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Chapter 7

Talent Development in the Context of Higher Education

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Abstract

In this chapter, we discuss talent development in the context of higher education. After discussing the advantages and disadvantages of inclusive and exclusive approaches to talent development, we present empirical data that detail how the participants of a focus group study perceive talent development in higher education. Our data show the importance of a contextualized reading of talent development as the competitive context in academia hinders an inclusive focus on talent development. This context results in a performance-centred, instead of a development-centred approach to talent management, where outperforming others in narrowly defined areas (e.g. publication record) is the main goal. We show that in such a context the development of competitive talent is rewarded, and the development of communal talent is not. The focus on performance instead of (inclusive) development becomes more pronounced when employees move through their career and is believed to have several negative consequences. Mostly women perceived that such a non-inclusive approach to talent development hinders the development and deployment of their talents and obstructs their career progression.

Keywords: Talent management; inclusive talent development; exclusive talent development; universities; gender; career stage; focus groups

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As introduced in Chapter 1, talent management is broadly defined as the systematic deployment of human resource (HR) activities to find, attract, develop, engage and retain talented employees (Avedon & Scholes, 2010). Implied in this definition is that talent development is one specific sub-component of talent management (Garavan et al., 2012; Ibeh & Debrah, 2011). According to Garavan et al. (2012), talent development concerns

> the planning, selection and implementation of development strategies for the entire talent pool to ensure that the organization has both the current and future supply of talent to meet strategic objectives and that development activities are aligned with organizational talent management processes. (p. 6)

Talent development activities that organizations offer may include management skills training, job rotation, on-the-job training, challenging assignments and early leadership experiences (Dries & Pepermans, 2008), to name a few examples.

Authors who have discussed the construct agree on many important parameters of talent development (e.g. Garavan et al., 2012; Haskins & Shaffer, 2010; Pruis, 2011). First, talent development starts with strategic considerations: where is an organization headed and what does it want to achieve? Talent development should be built on a careful assessment of the organization's key business drivers (Haskins & Shaffer, 2010), strategic objectives (Garavan et al., 2012) or core business challenges (Pruis, 2011). Second, from these strategic considerations, organizations can derive which attributes (e.g. values, skills) to develop and ways (e.g. instruction-based vs experienced-based learning activities) to develop them (Haskins & Shaffer, 2010). This is in agreement with the ideas that talent development requires a careful planning, selection and implementation of development strategies (Garavan et al., 2012), as well as deliberation of the scope of development (Pruis, 2011). Third, Haskins and Shaffer (2010) stress the importance of instilling a culture of continuous learning and of monitoring and evaluating learning outcomes for talent development. Finally, Garavan et al. (2012) and Pruis (2011) would add that talent development needs to be aligned with and embedded in a broader talent management framework, creating synergies with other talent management components such as talent attraction, selection and retention.

It is not often that talent development is discussed on its own, without reference to the broader construct of talent management (Garavan et al., 2012; Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016). However, the literature on talent management suggests that talent development may be one of the, if not the, core aspects of talent management (Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016). A survey by CIPD (2015) revealed that developing high-potential employees and growing future senior leaders were the most commonly mentioned aims of talent management. The same survey revealed that the six most widely used talent management activities (i.e. high-potential in-house development schemes, coaching, mentoring and buddying schemes, 360-degree feedback, graduate development programmes, courses at external institutions) are all directed at talent development (CIPD, 2015).

The talent development activities organizations frequently use are thus aimed at simulating both more formal learning (i.e. planned, intentional learning) and informal learning (i.e. everyday learning embedded in the daily working situation) (Kyndt et al., 2009).

Furthermore, talent development may assist with the other sub-components of talent management because offering opportunities for development is a unique selling point, which helps to attract new talented employees, as well as to retain existing ones (Garavan et al., 2012; Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016).

In this chapter, we zoom in on talent development as a core aspect of talent management.

The goal of this chapter is to gain insight into how talent development is experienced in higher education and to explore how gender and career stage shape these experiences. In the first part, we will discuss theoretical perspectives on talent development. More specifically, we will discuss exclusive and inclusive approaches to talent development and the (dis)advantages both approaches have. In the second empirical part, we will focus on talent development in higher education. We will discuss the results of a focus group study that helped us to get a clearer understanding of how talent development in higher education is experienced by different stakeholders. We will pay specific attention to potential differences in experiences, based on gender and career stage. We conclude our chapter with a discussion of our findings in relation to the current state of the literature and the practice of talent development, particularly in higher education.

Theoretical Perspectives on Talent Development

Exclusive Talent Development

Some publications state that talent development initiatives target specific groups of people, for instance, leaders (Ibeh & Debrah, 2011), strategic or pivotal talent (Garavan et al., 2012), high-potentials (Garavan et al., 2021) or 'employees labelled as talented and those who hold critical and linchpin positions in organizations' (Chami-Malaeb & Garavan, 2013, p. 4047). These publications emphasize the exclusive nature of talent development as a coveted HR activity that is not available to the entire workforce. Restricting the access to talent development activities is a strategic choice of organizations, rooted in the conviction that not all employees are equally likely to benefit from talent development. Because talent development is a substantial investment (think, for instance, of the costs of an MBA), many organizations direct it at employees who are most likely to produce a high return on the training investment (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Most often, those are employees who are deemed to possess high potential, have a track record of excellent performance or show early signs of leadership potential (Dries & Pepermans, 2008; Silzer & Church, 2009). Lepak and Snell (1999) advise to provide opportunities for internal development to these employees as this can increase their commitment to the organization.

Prime examples of exclusive talent development activities are high-flyer or high-potential management development programmes (Garavan et al., 2021;

Larsen et al., 1998). Such programmes entail several components, starting with a critical screening of junior employees to detect individuals with a specific potential for fast career progress and promotion. The next component encompasses a range of structured development activities, including job rotations, special assignments, training and mentoring programmes, to accelerate the development of critical skills and competences in the target group. The final component is related to a rapid hierarchical career progression, with a quick succession of promotions to higher-ranked organizational positions (Larsen et al., 1998). Often, these programmes are directed at ensuring the succession in an organization's key or management positions (Larsen et al., 1998) and focus on the development of a narrow set of skills, most notably, leadership skills (Garavan et al., 2021).

There are several advantages to exclusive talent development. First, employees who have access to the coveted exclusive talent development activities are likely to repay the organization with higher loyalty and commitment (Larsen et al., 1998). In that sense, these activities form part of a high-commitment HR configuration for employees who are highly unique and valuable (Lepak & Snell, 1999). Second, and relatedly, exclusive talent development ensures the availability of qualified and knowledgeable successors for key organizational positions (Garavan et al., 2012). In tight labour markets, this may give organizations who 'make' talent through internal programmes a critical advantage over organizations who strive to 'buy' talent from the external labour market (Cappelli, 2008). Third, exclusive talent development may help to attract high-performing or high-potential candidates to the organization (Garavan et al., 2012), thus ensuring a sufficient talent inflow. Finally, Pruis (2011) suggests that exclusive talent development directed at high performers and high potentials may be effective to boost short-term (2–5 years) business performance.

There are also certain disadvantages of exclusive talent development. First, the selective investment in very few individuals may bear the risk of misidentifying those with the highest potential. In fact, several authors point out the difficulties of assessing potential in a reliable and bias-free way (e.g. Silzer & Church, 2009; Swailes, 2013). Second, exclusive talent development typically focusses on a very narrow set of talents (e.g. leadership talent), leaving many other qualities of employees underdeveloped (Garavan et al., 2021; Yost & Chang, 2009). Third, several authors also point to the fact that organizations who adopt exclusive talent development evade their societal or ethical responsibilities (Devins & Gold, 2014; Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016; Swailes, 2013). Devins and Gold (2014), for instance, indicate that exclusive talent development reinforces and enlarges existing inequalities between employees. They state:

> For those not receiving training, a vicious circle arises where those who need the most training to develop their employability and careers receive the least training and subsequently lose their motivation to learn as the pay and career gaps with their peer groups widen. Beyond the negative psychological effects on individual motivation, it maintains a status quo based on a low-skill equilibrium, which traps the economy in a low-wage–low-skill path,

> and this lack of sustainable development can be devastating for individuals, localities, employers, labor markets and entire sectors of the economy. (Devins & Gold, 2014, p. 9)

Swailes et al. (2014) go as far as to say that organizations that aim to treat all people with equal respect are 'ethically failing' if they further develop those who already have the most. Furthermore, they suggest that exclusive talent management that is mainly driven by the rationale to increase organizational profits and performance may violate ethical standards of valuing human beings in their own right (Swailes et al., 2014).

Inclusive Talent Development

In contrast to exclusive talent development, inclusive talent development implies that access to talent development activities is not, in principle, restricted. It is based on the assumption that all employees have a 'great capacity to adapt, change, and grow' (Dweck, 2012, p. 614) and strives to give all employees the opportunity to exploit that capacity (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Inclusive approaches to talent development are closely aligned with principles of positive psychology, which is dedicated to furthering the 'conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions' (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 103). To flourish, individuals need opportunities to grow as a person, to realize their potential and to become the best possible version of themselves (Corey, 2002).

Inclusive talent development, similar to inclusive talent management, starts with an (ongoing) assessment of the talents of all employees (Swailes et al., 2014). Talents, in this approach, are seen as an individual's unique potentials to achieve excellence in a specific domain (Biswas-Diener et al., 2011). The next step would be to place individuals in positions where they have real opportunities to apply and further grow their talents (Yost & Chang, 2009). Subsequently, organizations would need to encourage employees to further develop their talents and offer suitable tools such as individual development plans, stretch assignments and mentoring to support this development (Yost & Chang, 2009). In contrast to common development approaches, inclusive talent development not only stresses the aim to increase a person's proficiency (enhancing a talent itself) but also the frequency of talent use, as well as a prudent regulation of talent usage in calibration with situational demands (Biswas-Diener et al., 2011).

Inclusive talent development knows several advantages. First, it caters to the development of a broad variety of talents (e.g. not limited to leadership talent), which is advantageous in today's highly dynamic business context which makes it increasingly difficult to predict talent needs (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014; Yost & Chang, 2009). This ties in with Pruis' (2011) prediction that inclusive talent development is particularly beneficial when long-term goals are concerned. Second, it grants equal opportunities for development to all employees, avoiding a situation where disparities between highly skilled employees and their lower-skilled counterparts grow increasingly wider (Devins & Gold, 2014). Avoiding

this is not only in the interest of individual employees but also of society at large. Moreover, it appears that inclusive talent development fits well with the Kantian ethics imperative to treat the realization of people's potential as an end in itself (Swailes et al., 2014). Third, granting opportunities for development and growth to all employees can make a significant contribution to the overall motivation and well-being of the workforce. For instance, talent development may lead to more mastery experiences among employees, which fosters their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997); and it may also lead to the fulfilment of their need for competence, which fosters their intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Not surprisingly, inclusive talent development also knows several disadvantages. The first is related to the high costs for development if developmental activities are offered to the whole workforce (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Organizations with tight budgets may struggle to offer substantial and meaningful learning opportunities to everyone. If learning opportunities are not perceived as meaningful, this may have ramifications for the loyalty and commitment of the current workforce, as well as for the employer attractiveness ratings of potential future employees. Second, inclusive talent development requires a lot of tailoring, which may burden HR professionals and, by extension, line managers who assume some HR responsibilities, for instance, by discussing individual talents and related development opportunities with every subordinate.

Talent Development in Higher Education: A Focus Group Study

In this empirical part of this chapter, we describe a focus group study that we conducted in the setting of higher education. While this study was part of a broader study on talent management and career progression, we will filter out information on talent development to analyse how talent development is experienced by different groups.

Method

We use discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 2006) to understand how gender (male; female) and career stage (PhD students; assistant and associate professors; full professors) shape how participants experience current talent development opportunities in one Dutch university. The focus groups were homogenously sampled in terms of career stage and gender to allow for unique sense making of talent development programmes between different groups. This resulted in the following six focus groups: (1) men PhD students ($n = 9$), (2) women PhD students ($n = 5$), (3) men assistant and associate professors ($n = 6$), (4) women assistant and associate professors ($n = 7$), (5) men full professors ($n = 5$) and (6) women full professors ($n = 3$).

We focus on the experiences of employees at the receiving end of talent development. Although employees are an important stakeholder in talent development, who largely determine the success of any given talent development initiative or policy, they are often forgotten in talent management research. Most research has been conducted on the organizational level and centres around intended or

implemented talent management policies and practices (Daubner-Siva et al., 2018). This is problematic, as a recent study of McDonnell et al. (2021) showed a mismatch between intended and perceived talent management practices. In their study, they showed that while there was agreement between senior and HR managers on what talent is and how to identify and develop it, this understanding was not shared by employees. Given the mismatch between intended and perceived talent management and the limited insights in talent management experiences, our chapter focusses on employee experiences with talent development. We distinguish between the experiences of different groups of employees since previous research has shown that perceptions of talent management practices can depend on demographic factors (Festing et al., 2015; Finkelstein et al., 2018). Makarem et al. (2019), for example, argued that talent management has primarily benefitted men, and Finkelstein et al. (2018) claims that developing employees for the future is typically associated with younger instead of older employees. We therefore pay attention to how talent development experiences potentially differ depending on one's gender and career stage.

The participants of this study formed a representation of the makeup of the university as participants with different nationalities and from different schools were represented in each of the focus groups. Each focus group had a duration of approximately two hours, which resulted in rich transcripts with almost 80;000 words in total. The study was part of a broader study on talent management and career progression. We asked participants to share their experiences within academia and to reflect on the barriers and opportunities they encountered throughout their academic journey. For this chapter, we analysed in particular how talent development was experienced by different groups.

Results

Our discourse analysis showed that there was very little emphasis on talent development in academia, let alone, strategic talent development starting with an assessment of the university's core business drivers (Garavan et al., 2012; Haskins & Shaffer, 2010). Instead, the analysis revealed that the focus in talent management in this university mainly lies on the assessment of talents via performance assessments to segment the workforce in a less and more talented group, with the latter receiving tenure or other promotions. This practice is commonly labelled as workforce differentiation (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Huselid & Becker, 2011). Although most respondents agreed that in theory there is ample room for (self-initiated) talent development in the job, they indicated that the context mainly requires employees to showcase, instead of develop, their superior abilities in comparison to others.

The respondents indicated that there are three general mechanisms through which they develop their talents: (1) development via self-initiated enrolment in certain courses or programmes; (2) development stemming from the guidance, feedback and advice of individual supervisors, mentors and/or coaches; and (3) development via role modelling. So, both more formal and informal learning was considered to be part of their development. Interestingly, those developmental

routes are not equally effective for or available to all the studied focus groups and do seem to differ based on gender and career stage.

First, analysing the gender dimension in talent development, women academics indicated that they lack role models which hinder their development and that the well-intended advice provided by men supervisors and mentors is not necessarily effective for women.

> But I do think that having a female mentor is very useful too, because usually, when I need advice, I as a woman and not as a man need advice. Because I have noticed that all the advice from men works for them but not for me […] For instance, if I look at men, how they teach and I try to follow their advice, students evaluate me differently than a man that is teaching. And if I follow the advice from a woman, students appreciate what I am doing. (Participant 3, women assistant/associate professors' group)

Second, analysing the career stage dimension in talent development shows that the emphasis on performance instead of development becomes more pronounced when progressing throughout the career. While PhD students indicated they were offered support to invest in their talent development and felt they could voice their developmental needs and wants, this experience was not shared by employees functioning as assistant, associate or full professor. From assistant professor level onwards, the respondents indicated that the focus in their job was increasingly placed on demonstrating excellence, leading them to refrain from voicing their developmental needs and wants and to hide areas for development to not show any signs of weakness. Mainly, the assistant and associate professors frequently used metaphors referring to the battlefield (e.g. fight, rat race, enemies) – in which surviving, fighting and winning are the main tasks – to describe their own career experiences. This further demonstrates the dominant focus on competition and performance instead of development as stated by the following respondent:

> Or the other political things and fighting for space. With that I don't want to have to do anything with. Well, probably I will have to do something, at some point. (Participant 4; men assistant/associate professors' group)

Several respondents indicated that the high-pressure context in which competition is encouraged leaves little room and time for investing in one's own talent development. The emphasis is on efficiently producing papers instead of thoroughly developing one's talent. This focus not only creates negative consequences in terms of individual talent development but also in terms of the value of the scientific contributions being made as articulated by a full professor:

> You are rushing from one, to the next, to the next, to the next, there is a lot of pressure. In the system now there is no room for contemplation […] You go from conference to paper, to the next

> and next and next. All very productive, all nice. But there is something that's not good. And I think in the long run the system won't be so innovative and creative as we praise ourselves to be. With all these grants and all these A+[publications]. There is a suffocation going on and I fully agree that for young people it's extremely hard. You get in the rat race from day 1 minus one. (Participant 4, men full professors' group)

The dominant focus on competition and productivity was heavily criticized by the full professors' group as they were convinced that neglecting broad talent development – which requires time and contemplation – reduced the quality of academic output. More so, they indicated that in such high-pressure competitive environment, employees tend to solely invest in talent development that directly results into performance improvements in the areas most valued by the institution and that are considered instrumental to promotion (i.e. publishing articles and attaining funding), leading to the homogenization of the talents that academic staff develop. These talents might not necessarily align with the talents academic staff intrinsically wants to develop or make use of. Many respondents, and this across the different focus groups, stated that the talents that are currently valued by the institution are rather narrow and do not represent the full range of tasks that need to be conducted in their position (e.g. impact, service-related tasks, teaching-related tasks), in line with criticism on exclusive talent development (Garavan et al., 2021; Yost & Chang, 2009). One respondent explicitly mentioned that being result-oriented and resilient are the most valued talents in this highly competitive context and that this leads to the underdevelopment and underappreciation of other much-needed talents in academia.

> Yeah, but I think it's a system pressure, because if you are starting [an academic career] you know you need to publish in an A journal, something I have never heard during my thesis, then you know the pressure is on. But I think our performance should be evaluated a little bit differently. For instance, I also think that teaching is very important, but now with the system we have currently, of course you spend more time doing research because this is how your performance gets evaluated. Of course, you also get feedback from your students who evaluate you, but in the end even if you have this great teaching feedback but you do not have published, it doesn't help you much. (Participant 2, women PhD students' group)

Next to a focus on a narrow set of talents, the current institutional environment in academia encourages individuals to develop and showcase talents that are beneficial for their own individual career instead of for the collective they are functioning in. The following respondent even expressed that focussing on one's contribution to the team can backfire in terms of individual career progression. Especially women continue to focus on their team contribution and – as also

previously shown (Lund & Tienari, 2019; Makarem et al., 2019) – tend to engage in less strategic, less rewarded behaviour.

> I see so many female staff coming and making this very nice and lovely mistake and thinking I am a member of a team now, I should serve the team. And if there is something to do, why don't I help. And I see all the male colleagues who pretend to be nice but just are egoistic for their own course. And at the end the same people who applaud you that you are doing the job will tell you, I am very sorry but you do not meet the criteria. And this is totally structural. And I have seen it all the time. The only thing I can do is when I see this happening, I try to warn people be careful, this is a trap. The trap is that for four years you are the nicest colleague but in year 5, I am telling you, I am very sorry but the numbers are not good enough, you know, Pete is so much better than you […] so I see all those career paths, and what we are really nurturing is the focused, egocentric career, network of course, but my network for my purpose. I am totally focused on my publications, I just have to do other services so that I do not really become a bad guy. But that is all they do, and those people make careers. (Participant 4, men full professors' group)

As such, the current reward system in academia encourages a talent development approach that is individually centred with limited attention paid to how talented teams can be developed. According to Benschop and Brouns (2003), this reflects the so-called Olympus image of science in which employees strive for excellence in solitude to become the celebrated heroes on top. This dominant individualized approach provides limited room to develop talents that are connected to knowledge exchange and contribute to public accountability, social responsibility and transparency as reflected in an alternative Agora image of science. The Agora model has the potential to value and develop scientific achievements and talents more broadly, including the more collective ones women scientist demonstrate more frequently (Benschop & Brouns, 2003).

While new initiatives in which universities are promoting collective development and team science are being set up, the current non-formalized and individualized approach to talent development in academia might hinder progress towards the goal of team science. Accordingly, the senior full professors indicated that the academic context has changed drastically over the last decades favouring individual contributions and competition based on publications – a central element in the Olympus model – over incremental development and societal impact.

> […] it changed [academia] a lot from 34 years ago. I feel sorry for the people [that currently are competing in academia]. We have these tenure tracks now and so on, and we look at things like how many funds someone can get into the university and we give assignments. Things that are imposed on people that were

> never imposed on me. The institutional context of science it has changed a lot […].
>
> I remember in the 60's 70's there was this understanding […]. If somebody that everybody knew was brilliant, would get children [refers in this context to women], everybody also accepted that for a while, the publication rate was going down. Nobody was interested in that anyway, because if you were a very good scholar before that, and indeed in this case a friend of mine became a professor after the babies grew up and her career took off again. Anyway, the publication pressure in the humanities led to an enormous overproduction of mediocre articles because to get their jobs they have to publish and it's on the most idiotic topics […]. (Participant 1, men full professors' group)

Multiple respondents indicated that to optimize talent development, we need to rethink the current academic context and collectively question the (neoliberal) logics and patterns that have been normalized and institutionalized in academia.

> I think the question for me is more like okay if we do not agree with that [narrow focus on individual publications and grants and not on development], what do we do in our daily practice to actually reinforce all those patterns. I am not saying it is easy, and I am not saying I am doing it but I find myself constantly between those things. I am in the logic but then I say wait a minute, I make the rules myself because I could just tell people, no I am not going to sit in that committee to look at 60 grants in one hour, I am not doing that because I think that is useless. (Participant 5, men full professors' group)

Discussion

Even though there is not much literature on talent development, let alone talent development in the context of higher education, the broader literature on talent management suggests that talent development may be one of the core aspects of talent management (Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016). Developing high-potential employees and growing future leaders are the most commonly mentioned aims of talent management and the most widely used talent management activities are all directed at talent development (CIPD, 2015). Therefore, research on talent development in the context of higher education is sorely needed. In the empirical part of this chapter, we offered a contextualized analysis of talent development in higher education and especially focussed on how different group of employees experience talent development. Research on experiences of talent development is highly needed, as talent initiatives are often not experienced the way they are intended, leading to unintended consequences (McDonnell et al., 2021).

In theory, ample opportunities for talent development, both in a more formal and informal way, were available at the studied university. In practice, respondents indicated that there was limited systematic and strategic attention paid to talent development. They perceived talent development to be rather narrow and indicated that the routes through which talents are mainly developed (e.g. role modelling, mentoring and career guidance) are not equally effective for all groups of employees (e.g. women).

We showed that understanding the current competitive context is essential to unravel how talent development is being experienced in academia. In general, neoliberal assumptions (Bal & Dóci, 2018; Makarem et al., 2019) heavily underlie the talent development practices in our studied university and were further promoted and enforced by the university by widely adopting individualized and competitive systems, leaving limited room and time for inclusive talent development and for supporting individuals in assuming responsibility for their own talent development (Barlow, 2006). To understand more closely how talent development is experienced in such a competitive context, we looked at how gender and career stage shapes one's experiences.

First, our discourse analysis shed some light on how gender shapes how participants experience current talent development practices. More specifically, we found that the lack of female role models had a negative impact on the talent development of female staff because advice provided by male supervisors is not necessarily effective for females. This is in line with studies showing that females and males are evaluated differently in academia, based on widely ingrained stereotypes and gender norms (Beddoes & Schimpf, 2018; Bleijenbergh et al., 2012). There is, for example, a gender bias in student evaluations of teaching; whereas evaluations of male teachers are mostly based on their subject knowledge, female teachers are mostly assessed on their service to students and relatability (Sigudardottir et al., 2022). Women are thus, contrary to men, expected to be more communal and less self-interested. These gender norms create a double-blind for women functioning in a competitive environment. On the one hand, displaying competitive talents might not be rewarded for women as this violates gender norms. On the other hand, displaying communal talents will also not be rewarded for women as these talents do not align with the talents the environment has come to associate with excellence and merit (Beddoes & Schimpf, 2018). These gender norms affect the talents women academics develop and display. In our study, we found that women tend to focus less on developing strategic behaviours and more on serving the team they work in. Currently, the latter talents are undervalued in the competitive environment of academia. This underlines the importance of making criteria for promotion more based on individual qualities and diversity instead of striving for uniform criteria (Van Woerkom, 2020). To get tenure at a Dutch university and make promotion academics need to excel in research, teaching, management and creating impact in society. However, these qualities do not necessarily need to be combined within one person because academics usually collaborate in teams or departments. By acknowledging and valuing different talents related to the work in academia, including the talent to help colleagues and serve the team, universities can encourage individuals to develop and showcase talents that are

not just beneficial for their own individual career but also for the collective they are functioning in as described in the Agora image of academia (Benschop & Brouns, 2003).

Second, our findings shed light on how career stages shapes how participants experience current talent development practices. Our finding that the emphasis on performance instead of development becomes more pronounced when progressing throughout the career is in line with findings from Thunnissen (2016) who found that universities differentiate between talent development approaches for junior and senior academic talents. For the academic talents at the start of their career, an inclusive and more development-oriented approach was utilized; conversely, an exclusive and more performance-oriented approach was utilized for senior academic talents (Thunnissen, 2016). The non-junior staff, and mainly assistant and associate professors, felt pressured to showcase the narrow talents that were valued by the institution and to demonstrate that they outperformed others in those areas. This could potentially dismiss the talents employees more intrinsically want to develop, which is a commonly articulated critique on exclusive talent development approaches (Garavan et al., 2021; Yost & Chang, 2009). Our finding that career development was strongly framed in terms of competition with coworkers might indicate that universities have created a climate in which academics give more priority to performance goals compared to learning goals. Whereas individuals with performance approach goals are mostly concerned with comparing their own performance with that of their peers and demonstrating high performance to others, individuals who have learning goals intent to develop their competencies, knowledge or skills and interpret challenging tasks as an opportunity for learning (Dweck, 1990). Previous studies have shown that teachers who adopt a learning goal orientation tend to seek more feedback from others (Chughtai & Buckley, 2010; Runhaar et al., 2010) and invest more in their professional development (Runhaar et al., 2010), whereas performance-goal orientations are unrelated to learning (Payne et al., 2007). By allowing for more diversity in the criteria for promotion and by creating different career paths for academics with different types of talents, talent development will become less prone to comparison and competition with peers and more based on the unique talents of individuals. This will have a positive impact on talent development, since several studies have shown that people show their steepest development curves when the theme of development is aligned to their personal strengths (Hiemstra & Van Yperen, 2015; Meyers et al., 2015).

The contextualized analysis we offered showed the limitations of the current approach to talent development and provided us with guidance on how to further optimize talent development within the context of higher education. More specifically, we can conclude that (1) there is a lack of systematic and strategic attention to talent development in academia; (2) the opportunities for talent development are dependent on the opportunities given by individual supervisors, mentors and/or coaches and are not driven by formally developed policies and programmes; (3) the opportunities for talent development are not equal for all, with women experiencing less opportunities; (4) the competitive context and the focus on excellent performance leads employees to refrain from voicing and acting

upon their developmental needs and wants; (5) more room for voicing and acting upon developmental needs and wants is given in the beginning of the career; and (6) there is a homogenization of talents developed in academia as there is limited time and reward for developing talents that do not directly contribute to individual career advancement and scientific quality as narrowly defined (i.e. number of publications) by the institution.

In this chapter, we identified the competitive and individualized environment as a context factor that shapes how talent management is conceptualized, implemented and experienced in academia. In the studied institution talent is believed to be evidenced by outperforming others, and this in narrowly defined areas one has come to associate with scientific excellence, such as publications records and funding applications (Bleijenbergh et al., 2012). According to our participants, this results in a performance-centred, instead of a development-centred, approach to talent management, where the development of competitive talent is rewarded, and the development of communal talent is not. Such a non-inclusive approach to talent development is believed to not only have negative outcomes for individual talent development – as employees feel pushed towards showcasing certain talents and neglecting others – but also undermines the quality of the scientific and societal contributions universities are able to make. It is paradoxical that in an organization that has generating and exchanging knowledge as its core mission, so little attention is given to (inclusive) talent development. We propose that opening up the criteria for promotion can stimulate the development of a wider range of talents (Van Woerkom, 2020) and can help institutions in higher education to make the much-needed transition from an Olympus towards an Agora image of science (Benschop & Brouns, 2003). Recently, efforts have been made in higher education in terms of recognizing and rewarding a broader range of talents. Future research would do well to study these initiatives more closely and map the outcomes they generate in terms of individual talent development, the career progression of certain groups (e.g. women academics) and the societal value of the generated knowledge.

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