



GUEST EDITORIAL

Mapping talent
development

Mapping talent development: definition, scope and architecture

Thomas N. Garavan, Ronan Carbery and Andrew Rock

*Department of Personnel and Employment Relations, Kemmy Business School,
University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland*

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept of talent development, define its scope and identify the issues involved in formulating talent development strategies in organisations.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper reviews the relatively scant and fragmented literature on talent development processes.

Findings – The literature review revealed that talent development is usually discussed as part of a wider talent management process. The literature highlights issues concerning who is the talent to be developed, what competencies should be developed, who drives development, what is the appropriate pace of development and what is the architecture to support the development.

Research limitations/implications – The paper is solely theoretical in nature; however, it does identify gaps for further research.

Practice implications – The paper raises a number of important questions that should be considered by organisations when they engage in talent development.

Originality/value – The paper contributes to a perceived gap in the literature and highlights the issues that come within the terrain of talent development.

Keywords Human resource management, Employee development, Talent development, Talent management, Talent development architecture

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

Talent management is increasingly discussed in the HRM and HRD literature (Stahl *et al.*, 2007; Collings *et al.*, 2011). It is a set of practices that are implemented in organisations (CIPD, 2011; McDonnell *et al.*, 2010), and refers to how organisations attract, select, develop and manage employees in an integrated and strategic way (Scullion and Collings, 2011). Talent development represents an important component of the overall talent management process (Novations, 2009, Cappelli, 2009). While it is possible for organisations to pursue a strategy that focuses on talent acquisition from the external labour market, such a strategy is unlikely to be successful in the long term. It is well established that there are significant advantages to be gained from an internal development approach and that organisations need to acquire and develop industry – and firm-specific knowledge and skills (Lepak and Snell, 1999) in order to be competitive. As a consequence, organisations are likely to make significant investments in talent development activities, so that talented employees possess the competencies to successfully implement business strategy. Talent development activities are typically undertaken by organisations to ensure that there are zero talent



outages, to ensure planned succession rather than replacement, and to enhance the organisations' reputation as a talent magnet (Gandz, 2006).

There are relatively few academic papers that focus primarily on talent development. It is with this intention that this special issue was proposed. We sought to ensure that the parameters of the special issue were sufficiently broad to encourage a diversity of submissions. The majority of papers submitted discussed talent development from a European perspective and focused on a particular talent development initiative or dimension of the talent management architecture. It is our hope that through the empirical insights gained from the various papers, we will shed some light on the issues involved in talent development and the challenges encountered in implementing talent development in organisations.

In this paper we set the scene for the special issue by considering the scope of talent development within a wider talent management strategy, the issues to be addressed and the implications of those issues for talent development policy and practice. We also provide a summary overview of the individual contributions in this special issue.

Defining the scope of talent development

There is surprisingly little published research on global talent development issues and literature that defines the scope and sets the boundaries of the concept (Cohn *et al.*, 2005; Younger and Cleemann, 2010; Garavan *et al.*, 2009; Cook, 2010). However, it is acknowledged that talent development represents an important component of global talent management (Scullion and Collings, 2011; Barlow, 2006; CIPD, 2011). We suggest that in order to understand the scope of talent development, the following questions should be posed: What is talent for the purposes of development? Does talent development focus on technical or generic competencies or both? What are the learning needs that are the primary focus of talent development, organisational or individual or some combination? Does talent development occur in an accelerated or normal way? What are the pathways, programmes and processes that contribute the architecture of talent development? Answers to these questions should help to bring some coherence to the scope of the concept.

For the purpose of this paper we define talent development as follows:

Talent development focuses on the planning, selection and implementation of development strategies for the entire talent pool to ensure that the organisation has both the current and future supply of talent to meet strategic objectives and that development activities are aligned with organisational talent management processes.

Our knowledge base concerning talent development is currently weak. However, the existing evidence suggests that organisations are designing talent development processes unique to their organisations. However, it is also clear that many definitions or descriptions of talent development focus on exclusive models and emphasise leadership talent development. We examine a number of questions posed in this section in the remainder of this paper.

Defining talent for development purposes

A reading of the talent management literature suggests that, at an individual level, talent is something exemplary that certain people possess. Gladwell (2010) proposed that "talent is equal to ten years or 10,000 hours invested in a specific field". However,

when one considers organisational level definitions, a narrower view of talent emerges. Michaels *et al.* (2001) argues that, in the context of management positions, talent is conceptualised as:

A code for the most effective leaders and managers at all levels, who can help a company fulfil its aspirations and drive its performance. Managerial talent is some combination of a sharp strategic mind, leadership ability, emotional maturity, communications skills, the ability to attract and inspire other talented people, entrepreneurial instincts, fundamental skills and the ability to deliver results (Michaels *et al.*, 2001, p. 111).

A similar notion is proposed by Ready *et al.* (2010). They articulate the characteristics of high potentials as follows: they consistently deliver strong results credibly; they master new types of expertise quickly; and they recognise that behaviour counts. They also suggest that high potential talent is hardwired with the drive to achieve excellence, a relentless focus on learning, an enterprising spirit, and a capacity to make careful assessments of risk. Therefore, “talent” can be viewed as referring to a limited pool of organisational members who possess unique managerial and leadership competencies. Iles *et al.* (2010) have highlighted the lack of consensus concerning what talent may fall within the scope of a talent development process. They emphasise four possible scenarios: an inclusive approach that focuses on developing each potential employee; an inclusive approach that emphasises the development of social capital more generally in the organisation; an exclusive approach that focuses on developing specific elite individuals or an exclusive approach that focuses on key positions, roles and develops talent to fulfil these roles.

The empirical evidence suggests a mixture of approaches in organisations. A CIPD (2011) study found that many organisations have adopted an exclusive approach that focuses on developing senior managers. There is a lot of focus on high potentials, future stars, future leaders and high-fliers. However, while the McKinsey Consulting Group initially advocated an exclusive approach to talent development, they now advocate a more inclusive approach that targets development for not just “A players” but also “B players” (Ernst & Young, 2010). However, relatively few organisations adopt inclusive approaches. A study reported in Public Personnel Management (Reilly, 2008) suggested that inclusive approaches to talent development are more likely to be found in public sector organisations. Bersin (2010) calls this inclusive approach a form of talent segmentation but with recognition that all groups of employees have a contribution to make to the organisation. Such an approach is consistent with an innovation perspective on talent (Christensen *et al.*, 2010). This suggests that all employees should be regarded as great talent given their potential to generate creative ideas. Van der Sluis and van de Bunt-Kokhuis (2009) advocates a hybrid approach because it enables organisations to reap the advantages of both approaches. Ford *et al.* (2010) also suggest that a hybrid approach to talent development may be more appropriate in terms of fairness and employee motivation.

Talent development: technical or generic competencies or both?

Whether talent development processes should focus on the development of technical or generic competencies or both represents a significant debating point within the literature. Traditionally authors posited that the overriding factors leading to effective performance included technical credibility and the ability to use systems and processes to meet performance standards. Managers in the initial stages of their careers often

place more focus on technical competencies while giving generic competencies less credence. As a consequence, they frequently fell short on the performance expectations required of the role. Traditional talent development processes such as training are extremely effective at imparting technical competencies. They can in many cases be developed in isolation from the workplace (Lahti, 1999; Hirsh, 2009)

However, it is increasingly emphasised that high potential talent must be proficient in working in diverse work contexts (Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2007), and are inextricably linked to features or characteristic of context. As a consequence, there is an increased focus on generic competencies. The shift to generic competencies is something that has occurred in the past 10-15 years. The term “generic competencies” emphasises a range of qualities and capabilities that are important in the workplace. These include skills such as problem solving and analytical skills, communication skills, teamwork competencies and skills to identify access and manage knowledge. Generic competencies also include personal attributes such as imagination, creativity and intellectual rigour and personal values such as persistence, integrity and tolerance (Garavan *et al.*, 2009; Sandberg, 2000).

Generic competencies are considered to be important for potential and career advancement; however, it is clear that such generic competencies are also highly contextual (Dierdorff *et al.*, 2009). Context consists of task, social and physical dimensions. Task context emphasises informational and structural features of the role, ambiguity, uncertainty levels of accountability and autonomy (Johns, 2006). Social context dimensions focus on aspects of the role that are interpersonal in nature such as interpersonal conflict, the degree of interdependence and density of human interaction. Physical context focuses on issues such as the working conditions like degree of risk, hazard, noise etc, which influences work performance and behaviour. Unlike technical competence, generic competencies provide more significant development challenges. They tend to be holistic, to overlap, and interweave (Capaldo *et al.*, 2006), and they are intrinsically related to the kind of person that one is. They are clearly related to issues such as self-confidence and self-esteem of the learner.

It is therefore clear that the new workplace places emphasis on skills that go beyond the technical and include a full spectrum of soft skills. Talented employees are expected to display these generic competencies in combinations that meet the demands of a unique and continually changing work environment (Garazonik *et al.*, 2006). It suggests that on-going talent development processes need to be flexible, adaptable, and capable of scalability and in tune with the evolving context. As a consequence, talent development must increasingly be work-based in order to develop capabilities to cope with the temporality or dynamism of work context.

Whose talent development needs and whose responsibility?

Organisational restructuring, globalisation and competition highlight the need for both organisations and individuals to be focused on investment in learning (Garofano and Salas, 2005). Organisational talent development processes almost invariably focus on organisational needs. Pruis (2011) states that talent development does not represent a “pro-bono” investment on the part of organisations. It is an investment in organisational needs. Organisational driven talent development focuses on a multiplicity of organisational needs such as succession planning (Lawler, 2008), the achievement of business strategy (Scullion and Collings, 2011), the enhancement of

leadership bench-strength (Bryan and Joyce, 2007) and the development of star employees (Jones, 2008; Groyberg *et al.*, 2010). CIPD (2009) recommended that during these difficult times, it is important for organisations to focus on developing employee capabilities and skills so that it will stand the organisation in good stead when the upturn happens. They should also focus on the development of employees that occupy pivotal roles to meet current and future development challenges. Garavan (2012) found that executives in science-based organisations almost exclusively justified investment in talent development in terms of potential to capitalise on business opportunities and facilitate global expansion into emerging markets. The resource-based view provides an explanation of why investment in talent development is a potential source of competitive advantage when it results in valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutional human resources. The resource-based view is particularly useful in the talent development context because of its focus on content issues (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000).

It is increasingly recognised that employees are responsible for managing their own development to prepare themselves for future career and job changes (Simmering *et al.*, 2003). A review of the literature reveals that developmental behaviours by individuals can result in a multiplicity of outcomes related to performance, rewards and career (Benson, 2006; McCauley and Hezlett, 2001; Kang *et al.*, 2007). The talent development literature is less explicit in how it addresses individual needs. It is clear that much of the literature is highly managerialist in nature and primarily focuses on attributes of individuals in the context of how they fit organisational requirements (Haskins and Shaffer, 2010; Farndale *et al.*, 2010). It essentially comes down to a requirement that organisations develop the “right talents in the right people, at the right time, in the right way, to ensure their talent pipeline has an abundant supply of management talents” (Wang-Cowham, 2011, p. 392).

The emergence of the new career has highlighted the need for employees to be concerned with career management and employability (Rasdi *et al.*, 2011). Such a focus on career is argued to be the function of both individual agency and context. This does not, however, suggest that organisations do not have responsibilities in this respect. The role of the organisation tends to be diminished in the context of individual career management and employability (Scholarios *et al.*, 2008). It is clear that new notions of careers depend on employees’ continuous learning and demonstrated adaptability to new job demands (Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006). It is also likely that organisationally provided talent development activities will enhance self-management and proactivity (De Vos *et al.*, 2009).

Accelerated or traditionally-paced talent development

Advocates of an integrated talent management approach emphasise the need to speed up the development of talent in order to respond to current and anticipated business pressures (Abell, 2005; Backus *et al.*, 2010; Korotov, 2007). Whereas a traditional approach emphasises a focus on blending classroom development, e-learning and on-the-job development enhance the competencies of talent to perform effectively and enhance their potential. Conger (2010) is a particularly strong supporter of the blended approach. He highlights four components of formal development: individual skill development, socialising development interventions, action and strategic learning initiatives. However, traditional talent development approaches are frequently passive

rather than active, they tend to be slow, they emphasise natural experiential learning, and the blend of development strategies needs to be carefully managed to engage the employee in a genuine experiential development process (Tansley *et al.*, 2006). Traditional learning timeframes are typically five to seven years (Williams-Lee, 2008).

Accelerated talent development programmes focus on ensuring that talent is competent to perform, and there is a strong emphasis on accelerating the learning curve. Such programmes are premised on a highly motivated learner; ongoing intensive training, extensive use of simulation tools, structured projects and experiences to drive learning and self-managed development processes. Critical objectives that drive accelerated development include the enhancement of knowledge and skills (Lombardo and Eichinger, 2000); identify development (Ibarra, 2003); the development of new networks (Wang-Cowham, 2011) and the development of new stories about self (Ibarra and Lineback, 2005). Accelerated development time frames are considerably shorter typically between one to three years. It is assumed that high potential individuals will be sufficiently developed to assume higher or broader roles (Silzer and Church, 2010). There are significant gaps in our knowledge concerning the value of accelerated development models and whether they are more effective than more traditional approaches.

The architecture of talent development

Gandz (2006) suggests the notion of a talent development pipeline architecture. This architecture consists of a clear statement of talent development needs, developmental pathways, effective HR systems to support identification, assessment and development of talent and a blend of developmental strategies. The notion of an architecture is central to the arguments made by Lepak and Snell (1999) who suggested different approaches according to the different contributions employees make to the business. Therefore, the talent development architecture is not a one size fits all approach but should be differentiated.

It is argued that it is necessary to understand the processes that support talent development in order to understand its contribution to achieving competitive advantage (Festing and Eidems, 2011). Consistent with the dynamic capabilities perspective, it is important to consider how those responsible for managing talent development manage the architecture. In particular, it focuses on issues of stakeholder engagement, communication activities and decisions concerning the target groups for talent development activities and the extent of standardisation of talent development processes and systems across the organisation (Kim, 2003; Lewis and Heckman, 2006).

Articulation of talent needs

Many MNCs utilise competency maps to guide competence development and provide a common language around which to discuss talent development needs (Isrealite, 2010). These maps or frameworks are typically standardised across all units of the organisation and are used to identify individual and business unit development needs. There is a set of mixed views concerning the use of competency models especially in the context of identifying and developing high potentials (Hollenbeck *et al.*, 2006). However, they are very popular in many organisations. Competency models typically articulate behavioural standards that frequently look to the past rather than the future (Tornow and Tornow, 2001).

Many organisations make use of systematic, formal talent review processes, which focus on assessing future development potential. These processes typically focus on the identification of high potentials and their unique development needs. Many of those processes tend to be complex and the main aim is to strategically align talent with critical organisational capabilities. Mäkelä *et al.* (2010) suggest that talent review processes usually involve senior management in identifying development needs. McDonnell (2011) suggests that such processes may lead to cloning and there may be too much of a focus on the current rather than the future. He also highlights the issue of organisational politics. Senior management may characterise particular high potential candidates in overly positive terms. There may be a lack of candour concerning other people's strengths and development needs and information about the best performers and those with most potential may be suppressed in an effort to protect particular individuals who they do wish to choose (Mellahi and Collings, 2010). There are also definitional problems particularly with what constitutes potential. Silzer and Church (2010) highlight that the term high potential is over used and it is not always clear what people mean when they use the term in organisational discourse.

Creating developmental pathways

Developmental pathways are defined as "experiences, exposures and challenges" (Gandz, 2006, p. 2) that talent must work through in order to emerge as the talent of the future. There exists a major gap in the literature concerning these pathways and how they are designed for different categories of talent. Experiences are however highlighted as central to the design of talent development pathways (Carpenter *et al.*, 2000). They can lead to significant career advancement and confer strategic advantage on the organisation. Ruddy and Anand (2010), for example, cite an interview with Erin Lap from Hay Associates in which she emphasised four key strengths of a series of experiences in the context of talent development: the development of an enhanced understanding of complex business issues and a broader perspective; enhanced organisational and cultural awareness, enhanced respect for differences and a greater sense of curiosity and the opportunity to build relationships and enhance networking skills.

The concept of exposure is also highlighted as an important dimension of development. Exposures in this context mean opportunities to work in different contexts and situations. These may be achieved through job rotation, secondments, project and international assignments (Evans *et al.*, 2011). These exposures provide talent with opportunities to experience different organisational, cultural, cross-cultural and work practice situations. Exposures help to develop technical expertise, judgement and decision making, drive for results, strategic thinking and business acumen (Yost and Mannion-Plunkett, 2010).

Developmental challenges or hardship challenges are an important component of the talent development process. These may include challenges such as business turnaround, a business start-up, downsizing or business closure. These challenges allow employees to address blind spots, learn from mistakes and failures, deal with stressful situations and recognise personal limitations (Garavan *et al.*, 2009).

Effective HR systems to support identification, assessment and development of talent

The components of an effective HR system to support talent development are well documented in the literature. It includes human resource planning, effective selection of

talent, performance management, career management processes and succession planning (Dickmann *et al.*, 2011; McDonnell and Collings, 2011). McDonnell and Collings (2011) advocate a contingency approach to the design of HR systems to support talent development. These systems should be based on business strategy imperatives and objectives. They also highlight the importance of cultural fit and the involvement of stakeholders in the full spectrum of talent management processes. Avedon and Scholes (2010) suggests four levels of talent integration. They point out that in the initial stages the HR system will consist of separate programmes and a strong emphasis on tools. At level two, there will be evidence of a more systematic approach emphasising integrated and aligned processes and programmes. At level three, the organisations business strategy will drive HR system integration and alignment. At level four, there exists a talent management mindset within the organisation.

Kaye (2002) conceptualise talent development as a three way process. The individual, the manager, and the organisation have particular accountabilities for talent development. The organisation provides resources, tools, values and culture. Managers play a role in assessing needs, clarify and discuss goals, support development, provide feedback and monitor development. Employees set career goals, seek development opportunities and implement development action plans.

Programmes to enable talent development

The types of programmes that organisations utilise to develop talent fall into four categories:

- (1) formal programmes;
- (2) relationship based developmental experiences;
- (3) job-based developmental experiences; and
- (4) informal/non-formal developmental activities (Conger, 2010; McCall *et al.*, 1988; Byham *et al.*, 2002; Garavan *et al.*, 2009).

Some commentators have suggested a 70:20:10 strategy whereby 70 per cent of talent development takes place through work activities; 20 per cent through relationships and 10 per cent through formal development activities (Wilson *et al.*, 2011). It is an extremely popular framework; however, it is rarely implemented in a systematic way. The model is largely too high-level and does not offer much in terms of detailed guidance nor does it specify the lessons learned from each experience. Wilde (2010) argues that this model overstates the role of experience in talent development and it underestimates the value of learning from others. Day (2010) has also highlighted the difficulties involved in learning from experience and other researchers have highlighted the tendency to fall back on the 10 per cent component, which then becomes the 70 per cent (Wilson and Van Velsor, 2011; Wilson and Yip, 2010). Therefore, in reality the reverse is the case with the majority of talent development activities concentrated in the 10 per cent category.

Formal talent development programmes. Formal talent development programmes cover a broad spectrum of strategies including conceptual and skill-based development programmes, personal growth development programmes, feedback-based development interventions and action focused development interventions (Conger, 2010). The majority of formal programmes are designed to enhance generic skills and behaviours. These

types of programmes are typically targeted towards middle and senior managers and technical/professional talent categories. Action learning interventions are typically directed at management talent groups and are designed to enhance generic competencies such as teamwork, problem solving and strategic awareness. The research on this group of development strategies is mixed and it fails to establish whether it enhances talent effectiveness and potential (Baruch, 2006; Ready and Conger, 2007).

Relationship-based talent development interventions. Relationships are increasingly considered central to the talent development process (McCauley and Douglas, 2004; Rock and Garavan, 2006). The relationships considered most significant include peers, senior leaders, customers and suppliers. They are considered important to the talent development context because they have helped talented employees see new perspectives and understand bigger picture issues (Balkundi and Kilduff, 2006). Developmental relationships are conceptualised by Higgins and Kram (2001) as relationships where an individual takes an active interest and action to advance the career of another individual. They provide a variety of developmental functions such as sponsorship, coaching, mentoring, psycho-social support and career advice (Friday *et al.*, 2004). Developmental relationships are increasingly used to develop high potential talent (CIPD, 2011; Novations, 2009). Developmental relationship strategies present a number of significant challenges for organisations: finding the appropriate number of individuals who can perform roles as coaches and mentors, specific gender issues when matching mentors and mentees. Higgins *et al.* (2010) has highlighted the role of optimism may be important in explaining both the structure and quality of an individuals' developmental network. Lombardo and Casey (2008) found that the processes in developmental relationships involved an iterative interplay between specific designer-led learning activities, learner-led activities interaction with others and learner action and cognition processing. They represent an important and effective talent development strategy because development takes place in context and learning is embedded in the learners' work.

Using the job as the basis for development. The job represents a primary source of development and various aspects of the job are highlighted. Wilson *et al.* (2011) suggest that the job provides five significant developmental opportunities: bosses and superiors, turnaround situations, increases in job scope, horizontal job moves and new initiatives such as doing a stretch task, implementing change and developing new practice. These job-based experiences need to meet a number of design requirements to be effective (Ohlott, 2004; Lombardo and Eichinger, 1989). Job tasks need to have high instability and the potential to be successful; they should involve some form of cross-functional influence; take learners outside of their comfort zones, have a major strategic component and involve dealing with different bosses.

Job experiences are frequently taken for granted as talent development strategies (Van Velsor and Guthrie, 1998; Garavan *et al.*, 2009). They are often viewed as opportunities to get work done and the mindset of key managers may be anti-development. They require significant levels of self-confidence on the part of the learner and the climate and culture of the organisation may not be conducive to the recognition of job activities as development opportunities.

Informal and non-formal talent development opportunities. The majority of the talent development literature emphasises formal development strategies; however, Raelin (1998) suggests that it is important to challenge conventional thinking. The contingent nature of work in organisations suggests that talent development strategies should also

focus on the informal and non-formal (Marsick and Watkins, 2001). Marsick and Watkins (2001) make a number of important distinctions between informal, incidental and implied development. Informal development is unplanned, ad-hoc with no specified outcomes. It is predominantly experiential. Incidental development is unintentional, a bi-product of another activity. They see it as a sub-category of informal learning. Implicit development consists of learning that occurs independent of conscious attempts to learn. Eraut (2004) suggests that it is development that occurs without awareness or explicit knowledge. Sadler-Smith (2006) suggests that implicit development is broadly equivalent to incidental learning. Non-formal learning is structured in terms of learning outcomes and it is considered intentional development (Colley *et al.*, 2002). Billett (2001) suggests that there is no such thing as informal learning because whatever people do will result in learning. With the increasing emphasis on a social capital perspective and collective learning processes, informal talent development processes will become more used and researched (Wang-Cowham, 2011; Wenger *et al.*, 2002).

Some tentative conclusions and avenues for research

Based on this review of the terrain of talent development it is possible to draw a number of tentative conclusions. Talent development is a significantly under-developed and under-researched concept. It is almost invariably highlighted as a key component of talent management, which in turn is put forward as one of the most significant challenges facing organisations today. There is also a degree of scepticism as to whether talent development differs from learning and development or whether it represents a significant paradigm shift in terms of how learning and development is conceptualised and practiced in organisations. It is our view that there is scope in the talent development concept. It raises a number of important questions concerning who should be developed, to what degree and in what way. These represent fundamental questions that we have considered in this paper and to which we have in some cases provided the most tentative of conclusions. However, our review does point to a number of conclusions and useful avenues for future research.

An exclusive focus on strategic talent

There is a particularly strong focus in current writings on talent management to consider the development of strategic or pivotal talent as a key concern of talent development. Talent development strategies can be considered a key dimension of a bundle of high performance work practices that are associated with superior organisational performance. The key issue in this context concerns the way talent development processes are implemented and how they are communicated in organisations. It is not just their presence that is of significance. There is a clear requirement for talent development processes to be integrated with business strategies. There is considerable debate concerning the merits and demerits of exclusive and inclusive approaches to talent development; however, there is significant scope to more fully understand how these two generic approaches influence business performance and the engagement of employees who are not included in an exclusive approach.

A shift towards customisation and personalisation

The notion of a one-size fits all approach in terms of talent development is considered to be ineffective. There is an increased emphasis on customising talent development

strategies to meet the needs of individuals. These talent development strategies will need to take account of individual needs, learning styles and current work priorities. Talent development processes therefore need to be less prescriptive and far more about the needs of individual talent. Such a strategy represents a major investment for organisations. It places a significant reliance on effective talent assessment processes and the utilisation of the information generated to select best-fit talent development strategies. Personalisation and customisation bring to the fore the value of individual development planning processes and the design of development pathways suited to current and future needs of individual learners. There is a paucity of research on how these customised and personalised strategies work and the types of talent development architecture required to support them.

A shift from organisationally managed to self-managed development

Increasingly the onus is shifting to the individual to plan and implement development activities. The locus of decision-making has shifted towards the individual learner making informed choices concerning development. Self-directed talent development activities highlight the need for learner insight and self-awareness, self-confidence and persistence. It also raises questions concerning the developmental stability of individuals. There are significant challenges for organisations to develop technologies to support self directed development. There are also challenges involved in linking self-development activities to organisational goals. Self-directed learning concepts highlight the value of community of practice approaches to talent development, and the notion that development is organised through the practices by which employees' structure conversations. Indeed, there is a major gap in our understanding of individual characteristics that facilitate self-directed learning, the nature of self-development behaviour and the influence of group and organisational factors that facilitate self-development in the context of talent development.

Continuous, just-in-time, blended talent development processes

There will be a continuous demand for talent development processes with the result that such processes will need to be flexible and to move away from the classroom. Talent development must also be delivered just-in-time. This has led to talent development processes that focus on delivering learning in bite-size chunks. It means instant access to development. This imperative has resulted in an increasing emphasis on the use of online resources and signposting to learners the most appropriate learning strategy given the amount of time they have available to learn. Blended learning that combines the formal with the informal represents a key challenge for organisations. However, it is clear that while some organisations say they utilise a 70:20:10 approach, in reality there still exists a strong focus on the classroom. Increasingly the lines between work and non-work have become blurred resulting in a 24/7 philosophy on access to talent development resources. Technology is increasingly used as a means to provide this access; however, there is much to be learned concerning the effectiveness of on-line development strategies.

Table I summarises some of the issues that merit consideration in the context of talent development in organisations.

Dimension	Key questions
Defining talent for talent development	<p>What drives an organisation to nominate particular employees as talented?</p> <p>Does the organisation encourage narrow or broad inclusion?</p> <p>Is talent natural or developed?</p> <p>Does the organisation believe in satisfying or maximising talent?</p>
Focus on technical or generic competencies or both	<p>Should the talent development process focus on generic or technical competencies, or both?</p> <p>When should the organisation focus on both sets of competencies?</p> <p>How should both sets of competencies be developed?</p> <p>Which competencies are more important for performance, potential and career advancement?</p>
Whose talent development needs and whose responsibility	<p>What needs take priority in the talent development process (organisational or individual)?</p> <p>What is the proportion of organisationally driven versus self-directed development activities?</p>
Accelerated or traditionally paced development	<p>What are the demands of the business strategy in respect of development?</p> <p>What is the time frame required to develop talent and particularly, high potential talent?</p> <p>How should development strategies be combined in both traditional and accelerated models?</p>
The architecture of talent development	<p>What are the talent development needs of the organisation?</p> <p>What are the key objectives of talent development process?</p> <p>How appropriate are competency models?</p> <p>What sequence of experiences, exposures and challenges are appropriate for different categories of talent?</p> <p>How are talent development processes linked to talent selection, assessment and retention processes?</p> <p>What is the appropriate blend of talent development programmes to achieve talent development objectives?</p> <p>How customised or personalised are talent development strategies?</p> <p>Does the talent development architecture provide on time access and facilitate self-directed learning?</p>

Table I.
Key dimensions of talent development

The contributions to the special issue

The first paper in this collection is “Employability and talent management: challenges for HRM practices” by Staffan Nilsson and Per-Erik Ellström. The key objective of this paper is to explore the link between talent development and enhanced employability. They examine the substance of talent and the problems associated with its identification in terms of three distinct concepts: employability, knowledge, and competence. The authors propose that employability is central to employee performance and organisational success. Individual employability includes general meta-competence and context-bound competence that is related to a specific profession and organisation. This concept of employability is broader than that of talent alone, but the possession of talent is critical to being employable. They propose a three-dimensional model of talent that incorporates an individual dimension, an institutional dimension, and an organisational-social dimension.

The next paper is “Information pathways for the competence foresight mechanism in talent management framework”, written by Lena Siikaniemi and it explores the concept of competency foresight, how it operates and its relevance to talent development. Its objective is to address a lacuna in the literature on competence foresight and it synthesises theories and perspectives of strategic human resource management and development, talent management, competence management and foresight in order to develop a framework for competence foresight. This framework proposes three pathways for detecting the needed competences for strategy implementation, the pathways for detecting rapid changes and the loss of competences. This research has significant potential for HRD practitioners by providing new perspectives on the use of systematic foresight processes in talent management. The research also has the potential for modelling the information pathways for the competence foresight mechanism in talent management software.

The third paper in this issue is “Developing managerial talent: exploring the link between management talent and perceived performance in multinational corporations (MNCs)” by Maura Sheehan. She presents the findings of a large study of UK subsidiaries of multi-national corporations examining the link between investment in the development of managers and perceived subsidiary performance. The author specifically addressed the issue of whether there was a positive relationship between investment in management development and perceived subsidiary performance; and to extent to whether the national context mediated any relationship between management development and perceived subsidiary performance. The findings suggest that investing in talent development, in this context, the development of the key talent group of line managers, is positively associated with perceived organisational performance. The national context in which this investment is undertaken is also found to affect the associated returns. Given the current economic climate, this research has important implications for organisational budgetary considerations and suggests that on-going investment in talent management is likely to be crucial for sustained competitive advantage.

The fourth paper is “HRD practices and talent management in the companies with the employer brand”, written by Dmitry Kucherov and Elena Zavyalova. It investigates the use of talent management and development practices for the purposes of employee branding. They define employer brand as the qualitative features of the employing company, which are attractive to a target audience (current employees, prospective employees, competitors and intermediaries). They suggest that these qualitative features are comprised of material (economic) and non-material (psychological and symbolic) advantages distinguishing a company in the labour market. Employer branding is proposed as a strategy and a set of HRD activities that is geared toward managing the corporate identity by creating a positive image of the organisation as a distinct and desirable employer. The authors hypothesised that:

- economic and organisational features of HRD systems in companies with employer brand (CEB) differ from economic and organisational features of HRD systems in companies without employer brand (CWEB); and
- employer brand could be a key factor for attracting talent to the company.

It was found that CEBs had lower turnover and invest more in training and development. They also identified a number of positive qualitative features of CEBs

that could improve labour relations and organisational culture such as involvement, communication, training and development, rewards, and recruitment and selection practices. The findings also indicate that CEBs gained not only stronger talent attraction, but also certain economic advantages as there were lower salary expectations in the CEBs compared to the CWEBs. These findings provide evidence in support of the benefits of investing in employer brand through HRD and talent management practices, in addition to suggesting how positive employer branding can be established.

The final paper in this issue is “Developing ethnic talent in the Dutch national tax administration: a case study” by Folke Glastra and Martha Meerman. The main objective of their research is to report the findings of a case study investigating the development of ethnic minorities within the Dutch National Tax Administration, and how the achievement of organisational diversity goals can be realised in a talent management context. The authors findings suggest that key success factors usually identified in the literature, e.g. top level commitment and strategic integration, are insufficient and overrated aspects. Of significantly more importance are “non-issues” in the formulation of diversity strategies, organizational alignment of relevant organisational players, strategic coherence and organizational culture. The implications of the research suggest that talent management activities targeted at fostering ethnic diversity in talent development require specific awareness at the outset of cultural and organisational conditions and processes underpinning standard practices of talent and career development. They suggest that it is insufficient to solely seek strategic integration and top management commitment, but to also leverage broader organisational alignment.

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About the Guest Editors

Professor Thomas N. Garavan is a Professor at the Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick where he specialises in both the research and teaching of Human Resource Development, Leadership Development and Vocational Training and Education. A graduate of the University of Limerick (BBS, 1982; MBS, 1985) and the University of Bristol (Doctor of Education, 1996), he has authored or co-authored 14 books and over 100 refereed journal papers and book chapters. Currently he is Editor-in-Chief of *European Journal of Training and Development* and Associate Editor of *Human Resource Development International*. He is a member of the editorial board of *Human Resource Development Review*, *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, and *Human Resource Development Quarterly*. Thomas N. Garavan is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: Thomas.Garavan@ul.ie

Dr Ronan Carbery lectures in Human Resource Development and Human Resource Management at the University of Limerick. He is a Chartered Member of CIPD Ireland (MCIPD) and is also a member of University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD) and the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD). He is Associate Editor of the *European Journal of Training and Development*. His research interests include careers, career development, workplace learning, and participation in training and development.

Andrew Rock teaches Human Resource Development, Human Resource Management, and Organizational Behaviour and Psychology at the University of Limerick. He graduated the University of Limerick with a BBS (2003) and MBS in HRM (2004) and is completing his doctoral thesis in the area of mentoring in organizations. He is a member of the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD), Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), and University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD).