

The Mechanistic and Political Frames of Talent Management Processes The case of a Talent Analytics System

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Agreement on the definition of talent management is not yet achieved. Reasons for this are overlapping human resources fields and the lack of conceptual boundaries to determine what should be under the concept of talent management and what not. However, the concept is getting stronger among academics and practitioners, and talent is identified as a critical source of sustainable competitive advantage. This paper examines the progress of the definition of talent management in the literature and investigates if both mechanistic and political frames are taken into consideration when implementing talent management systems. Results of this study showed that systems can offer a complete panorama of talent management activities. However, its effectiveness is reduced by power relationships and political behavior. Awareness of this behavior when designing and dealing with information system can help to overcome, to certain extent, these obstacles.

Keywords: talent management, organizational politics, decision support systems, business analytics.

The definition and boundaries of talent management are still developing. There are related fields intersecting the concept of talent management such as competence management, succession management, and human capital that share similar characteristics to the ones attributed to talent management. As a result, different perspectives of talent management have been adopted by different authors. Some authors emphasize the strategic importance of managing key individuals in the organization (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Collings & Mellahi, 2009) while others emphasize the processes of attracting, developing, and retaining the right people with the right skills in the organization (Cappelli, 2008; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). And other authors have introduced talent management as a new function in organizations which aim is to improve decision making in human resources (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007). Despite the complexity of the term and its blurry boundaries, talent management is on the rise among organizations, and as a result many large companies have some form of program designed to detect and develop talent (Ready & Conger, 2007; Martin & Schmidt, 2010).

Cappelli (2008) indicates that talent management is perhaps better understood when it fails. Poor talent management practices can have disastrous effects in organizations such as having more employees than needed leading to lay-offs, having shortages of qualified people in critical areas, or having a negative impact in operations when key resources leave the company.

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Our investigation of previous research in the fields of talent management and the related concept of competence management have identified only a few texts, that describe how the self-interests of employees (either potential or existing) influence the processes of talent and competence management. This is of interest, as the theories of sociology indicate that recruitment (including the measures taken to keep competent employees being recruited) is where a misalignment between the interests of the recruiting organization on the one hand, and the self-interest of the recruited on the other, is most prone to exist. For example, Jaffee (2001) describes recruitment as an arena of 'perpetual tension' between the employee and the organization, where the organization aims to align the interests of the employee to the interests of the organization by offering compensation. However, an organization cannot perfectly measure the performance of its employees.

Employees, who find ways to exaggerate their performance, will receive more compensation than will those who don't execute such political behavior (Thompson, 1967). Alas, at closer inspection any one organization is not only an arena for cooperation in making contributions to the interests of the organization, but also to some extent an arena for competition in making the organization satisfy the self-interests of its members. To quote Buchanan and Badham, "we perhaps like to think of our social and organizational cultures as characterized by order, rationality, openness, collaboration and trust. The reality is different. Competition sits alongside co-operation. Informal 'backstaging' supports public action. We see self-interest, deceit, subterfuge and cunning, as well as the pursuit of moral ideals and high aspirations" (Buchanan & Badham, 1999, p.1).

Lindgren and his colleagues (Lindgren et al., 2003; Lindgren et al., 2004), recognized that competence management is in fact prone to being subjected to political activities due to the self-interests of employees. In their study, they identified that employees manipulate competence inventories so that those inventories do not contain records of what competencies the employees have, but what competencies the employees want the managers of the company to believe they have. Lindgren and his colleagues conclude, that in order to perform competence management well, a computerized system supporting a competence management process needs to be designed using the principle of 'multi-perspective interests integration', recognizing the interests of all stakeholder groups using the system.

The political frame is often neglected when analyzing organizational behavior (Collins, 1998), and can be considered actively 'repressed', despite its ability to explain many causes of organizational challenges (Buchanan & Badham, 1999). Instead, the most common frame used is the mechanistic one, where the organization is metaphorically regarded as a machine, and where the employees cooperate to maximize its performance (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Dahlbom & Mathiassen, 1993; Morgan, 1998).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate if both the mechanistic and political frames are taken into consideration when implementing talent management systems. We do this by inspecting the design of a commercial computerized decision support system for managing talent in organizations. By choosing a system with an existing customer base, and using the supporting hypothesis that the system is implemented according to its manual, we can investigate the talent process of the customer base.

The paper is structured in four sections: (1) the assessment of the term talent management, its perspectives, related concepts, and activities; (2) a review of decision support systems; (3) our methodology and choice of computerized system; (4) our analysis of the computerized system; and

finally (4) discussion and conclusions about benefits and limitations of decision support systems in talent management and managerial implications in the field are presented.

Talent Management Related Concepts

Talent management overlaps with some of the fields in human resource management including competence management, human resource planning, and human capital. Although similar features are shared among these concepts, some distinctions are observed.

In the same way that talent management aims to identify key resources in organizations, in particular those that add to the competitive strategy (Collings & Mellahi, 2009), *competence management* deals with the identification of desired competences in an organization and the strategic supply of those competences (Baladi, 1999). In competence management, a competency is a characteristic of an individual or the organization that is related to effective and superior performance in a job (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). A key difference between competence management with talent management is that competences encompass both levels the individual and the organizational. While in talent management the focus is in the individual level which includes attributes such as motivation, disposition, values, communication, and learning capabilities. The organizational level competences include firm-specific assets, knowledge, skills, technology, process, culture, routines, and learning (Lindgren, Henfridsson, & Schultze, 2004).

Similarly, talent management and competence management take care that organizations have the appropriate people in key positions at all times. A summarized definition of talent management is getting the right people with the right skills into the right jobs (Cappelli, 2008). In the literature, this process can be found under the concept of human resource planning or success management (Jackson & Schuler, 1990). These concepts are used interchangeably with talent management (Lewis & Heckman, 2006).

From an economic perspective, *human capital* is seen as an enhancer of firm performance. From this perspective, it is argue that firms should invest in acquiring, developing and retaining specific human capital. In particular in human capital that is not easily tradable in labor markets (Crook, Todd, Combs, Woehr, & Ketchen Jr., 2011). Likewise, talent management focuses in key individuals that are hard to replace.

New terminology around the concept of talent management is being created. “Talentship” is a term introduced by Boudreau and Ramstad in 2002 to address a new function to improve decision making in human resources and to connect human resources to strategic success. The authors argue that talentship is to human resources as finance is to accounting and as marketing is to sales. Talentship is presented as an opportunity for organizations to take full advantage of their most important resource: the talents of their people (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007).

Talent Management Perspectives

The lack of consensus about talent management among researchers and the strong acceptance among practioners makes the effort of clarifying the concept relevant. Lewis and Heckman (2006) identified three different perspectives of the definition of talent management that can help understanding the difficulties of delineating the concept. In the *first* perspective, talent management focuses on traditional human resource functions, in terms of recruiting, selecting, developing and succession management, but with the aim of doing it faster, using the latest technologies, across the enterprise,

and highly aligned to the business strategy. The authors find this perspective problematic in the sense that it overlaps the notions of traditional human resources management.

The *second* perspective is based on the term “talent pool” which is the collection of processes that allow the right flow of employees across the organization. In this view, the focus is in succession planning which is defined as “the process that helps stabilize the tenure of personnel. Any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization, division, department, or work group by providing for the development, replacement, and strategic application of key people over time” (Rothwell, 2010, p.6). According to this approach, emphasizes is given to internal processes, procuring the optimization of internal resources, and requiring a comprehensive understanding of the workforce situation in the organization (Lewis & Heckman, 2006).

The *third* perspective, stresses the need for talent itself. Specifically, talent can be seen as highly competent performers that an organization needs to hire or identify within its own resources. In this case, employees are ranked by performance level which encourage reward to top actors and threaten low performers out of the organization. Under this third perspective, talent can also be seen as the responsibility of an organization to manage everyone to outperform (Lewis & Heckman, 2006).

Collings and Mellahi (2009) suggested a *fourth* perspective that draws attention to key positions that have the capacity to differentially impact the competitive advantage of the firm. From this approach, the distinction between strategic human resource management (SHRM) and strategic talent management (STM) can be explained as: SHRM models applies to all employees in the organization, while STM focuses in attracting, developing, and retaining the talent of individuals that have the potential to fill key positions. These positions are not limited to top management, but include different levels in the hierarchy among functional and operational units. Key positions are not static and keep changing and evolving over time.

The review of related concepts and perspectives of talent management evidences that researchers have different stances on talent management. Correspondingly, practioners address the function of talent management in different ways. Formulating a definition that intersects the main elements of talent management and its related concepts can provide a mean to progress in the study of the field. The definition underlying this paper, therefore, is that talent management is concerned with attracting, developing and retaining key personal in the organizations, in particular those who contribute the most to the organization’s strategy.

Talent Management activities

Analogously to strategic human resource management, talent management main activities are attracting, developing, and retaining (Tarique & Schuler, 2010).

Attracting talent

In this area focus is in developing organizational reputation or attractiveness to appeal talent; developing forecasts of talent requirements, and deciding whether to hire people from the outside or promoting from within the organization. These factors have implication in terms of costs and affect the productivity outcome if carelessly treated. The complexity of estimating talent requirements (oversupply or undersupply) is linked with the difficulties of forecasting business demand for most organizations. The higher the uncertainty of future demand, the harder to estimate your talent needs (Cappelli, 2008).

Developing talent

Individuals identified with the potential to fulfill key roles are the ones that should be the focus of talent management strategies. Development of a talent pool with top performers to fill key roles that contribute to the sustainable competitive advantage of the organization is a key activity (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Development offered uniformly across the organization is a costly practice. Development needs to be framed under thoughtful calculation where development is not seen as an entitlement but as an investment (Cappelli, 2008).

Retaining talent

Organizational commitment and identification has a strong impact on organization performance. Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982), as cite in Collings & Mellahi (2009, p.310) “(committed employees) are willing to give something of themselves in order to contribute to the organization’s well-being”. In this sense, focus on increasing employee commitment is crucial to talent management strategy as a driving force of organizational performance. It is of the interest of any organization to engage their top performers and keep to a minimum the turnover of its talent pool. Thus, organizations should get involved in different practices to promote organizational commitment and retention of key talent (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

Career management is a stimulating aspect for employees, despite the fact that some employers consider it highly uncertain and costly. A possible solution to this contradiction in career management could be the creation of an open market for talent inside the organization, in which employees are the first option to fill new role openings, contributing to the growth and career development of employees (Cappelli, 2008).

Additional aspects that impact retention rates in organizations are the work-life balance issues (Deery, 2008). Practices such as: flexible working hours and work arrangements, training opportunities, provision for career’s leaves or time-out, and sound management practices have a positive effect on retaining talented incumbents. A holistic view that balance work environment and home life could reduce turnover caused by stress, work overload and low job satisfaction (Deery, 2008).

Decision Support Systems (DSS)

This study is based in the revision of the design of a commercial computerized decision support system for supporting talent management in organizations. Decision support systems (DSS) are computer-based systems that gather data, documents, knowledge, and models in an aggregate and structured manner to proportionate organized and relevant information to its user and assist them in the decision making process. Three main characteristics are identified (Power & Sharda, 2009):

- DSS are designed specifically to facilitate decision processes.
- DSS should support rather than automate decision making.
- DSS should be able to respond quickly

DSS have evolved from their primitive beginning in the 1960’s to the comprehensive Business Intelligent (BI) and analytics platforms of nowadays (Power & Sharda, 2009). Business intelligence systems are defined as a group of DSS for the enterprise, enabling knowledge workers (executives, managers, business analyst) to understand and analyze business performance (Chaudhuri, Dayal, & Narasayya, 2011; Davenport & Harris, 2007).

DSS implementations are shaped by the information needs of managers and decision makers in their business context. Some users will require summarize information while other may need detail transaction data, some may require graphics and easy to read information in tables while other will

require dynamic reports that allow them to rearrange data. Delivery formats are also evolving and range from web base portals, to shared files, emails, or reports delivered to mobile devices. In any case, information must be timely, accurate, complete, understandable, and reliable (Power & Sharda, 2009).

DSS are not the answer to all needs of information in organizations. It is limited to the information technology capacity of the organization, the support that DSS find from the top management, the quality of the input data and the cost to obtain it, the value perceived by users of the DSS, and the ability of managers to take action from the information. Nevertheless, DSS are a genuine necessity to remain competitive (Power & Sharda, 2009).

Research Methodology

Practices in talent management are assessed by means of a corporate computer system in talent management. We have chosen to explore a commercial computer system developed by a corporate vendor, as we can assume that the vendor wants its system to be applicable to a large number of customer organizations. Furthermore, we have chosen a system with an existing customer base and which has been developed in several revisions, because we thus can assume that its users have provided feedback on the usability of the system, influencing its current design to have a high fit with the needs of their practice. Thus, by exploring a commercial talent management system, we would understand talent management practice.

The IBM Cognos® Workforce Performance Talent Analytics System² was selected based on its leadership in decision support system technologies as seen in figure 1. IBM's analytics systems are a complete collection of metrics and pre-packaged reports that support business functions including human resources and talent management.



Fig. 1. Main decisions support systems platforms. Source: (Gartner, Inc., 2011)

² IBM Cognos® is a trademark of International Business Machines Corporation.

The Talent Analytics System (TAS) was studied by means of its manual, web site, software design fact sheet, and a system demo. This information was used to recreate the structure and features of the system. The study included a detailed review of the “look and feel”, the content structure, and the pre-defined metrics of the system. The benefit of using the system manual instead of an implemented (working) version of the system is that the intended design is regarded as it was conceived by the developers of the system. However a drawback of not having studied an implemented version of the system is that our ability to see possible flaws or positive features during execution is restricted.

Analysis and Results

Description of the Talent Analytics System

IBM’s analytics systems comprise different modules for different business functions:

- Financial Performance Analytics
- Customer Performance Sales Analytics
- Consumer Insight Analytics
- Supply Chain Performance Procurement Analytics
- *Workforce Performance and Talent Analytics*

Workforce Performance and Talent Analytics provides metrics related to workforce strength, talent acquisition, development, retention, and compensation. Executives, managers and human resources specialists benefit from the use of this system by having a comprehensive and unified view of the workforce (IBM Corp., 2011). In addition to the basic workforce metrics, this system includes a talent management module which is the focus of this study.

Design and Metrics

The Talent Analytics System (TAS) structures the function of talent management in three business capabilities: *talent acquisition, talent development, and talent retention*. The system provides different information for each capability which is used by human resources staff and managers of the organization to support their talent decisions. The information is presented as reports (table, graphs, statistics, etc.) by area of analysis (i.e. acquisition effectiveness, talent pool availability, learning impact, etc.). Reports are customized according to the information and the format that users require. Sample of reports and screens are included in appendix 1.

A summary of the pre-defined metrics offered by TAS (i.e. cost of hire, average time to fill a position, turnover rate, etc.) is presented in Table 1. The details of these metrics were obtained from the TAS’ system manual and report demos from IBM’s web site (IBM Corp, 2010).

<i>Basic Workforce Information</i>	
Workforce Demographics ³ (Applies to all capabilities)	- Employee List, Age Ranges, Employee Statues, Ethnics groups, Gender, Qualifications, Job Positions, Full/Part Time/Contractor, Standard hours, Length of Service, Compensation Types & Frequencies, Salary Plan, Benefits, Business Groups, Locations (Country / cities), Organization Levels (department, divisions, cost centers,...), New hire / Re-hire, Recruiting Channel

³ Demographics refer to the facts that are stored in the databases and that allow users to filter different metrics. For instance, if a metric calculates the cost of a new hiring, this value can be analyzed by location, recruiting channel, business group, salary plans, etc.

<i>Capability: Talent Acquisition</i>		
Area of Analysis	Metrics	Sample of questions that are aimed to be solved
Acquisition Effectiveness	- Conversion Ratio: the number of applicants hired over the total number of applicants - Offer Acceptance Rate: the number of accepted offers over the offers made	- What is the conversion rate by demographics? - What percentage of offers do candidates accept? - Are first choice candidates being hired?
Acquisition Efficiency	- Requisition Ratio: number of hires over the number of open requisitions - Number of days from requisition to hire.	- How many requisitions does a recruiter handle on average? - Where are the bottlenecks in the requisition process by demographics?
Cost to Acquire	- Cost per Hire - Cost of Unfilled Position - Unfilled position number of days	- What is the cost per hire? - How does the cost vary by demographics?
Global Talent Sourcing	- Number of applicants hired	- What is the distribution of recruiting channels and sources? How does this vary by job? - How is the mix of recruiting channels and sources changing? What is the referral rate?
Talent Pool Availability	- Number of applicants (that hasn't been hired) - Applicants' detail list	- What is the pipeline for hard to fill positions? - How many qualified candidates are available? - What are the background/characteristics of people that have applied for jobs?
Time to Acquire	- Average Time to Fill a position - Total number of Open Requisitions	- Which jobs are taking the longest to fill? - What is the average time to fill by demographics?
<i>Capability: Talent Development</i>		
Performance	- Performance Appraisal rating - Percent Total of High Performers Count - Percent Total of Low Performers Count	- How does performance vary by demographics? - How is new talent performing?
Progression	- Promotion Count - Promotion Rate	- How many talent promotions by demographics? - How many hires receive a promotion within 1 year of hire?
Learning	- Training Hours	- How many learning hours are employees taking by demographics? - Is training disproportionately offered to new employees?
Global Learning	- Training Type (courses, seminars, E-learning, etc.) - Training Subjects - Training enrollment / completion	- What is the distribution of training types? - What is the distribution of training subjects? - What percentage of employees has development plans?
Learning Cost	- Training Cost	- What is the average training and development cost by demographics?
Learning Effectiveness	- Training Score - Learner Satisfaction	- What is the success rate of courses? How is this trending? - What is the average proficiency? - What is the learner satisfaction?
Learning Impact	- Promotions Rate by training - Performance Rate by training	- How does training affect employee promotions? - What are the performance ratings per learner? - Does learning impact employee performance?
Position Requirements	- Required Competencies by Job Position	- What are the skill requirements by Job position? - Which positions require critical skills?
Skills and Competencies	- Competencies by employee (Certifications, Certification Level, qualifications)	- What skills are available in the organization? - How many learners have received certifications? - Where is increasing skill proficiency? How is this changing?
Succession Planning	- Successor by Job	- What percentage of key positions have successors identified? - What positions have multiple successors?
<i>Capability: Talent Retention</i>		
Compensation	- Hourly Salary Rate - Individual Benefits - Deductions - Other earnings (bonus, incentives)	- Are compensation increases consistent with experience? What is the compensation distribution by demographics?
Turnover	- Separation Rate - Involuntary Separation Rate - Voluntary Separation Rate	- What is the turnover rate by demographics? - Has turnover been increasing or decreasing? - Whose decision was to terminate?
Learning Turnover	- Separations by Training Hours	- Does training impact retention? - How much training investment has been lost as a result of turnover?

Table 1. Summary of pre-defined metrics of the Talent Analytics System

Further functionality of the system comes from its capacity to connect with other applications to relate these metrics with different information systems from the organization. For instance, if a decrease in sales is detected by a subsidiary's manager, he or she can link his sale statistics to the Talent Analytics System (TAS), to see if the subsidiary is having unfilled positions, a bottleneck in training, or a suspicious turnover rate (IBM Corp., 2011).

The next section is reserved to compare the functionalities of the system with the talent management literature review. The different talent management perspectives and activities will be associated to the capabilities of the system.

The Mechanistic frame of the Talent Analytics System

The design of a system set to manage the way an organization deals with one of its management processes, such as a talent management, is characterized by a trade-off between process generalization and process specialization. When you look at the details, any one organization deals with one management practice in a different way than does another. A more specialized system would fit the practices of a smaller number of organizations, leading to a smaller customer base. On the other hand, for those organizations for which it does fit, a more specialized system would typically offer a larger improvement of work efficiency, increasing the customers' willingness to pay. We would expect manufacturers of process-supporting systems manage this paradox by making new customers adapt their work practices to better fit the process of the system and by allowing the customization of certain capabilities.

As defined by Cappelli (2008), talent management is about anticipating and meeting talent needs. In that sense the Talent Analytics System (TAS) offers a *complete overview* of job positions in an organization from basic demographics such as length of service to succession possibilities. It is the capacity to have *the information organized in one site* that allows insight from the data making it a valuable tool for talent management.

From a strategic point of view, the metrics provided by TAS alone are not enough to relate with the business strategy. Nevertheless, strategic goals can be assigned to relevant metrics, for instance the system could be set to send a warning when strategically important positions lacks successor. The warning could include a list of employees (or applicants) that closely match the skills criteria for that job position. Thus, in order to properly assign strategic goals to TAS' metrics, the system administrator will need to determine and configure such links with other sources.

When the talent management perspectives from Lewis and Heckman (2006) are compared with the information provided by TAS it could be said that it is aligned with all perspectives. In other words, TAS provides enough data to deal with talent management issues of any of the four perspectives presented in the literature. (1) *Strategic human resource management*: TAS' demographics are typical human resources data including headcounts, payroll information, training needs, career development etc. On the other hand the link with strategy is not transparent. It will require that the organization leaders link strategic goals with the information from TAS. As seen in the example of the subsidiary manager who, after finding a drop in the sales, uses TAS to see if any talent management issues are causing this situation.

For the (2) *talent pool* perspective, TAS offer strong capabilities which are: the talent pool of applicants (outside the organization), the internal talent pool with the details of job position requirements, skills and capabilities available in the organization, and succession planning. This data

can be used to have a clear picture of talent across the organization to identify employees that are ready to take up new responsibilities.

Similarly the (3) top performers perspective is well represented by performance rates, progression rates and first choices hires. TAS can be used to identify high, low and steady performers. It allows comparison between performance across business units/locations (or other demographics) in order to find performance trends and identify sources of low/high performance. This perspective also includes the idea of driving people to outperform. In this scenario, TAS offers development data that can guide managers to make sure staff is having the tools needed to keep growing in the organization.

The perspective presented by Collings and Mellahi (2009), (4) *focus on key positions that add to the competitive advantage of the firm*, is not as well exemplified by TAS as the other perspectives. As mentioned before strategy issues are not directly linked to TAS so, selection of key people according to his/her relevance to the competitive advantage is not something that can be inferred from the information in TAS. It is a function of the business analyst to identify key positions based on information that is not necessarily available in TAS. Once key people have been identified, close follow up to them is enabled with TAS.

Talent management activities with the Talent Analytics System

The structure of TAS follows the scheme of the main activities of talent management according to Tarique and Schuler (2010) *attracting, developing and retaining*. However differences between the author's activities and the capabilities of TAS for each section are presented.

Attracting

According to the literature, one of the functions included in this section is the *reputation and attractiveness* of a firm to recruit talent. TAS gives information about the effectiveness of recruiting process. Information in terms of the number of people that take a job once an offer has been made, it identifies if a person hire was the first choice, and it provides statistics about the time to recruit new people. These are indicators of the attractiveness of the firm and are a good starting point to review and shape the firm's initiatives to attract new people.

Developing

Following the idea of treating *employee development as an investment* decision and not as an entitlement, TAS gives tools to assess the cost of development plans linked with performance and compensation aspects. Nevertheless, it is still a decision of managers to identify key people whose development plans need to be followed-up closely.

The link between *forecast of demand and its impact on talent requirements* is loosely defined because it depends on whether new talent necessities are entered to the system with demand forecasts on mind. For instance, if the launch of a new product generates requirements for new talent, it is the manager's responsibility to submit the new talent needs based on the prospect of additional demand.

The information about *hierarchy of skills and jobs* that can enable candidates to learn through internal development is found to be properly addressed by TAS metrics (job description, training plans skills and competencies by demographics).

TAS also helps with the decision of *hiring from outside or promote someone from within* the organization. TAS enables managers with a complete overview of the skills and competences available in the company and the talent pool of potential employees from the outside. They also have the option to evaluate the impact of moving an employee from its current position to another

(succession planning capability). This information helps decision makers to anticipate implications of their decisions.

Retaining

Activities in this area are related to *increasing commitment and identification from employees*. Although TAS could not be directly associated with increasing commitment and identification through its metrics, it is possible that TAS is improving the way that talent management is conducted in an organization and by doing so it is increasing commitment and identification among employees.

Keep turnover of talent pool to a minimum is another objective of retaining activities. Indicators of commitment and identification could be extrapolated from TAS metrics, for instance a high voluntary turnover rate in a specific location could suggest commitment problems in that region. TAS contributes to the activities of retention of the talent pool by providing clear indicators of turnover rates and unveiling suspicious patterns.

It is probably in *career management* aspects where TAS is of most use. Capelli's (2008) proposal, of an *open market for talent inside the organization* in order to promote career advancement, is supported by TAS. A clear overview of current skills and competences within the organization gives extra visibility to managers about talent sources within the organization. Finally some *work-life balance* indicators can be obtained from TAS metrics, such as hours worked per week, training opportunities, compensation plans.

The Political Frame of the Talent Analytics System

The quality of the metrics provided by a decision support system (DSS) will depend on the quality of the data entered into the system. In particular, a talent management DSS requires careful design of the flow of information in order to address the talent management activities properly. It is also needed that several functions of the organization work together to provide quality data and to keep the information updated.

One of our two analyses of the Talent Analytics System is to investigate if the system documentation describes that such a system would be prone to manipulation. Indeed, the system manufacturer suggests the involvement of stakeholder from different functions as a good practice in talent management "...look at business performance challenges not as isolated, siloed moments in time, rather as challenges that more often than not radiate out and affect multiple stakeholders, departments and the organization as a whole" (IBM Corp., 2011, p.2). This recognition of stakeholder groups in the system description can be considered a necessary requirement towards the recognition of political behavior such as the manipulation of information among the customers of the system. However, the user manual neither explicitly nor implicitly describes that self-interests of stakeholders would influence the quality of the system information. Thus, the political frame is not evident in the system documentation.

Our second analysis is to investigate if the system design recognizes the 'multi-perspective interest integration' principle (Lindgren et al 2004) by letting users enter explanatory text next to the metrics, or if the system uses several fields to separate facts from wishes (e.g. the competence inventory). The Talent Analytics System does not allow explanatory text next to metrics. It does not offer fields separating facts from wishes relating to the competence inventory, nor was any other facts and wishes pair of fields identified in any other part of the system. Thus, we conclude that the multi-perspective interest integration principle is not satisfied by the system design, (Lindgren et al 2004), thus making it prone to being used inappropriately by individuals distorting or omitting information.

This is an apparently minor issue of self-interest in the display of competences in talent management systems, but the implications are significant. If customers of decision support systems would prefer vendors that support them in achieving awareness of such practices, an effort to unveil these political behaviors would be of interest. However, designing a system that is politically aware is not an easy choice. Politics is usually repressed and neglected in organizations, but it is necessary that the systems and their instructions point out the fact that organizations are vulnerable to self-interest and other political behaviors. Overlooking this fact will have an impact in the reliability of the provided information and the decisions based on it.

Conclusions

Despite the fact that talent management is an ongoing subject where agreement about its definition and boundaries has not been achieved, researcher and practitioners are working close together in similar paths. Both, the literature in talent management and practitioners experiences are aware of the strategic importance of the field. It is probably Collings and Mellahi's (2009) definition of talent management that best delineates the boundaries of talent management and differentiates it from regular human resources activities. Their definition of talent management is related to the processes to attract, develop, and retain *key positions that have the capacity to differentially impact the competitive advantage of the firm*.

A talent Analytics System (TAS) was selected as a sample of how practitioners approach talent management. From a decision support system point of view, the Talent Analytic System (TAS) is a comprehensive tool that provides a complete panorama of the main activities of talent management: attracting, developing, and retaining. However, information needs to be analyzed and action has to be taken upon the provided facts in order to positively impact talent management practices.

Our study concludes that the investigated system complies well with the functional requirements stipulated by research of the mechanistic frame, while there is a lack of compliance with the functional requirements made by research of the political frame. We argue that this lack of political sensitivity may cause talent management work to be performed less efficiently among the customers of this system. However, according to Buchanan and Badham (1999) we can expect the political frame to be repressed in general, and thus we expect many more decision support systems to lack this political sensitivity. Furthermore, extending stakeholder analysis outside of the borders of the firm, we can identify system vendors and system users as two separate stakeholder groups. In whose interest is the suppression of the political frame? Is it the interest of the vendors or of the customers? Or is it more of a general principle of organizing, to never 'talk about the political game'? This we cannot say, as further research is necessary. We do, however, agree with Lindgren et al (2003, 2004) in their conclusion that a talent management system needs to be designed in recognition of the interests of the people using it.

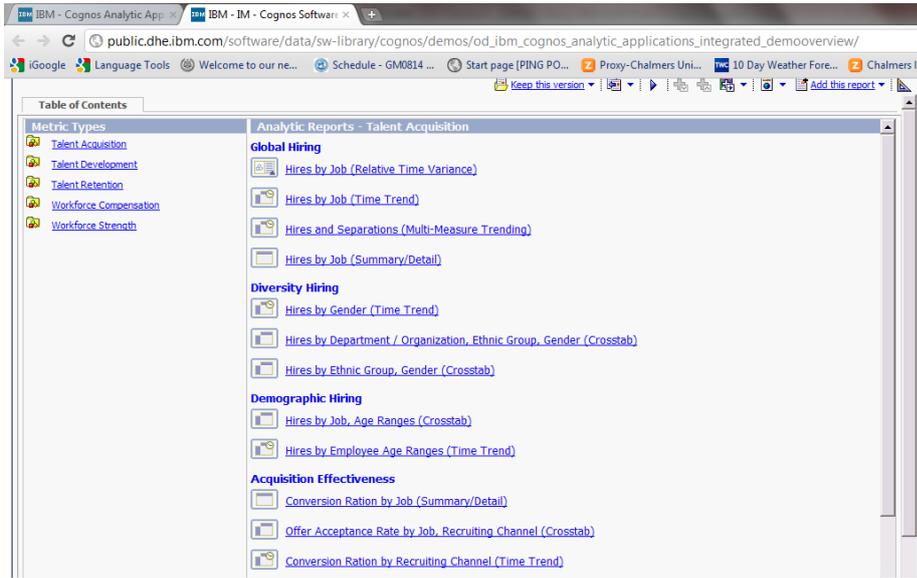
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Appendix 1

Sample of reports and screens from the IBM's Talent Analytics System (IBM Corp., 2011)



IBM Cognos Analytic Applications Integrated Demo - Overview

