



Incorporating the macro view in global talent management



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ABSTRACT

We argue that the present scope of global talent management (GTM) is limited by its focus upon individuals and organizations, that leaves country effects and influences, as witnessed in the form of talent mobility, and respective governments' direct involvement in attracting and developing national talent, unaddressed. We present a conceptual framework for macro global talent management (MGTM), which incorporates a macro view and supports interdisciplinary research. The framework draws our attention to the macro context in which GTM occurs as well as illuminates its multiple consequences traversing levels of analysis. It also captures the essence of complexities associated with managing talent globally. We offer directions for future research and discuss implications for managers and policy makers. We conclude with some contributions, limitations and conclusions.

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The origins of global talent management (GTM) can be traced back to the 1800s and to the fields of arts/entertainment management, sports management literatures, and early education (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). Interest in talent management in the business context came in the 1990s by a group of McKinsey consultants coined the phrase, 'war for talent' in the late 1990s to emphasize the critical importance of employees to the success of top performing companies (Michaels, Hanfield-Jones, & Axelford, 2001). This led to a flurry of interest in talent management research and practice within organizations (e.g., Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Collings, 2014; Farndale, Pai, Sparrow, & Scullion, 2014; Minbaeva & Collings, 2013), including many reports that indicate that business leaders realize the importance of talent management, and spend a significant portion of their time and resources in planning and implementing talent management activities (see for example, Boudreau, 2010; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2011; Heidrick & Struggles, 2012; Strack, Baier, Caye, Zimmermann, & Dyrchs, 2011). Although in recent years, continuing financial market instability and uncertainty have resulted in disruption and job losses, (McDonnell & Burgess, 2013), several studies indicate that talent management has gained a greater strategic role within organizations (Gunnigle, Lavelle, & Monaghan, 2013; Zagelmeyer, 2013).

Tung and Lazarova (2006) argue that talent war is here to stay. Lanvin and Evans (2013), based upon Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), also conclude that global talent war is on. Findings from other surveys (such as a Softscape Global Survey, 2009 and a Deloitte–Bersin survey by Benko, Bohdal-Spiegelhoff, Geller, & Walkinshaw, 2014) also indicate that uncertain global market conditions have heightened leadership awareness to developing robust talent management strategies that help organizations attract and retain the best talent. McDonnell (2011) in discussing the pressing role of talent management post global financial crises, has argued that talent management “has never been more decisive because an organization's talent will be one of the principal determining factors in turning the downturn into long term organizational sustainability and success” (169).

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In the literature, GTM has been defined as:

“Systematically utilizing IHRM activities (complementary HRM policies and policies) to attract, develop, and retain individuals with high levels of human capital (e.g., competency, personality, motivation) consistent with the strategic directions of the multinational enterprise in a dynamic, highly competitive, and global environment.” (Tarique & Schuler, 2010, p. 124)

While the definition fits the individual and organizational levels, it omits several aspects of the macro environment that are proving to be invaluable for talent management at the individual and organizational levels. Indeed, several studies have highlighted the macro national aspect of global talent management (Boudreau, 2010; Cooke, Saini, & Wang, 2014; Dutta, 2012; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2011; Heidrick & Struggles, 2012; Oxford Economics, 2014; Special report—outsourcing and offshoring: Here, there & everywhere, 2013; Strack et al., 2011). It showed that the war for talent had intensified and gone global, as many governments (including Australia, Canada, Germany, UK and USA) had joined the hunt for global talent by developing immigrant friendly policies. Some governments (for example, China and India) are also luring back skilled diaspora, and many others have been making serious investments in education and human development of their own citizens (for example, Singapore) — what Oxford Economics (2014) refers to as “home growing” (2). These efforts have been part of government-led policies of strengthening respective countries through human talent, and aimed at spurring economic growth by upgrading local capabilities and building innovative capacities of firms (Oettl & Agrawal, 2008; Ragazzi, 2014; Saxenian, 2005; Tung, 2008; Zweig, 2006).

The macro view of GTM, that includes a discussion of country level activities (both governmental and nongovernmental) has largely been ignored in the literature, as a majority of the current research either maintains a focus upon organizations and individuals, or presents a comparative view of how organizational talent management systems operate in different national contexts (Ariss, Cascio, & Paaewe, 2014; Farndale, Pai, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2014; McDonnell, Lamare, Gunnigle, & Lavelle, 2010; Tyman, Stumpf, & Doh, 2010). These presentations of GTM, although take varying national contexts into account, ignore aforementioned governmental and nongovernmental efforts to manage global talent.

Active involvement of various governmental and nongovernmental organizations in attracting and developing talent makes GTM truly a global issue, which reaches beyond a single organization and its human resource management activities. It draws attention to complexity of the environment within which organizations develop their talent management systems, and individuals make career choices. It incorporates cross border flow of talent, diaspora mobility, and government policies to attract, grow, develop and retain the talent nationally for innovation and competitiveness, which facilitates talent management activities within organizations. We therefore suggest that the scope of GTM extends beyond an individual and organizational analysis to incorporate a contextualized macro view in order to fully comprehend the complexities of managing talent in today's globalized world, where organizations are not only competing with each other but governments and diasporas have also joined the race (Lanvin & Evans, 2013; Leaders: The magic of diasporas, 2011; Ragazzi, 2014). As such, we propose definition of macro GTM (MGTM) as:

The activities that are systematically developed by governmental and nongovernmental organizations expressly for the purpose of enhancing the quality and quantity of talent within and across countries and regions to facilitate innovation and competitiveness of their citizens and corporations.

By promoting the macro perspective, we want to broaden the scope of GTM beyond its current singular focus on individuals and organizations. As GTM continues to become an increasingly complex phenomenon with continuous changes across national and social contexts (which will be discussed in details in this paper), we argue that in order to generate a more comprehensive understanding and further theory development of the phenomenon, we need to explore other fields and disciplines and engage in an interdisciplinary research (Cheng, Guo, & Skousen, 2011; Cheng, Henisz, Roth, & Swaminath, 2009; Hitt, Beamish, Jackson, & Mathieu, 2007; Khilji & Keilson, 2014; Kuhn, 1962). Our hope is that the research community can shape, build and strengthen knowledge and practice in the area of GTM in order to help businesses as well as governmental and nongovernment — level policy makers address the complexities of managing talent in today's global labor market.

The paper is organized in four sections. We begin with a brief review of the GTM literature to discuss the significance of the topic and the variations in how it is defined. We present MGTM to identify the role of respective governments in poaching skilled workers, using an integrated country-level human development agenda related to talent development and the diaspora effect in economic development of emerging economies. We also outline the importance of knowledge flows, innovation and learning in international talent mobility to highlight critical country effects related to GTM debate. Next, we present arguments to make a case for broadening the scope of GTM beyond organizational and individual aspects. In addition, we propose a conceptual model of MGTM that incorporates multi-level analyses of individual, organizations and societies, and encapsulates environmental factors, processes and outcomes related to GTM. We hope that this conceptual framework can serve to present MGTM as an inter-disciplinary phenomenon, and provides building blocks for future research.

1. The need for the macro view

There is a wide variation in how GTM is defined (Aston & Morton, 2005; Collings, 2014; McDonnell, 2008; Scullion, Collings, & Caligiuri, 2010), which has contributed to a lack of clarity regarding its overall goals (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; McDonnell, Collings, & Burgess, 2012; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). While some scholars have focused upon core functions of GTM to define it as an organization's efforts to attract, select, develop and retain key talented employees on a global scale, others have used literal meaning of talent to address management of top talent within organizations (Collings, 2014; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Stahl et al., 2007).

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