

TALENT MANAGEMENT IN POLISH COMPANIES IN THE LIGHT OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

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Purpose: The aim of the paper is the introduction of talent management practices that are applied in Polish companies in the context of effectively identifying, developing and retaining talent within the company.

Design/methodology/approach: The approach applied in the paper is of descriptive-empirical nature. The research methods involved in this paper are: induction, deduction, literature studies, as well survey and data analysis.

Findings: On the basis of the analysis of the research material - in the conclusion - recommendations are presented for Polish companies to implement the practices of talent management programs talents.

Research implications: Future research directions should focus on further extended research exploration in this area, taking into account various companies, both small, medium and large.

Practical implications: The presented research results (from 2006 to 2018) make an important contribution to the existing knowledge on building and implementing talent management programs in a company and have a number of practical implications mainly for HR professionals.

Social implications: Building awareness of talent management issues in the company.

Originality/value: The research findings and opinions have both theoretical and practical implications, which can be used to shape and optimize management practices with regard to talent employees. The work has cognitive value for managers, HR departments, people managing human resources, as well as for people interested in the topic of talent management and employee development. It may also be of interest to academics, providing them with a source of inspiration for research work.

Keywords: talent, talent management, human capital, Polish companies.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Talent management (TM), both in terms of individuals and the entire process of developing and achieving an organization's goals, is currently one of the biggest global trends. The success of a company¹ nowadays is based not only on the struggle of competing companies, but also on the ability to attract the best talented individuals. Undeniably, talent management has become one of the main strategic elements of the functioning of a modern organization and is gaining in importance every year. Confirmation of this thesis is provided by numerous scientific studies available in the literature. This claim is also substantiated by the results of studies conducted in Poland by actively operating training and consulting companies. This study includes considerations of the talent management process. The purpose of the essay is to introduce the talent management practices used in Polish companies in terms of their effective operating strategy for the various phases of the process. The essay reveals the concept and essence of talent, as well as the complexity and definitional diversity of the talent management process, presents synthetically collected research results from House of Skills and HRM partners S.A. on talent management in Polish companies, as well as presents selected results of our own research of the issue. The purpose of this interpretation is to better understand the present issue, as well as its dynamics, and to present in conclusion areas for further improvement in the talent management process in Polish companies. The analysis of gathered material and literature studies devoted to talent management has made it possible to carry out the task, at the same time shaping the layout and scope of the present article.

2. "Talent" and "talent management" in literature

A highly dynamic nature of changes in business environment has facilitated transition from the industrial era to the world ruled by knowledge and information. Progress has put more focus on human resources which started to be perceived as crucial determinants of enterprise development. Together with advancing globalization, social-and-demographic changes and turbulent environment, the concept of human capital has gained the status of a strategic factor in business organizations. Thus, the run for best employees, i.e. talents, has started.

Both in practical management and management theory, there is no unique definition of talent to be found. The experience of organizations described in thematic literature teaches us that the definition of talent is made up to a great extent by companies themselves,

¹ The author uses the following terms: enterprise, company and organization interchangeably with reference to micro-economic business entities. Such an approach is resultant from stylistic purposes and goes in tandem with a common understanding of these terms, which are frequently used interchangeably in thematic literature.

as by implementing new solutions or introducing novel concepts it is always necessary to adjust them to already existing standards according to which the organizations function (Cannon, McGee, 2007, pp. 4-6). Thus, talent can mean whatever a business owner or organizational manager wants it to mean, as each has its own view of what should be understood by its term and meaning (Ulrich, 2011, pp. 189-211). Such dissonance is also characteristic of academic publications devoted to organizational aspects of human resource management (Janowski, 2017, pp. 29-31). It seems, therefore, that the development of a consensus when defining this concept is an extremely important step on the way to introducing effective talent management.

An attempt to define talent has been made by T. Ingram and team. Having analyzed the concept, they identified three main categories of a talent-based idea: the characteristics of talent as a person, the activities characteristic of talent, and the object of talent's influence (Ingram, 2011, pp. 17-18). Exemplary definitions according to every category have been provided in Table 1.

Table 1.
Definitions of talent

Definition by	Definition
First category	
S. Borkowska	Talent is a creative, resourceful person with a high potential for development that can trigger and foster a company's value.
L. Barlow	Talent is a person inclined to face challenges, who cares about personal growth, with a company's adequate support.
Second category	
T. Listwan	Talent is made by: extraordinary abilities, specific skills, creativity and deep involvement in tasks.
D. Ulrich	Talent = competence x involvement x contribution
Third category	
V. Garrow, W. Hirsch	Talents are people with a great potential, who are of special value to an organization.
C. Zheng, C. Soosay, P. Hayland	Talents are people capable of creating organizational effectiveness, who help to maintain a competitive advantage.

Source: own analysis based on: (Borkowska, 2005; Barlow, 2006; Listwan, 2022; Ulrich, 2008; Ulrich, Smallwood, 2012; Zheng, Soosay, Hayland, 2008; Ingram, 2011; Juchnowicz, 2014).

Talent management is a relatively new concept of action. The growing popularity of the concept in this case obliges a precise definition of the essence of talent management. However, in the literature, just like the concept of talent, the concept of talent management is not clearly defined. There are many interesting concepts on the essence of talent management. In M. Armstrong's work, the term talent management can be attributed to succession planning and to activities aimed at employee development (Armstrong, 2011). The author believes that this concept brings nothing new to known human resource management processes, apart from an eloquent name. Talent management should be treated as a universal set of activities. It aims to secure the flow of talents in the organization, treating it as one of the company's key resources (Balcerzyk, Matera, 2019, p. 11). Based on the achievements of R.E. Lewis and R.J. Hackman, talent management should be considered in three basic trends:

- in the first perspective, talent management is perceived as a set of standard practices, activities and functions of human capital management. These include, for example, recruitment, selection and development,
- the second approach concerns activities within the talent pools. The inflow of employees is subject to analysis and control. The employed are assigned to the appropriate job positions,
- the third view, whose center is talent itself, distinguishes two different tendencies (Lewis, Hackman, 2006). The first one assumes that talents are people with high potential. They should be sought, recruited and rewarded for the results achieved. The second approach considers talent as undifferentiated good. The role of the executive personnel is to manage the overall talent to achieve the best possible results (Balcerzyk, Matera, 2019, p. 11).

According to a pragmatic approach, represented by E. Maliszewska, talent management consists in searching for talented individuals within or outside company structures, and once found, taking special care of them by facilitating their self-development, offering business trainings and helping them with adequate career planning. It is also important to make sure that the payment offered is accurate and satisfactory so that the talents could stay resistant to enticement from other employers and stick to their current business engagement (Maliszewska, 2005, p. 79). On the other hand, Ł. Sienkiewicz defines talent management as identification, development, preservation, involvement and proper use of talents under specific organization conditions (Sienkiewicz, 2007, p. 32). T. Listwan describes talent management as a group of actions that are directed towards outstandingly skilled individuals and which are taken with the aim to facilitate talent growth and effectiveness to benefit fulfilment of an organization's goals (Listwan, 2010, p. 21). Thus, despite the discrepancies in the way the concept is interpreted, many researchers show a consensus on the main feature of this issue. Talent management undeniably refers to talented individuals who are of great importance to their company.

The activities undertaken within the framework of the talent management concept are a certain complex process of a holistic nature, the purpose of which is to make the best use of talent in the organization. The multifaceted nature of the issue forces the existence of many models and research approaches describing the phenomenon in question. The basis of the model developed by T. Listwan (2022) is the separation of three main phases of the talent management process in an organization: entry (acquisition of talent through recruitment and selection, as well as their identification from among existing employees), transformation (motivation, training, development, assessments) and exit (includes activities aimed at retaining talent in the organization and dealing with the situation of their departure). The approach emphasizes linking talent management to company goals, strategy (including HR strategy), values and organizational conditions. A more detailed approach talks about identifying, developing, retaining, engaging and properly utilizing talent in specific organizational conditions (Pocztowski, 2008, pp. 61-62). In this author's model, the talent management strategy details

the human resources strategy, which in turn is derived from the organization's business strategy. An important aspect influencing all processes here is the labor market, particularly supply, demand and compensation issues (Mróz, 2015, pp. 98-99).

The connection of the concept of talent management with the company's business strategy is the dominant theme of many interesting research proposals, all of which, due to the volume limitations of this paper, it is impossible to cite here. Models that emphasize the importance of considering talent management in relation to organizational strategy are described in the Polish-language literature by, among others, H. Bieniok (2010, p. 23), T. Ingram (2011, p. 49), or A. Miś and A. Pocztowski (2016, p. 65), and in the English-language literature by M. Armstrong (2011, pp. 504-506), R. Silzer, B. Dowell (2010, pp. 21-22), or J. Cannon and R. Mc Gee (2015, pp. 28-39).

3. Talent management – practices in Polish companies

Every organization, in order to stay in the market, must try to improve its competitiveness. Perhaps the term competitiveness was used in Polish literature for the first time by S. Flejterski, who described it as “the ability to design, create and sell goods whose prices, quality and other added values are more attractive than those of comparable products offered by competitors” (Flejterski, 1984, p. 391). M.J. Stankiewicz defines competitiveness as a feature characterizing the members of competition (Stankiewicz, 2002, p. 30). On the other hand, M. Gorynia assumes that “competitiveness means the ability to compete, i.e. to act and survive in competitive surroundings” (Gorynia, 2009, p. 51). Many factors influence the competitiveness of an organization. One of the important ones is the quality of human capital. The strategies of today's organizations are making increasing demands. Wanting to respond to the ambitious plans of business, the HR function strives to provide the best possible employees, capable of achieving more and more, faster and in new ways. Companies are faced with the challenge of dynamically developing the business and, through it, the employees. Key employees are of particular importance in this. Therefore, leading consulting and training companies decided to look at the talent management practices of companies in the Polish market. How do companies think about key employees and how do they manage them? Synthesized selected results of the companies' research: House of Skills and HRM partners S.A. are presented in tables 2 and 3.

Table 2.
Selected results – a dynamic approach

Author's own research	
Research method	<p>Since 2006 House of Skills has been conducting studies devoted to talent management in Polish companies. Until now, they have realized two research campaigns: in 2006 and in 2015. The first edition was organized together with The Conference Board association, while the partner of the second event was SAP Polska. The study was based on two primary methods: on-line questionnaire and individual interviews, which made it possible to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. In 2006, the quantitative data consisted in personal application forms distributed to HR managers of 300 biggest enterprises in Poland (according to the ranking of 500 top companies published by Rzeczpospolita newspaper). The data obtained from 34 correctly filled-in forms was supplemented with remarks provided by HR managers of key branches of Polish enterprises. The study lasted between July and September 2006. On the other hand, the report from 2015 was based on data collected via personal surveys distributed to a group of big companies operating on the Polish market and hiring above 250 employees each. On-line version of the questionnaire was filled in by 22 firms. 15 companies took part in a personal interview. The study was carried out between June and August 2015.</p> <p>The limitations of the research study - relatively small research sample.</p>
Definition of talent	<p>Almost all companies that took part in 2006 study considered talent as a person with a higher, outstanding potential. However, throughout the current decade and since the first research edition we have witnessed a certain transformation of this approach. Nowadays, organizations take a broader look and tend to believe that a talent is a person capable of rapid learning, adjustment to changes and role-swapping, determined by specific business needs.</p>
The importance and scope of talent programs in Polish companies	<p>In 2006, 94% of HR Managers were convinced that the process of talent management would gain on popularity and importance in the future. This belief must have been reflected in the fact that as many as 73% of the surveyed companies were running a program devoted to talent management. In 2015, already 85% had it applied. What is more, the majority of respondents declared the intention to continue talent programs and re-launch them in the future. This may point to a gradually increasing effectiveness of these processes, and to numerous benefits they bring to business organizations. Personal opinions seem only to corroborate this statement: in 2006 people saw both advantages and consequences of introduced talent programs, whereas now they derive pure benefits out of programs run in their companies.</p>
Aims of talent programs	<p>According to respondents of 2015 survey, talent fostering programs are primarily aimed at developing a company's key competences (68%) to secure succession (68%) and output of future managers (51%). This conclusion seems to confirm the one drawn in 2006. However, it is to be noticed that nowadays talent programs tend to be more specified and focused on the development of selected qualifications, the implementation of specific changes or realization of strategic projects, as well as making employees ready to take up new business roles.</p>
How long do the talent programs last ?	<p>Programs tend to become shorter: nowadays, companies go for programs that last up to one year - 36% (vs earlier practices that lasted from one up to three years - 39%). This tendency must come from the requirement to react rapidly to fluctuating business needs.</p>
Talent management process - tools and methods used to identify talents	<p>According to respondents, the most effective sources of finding talents are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - indication of the supervisor (73% - 2006; 95% - 2015), - results of periodic evaluation (55% - 2006; 73% - 2015), - assessment center (0% - 2006; 59% - 2015)).
Talent management process - tools of keeping and developing talents	<p>Activities and methods used during realization of Talent Management programs are highly diversified. According to respondents, the most often used tools are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training programs (76% - 2006; 82% - 2015), - internal projects (0% - 2006; 77% - 2015), - team/individual tasks (0% - 2006; 73% - 2015).

Source: own analysis based on: (House of Skills, 2022; The Conference Board, 2022).

Table 3.*Selected results – a dynamic approach*

Author's own research	
Research method	Since 2010 HRM partners S.A. has led studies devoted to practical aspects of talent management in Polish companies. Until now, three research editions have been conducted: in 2010, 2013 and 2016 with the application of a questionnaire method. 2010 study was done with the involvement of 53 companies, in 2013 it embraced 101 entities, whereas in 2016 as many as 130 firms. In each case, respondents were constituted by local and international businesses of various fields, all running their activity in Poland. The first edition took place throughout October and November 2010, the second in May-June 2013, and the third one in July and August 2016.
Definition of talent	The results obtained through HRM partners' research demonstrate that the definition of a talent evolved in the span of six years. It is still understood as a person achieving targets and possessing outstanding competences and erudition, but above all, this is an individual focused on self-development (85% in 2016 vs 60% in 2013). One of talent-defining criteria that has gained on popularity is business thinking (46% in 2016 vs 28% in 2013).
The importance and scope of talent programs in Polish companies	Talent management programs are directed to a greater range of employees. In 2010 and 2013 all organizations tried to maintain an exclusive character of the programs which were reserved for only 1-5% of employees (78% and 65% respectively). On the contrary, now they are offered to 5-10% (a shift from 11% in 2010 to 47% in 2016) and to 11-15% of employees (shift from 7% in 2010 to 16% in 2016). Where do companies seek for talents? The answer is simple and short: everywhere. Not so long ago, the target group involved only managers. Nowadays, talent programs are directed to specialists rather than managers (51% and 44% respectively in 2016 vs 44% and 67% in 2010). Moreover, it is worth noticing that the share of organizations offering talent programs to all employees has grown from 22% in 2010 to 36% in 2016.
Aims of talent programs	An increased priority of programs for talented individuals is supported by a significant change of goals they are faced with. While the initiatives were once meant to merely boost engagement or limit headcount fluctuation (52% - 2010; 23% - 2013; 42% - 2016), now they constitute a tool that facilitates talent keeping inside company structures and makes it possible to take advantage of their potential through a greater involvement in diversified projects (89% - 2010; 37% - 2013; 66% - 2016).
How long do the talent programs last ?	It is essential to realize that nowadays talent programs tend to be shorter and last from one to two years
Talent management process - tools and methods used to identify talents	The results show that companies do not find it problematic to pick up talents and they use a variety of methods to achieve this goal. Most of the practices are focused on qualifications (assessment center – 41% - 2010; 30% - 2013; 54% - 2016, qualifications-based interview – 33% - 2010; 16% - 2013; 46% - 2016). It is also worth noticing that co-workers' recommendations (0% - 2010; 0% - 2013; 13% - 2016) and talent matrices (0% - 2010; 0% - 2013; 26% - 2016) have recently emerged as a new popular source of valuable information about potentially talented employees.
Talent management process - tools of keeping and developing talents	Furthermore, the last decade has brought a change in a program structure itself. Although training sessions still constitute its crucial element (81% - 2010; 49% - 2013; 69% - 2016), it is practice and action that keep gaining interest as new forms of development. When it comes to motivating talent programs, the results demonstrate that Polish companies lack a coherent, clearly defined policy. The majority of business entities do not make use of any additional motivating systems. However, it should be acknowledged that the number of companies that use financial methods has relatively grown, which may point to the fact that Polish enterprises have started to recognize the value of talented individuals.

Source: own analysis based on: (HMR partners S.A., 2022).

Results presented in the reports show clearly that talent concepts over the last decade have evolved intensively. It's their philosophy that has mainly been changing. Talent management concept is not considered as a separate process any more. Instead, it has become an integral part of the company's strategy, thus being closer to the business and its needs. The scope of changes that has been observed is significant:

- firstly, what undergoes a change is the way one thinks about a talent - it is still a person who achieves high results and possesses unique competences and knowledge, but most importantly, it is someone who is noticeably focused on development. Among the criteria defining talent, business thinking is becoming more and more important;
- the second change is the mentality and attitude of entrepreneurs towards talent programs - more and more surveyed firms have talent programs and want to continue them. Their intention is to realize succeeding editions, which is a proof of growing effectiveness of these processes and benefits they bring for the organization. In addition, talent management programs are addressed to the growing number of employees, which means that they lose their exclusive character;
- thirdly, talent programs tend to concentrate on particular targets and business needs - predominantly, they used to be a tool to decrease the employees' fluctuation but now the programs are used to keep talented employees in a firm because it gives the opportunity to use their potential and engage them in the realization of various projects;
- fourthly, entrepreneurs shorten the period of talent programs from three years to one year only. It is connected with the necessity of a quick response to the changing needs of the business;
- finally, the research shows that within the first area of talent management, firms do not have problems with hunting talents. To do it they use different methods, especially those focused on competences, like assessment center or competency interview. It is worth mentioning that there have appeared new sources of information about a talented employee in an organization, such as a recommendation of co-workers or a talent matrix.

As far as the development activities are concerned, the construction of talent programs undergoes changes. The programs' concepts are clearly evolving, becoming more versatile, practical and demanding. All kinds of practical actions for business play a more and more important role here. However, the results show that when motivation is taken into account, the companies in Poland do not have a clear strategy on how to keep talented employees. Most of them do not use any additional motivation systems (Dudzik, 2019, pp. 13-14).

Studies on practical talent management in Polish companies, published between 2006 to 2016, encouraged the author of the present article to take a closer look on the topic from the angle of precise identification, development and bolstering of talents in a business entity. In 2018, pilot studies were conducted that approximated talent management practices that were applied in Polish companies. Selected results of this research are presented in table 4.

The available scientific studies present diverse approaches to the essence of talent and talent management, but are based mainly on research conducted in large organizations. The author's research reveals the peculiarities of talent management both in large companies and in the SME sector. This approach is intended to indicate possible differences in the areas of talent management occurring between these entities. However, due to the fact that the research sample is not large, which is certainly an important limitation of the study conducted, the results of the study should be treated as preliminary, aimed at identifying areas for further research.

Table 4.

Presentation of selected results of the pilotage study

Author's own research	
Research method	The research, whose aim was to get familiar with talent management practices, was carried out with the use of the quantitative method and auditorium technique. It was conducted among 16 entrepreneurs who took part in the workshop organised by the author of this work. They were asked to fill in the questionnaire that had been prepared together with Marek Fulara. The questionnaire included 17 closed questions. The analysis was based on 16 correctly filled in questionnaires. The research was conducted in large, medium-sized and small companies. The structure of the research sample: large companies - 25%, medium-sized - 25%, small - 25%, micro - 25%. The limitations of the research study - relatively small research sample.
Definition of talent	Talent is a person with a high development potential (63,64%) who achieves above-average results (83,33%) and possesses high intellectual skills at the same time (62,5%). Equally important seem to be unique competences and knowledge (57,14%). Among the criteria defining the concept of talent, motivation is also gaining importance (45,45%).
The importance and scope of talent programs in Polish companies	The results of the research show that respondents treat the subject of talent management more and more seriously. However, their attitude is not always mature enough to rise to this difficult challenge. Many of the respondents have not implemented talent programs yet - merely 43,75% of study participants declared that talented employees are subject to these programs in their organisations. Talent programs are dedicated to a rather small group of employees - 42,86% of companies which implemented such programs admit that they offer them to 10-25% of the total number of employees. The above was a dominant reply among companies which operate on international markets. It is worth mentioning that 28,57% of the companies confirmed that over 50% of their employees are included in total management programmes. 14,29% of organisations apply talent programmes to 25-50% of their employees.
Aims of talent programs	The following factors have a decisive influence on the fact that talent management programs are implemented in organisations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the will to employ the best specialists (5 answers - 3 of them as "the most important", 1 "very important" and 1 "important"), - the need to prevent the best employees from leaving work (5 answers - 2 of them as "the most important", 2 "very important" and 1 "important"), - elimination of competence gaps among employees (4 answers - 2 of them as "the most important", 2 "very important" and 1 "important"), - The need to improve employer's image on the labour market (4 answers, 2 of them as "very important" and 2 "important"). Two first factors seem to be particularly interesting - the first one enables talents to enter an organisation, while the second factor tries to keep them in it.

Cont. table 4.

How long do the talent programs last?	Talent programs are realised cyclically and usually last from 1 to 2 years (42,86%). However, there are employers who still prefer longer-lasting programs - from 2 to 4 years (28,57%) and over 4 years (28,57%).
Talent management process - tools and methods used to identify talents	According to respondents, the most effective sources of finding talents are: - internship programs addressed to students and graduates of universities (33,33%), - recommendation of a talented employee (30%), - head-hunters (23,33%).
Talent management process - tools of keeping and developing talents	Activities and methods used during realisation of talent management programs are highly diversified. According to respondents, the most often used tools are: - workshops (68,75%), - specialised development programs for future leaders (45,45%), - participating in the company's projects (36,36%). And what motivates the employee the most effectively ? In view of respondents, the most important elements are: supporting development of employees (57,14%), remuneration (53,33%) and ambitious tasks (42,86%).

Source: author's own analysis.

4. Summary

The results of the research presented in this work point explicitly that companies take the issue of talent management more and more seriously. Moreover, they are becoming more and more aware of how complex this challenge is. Modern concepts of talent management evolve clearly. The observed changes in concepts and construction of talent programs indicate that they (programs) are more and more often regarded as elements of business programs and are the answer to business needs and demands.

The range of these changes is significant. The most important ones are: the way of perceiving the talented person, the change in mentality and attitude of entrepreneurs to the very talent programs (noticing the effectiveness and benefits of these processes, extension of the target group of potential talents), concentration of talent programs on realization of particular targets of the business company, cutting down the lasting period of these programs, the use of a wide variety of recruitment and talent selection tools and a change in the talent programs' construction.

Polish companies will certainly face plenty of challenges connected with effective talent management. Among the recommendations for the future the crucial ones seem to be:

- introduction of more intensive actions to build mature concepts, in which talent management strategy is integrated with the main strategy of the company. The very strategy should be focused on realization of particular business aims that are able to meet the business needs,
- the use of a wide range of tools and methods of talent recruitment to ensure better choice of people for the program, greater emphasis on verification and motivation diagnosis of the talent to take part in the program,

- further intensive development focused on actions, which enable acquisition of particular knowledge and skills necessary to function in a changing, unstable and more and more demanding environment,
- expansion of the financial system to keep the talents,
- emphasis on the individualisation of talent programs by creating dedicated career paths for talented employees.

“The war about talents” continues and will probably be constantly continued. As for now, talent management activities have been the domain mainly of large companies. However, the results of the research obtained by the author indicate that talents are pursued not only by large firms, but also by medium-sized and small ones. It means that modern companies, regardless of their size, notice the necessity of possessing dedicated talent programs. No relevant differences in the concept of talent management have been found among these entities. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that the research group was relatively small, which was a significant limitation for the research as a whole. Therefore, the research is to be considered only as a pilotage study and it remains open for further research in the future.

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