy ending for enlightened individuals with a considerable social pathos at any time in history, especially not if it meant exposing those who prospered because of the existing social divides and somehow benefitting from a status quo (Hollingworth, 1942; Persson, 2009a; 2015). However, all through history talent has generally been admired as something unique and special. But come the four industrial revolutions and this admiration began to transform into a demand characteristic required of everyone, especially students and employees; increasingly imposing a state of discontentment for everyone professionally charged with production for economic growth assuming, wrongly, that they all constitute talent and represent a general *culture of excellence* (Berger, 2003; Persson, 2017a). The first industrial revolution embraced mechanization by steam; the second expanded and elaborated on societal infrastructures by automatization and standardization; the third introduced the personal computer as well as the Internet, and the current and fourth industrial revolution has declared that talent is the basis for all the further expansion and utilization of the Internet and Artificial Intelligence for economic growth (Berlanstein, 1992; Muntone, 2013; Herman-Pentek, 2015; Rifkin, 2011; Schwab, 2016). Innovation has become the most prominent target for societal and economic development carried by a continuously learning knowledge economy intended to serve and support this

development (Powell & Snellman, 2004). This target has, in turn, revamped education globally to produce increasing numbers of talent in science, technology, engineering and mathematics at all levels in national education systems all over the World (e.g., Hanushek, 2005).

Clearly, the political assumption is that talent is for all, and education has been tasked with producing a talented work force, which brings me back to the most fundamental question of all in this context: Are the talented few or many?

The few or the many?

If your argument is that everyone is or can be talented by will, training, and social support, then you are inevitably politicizing the issue to fulfil, or identify with, explicit or implicit ideology. Alternatively, you are using talent somewhat loosely as a synonym for any employee or student, which is much too general and vague to have any scientific meaning or applicable potential. If, on the other hand, your argument is that only few can be talented you either have remarkable intuition or, alternatively, base your conclusion on an overwhelmingly vast research literature in a variety of academic disciplines providing sound evidence to this effect.

Consider first that obtaining top marks in school is *more* genetically determined than it is determined by environmental factors. Language and literature achievements were proven to be genetically influenced by 58% whereas in mathematics the genetic influence was 52% (Shakeshaft et al., 2014). Our human capacity to abstract thinking (IQ) has recently been determined to have 53% heritability by the largest study to date involving 78 000 individuals (Sniekers et al., 2017). The same goes for our human capacity for creative behavior: About 50% of this capacity is genetically programmed (Grigorenko, LaBude & Carter, 1992; Piffer & Hur, 2014; Plomin et al., 2008). Needless to say, our genetic programming does not determine everything, but genetic research pursued over the last 20 years or so demonstrates very clearly that human abilities are *always* the result of *both* genetics and environment in a complex pattern (Thompson & Oehlert, 2010). We cannot develop any skills whatsoever by means of one or the other only.

Critics of genetic research argue that even though humans differ genetically to some extent, they say that this has very little impact on skill development and the level of expertise to which anyone can aspire by *deliberate practise* (another term for enforced training beyond what motivation permits) and proper support from others in a social context (Ericsson, 1996; Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993). This research tradition, which has grown exponentially in a few decades and also tends to be favored by market representatives, politicians as well as best-selling popular science authors (e.g., Colvin, 2008; Gladwell, 2008), has completely ignored the fact that the ability to train or practise is itself submitted to heritability! We all differ also in this respect. Research on twins has established that the genetic component for this particular human behavior varies between 40% to 70% (Mosing et al., 2014), while other scholars have determined that deliberate practice has an even more limited explanatory power for music, sports, and a variety of different professions (Macnamara, Hambrick & Oswald, 2014). It is therefore beyond dispute that while practise certainly is an important aspect of developing any skill, it does by no means make perfect on its own!

If understanding talent as individuals capable of extraordinary ability it is spectacularly amiss to argue that *everyone* has the potential to develop a certain behavior to an extreme level. Human abilities and their developmental potential are normally distributed in any population. Hence, the idea of everyone being talented is an illusion and most often ideologically based. Such an assumption will always remain scientifically incorrect. The numbers of talents in any population are always, beyond any doubt, relatively few!

How to define talent (or giftedness) by determining a specific cut-off point on the normal distribution curve beyond which someone can be said to be gifted or talented is, on the other hand, a largely subjective and arbitrary decision. There are several suggestions how this could be done, but it makes much sense to divide the gifted and talented group of individuals into high achievers and gifted depending on how extreme they are in terms of various human abilities of interest. Gagné (1993) has suggested, in psychometric terms, that high achievers (or basic to moderately gifted) score one to two standard deviations beyond the population average together accounting for approximately 20% of a population. The ones designated as gifted (or high to extreme), on the other hand, score

three to four standard deviations beyond the population average. This is a small group! It constitutes, on average, about 14 individuals per 1000. Both groups are very capable in comparison to the majority of individuals in any population, but the difference between high achievers and the gifted is extreme (Gross, 2009). With ability levels, as many years of research have demonstrated, follow also personality characteristics and behavior intensity (for an overview, see Mendaglio, 2008; Persson, 2014b).

So, in a world where focus is increasingly on extreme talent for best possible results no matter in which kind of company or organization, there certainly is a ‘war for talent’. There are few of them around and the stated demand for them is considerable. Research has also demonstrated why they have become recognized as so very desirable. Top talent produces a disproportionately large amount of output! O’Boyle and Aguinis (2012) collected data from 198 samples of 633,263 athletes (e.g., professional and collegiate basketball players, soccer players), entertainers (e.g., writers, movie stars), politicians (e.g., elected officials in state and national legislatures around the world), and researchers in more than 50 scientific fields. They found that the most performance outcomes were attributable to a small group of elite performers. Results suggested that 66% to 83% of performers fell below the mean level of performance, but 10% to 26% of all productivity came from the top 1% to 5% of the entire studied population! Hence, the perhaps most astute definition of talent in considering working life, taking both genetics and environmental influences into account, is this one as proposed by Heyse and Ortman (2008):

Talent is a formal and *not* learnable capacity allowing the development of competences. It is the prerequisite for self-organization; for adaptation to new challenges; for unsolicited learning, and in so doing, reaching higher than the average of comparable experts ... Talent along these lines, is the sum of

- ✓ developed competences from giftedness-based skills;
- ✓ the concrete part-skills derived from, and valued because of life-experiences, and
- ✓ an extraordinary individual will power through which competences operate

In the following, talent will be understood as the normally distributed gifted group in a population, limited in numbers. I will also use both talent and giftedness as synonymous terms interchangeably.

Demanding their skills not accepting their needs!

Despite the ongoing talent wars and the often-argued demand for extreme talent, it is reasonable to question whether labor markets are willing and able to recruit, manage, and keep the talent it says it wants and so desperately needs. Surprisingly, and somewhat alarmingly, most organizations are most likely not!

Employers often do not recognize the gifted as they apply for work since they rarely make a distinction between talent as a collective work force, individual talent as high ability and achievement or giftedness as someone at the extreme end of normal distribution in more ways than merely by an IQ-measure. Even if identified and eventually employed it remains relatively rare to find an organization able and willing to manage a gifted employee for the greatest benefit of the company and simultaneously seek work satisfaction for the employee. The hiring of American top executives, for example, as a rule termed desirable talent by their recruiters, often ends in frustration. A study by the Gallup institute showed that 82% of all executive recruitments failed because the hired talents were, in various ways, unfit for the job they were given (Beck & Harper, 2014). In addition, organizations often fail to live up to their given commitments to any employee, be they either gifted or not. There are no large-scale studies to date, but judging from lesser studies done so far, about half of all organizations breach the psychological contract with their employees within a relatively short time of employment (Conway & Briner, 2002; Herriot, Manning, & Kidd, 1997; Sutton & Griffin, 2004; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Reasons for disappointments and frustrations leading to a breach were employers' failure to challenge employees' intellect, engage their creativity, offer continued development of their professional skills, listen to suggestions or heed initiatives, appreciate efforts and contributions, and a failure to even trust their employees. In sum, employers tend to show little concern for the talent they have hired (Myatt, 2012).

Even more surprising perhaps, is the fact that the academic world, in which one assumes that the vast existing knowledge of organizational behavior would be conscientiously applied, shows the same patterns of mismanagement—globally. About half of the world’s academics involved in teaching and research are stretched very thin by their university managements thereby jeopardizing their health. Work satisfaction in the academic world is much too often an illusion (Persson, 2017b)! This state of affairs is particularly troubling considering the key role that higher education has been given in the emerging knowledge economy. In addition, academic mismanagement has not surprisingly been shown to produce research of increasingly poorer quality (Moore et al., 2017).

Clearly, lack of knowledge of how to make employees happy and thereby productive at work is at the heart of any sensible management strategy. There is, however, also another aspect to consider. Employers might simply not care or, having met very talented individuals, they wish to avoid them for rather personal reasons. Meeting or hiring someone who is potentially more brilliant than you are is most likely an asset to the organization but it is simultaneously a challenge to a manager or a recruiter with an inferiority complex (see Adler, 1913)! The following is what a London City business manager had to say on extreme talent in an interview (as quoted by Robertson & Abbey, 2003, pp. 28-29):

... I think 'talented' means someone who is original and creative and constantly questions things. These people are extremely difficult to manage—they are easily bored and refuse to accept the authority of a boss just because he is the boss. This is why most companies, despite all their propaganda, actually do not want talented people ...

... As Nigel Nicholson of the London Business School says: 'There is a global dearth of people who really have what it takes to be significant agents of change. The trouble is that corporate culture kills off these people before they can climb the ladder, It's usually the safe people who manage to get to the top.'

Companies definitely need talent at the top of companies to design and implement new and competitive strategies, but they know deep down that

lower down the company they don't want talent but want people who can do the job well and won't be troublesome. How do they deal with that contradiction? How do they create the talented board members of tomorrow?

The London City manager's apprehension is both considerable and paradoxical. It should be compared to what another executive has said on the matter, also when being interviewed, but who is less intimidated to hire someone possibly more clever and creative than he is himself (Raza, 2003):

Managing these people isn't for everybody, Raza says. But they're powerful engines. If you harness their energy and creativity, you have a Ferrari on your hands. Managers may talk about teamwork and collaboration. But most, like Raza, will admit that *the contribution of a single, exceptional individual often makes all the difference*. That's especially the case in a knowledge based economy, where a company's fortunes rise and fall with its collective brainpower.

The few, the proud and the brave?

The need for extreme talent is undeniable and recognized by all stakeholders with a vested interest in high ability (Persson, 2014a). The emerging picture of talent in working life, however, does not quite fit talent bliss, general assumptions, and expectations. The impression to date is surprisingly that employers, both academic and business-oriented, assume they want talent but at the same time they only seem to be willing to accept talent on the following terms:

- If it fits into a rigid structure
- If it is motivated by extrinsic (usually monetary) rewards
- If it is competitively inclined
- If it conforms to the organization and follows order without question or criticism
- If it is insensitive to logic when required

Returning to the motto of the US Marine Corps briefly, while the USMC may well treasure the few, the proud, and the brave; just as the gifted tend to do as a

result of surviving a less than friendly social context, this appreciation, however, is not necessarily shared by labor markets and its employers. While these insist on increasing numbers of talents to be hired, they find individual pride unimportant and even frown upon it. Additionally, the sought-after talent should preferably not be brave, since this invariably would entail criticism and standing up for logic, convictions, and insight. As research has shown, the gifted employee also does not fit into rigid and formal organizations with much bureaucracy, nor are they usually motivated by extreme salaries and achievement bonuses. They tend not to be competitively inclined, they are very sensitive to lack of logic, and while they are certainly not crazy by any meanings of the word they are, however, *eccentric*—leading their lives on the basis of a different kind of normal (Ivancevic & Duening, 2002; Lachner, 2012; Persson, 2014b; Simonton, 2008; Udvari & Schneider, 2000). Research has also demonstrated that extreme talents are the happiest when starting up and running their own companies (Persson, 2009b). It is not difficult to understand why. No one, or at least very few, will then be meddling with their logic, their pride, and their bravery. They can follow their own ideas and convictions as they see fit, for as long as they remain within legal and ethical frameworks.

Talent is *both* an inconvenience as well as a tremendous and often untapped resource; an interesting paradox indeed. A significant cause of this paradox is that hand in hand with economic growth *dehumanization* follows in its footsteps. The process of dehumanizing society mechanistically, construing individuals as machines for production, and as human capital existentially defined by the economic value they represent, is increasingly becoming a problem on the labor market as well as in education all over the world in the wake of the global knowledge economy (Cross & Cross, 2016; Haslam, 2006; Schultz, 1981). Stakeholders with a vested interest in talent hold not only conflicting understandings of what talent and giftedness are and often aim to protect their sometimes poor image of self, more alarming is the fact that they also hold fundamentally conflicting values and might not be at all interested in changing them. Econocracy—the rule of economic experts without the influence of democratic processes nor with an understanding of how *Homo Sapiens* actually functions—is the latest term used to pinpoint the dilemma (Earl, Moran & Ward-Perkins, 2017; Offer & Söderberg, 2016)

Talent managing the gifted employee

Despite widespread ignorance of the nature of talented professionals, also taking into account the increasing influence of dehumanization, let us assume that there is a will among employers and society in general to embrace the small group of professionals in any population anywhere, who can be suitably termed as gifted, in order to win the war of talents more effectively. The research community can then offer, through experience and research, how gifted employees are likely to be best managed. I will argue that allowing the gifted to make their contribution to the world it is necessary to first educate the World of who they are and how they function. Needless to say, it is equally important to prepare the gifted for working life and the general conditions of working in an organization—business-oriented or other. In my experience, this is equally neglected. Gifted education is by tradition confined to school systems and are as a rule geared towards curricular or scholarly learning rarely involving or preparing gifted students for the pragmatics of a professional life.

Clues to work satisfaction and inspired production

Traditional career paths are unlikely to motivate the gifted employee, Ivancevic and Duening (2002), argue in proposing how to manage ‘Einsteins’ in contemporary IT-oriented organizations. These ‘Einsteins’ show little interest in job titles or achievement perks. Their motivation for work lies with their skills, knowledge and learning as well as opportunities to develop these. Anything that thwarts this quest, or hinders personal skill development, Ivancevic and Duening point out, will be resisted. Trying to lure them to employment by exorbitant salaries will also not work (Lachner, 2012; Oelsnits, Stein, & Hahnmann. 2007). Instead, you are likely attract gifted employees by the following (as suggested by Lachner, 2012; Nauta & Ronner, 2008; 2016):

- Having a smaller and flexible organization; or as the Google Corporation has phrased it: You build your organization around your talent rather than trying to mold your talent to fit into the organization (Schmidt & Rosenberg, 2014)
- Having an organization valuing, and living by, fairness, openness, and equal treatment of all employees
- Offering relative freedom. Excessive control by bureaucracy, a plethora of rules, and formality, is likely to either drive your talent away in search of

another employer or will render them miserable, unproductive and most likely also ill (Amabile, 1996; Amabile et al., 2004; Berliner, 2011; Byron et al., 2010; Persson, 2017b)

- Offering a work environment with equally talented co-workers
- Allowing some time for their own interests and self-chosen development. This is also characteristic of the Google Corporation (Schmidt & Rosenberg, 2014).
- Having an organization unfettered by hierarchies. These are of course culturally determined. But in following again Google's experience, it is probably a good idea to create a separate and less hierarchical context for your gifted employees, perhaps separate from the main and much more traditional organization.
- Allowing for constructive conflict and disagreement in the organization. This also ties into which culture an organization exists in. Some cultures like the Scandinavian and many of the Asian cultures tend to be conflict-avoidant, whereas others such as central European and North American cultures have less of a problem with conflict and confrontation (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). In the case of a conflict-avoidant culture training for all and context adaptation is likely to be particularly important. A gifted employee will undoubtedly feel constricted and uncomfortable in a rigid hierarchical structure, which raises the question of how to manage a gifted employee in collective cultures. Uniqueness in Japan, for example, is often admired. *Individualism*, however, is frowned upon and is equated with selfishness, which is culturally not acceptable (Reischauer, 1978; Toivonen, Norasakkundit & Uchida, 2011). In a Confucian tradition, being unique and individual is only acceptable for as long as harmony is not challenged. This means that historically established societal hierarchies must remain unaltered and always be respected (Ames & Hall, 1998; Greenwood, 2003). Hence, understanding and acceptance must come prior to implementation of any talent management strategy. Education is essential, more so in some cultures than in others.

The special case of Google

The Google Corporation, one of the world's most popular employers, have implemented much of what we already know to make talent thrive. They have

invented several worthwhile management practices by experience (see Schmidt & Rosenberg, 2014). To mention only a few, they stress the importance of relative freedom and allow, for example, that employees may pursue self-initiated activity by 20% of their contracted work. Google are also fully aware that talent likes to work with other talent. They do not try to make their talent fit the company but rather tries to organize the company around its talent avoiding hierarchies as much as possible. Google also embraces 'quirky' and cherishes 'nerdy know-it-alls'; individuals which in other types of organizations and businesses, especially in a highly formalized civil service organizations, would most likely be an insurmountable problem. The corporation also has an unusual, but very apt, recruitment policy. They hire new talent on the principle that new staff should always be 'smarter than the ones recruiting them,' and does therefore *not* allow the HR-department to be in charge of the selection process. Peers select the ones they wish to work with in the future, *not* HR Specialists!

There are also a few snakes in the Google Paradise. While the organization has many commendable ideas and practises, even enviable, due to experience and actively listening to what their employees need and have to say, Google is also unwittingly fettered by its native American culture, prompting the company and its policies to prioritize some attributes and values which are neither globally applicable, scientifically valid, nor at times even compatible with human nature (e.g., Stewart & Bennet, 1991).

Google is sometimes confusing cultural ideology with general human socio-psychological dynamics and reality. They have a policy to recruit only talented problem solvers; always going for the solution; seeing a glass of water as half-full rather than half-empty, to make good use of a popular cliché. In pursuing this, they may miss the fact that the gifted tend rather tend to be problem *finders* driven by their need to see and understand the logic behind the problem to be solved (Getzels, 1979; Runco, 1994). In generating any solution to a problem you first need to analyze it and understand which the potential obstacles to a solution might be. The gifted tend to see such obstacles first, whereas other less talented employees find it easier to ignore them and prioritize living up to the often implicit expectations of being 'passionate doers, movers, and shakers.' If they do conform to cultural pressure they presumably also leave a trail of all too

many failures behind them! Being problem oriented rather than a problem solver in this way is rarely appreciated. The gifted employee risks being labelled a defeatist, when in fact he or she is probably putting a finger exactly on what needs to be done to eventually being able to achieve a certain tasked goal (see for example Brown, & Hesketh, 2004).

Google is also demanding all employed talent to be team oriented at all times. This is a demand carrying with it some complexity of which the Google Corporation seems unaware. The gifted employee often prefers to work alone at least part of the time. This is not to say that they are in any way anti-social, but thoughts and ideas are often born, considered, and perfected in solitude *prior* to being exposed to others for in-put, sharing, and further development in a team of talented others. Considering that the gifted also tend to be perfectionists working in solitude may take a while (Kreger-Silverman, 2007)! To put teams together to work for optimal output and creative endeavor, irrespective of team members being gifted or not, is a difficult task at best in all kinds of organizations (Nijstad & Paulus, 2003; Kleingeld, van Mierlo & Arends, 2011; van Mierlo & Kleingeld, 2010).

Finally, the Google corporation demands that employees must also be ‘business savvy.’ If they are not, the potential Googler will simply not be hired. Such a demand is unfortunately based on wishful thinking and on cultural ideals. The creatively gifted tend not to be at all interested in the business side of their work. Some are probably astutely aware of how the business world works and what it entails, but motivation and interests to pursue their professional role lie elsewhere. In addition, salary levels are rarely a primary concern and are almost never a means for motivating them to work better, creatively, and more swiftly (Ivancenic & Duening, 2002; Lachner, 2012)

Nine lessons for winning the talent war

Individual talent exists in *all* cultures because of normal distribution. However, individual talent *cannot* be expressed, encouraged or singled out everywhere in the same way because of differing cultural values as based on individual or group perspectives. The knowledge economy is mainly a Western notion having a considerable global impact. Whatever definition of talent that the global knowledge economy and its captains prefer, this will be imposed globally

irrespective of ethnic culture (Cowen, 2002), especially so since economists have demonstrated that type of culture affects the wealth of a nation (Guiso, Sapienza & Zingales, 2006), and cultures with individualist values tend to be more economically successful than collectivist cultures (Gorodnichenko & Gerard, 2010). Even if the recognition of individual talent is likely to increase globally, also by cultural-insensitive imposition, globally active HR-staff need to expect different talent management models, strategies and solutions in different countries as well as in different organizations in the same country. There is no such thing as a standardized talent management model valid everywhere and for every type of organization and culture (Kahl, 2011; Majer & Mayerhofer, 2013). One can be customized, however, and if impressed by the scarcity of talent as well as understanding what gifted employees are capable of as employees, there certainly are a few good principles to follow as culled from research and documented experience.

Lesson 1

Give suitable talent management strategies serious consideration and implement them well. It does pay off to do so, as research has demonstrated (Bethke-Langenegger, Mahler & Staffebach, 2011; O'Boyle, & Aguinis, 2012).

Lesson 2

There is such a thing as organizations *unsuitable* for gifted employees, namely the large, hierarchical, and rigid organizations with much formal bureaucracy and little room for initiatives and alternative solutions to problems.

Lesson 3

There is also such a thing as organizations being more *suitable* for gifted employees. These would be smaller organizations offering relative freedom, limited formality, openness, encouraging disagreement and critique, having limited hierarchies, as well as having other gifted employees around as colleagues

Lesson 4

The Google Corporation offers many an insightful advice in dealing with gifted employees: Allow employees to be better than you; to be quirky, critical, to take risks, and to feel relatively free in the pursuits of their respective tasks.

Lesson 5

However, avoid some of Google People Operations' fallacies: Some of their management policies are tied rigidly to American cultural values and are for this

reason not necessarily applicable everywhere, and some are dysfunctional even at home in the United States for reasons of being incompatible with Human Nature.

Lesson 6

Related to Google's fallacies, shared also by many other multi-national organizations, is the fact that *similarity* among employees, not necessarily differences, facilitate and constitute group cohesion. Acceptance and understanding can be taught but such learning needs to start with management affecting organizational culture and its stated values on all levels

Lesson 7

Similarity, on social evolutionary grounds, also needs to be the basis for talent management strategies for the mutual benefit of both employer and employee

Lesson 8

Related to the need for similarity amongst employees is management's need to treat every employee, irrespective of their position and task, with dignity and respect. Currently in the global knowledge economy, this is often neglected (Brännmark & Håkansson, 2012; Longoni et al., 2013). Basis for development and its operations are most often *only* considered in the light of economics. This will invariably dehumanize an organization into regarding each employee as an objectified commodity—or as investible human capital—nothing more. Interestingly, this dehumanization is implemented to the detriment of the organization itself. To fail to keep the psychological contract dynamically alive and intact with their employees is financially very costly for the company.

Lesson 9

To demand 'passionate' co-workers is now commonplace when recruiting for the knowledge economy. But, if this is a specific target for an organization, it is likely that its management does not understand how motivation works. If this is the case, gifted employees, as well as others, would probably do well to search employment elsewhere. To seek 'passionate employees', as research has suggested, tends to signify flawed management priorities, which are not likely to be conducive to either work satisfaction or optimal production (Linstead & Brewis, 2007). Such an organization will probably not be able to keep the talent they so desperately need for survival in a world based on the power of creativity and innovation!

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