Thinking honours: Talent development and professional excellence in a broad international perspective

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Illustration from HR in Asia
What is "talent"?

Greek origin:
Talanton (τάλαντον)

Historically the word represents a measure of mass or volume ranging in weight from 26 to 60 Kilos little depending on which culture adopted its use and for measuring what.

The general idea is being in possession of something precious and worthwhile.
What is "talent"?

Science has thus far not reached an agreement on what determines human talent or how to define it.

- There are well over 100 efforts made to suggest appropriate definitions, but none of these have as yet gained general acceptance.

- As a result some have proposed we need no definition and should avoid creating one.

- In spite of the relative confusion of meanings and labels talent has become, for good and for worse, an important commodity in the global economy.

Sources: Hany, 1993; Dai, 2010; Borland, 2005
The multiple meanings of talent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAKEHOLDERS</th>
<th>Most common label</th>
<th>How many?</th>
<th>Typical key question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE BUSINESS WORLD (Emphasising leadership)</td>
<td>Talent</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>WHAT can they do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE BUSINESS WORLD (Emphasising production)</td>
<td>Talent</td>
<td>Common</td>
<td>WHAT can they do?</td>
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<tr>
<td>THE GENERAL PUBLIC (Entertainment/Sports)</td>
<td>Talent/Giftedness</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>HOW MUCH do I like it?</td>
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<tr>
<td>POLICY MAKERS</td>
<td>Talent/High-achievers</td>
<td>Common</td>
<td>TO WHAT DEGREE do definition and application fit ideology?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE ACADEMIC WORLD (Emphasising psychometrics and genetics)</td>
<td>Giftedness</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>CAN THEY BE IDENTIFIED by traits and cognitive attributes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE ACADEMIC WORLD (Emphasising cognitive expertise and behaviourism)</td>
<td>Talent</td>
<td>Common</td>
<td>IS EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SUPPORT OPTIMAL and is practice and training substantial and deliberate?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The multiple meanings of talent

- Excellence
- Expertise
- Eminence
- Elite
- Genius
- Competence
- Achievement
- Success

Trendy and fashionable concepts invented for the marketing of academic careers and business opportunities? = *Tooth brush concepts*, used only by its inventor and by no one else? (Ziegler & Raul, 2000)
Cognitive ability
(...) as below normal intellectual functioning

Mildly impaired
IQ 55-69

Borderline impaired
IQ 70-79

Low average
IQ 80-89

Average
(68% of population)
IQ 90-109

In accordance with the Stanford-Binet (SB5) Classification
Cognitive ability
(...as beyond normal intellectual functioning)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGH-ACHIEVERS</th>
<th>GIFTED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>+ 1 SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ 1 SD</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-20% of a population</td>
<td>+ 2 SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4% of a population</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.001-0.003% of a population</td>
<td>Extreme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.00002% of a population</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Persson, 2014; Gagne, 1993
Personality dynamics
(...beyond normal intellectual functioning)

Source: Persson, 2014
The world wants talent!  
*Europe wants talent!*

For **Britain** according to former Prime Minister Tony Blair “Talent is 21\textsuperscript{st} century wealth” (quoted in Brown & Hesketh, 2004, p. 1).

For all of the **European Union** “talents contribute to the increase of competitiveness and help the realization of the strategic goals of the European Union” (Hungarian EU Presidential Conference, 2011; p. 1).

In the **U.S.** “nurturing the gifted and talented … will guarantee a constant reservoir of individuals who will later lead both … research and development, and education, thus continuing to propel recruitment of the community, the State, and humanity at large toward a knowledge-based economy” (Sever, 2011; p. 454).

In **Korea** “creativity has come to the forefront in considering Korea’s future in the global economy” (Seo, Lee & Kim, 2005; p. 98).

Also, post-communist **Russia**, aspiring to become an economic world power, reasons in much the same way. Russia is at a stage where further economic growth can only be achieved by knowledge-based industry supported and generated by Russian talent and gifted education (Bondarik, Dymarskaya & Persson, in preparation).
What kind of talent?

Production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technical and scientific advance, as well as rapid obsolescence. The key component of a knowledge economy is a greater reliance on intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources.

The is very much a part of the European Agenda for 2020:

- Innovation as a motor for economic change
- A learning (or knowledge) economy serving and supporting innovation
- Social and environmental renewal on a basis of sustainability
- The Digital Agenda proposes to better exploit the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in order to foster innovation, economic growth and progress.

Source: Powell & Snellman, 2004
“All excellent talent welcome, encouraged and supported, but ...”

“Yes, the strategic use of culture goes beyond the notion of culture as arts and heritage, and creates a new driving force for change and innovation in different domains of society. It injects new ideas into business and the economy, inspires communities to promote new ways of participation, responsibility and cohesion, and re-energises education” (European Cultural Parliament, 2006; p. 5).

... in other words, all things cultural tend to be seen as instrumental in economic growth and not necessarily for its own intrinsic value!

This on-going and quite dramatic re-evaluation and restructuring of global society in line with a knowledge economy carried on an ICT structure, has been termed **THE SECOND MACHINE AGE** by MIT scholars Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) and hailed by Google executives and visionaries Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen (2013) enthusiastically as **THE NEW DIGITAL AGE**

Political and economic emphasis worldwide is increasingly given to intellectual production
In the United States 47% out of 702 officially recognized jobs are likely to be replaced by computerized processes within 20 years.

In Sweden, being more sensitive to infrastructure change than the United States, 53% of such jobs are likely to become obsolete.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Percentage of employers having difficulties filling jobs with suitably trained and experienced work force (2012)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GLOBAL AVERAGE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Frey & Osborne. 2013; Swedish foundation for strategic research, 2014; Manpower Group, 2012
Since the IT-revolution began, globalisation has grown exponentially.

- In 1990 there were about 3000 multi-national corporations (MNCs) globally.
- In 2003 there were 63,000 MNCs around.

**NEW TO THIS ERA** is the introduction of talent (as high ability/high achievement/excellence) and its perceived potential in national and global economy as human capital. Talent is *economically efficient*!

Sources: Chandler & Mazlish, 2005; Greider, 1997.
The war for talent refers to an increasingly competitive landscape for recruiting and retaining talented employees; a mindset that emphasises the importance of talent to the success of organisations (as outlined by Wikipedia).

If an individual constituting intellectual capital decides to emigrate in search of greener pastures elsewhere this migration constitutes human capital flight or “brain drain”; an often politically sensitive issue for any nation, since lack of human capital relates to poverty and access to it relates to wealth.

Talent mobility remains a relative rarity across the EU. In 2012 about 6.6 million workers in the EU were citizens from another EU member state, that is 3% of the European work force.

Illustration from www.jobat.be
The war for talent refers to an increasingly competitive landscape for recruiting and retaining talented employees; a mindset that emphasises the importance of talent to the success of organisations (as outlined by Wikipedia).
An ability climate describes how a population values certain types of abilities. There are three such climates:

1) The Diverse Climate (striped)
2) The Divergent Climate (grey)
3) The Uniform Climate (black)

**Ability clusters:**
- Arts and Entertainment
- Intellectual and Academic
- Social and societal
- Sports

**Germanic cultures value intellectual pursuits the highest.**

**Northern European cultures value intellectual pursuits the lowest**

**All European cultures highly value Arts and Entertainment, and most also value sports.**

**No European culture values business people and entrepreneurs on a population level.**

Talent MANAGEMENT

The Stars

- have high ability, high individual achievement, are team workers and have a considerable amount of “soft skills”; that is, they have interpersonal sensitivity, persuasiveness, emotional resilience, charisma and people skills.

- Probably a high percentage of honour programme students

The Razors

- are “too sharp for their own good”. As competent as a Star, but too aggressive and lacking in sensitivity and people skills; they are not considered suitable for team work

- More often than not psychologically disordered (psychopathic tendencies)

# Talent MANAGEMENT

## The Safe Bets

Not as competent as Stars and Razors, but are still employable and represent reliability. This is an employee who may or may not shine in the future, but is willing to be a team player. Hence, this employee is also a team player.

- *Most likely to be non-honour programme students*

## The Iffys

Are “close but oh so far”. These are the ones who rarely are selected in a talent employment process. While often very competent, they fail to convince the employer as being “more than just clever”. They appear to interviewers and recruiters as having a lack of commitment, lack of business awareness, and a lack of enthusiasm and drive. They do have social skills and are often liked by others, but are seen as naïve and too idealistic by prospective employers.

- *Usually the creative geniuses who remain undiscovered and if employed rarely fit into the organisation*

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Losing TALENT (rather than gaining it?)

- More than 30% believe they’ll be working someplace else inside of 12 months.
- More than 40% don’t respect the person they report to.
- More than 50% say they have different values than their employer.
- More than 60% don’t feel their career goals are aligned with the plans their employers have for them.
- More than 70% don’t feel appreciated or valued by their employer.

Caveat: These are American data, but since management and business life, especially in Northern Europe, tends to be quite Americanised, a similar pattern is likely to be found.

Losing TALENT (rather than gaining it?)

Myatt’s and Forbes’ proposed reasons for failure – reasons which by and large have been known by creativity researchers since the 1960s:

1. Failure to unleash their passions
2. Failure to challenge their intellect
3. Failure to engage their creativity
4. Failure to develop their skills further
5. Failure to listen to them and give them a voice
6. Failure to care at all
7. Failure to actually lead
8. Failure to recognise their contributions
9. Failure to trust them and increase their responsibility
10. You failed to keep your commitments as an employer

... all issues that psychological science would recognise as an employer’s failure to hold up the psychological contract with an employee

Losing TALENT (rather than gaining it?)

The inevitable conclusion of employers’ tendency to break the psychological contract with employees would be the following:

While honours programmes and similar efforts to support talent may well provide the promising human capital needed and indeed actively sought after for targetted European development, the education effort may be in danger of failing because few at the receiving end—the employers—may actually not know how to deal with the talent they hire!
School system reforms

1. Instead of previously "Bildung" schools are now based on entrepreneurial learning

Because markets change the educational system must change also and adapt to the demands presented by societal change. Entrepreneurial learning is an educational attitude conveying both factual knowledge as well as encouraging entrepreneurial skills for business (www.skolverket.se)

2. Schools are now legally required to meet with the needs of high-achieving pupils also (2010:800, 3 §)

All children and pupils shall be given the guidance and stimulation they need in order to learn and individually develop so that, on the basis of their own potential, they may develop as far as possible in accordance with given educational targets. Pupils easily reaching the minimum curricular requirements within this educational framework shall be given guidance and stimulation to reach even further in their development

3. The introduction of education more advanced than the national curriculum

There are now 28 different Advanced Placement classes, all over Sweden, in various subjects, with all of Sweden as a catchment area, intended for children who are "inquisitive, want to learn more, like to be challenged and have an aptitude for a certain subject"
4. Special schools with a specific profile for music or a particular sport
   …but there has until now never existed an effort to train excellence for any academic subject below higher education

5. Young pupils in higher education
   Music and Arts students have always been able to attend tertiary education as “private students” simultaneously with compulsory secondary education. As private students they were given the artistic training but no academic degree

Higher education system measures

6. Supporting young scientists
   A number of programmes administrated by both State and private science foundations offer support for “young scientists”, where young tends to be defined as “immediately after having gained a PhD-degree and being around 25-30 years of age”
## Professional reality for professional talent in 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional field</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Work satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>23 %</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and social</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Running businesses</strong></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical and aesthetical work</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple professions</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students at universities</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired or unemployed</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 92% experienced school as hellish
- 50% had no understanding from for their talent home
- Of the ones who continued to university only 65% found it worthwhile
- 15% Bailed out of all education after secondary school
- 46% gained a bachelor or a masters degree
- 5% gained a PhD degree
- 20% chose professional rather than academic training
- 3% pursued artistic training
- 11% pursued other kinds of training

An educated guess (or perhaps a prediction even) on professional talent in its many forms in future Europe

The need for talent, particularly creative and innovative talent in science and technology, will increase manifold because of the targets of the Lisbon Treaty of 2004. However, brain drain between European nations and to elsewhere will also increase but perhaps not necessarily for the reasons we generally would consider:

Consider first this: the more creative or innovative an individual is the more an organisation will need to adapt to him or her to create an environment for optimal efficiency and production. The current situation is, however, that organisations more often than not adapt their employees!

Therefore, unless the companies, organisations and institutions of Europe adapt to their creative employees two things are very likely to happen:

1. Either the creative human capital stops being creative and becomes alienated because it is so frustrated with work, or ...

2. The creative human capital will move to where the ability climate is more accepting of a certain skill or profession (equals "brain drain"). Ability climates certainly differ within the European Union.
The Honours Programme in the Netherlands and its equivalent elsewhere is indeed a very promising education-political effort!

Its success however hinges not only upon the quality of educational provision but in equal measures on how talent will be managed in professional life!