

# What Is Talent Management? The Perception from International Human Resources Management Students

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**Abstract** Organisations are facing important challenges in what concerns human capital, and one of these challenges is talent management. Different reasons have contributed to highlight the importance of talent management, mainly due to the competition between employers at the local level but even more at the global level. The discourse within Human Resources Management (HRM) highlights the maximization of the talent of individual employees as a unique source of competitive advantage for organisations. The main objective of this chapter is to contribute to a better understanding of the meaning attributed to the concepts “talent” and “talent management”, from the point of view of students of the curricular unit International Human Resources Management. More specifically, the study conducted aims to understand how HRM may play a relevant role in attracting and retaining talents.

## 1 Introduction

Twenty-first century organisations are facing important challenges in what concerns human capital. One of these challenges is talent management [1; see also 2]. In fact, different reasons have contributed to highlight the importance of talent management, mainly due to the competition between employers at the local level but even more at the global level [3; see also 2, 4]. According to Farndale et al. [3, p. 161; see also 5], “[t]his globalization of talent management brings with it a requirement to create new HRM tools, methods and processes to provide the necessary co-ordination systems to support global integration”.

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More recently, the discourse is the one where the central element of strategic human resources policy is the maximization of the talent of individual employees as a unique source of competitive advantage for organisations [3, 6, 7]. However, the problem that emerges is the extent to which organizations effectively manage their talent in this respect [3, 8].

Nonetheless, this is still an under-researched area, characterized by little theory development and reduced empirical evidence [1, 9]. In a context of increasingly global competition where it is recognized the importance of talent management for success, according to Fardale et al. [3, p. 161] “the concept is still lacking in definition and theoretical development”.

The main objective of this chapter is to contribute to a better understanding of the meaning attributed to the concepts “talent” and “talent management”, from the point of view of students of the curricular unit International Human Resources Management. More specifically, the study conducted aims to understand how Human Resources Management (HRM) may play a relevant role in attracting and retaining talents. Through the use of specific organisations, seen as exemplar in the management of talents, the participants reveal their perceptions about these concepts and the development, waste or loss of talents, as well as the role that HRM has in this subject.

This chapter is structured in 5 sections. The second section provides a literature review on the concept of talent management from different perspectives and from the perspective of HRM. The third section describes the research method adopted in this study and is followed by the analysis and discussion of the results in section four. The chapter ends with the conclusion.

## **2 Talent Management: An Overview of the Literature**

### ***2.1 Talent Management: Different Perspectives***

According to Tarique and Schuler [10, p. 124], although there seems to be a growing consensus regarding the meaning of “talent management”, when considering the global environment the exact meaning of global talent management is not so precise. The global talent management will be influenced by the context it appears in and sometimes is used interchangeably with International Human Resources Management [10; see also 11–13].

The 1990s were characterized by a high demand for talented employees, what confronted the organizations with a global shortage of talent, which surpassed the supply [14; see also 15, 16]. This shortage of talent put the focus on how to acquire, retain and manage talent in global business [14; see also 17]. This challenge came to be labelled as “global talent management” [18].

The literature has developed a wide range of perspectives to conceptualize and contextualize talent management [19, 20]. Four main perspectives co-exist [19; see 7, 9].

According to Cooke et al. [19], the first perspective is a universalist and inclusive approach to talent management, which argues that all employees have talent and that talent should be harnessed for the organizational good through a range of HRM practices. Seen as a new fashion of HRM, this perspective was criticized for being undifferentiated [19; see also 7, 21, 22].

The second perspective takes a narrow view and defines talent management as succession planning. In this approach, according to Cooke et al. [19, p. 226]:

... a key task is to develop ‘talent pipelines’ to ensure the current and future supply of employee competence, as well as an organization-wide, holistic talent mindset [7]. Underlining this perspective is a long-term and static view that assumes that what is required in the future (i.e. roles and persons for the roles) is known to the organization, and that what the organization needs to do is to plan for it.

The main critic to this perspective is that it failed to take into account business and labour market uncertainties [8, 19, 23].

The third perspective defines talent management as the management of only relatively small group of employees who demonstrate considerable potential, that is the management of talented employees [19; see also 16, 21, 22]. Managing only talented employees implies to identify who those persons are through pre-defined criteria and “then manage them effectively through a set of tightly coupled HRM tools, activities, and processes” [19, p. 226]. However, the focus only on individuals identified as talented may be negative to the organizational culture, discouraging teamwork and collaborative spirit [19].

The fourth approach moves from individuals to strategic positions, where talent management is the “strategic management of ‘pivotal positions’ rather than ‘pivotal people’” [19, p. 226]. According to Cooke et al. [19, p. 226]:

Building on the works of Huselid et al. [24] and Boudreau and Ramstad (2005), which argued for an increased focus on key positions instead of talented individuals, this perspective of TM [Talent Management] focuses on organizational processes and systems for identifying key positions that are strategically important to the organization and filling them with the right personnel through well-developed HR systems and processes [9]. These key positions are not confined to managerial roles, and may include functional and technical positions, which may have a significant impact on organizational performance [9].

## 2.2 Talent Management: HRM Definitions

The four main perspectives used to conceptualize and contextualize talent management are the result of different definitions of talent management that can be found in HRM literature, as presented by Dries [1, p. 274], as follows in Table 1.

However, according to Dries [1], most of the authors fail to provide a definition of what is “talent” or what type of practices are under the talent management label.

**Table 1** Definitions of talent management in the HRM literature

Reference	Definition of talent management
Sloan et al. [33, p. 236]	“Managing leadership talent strategically, to put the right person in the right place at the right time”
Pascal [43, p. 9]	“Talent management encompasses managing the supply, demand, and flow of talent through the human capital engine”
Ashton and Morton [2, p. 30]	“TM is a strategic and holistic approach to both HR and business planning or a new route to organizational effectiveness. This improves the performance and the potential of people—the talent—who can make a measurable difference to the organization now and in future. And it aspires to yield enhanced performance among all levels in the workforce, thus allowing everyone to reach his/her potential, no matter what that might be”
Dutttagupta [44, p. 2]	“In the broadest possible terms, TM is the strategic management of the flow of talent through an organization. Its purpose is to assure that a supply of talent is available to align the right people with the right jobs at the right time based on strategic business objectives”
Warren [45, p. 26]	“In its broadest sense, the term can be seen as the identification, development, engagement, retention and deployment of talent, although it is often used more narrowly to describe the short- and longer-term resourcing of senior executives and high performers”
Jerusalim and Hausdorf [46, p. 934]	“High potential identification and development (also known as talent management) refers to the process by which an organization identifies and develops employees who are potentially able to move into leadership roles sometime in the future”
Capelli [8, p. 1]	“At its heart, talent management is simply a matter of anticipating the need for human capital and setting out a plan to meet it”
Collings and Mellahi [9, p. 2]	“We define strategic talent management as activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization’s sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potentials and high-performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization”
Silzer and Dowell [36, p. 18]	“Talent management is an integrated set of processes, programs, and cultural norms in an organization designed and implemented to attract, develop, deploy, and retain talent to achieve strategic objectives and meet future business needs” (p. 18)

Source Dries [1, p. 274]

### **2.3 Talent Management: Human Resources Management and Relevant Theoretical Perspectives**

There are different relevant theoretical perspectives, according to Dries [1], to the study of talent management. The perspective of human capital assumes a resource-based view of the company, where the main criterion is the contribution of

employees to the organization. The focus is devoted to the human capital that is both valuable and unique in an organization. There is also the perspective of international (cross-cultural) HRM, which has emerged in recent years, focused on the global talent management. However, there is still a lack of research focusing on the experiences and perceptions of talented (and less talented) employees [see, as exceptions, 16, 25], as well as research focusing on advantaged and disadvantaged employee groups from the viewpoint of workforce differentiation [see 26].

According to Schuler, Jackson and Tarique [14, p. 506], there are a considerable number of practices that companies can use in their initiatives concerning global talent management, which include the following: location planning and relocation management; HR planning and forecasting; staffing, meaning attraction and selection, retention, reduction and removal; training and development; performance assessment; and compensation. However, “[m]atching an accurate diagnosis of a firm’s strategy and talent management situation with possible HR policies and practices is a first step in gaining and sustaining a global competitive advantage that may result from the successful implementation of the appropriate HR policies and practices” [14, p. 506]. The contribution that HR professionals can make to the global talent management initiatives of a company is by measuring the impact of HR policies and practices through the use of metrics aligned with the business strategies [14]. These “[p]erformance metrics that reflect desired strategic business outcomes may include revenue, profit targets or retention of direct reports” [14, p. 506].

As expected, talent management, as HRM practices in general, is strongly influenced by the institutional and cultural context of each society and the way standard practices, such as legislation and institutional norms, are implemented, as well as the use of additional distinctive practices are the paths to firms raise competitive advantages [19].

Although the question has been raised that talent management is just a management fashion, several authors have “concluded that talent management does in fact add value to other strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices” [1, p. 274; see 22, 27, 28]. Talent management is seen by some authors as part of an organizations’ HRM strategy, while others argue that “talent management is a ‘mindset’ and thus, an all-encompassing characteristic of an organization much like organizational culture” [1, p. 275].

In fact, it is in the context of IHRM that global talent management and its multiple potential challenges, according to Tarique and Schuler [10 p. 123], can be examined. IHRM has been challenged, during the last two decades, by several changes as follows: the introduction of increased worldwide economic development; extensive global communication; rapid transfer of new technology; growing trade; and emigration of large numbers of people [10, p. 123].

Finally, it is important to highlight, as argued by Dries [1, p. 283], that no perspective on talent management is better than the other. Regardless of best practices, in what concerns talent management the most important is organizational fit: “fit with strategic objectives, fit with organizational culture, fit with other

HR practices and policies, and fit with organizational capacity” [1, p. 283]. Additionally, there are also the implications for individual employees in what concerns talent management:

As for individual employees, they are often oddly unaware of the talent management dynamics operating within their employing organizations—even though these are likely to have crucial implications for the further course of their career (Larsen et al. 1998). Part of the explanation is that talent management procedures are often quite intransparent, with crucial information being withheld from employees (e.g., not being identified as talented) (Bournois and Rousillon 1992). In addition, employees (even high potential ones) are often naïve, and somewhat reactive, when it comes to managing their own careers (e.g. Dries and Pepermans 2008). Advances in the academic literature may help both organizations and individual employees make more sense of how strategic talent management decisions may or may not affect them [1, p. 283].

### 3 Research Method

Positioned within the interpretative paradigm, this study assumes that reality is a social construction that cannot be understood independently from the actors that create that same reality [29, p. 59]. Within this paradigm, a qualitative approach is adopted in order to understand the phenomena through the meanings that individuals attribute to them [30]. Therefore, the main objective of this chapter is to contribute to a better understanding of the meaning attributed to the concepts *talent* and *talent management* and of how HRM may play a relevant role in attracting and retaining talents, from the point of view of students of the curricular unit International Human Resources Management.

Research on talent management has been mainly focused on assessing if firms adopt strategic talent management policies and practices, with researchers defining at the start what talent is; or researchers exploring how companies define talent and how they manage talented employees [19]. Given the limited studies in Portugal about HRM and talent management and the fact that this phenomenon is developed in the practice of HRM or/and by HR consulting companies, this study provides a different perspective of this topic by analyzing the perceptions of third year students that are finishing their graduation and will be facing the challenges of finding a job. Portugal has been since 2008 facing a difficult financial situation with repercussions in all domains of society. One of these was an exodus of qualified young people. Therefore, in the context of the curricular unit of International Human Resources Management, the students were invited to define what talent is and what talent management means (below the list of questions asked will be presented). In doing so, it was possible to explore how these students perceive the importance of knowing what a talent is and what perceptions they have about which companies are exemplar in the management of talents and about the practices adopted regarding the development, waste or loss of talents.

Each of the respondents are enrolled in the curricular unit where the topic of international talent management is debated and group work on the topic is developed by the students. The first author is the teacher of this curricular unit and permission was asked to the students to pass the paper version of the qualitative survey so they could fill out with their writing and without any interference. This process was developed at the beginning of the school year (September, 2016), with just a contextualization of the research. Confidentiality was guaranteed to respondents. In surveying the respondents, they were asked to address the following questions, originally written in Portuguese and analyzed in Portuguese and only after the results were translated into English:

1. What talent management means to you?
2. For you what is a talent?
3. How can HRM help a company to attract talent?
4. How can HRM help a company to retain talent?
5. Can you identify three talents (individual and/or collective)?
6. Can you identify a business company that, in your opinion, adequately manage its talents?
7. Can you identify any team/person that has done or does good talent management?
8. In your opinion, how can a company waste/lose its talents?
9. Thinking about yourself, what talents do you have?

The curricular unit is optional and students from a diversified number of courses are enrolled, in a total of 50 Portuguese students, from Management (19), Economics (3), International Relations (26), and International Business (2). Most of the students (43) age ranges between 20 and 22 years old, with 22 men and 28 women. The average time of respondents was 40 min and all questions were answered. From the 50 students, only the ones from management had previously attended a curricular unit of HRM. Content analysis was adopted following a thematic line guided by the research questions that were reflected in the survey questions, according to the list provided above.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

In this section, the findings and their discussion are presented following the thematic line guided by the research questions, as mentioned above. The quotations from the respondents are classified as a number from 1 to 50, followed by M or F, which means masculine or feminine. To simplify at the end of each quotation appears subject, the number and gender, for example Subj. 2F.

#### ***4.1 What Talent Management Means to You?***

The results show that the respondents adopted different dimensions to define talent management, as can be identified in the literature [1, 9, 16]. From the point of view of responsibility, the respondents have highlighted corporate responsibility and individual responsibility. In what concerns corporate responsibility, the company is considered responsible for identifying the talents that it has inside, in its workforce. It is considered to be fundamental that organizational structures understand that persons are not only good in some characteristics, "... but with persistency and good management capacity and leadership other personal skills can be improved and even new talents may be discovered within the workforce already in the company" (Subject 4F; with more 29 similar answers).

When considering individual responsibility, the respondents argue that the individual has to be proactive and create the conditions for his own development and progress, "not waiting for others to take care of my talent" (Subj. 1M), with more 32 similar answers). Developing a strategy of self-knowledge is fundamental. As described by Subj. 2F: "It is important to know your talents, to develop them and to empower them in contexts where they are most profitable to the individual and also where they allow to bring more benefits to companies where the individual can develop his activity and be recognized by it" (with more 22 similar answers).

This responsibility for identifying and developing talent, both as personal, individual or group characteristics, is described in the literature in the double perspective—corporate and individual, with studies that highlight this shared responsibility [1].

Another perspective adopted to explain what talent management is the aim: corporate aim and individual aim. From the perspective of corporate aim, talent management is intended to obtaining added value, greater profitability and a utilitarian orientation of the people, in line with Collings and Mellahi [9]. In the words of one of the respondents, talent management is: "When you recognize a talent and a strategy and dynamic is developed so that this talent reaches its maximum productivity, that is, to explore that talent and know how to manage it that it can then be applied to different areas and situations" (Subj. 25F; with more 26 similar answers). From the individual aim, talent management is related to obtaining success, personal visibility, higher and better status.

The globalization of the economy and the greater competitiveness between the organizations lead to this type of purposes that imply new strategies and new instruments of talent management [5, 9, 16, 20, 31].

Another perspective, expressed by 39 of the respondents, used to define talent management is the perspective of commitment, in which talent management is the management of people with the capacity to give to the organization the skills which bring usefulness and added value to the organization, but simultaneously, the organization must know their workers very well and apply strategies that contribute to their continuous development. In the words of the respondents:



... discover what makes people feel fulfilled on a personal level and can positively impact the organization. It is not a static process because it requires education and the constant challenge of people and companies (Subj. 10M);

Manage the better and more interesting a business has. Managing a talent means taking advantage of the skills that a person has and taking advantage of it in the development of the company (Subj. 35F).

Recognising the characteristics that a person has and that makes that person different from the others in a professional context, and place that person in an area of the company where she can use her talent only to bring benefits to the company and worker himself. (Subj. 49M, but also mentioned by more 34 respondents).

To define talent management from the perspective of commitment can range from more informal aspects to issues of a formal nature at the level of strategic human resources management, as demonstrated by previous studies [3, 6, 7, 18, 32, 33].

The perspective of values is another approach to define talent management. Within this perspective, the company has “to assume itself as a serious and honest entity in the relation that establishes with its workers knowing to take advantage of the qualities of a person” (Subj. 4F; with more 28 similar answers), and “encouraging them to adopt a global and integral development as a person and as a professional” (29 respondents express this idea), in line with the literature [2, 6–8]. As argued by one of the respondents, “talent management implies an investment by the organization. It is about providing someone, who has a differentiating and advantageous characteristic for the company, with opportunities to apply his talent and provide training so that it develops even more” (Subj. 19F; with more 34 similar answers).

The analysis of the data reveals a strategy of reciprocal instrumentality [7, 17, 18]. On the one hand, “Organizations recognize, attract and manage the talents by placing them in positions where they are needed and provide added value to the organization” (Subj. 3F; with more 32 similar answers). Taking advantage of characteristics, skills and abilities, thus benefiting from their talents. On the other hand, people “should know how to use characteristics that set them apart from others, at the right time and at the right place” (Subj. 5F) and “it is not worth wasting talent if what they ask of us has nothing to do with what we stand out most” (Subj. 6F).

According to the data, the instrumental perspective of the use of talent by workers should privilege aspects of personal distinctiveness, interpersonal comparability and take on a sense of opportunity and personal utility, which is aligned with the literature [16, 19, 21, 22].

The respondents also contextualize talent management taking in consideration both workers and organizations in varied scenarios: “Not all HRs in the professional contexts in which they are inserted are talented. Talent management is to know how to evaluate and to gather in itself all the necessary capacities for a certain plan of action” (Subj. 49M); and “... coordinate, direct, choose the talents appropriate to the needs of the company, business or activity...” (Subj. 41F). This need of

contextualization of what is and can mean a talent and lead to its development or disappearance is aligned with previous studies [for example, 7, 9–13, 20].

## 4.2 For You What Is a Talent?

The analysis of the data of the respondents allows to conclude for the absence of a specific definition of talent, appearing this concept associated not only to personal characteristics, but also to individuals, groups and even concrete organizations, reflecting the fail also identified in the literature to provide a definition of what is *talent* [9–13].

From the perspective of individual characteristics, the concept is presented as “... something intrinsic of the person and that it manages to perform almost naturally and even when it demands work it seems that it does it without any effort” (Subj. 3F). Several respondents (39 answers) consider that talent is a capacity, competence or skill that stands out most in a person and that will be used by the company.

Talent is also understood within this perspective as “... an unusual, extraordinary capacity that a person possesses and that stands out from all others in a given area” (Subj. 14M). This differentiating and unique capacity still appears “as an innate aptitude” (Subj. 31F) or “acquired by an individual” (Subj. 38M), that is “a natural or worked capacity over time, but that without a doubt will make a person stand out from others” (Subj. 39M), in line with the literature [16, 21, 22, 32].

Talent as a polysemous and polymorphic concept is equally perceived as something that can designate an individual, group or organization, as stands out from the respondents answers:

A person or group of people who have a characteristic and/or ability that makes them stand out positively in the performance of a task from other people (Subj. 40M);

A group of people who are the best at what they do, who are hard to compete with; Who give their maximum in what they are really good at and strive to be better and better (Subj. 20F);

There are companies that are themselves a talent, since they function in such a way that the whole is different from the sum of the parts. That is, all the individual talents that exist are as if powered by something that can be the company’s culture, values, goals or even leadership and with it the company is something even better and distinct from most other companies (Subj. 15M).

A talent can be “someone who stands out for his ability to adapt and to maintain high levels of performance even in professional areas he does not like...” (Subj. 25F), which clearly emphasizes adaptability and resilience as key to defining and building a talent [24, 34]. Finally, the respondents highlight the fact that whether at the individual, group or organizational level there is a need for dynamism, for development and continuous improvement (38 subjects provide similar answers).

### 4.3 *How Can HRM Help a Company to Attract Talent?*

At the level of how HRM can contribute to the attraction of talent, and also to retain as per the next question, there is a tendency for responses not to consider this department or direction apart from the other areas of management, but in inter-connection with them, characterized by a transversality of themes, actions and diffusion of policies, and practices in the company as a whole [7, 10].

As to the factors or strategies that favour talent attraction by HRM, the respondents mention: the credibility of the company in the market (26 answers in 50), standing out at this level the “perception of honesty and seriousness of the company” (Subj. 1M), and “the level of demand associated with a reputed company, responsible at the technical, social and environmental level” (Subj. 3F).

Another category of responses highlights *recognition*, which is related not only to remuneration, incentives and benefits policies (39 answers in 50), but also to “practices that keep motivated, happy, and satisfied talents with the work they do” (Subj. 3F). As highlights by one of the respondents: “When we work in a company that shows interest and concern for its employees, it is much easier to captivate and keep their workers fulfilled” (Subj. 4F).

As regards good working conditions, these are translated by respondents not only in terms of physical conditions, but also in what they call “good working environment for relations between people in different sectors” (Subj. 2F), and the potential for growth and development through psychological and mental conditions to perform work, in this case to express talent. For example: “Have a team work together, show the importance that this talent represents. Give freedom to this talent to suggest new procedures or necessary changes. Give the necessary support so that his function is fulfilled successfully” (Subj. 5F).

More specifically and explicitly referring to the performance of HRM within the scope of talent attraction, the following aspects stand out from the data, as Table 2.

### 4.4 *How Can HRM Help a Company to Retain Talent?*

Regarding the retention of talent, as also present in the study by Ashton and Morton [2], one of the ideas mentioned by 39 respondents can be translated into:

When we work in a company that shows interest and concern for its employees, it is much easier attract and to keep employees motivated. Although this aspect is the responsibility of the entire organizational structure, it seems to me that it should be led by the HRM area (Subj. 4F).

Respondents also refer to the need to encourage, recognize and effectively value the worker considered a talent, so that the worker feels useful and a person properly integrated and “...not a rare bird but a person” (Subj. 20F). According to other respondents:

**Table 2** Performance of HRM within the scope of talent attraction

HRM action	Respondents
The ability of the HRM body to generate and promote feelings of belonging	32 respondents
The ability to “diagnose the potential of people, prepare and instruct them, creating the conditions for the development of their potential and their own career” (Subj. 6F)	35 respondents
“Capacity and ability to develop policies that recognize merit, create career development opportunities within the company and foster mutual trust” (Subj. 13M)	30 respondents
Provide and promote the development of contexts that allow good use and improvement of individual and group talents	24 respondents
“To promote policies and practices that contribute to the development not only of the professional but of the person” (Subj. 10M)	39 respondents
Have an attractive communication ability, showing that they have a good working environment and that people in HRM are responsible and interested in employees	29 respondents

Talent lacks a permanent game to play and it is up to HRM to monitor and stimulate areas of the company through direct leadership to provide challenging play. There must not be any discrimination of any kind, particularly because it is a talent, but good integration policies and practices in which the person feels that he is contributing to the company and is encouraged and recognized (Subj. 21F).

Develop your potential without leading to exhaustion and providing personal development and satisfaction at the same time (Subj. 32F).

It is essential to make the “Talent” understand that in addition to working for the organization he is also working for himself, as if he himself was a brand and over time some advantages accompany the evolution of talent (Subj. 39M).

According to respondents, policies and practices of career management are considered fundamental to retain the talents (33 respondents). Additionally, respondents highlight that HRM has a particular responsibility of HRM, in articulation and sustained by the top managers of the organization, in the following policies: continuous training of all workers and good working conditions (36 Subj.); fair and attractive practices of remuneration, incentives and benefits (39 Subj.); and stimulating work tasks (30 references), as identified in the literature [9, 35]. According to the respondents:

To be in constant evolution so that workers feel that they always have something new to learn and do not feel unmotivated (Subj. 36M).

Improving working conditions and providing important positions and status appropriate to the contributions coming from these talents (Subj. 38M).

Another aspect emphasized by the respondents has to do with the prospect that HRM should be a “trustworthy and coherent area between what it claims to be and do and what it actually does” within management (42 Subj.), what is in line with the

literature on the distances between the narratives resulting from the rhetoric and the daily reality that many people face [1, 6–8, 36].

#### 4.5 Can You Identify Three Talents (Individual and/or Collective)?

When asked to identify talents, respondents diverged in the characteristics and nature of what is a talent. The answers can be classified in three categories: personality, knowledge and group, as presented in Table 3, with the number of references (refs.) made by the respondents.

A different categorization also emerged when talent was projected as an individual or an organization. Table 4 presents the top 5 talents identified by the respondents for each category.

These categories contain a set of characteristics, competencies and capacities of diverse nature that define a talent and that allow to perceive it as an important resource for the organization. A resource with unique value, which allows in theoretical terms an approach to resource-based theory [37]. Based on this theory, talent can be perceived as a resource that is an asset, which will add value to the organization and mark it in a distinctive way [16, 25, 37].

The respondents also adopted a perspective of talent as a natural gift, with the most important 10 being: communication (27 refs.); drawing (15 refs.); painting (13 refs.); dance (12 refs.); resolving conflicts (10 refs.); writing (7 refs.); musical skill (16 refs.); sports fitness (14 refs.); leadership (16 refs.); persistence and overcoming (22 refs.).

**Table 3** Categories and talents

Categories	Talents
Personality	Persistence (9 refs.) Resilience (8 refs.) Responsibility (8 refs.) Creativity (7 refs.) Critical spirit (2 refs.) Humility (1 refs.) Persuasion (1 refs.)
Knowledge	Know how to communicate (12 refs.) Leadership ability (7 refs.) Global management capacity (1 refs.) Organization (1 refs.) Reasoning ability (1 refs.) Conflict management (1 refs.)
Group	Teamwork (7 refs.) Proactivity (4 refs.) Work capacity (2 refs.)

**Table 4** Individuals and organizations as talents

Categories	Talents
Individuals	Cristiano Ronaldo (42 refs.) Pope Francis (31 refs.) Freddy Mercury (24 refs.) Steve Jobs (29 refs.) Picasso (28 refs.) Clint Eastwood (22 refs.) John Lennon (19 refs.) Barack Obama (17 refs.) Meryl Streep (13 refs.) Leonard da Vinci (8 refs.)
Organizations	Portuguese Football Team (34 refs.) Google Inc. (26 refs.) Apple Inc. (24 refs.) Leicester City Football Club (18 refs.) Continental AG (Portuguese subsidiary company) (16 refs.) AIESEC (international students association) (15 refs.) BBC Station (14 refs.) International Amnesty (12 refs.) United Nations (11 refs.) Unicef (8 refs.)

**Table 5** Business companies that adequately manage their talents

Portuguese companies	Non-Portuguese companies
SONAE	IKEA International Group (Sweden)
Farfetch	Apple Inc. (EUA)
Primavera Business Software Solutions	Microsoft Corporation (EUA)
Logoplaste	Walt Disney World Resort (EUA)
Jerónimo Martins	Google Inc. (EUA)
Continental AG (Portuguese subsidiary)	Lidl & Cia (Germany)
	Facebook Inc. (EUA)
	FNAC (France)
	BBC (United Kingdom)
	COCA-COLA (USA)
	Inditex (Spain)

#### ***4.6 Can You Identify a Business Company that, in Your Opinion, Adequately Manage Its Talents?***

The fact that the respondents are Portuguese nationals will have determined the reference to Portuguese business realities. The twenty organizations most referenced as having HRM practices best suited for talent management, are as presented in Table 5.

These organizations are considered by the respondents as having appropriate leaderships that promote a culture of development of their people [27, 38], and an HRM area with distinctive policies and practices in the human resource management, recruitment and selection, training and development, performance evaluation and compensation systems, in line with the literature [14, 18, 33].

Participants also refer to the importance of coherence of HRM policies and practices among themselves and with company culture and values, an assertion that may correspond to the vertical and horizontal fit already discussed in the literature [17, 39, 40].

#### ***4.7 In Your Opinion, How Can a Company Waste/Lose Its Talents?***

The respondents, when answering to this question, also contextualize *talent* in three perspectives: as concrete people; as cognitive, practical or behavioural characteristics (that is, technical, practical or behavioural competences); as a natural gift or result of a learning process, in both cases always lacking in development.

Respondents consider that the major cause of wasteful/lost talent has to do with poor organization management and poor human resource management. This poor management of human resources is a consequence of a devaluation of people considered talents or of the skills that characterize them as talents (39 refs.). But also it is a result of the ignorance of the people who compose the company, which leads to a waste of the talent and the value of the people and consequently to the demotivation and exit of the company (32 refs.), as identified in the literature [14, 18, 33, 40]. As one of the respondents says: “Failure to value or help your employees develop and feel satisfied, associated with poor management, can be a great way to lose talent and people” (Subj. 1M).

It is also mentioned that “the ignorance of people and their characteristics by companies and even by direct leaders” (Subj. 4F; with more 36 refs.), along with the lack of effective and affective recognition leads to perceptions of injustice, feelings of devaluation and, in some cases, to the loss of positive self-esteem, may result in the loss of key people or skills in many companies (42 refs.). Other aspects that lead to wasting/losing talent in respondents’ perspectives are as follows: placement in areas that do not allow the application of talent or that have little to do with the potential use and development of talent (28 refs.) or areas with which people do not identify (37 refs.); policies of discrimination and “organizational cynicism” that destroys the will to progress (Subj. 23M, plus 24 refs.). One of the respondents says.

A company can lose or lose its talents if it does not know them in the first place, and often even the direct bosses do not know their own people well. Secondly, people are placed in functions, areas or assume responsibilities with which they do not identify themselves, do not take advantage of their capacities and often are not well integrated and the most normal is to become discouraged... (Subj. 25F).

Additional reasons are presented by the respondents: Bad evaluation of workers (21 refs.) “often turning people into machines and treating them as machines” (Subj. 29F); Failure to comply with the conditions agreed upon during the selection process or after joining the company, leading to a breach of confidence (14 refs.),

the non-material and psychological recognition (17 refs.). In this regard, it is further noted that “if there is no compatibility between talent and the company, if the talents are not satisfied and the company does not seek to meet the needs and expectations through coherent and fair HRM practices it is very likely that people become unmotivated and end up leaving...” (Subj. 50F, plus 19 refs.) [see 9, 17, 39, 40]. These causes are according to the participants responsible for waste/loss of talent. However, a significant number of respondents share the argument that the waste of talent can be very damaging to the company in terms of reputation, reputation, results and sustainability in the medium and long term (44 refs.) [3, 9, 14, 24].

#### **4.8 Can You Identify Any Team/Person that Has Done or Does Good Talent Management?**

In order to explore other entities, and not limit the analysis of talent management to organizations or corporate businesses, the respondents were asked to identify teams/persons recognized by good practices of talent management. The results are synthesized in Table 6. The three categories along which the answers can be structured are: sport teams, organizations and individual entities.

Within the category of sport teams, the main aspects highlighted were the work carried out in the field of training and development of talents both individually, where the team has players that are clearly identified as playing the central role, but

**Table 6** Teams/persons with good talent management

Category	Teams/persons
Sport Teams	Sport Lisboa e Benfica (Portugal) Sporting Club de Portugal (Portugal) Portugal National Football Team (Portugal) AFC Ajax (The Netherlands) Futbol Club Barcelona (Spain) Real Madrid Club de Fútbol (Spain) Barcelona Basketball Team (Spain) Leicester City Football Club (United Kingdom)
Organizations	NASA (EUA) UNESCO (France) AIESEC (Netherlands) Amnesty International (United Kingdom) UNICEF (New York City) United Nations (New York City)
Individual entities	Companies CEO's Presidents of sport clubs Presidents of International Organizations Leonard Cohen Green Day (USA)



also the talent of the group and not of individuals. This situation happened not only with the Portuguese Football Team that won the European Championship in 2016, but also with Leicester City that won the English Premier League (year 2015–2016) without any “football star”, contrary to most expectations, especially of bettors. In what concerns organizations, the main aspect is related with how they attract talent, form and commit to their retention.

The identifications of individual entities considered to have the capacity to develop sports and business teams focused on the coaches of the mentioned football teams and the CEOs of the companies mentioned in the previous question, as well as presidents of the organizations also previously referred. Of note is the reference to Green Day and the singer Leonard Cohen and their musicians, as they are considered as examples in managing their own talents, as well as the talent of others with whom they work, and being good examples in the mastery of the arts, the art of managing talents.

It is also worth mentioning that of the 50 participants, 27 also referred to their families as successful team cases, assigning an important role to parents, and particularly grandparents, “in the integrated and sustained consolidation and development of the family that is a reality and a group of high complexity” (Subj. 2F). It should be recalled that these results cannot be separated from the fact that the respondents are Portuguese, young students completing their undergraduate course.

#### ***4.9 Thinking About Yourself, What Talents Do You Have?***

The respondents were asked to say what their main talents were. The tendency of the answers obtained can be classified in a perspective of greater operationalization at the level of knowledge, namely cognitive, practical, behavioural and evolutionary, as per Table 7.

At this level, it is not easy to establish boundaries and categories differentiated by the four types of knowledge. There is a transversality between them and a diversity of meanings that each one of these talents can assume. It is also worth noting that some of the talents are oriented more to processes, others to achieve results and others to aspects of interpersonal relationship.

Globally, the talents that have most predominated were the ability and willingness to learn, leadership, ability to work as a team, creativity and persistence, tolerance and willingness to help others. To these are also added the so-called natural gifts: playing soccer, being a good student, singing, dancing, creative writing, writing ability and oratory speech and sense of humour.

Finally, only two participants reported not being able to identify their talents and they even consider that what others designate and assume as talents are not recognized by them as sufficiently distinctive to be understood as a talent.

**Table 7** Main talents of the respondents

Perspective	Talents
Cognitive	Language proficiency Communication skills Conflict resolution skills Planning and organization skills Strategic vision Creativity Deduction ability
Practical	Ability to manage in risk situations Work capacity Quick decision-making Problem-solving ability Pragmatism Multitask Discernment in the approach and analysis of situations
Behavioural	Patience Persistence Tolerance Open mind Sympathy Understanding and assertiveness Leadership Willingness to help and work as a team Ease of communication Dynamism
Evolutional	Learning ability Desire to learn Ability to learn fast Develop critical sense Strive to improve Perseverance Commitment Capacity for innovation Resilience

## 5 Conclusion

This chapter aimed at contributing to a better understanding of the concepts of “talent” and “talent management”, from a different perspective of this topic by analyzing the perceptions of third year students that are finishing their graduation and will be facing the challenges of finding a job. Therefore, in the context of the curricular unit of International Human Resources Management, the students were invited to answer a set of questions to explore how they define talent and talent management. Based on the obtained answers, it was possible to explore how these students perceive the importance of knowing what a talent is and what perceptions they have about which companies are exemplar in the management of talents, as well as the role that HRM can play in attracting, retaining or wasting/losing talents.

Aligned with the literature the results show that it was not easy for the students to define what talent management is. Different dimension were adopted by the respondents, with a dichotomy on corporate responsibility and individual responsibility for identifying and developing talent. This dichotomy was complemented not only with another corporate versus individual aim, but also with the concepts/strategies of commitment, values and reciprocal instrumentality. Interesting is that talent management, from the different dimensions through which it was defined, is considered to be a responsibility of the organization as well as of the individual.

When trying to define what talent is, the respondents fail in their attempt, as in previous studies 8 [1]. In their attempt, students have related the concept with different characteristics at the personal, individual, group and organizational levels. But most importantly, respondents highlight that, regardless of the level talent is defined, there is a need for development and continuous improvement of a talent.

On the role that HRM may have to attract and retain talent, the main finding is that HRM has to act in coordination with all the areas of an organization, and never as an isolated department. Additionally, respondents present different strategies and practices for HRM, and the organization, to be successful in attracting and retaining talent, but most significant is that the emphasis in all of those is the need for HRM, and the organization as a whole, to see and consider first the person(s) and not only the talent. This positioning of the respondents is aligned with the perspective of human capital [1], in which the view is that employees are unique and valuable in an organization. However, the respondents recognize that HRM practices are influenced by the institutional and cultural contexts of each society and that it is important for HRM principles, policies and practices to have a vertical and horizontal fit [14, 19].

HRM is consider to have an important role in talent management through the implementation of different practices, such as: recruitment and selection of internal or external persons that can potentiate talent in an organization; continuous training of all workers and creation of good working conditions; and fair and attractive practices of remuneration, incentives and benefits. Additionally, respondents call attention to the problems of HRM to focus only on individuals identified as talented, as advocate by some perspectives of talent management [19, 21, 22], since it can be negative to the organizational culture and discourage the other employees, putting at risk teamwork and collaborative spirit.

As a consequence of the difficulty in defining what talent is, the respondents when asked to identify talents, they did it in three main categories: personality with persistence as the most mentioned talent; knowledge, in which to know how to communicate was the most cited; and group, with teamwork as the talent most quoted. But the respondents also identified individuals and organizations as an example of talent, with a considerable list of names of persons and companies being mentioned. When directly asked to identify a business company that in the opinion of the respondents manage adequately their talents, the list is diversified with names

of companies from Portugal, but also from other countries, and different activity sectors. The main criteria to select the companies were appropriate leadership and good human resources practices. Regarding the identification of teams/persons with good capacities in managing talent, the diversity was considerable, from sport teams to singers.

However, when asked about the reasons for an organization to waste/lose its talents, the respondents were very unanimous in mentioning poor organization management and poor human resource management, as a consequence of a devaluation of people considered talents or of the skills that characterize them as talents.

Finally, when questioned about their own talents, the most predominant were the ability and willingness to learn, leadership, ability to work as a team, creativity and persistence, tolerance and willingness to help others, from a rather long list. Although the students that participated in this study are not professionals or have studied talent management, their perception is important and shows the relevance of both practice and theory of IHRM in this particular subject.

The participants of this study will be, most likely, employees of twenty-first century organisations that are facing important challenges in what concerns human capital, and particularly talent management. One key aspect of strategic human resources policy is the maximization of the talent of individual employees as a unique source of competitive advantage for organisations. Therefore, it is important to better understand how organizations effectively manage their talents and also that both organizations and employees/individuals are aware that the context is one of the increasing global competition where talent management plays a central role in organizational and personal success. Both organizations and individuals have to be able to identify, develop and continuously improve their talents, as in the words of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa [42: p. 148]:

To be great, be whole; don't exaggerate  
Or leave out any part of you,  
Be complete in each thing. Put all you are  
Into the least of your acts,  
So too in each lake, with its lofty life,  
The whole moon shines.

14-11-1933

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