



## Encyclopedic Dictionary of Public Administration

The reference for understanding government action

## TALENT MANAGEMENT

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According to some authors, we have entered a new era of human resource management (Foucher, 2007), where managers are required to review their management practices and incorporate new ones. Talent management has sparked considerable interest in this regard in recent years (Foucher and Naji, 2010). However, before discussing this approach, it is important to explain the concept of talent.

According to the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “talent” can trace its origins to Ancient Greece, where it meant balance, weight or sum of money. Later on, after being incorporated into the English language, it acquired a range of meanings, including inclination, character or state of mind. Today, the concept of talent usually refers to a gift, special aptitude or a natural or learned ability in a particular field or activity. In this sense, a person is said to be talented if he or she is gifted in a specific field or activity. Some definitions also associate the concept of excellence with that of talent. Furthermore, certain authors consider talent and competency to be synonymous, while others believe that talent refers to an aptitude, and competency, to an observable, demonstrated output. In other words, talent is one of the factors behind competency and performance. Lastly, it should be mentioned that Foucher (2010) concluded, after reviewing the literature, that talent has the following properties:

- it is a fundamental characteristic of an individual;
- it is a determining factor of competency;
- it expresses itself in a specific field;
- it is a precursor of excellence;
- it is often a gift or a hereditary aptitude that makes it easier to learn or perform certain tasks, although it can also be acquired;
- it can be developed.

The importance of talent and competency can be demonstrated by a general recognition of the fact that it is easy to have confidence in people who are endowed with these two attributes, to trust their judgment or opinion, and to give them the latitude to marshal resources for solving problems. From an organizational standpoint, talents and competencies are also recognized as being at the root of performance and competitive advantages for organizations (Levy-Leboyer, 2009) – whence the need to establish processes for managing them.

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Until very recently, there was a tendency in management to use the expression “competency management” while overlooking the concept of talent or simply including it implicitly. The expression “talent management,” which appeared in the mid-1990s, is defined in various ways; at one end of the spectrum, it refers to something akin to basic management planning practices, while at the other, it denotes practices having a content of their own.

Considered an issue in its own right and even a specific approach in certain specialized studies, such as the collective works edited by Berger and Berger (2004) and Silzer and Dowell (2010), talent management is usually used to designate an integrated set of policies, practices and cultural norms designed to attract, target, develop, make use of, recognize and retain people whose natural abilities can have a significant impact on the achievement of an organization’s strategic objectives. In other words, these policies, practices and norms are aimed at creating a pool of talent in management positions and key sectors within an organization through mechanisms serving to detect, develop, recognize, promote and retain talent. This approach, which is designed to ensure that talent will contribute significantly to the achievement of excellence and strategic objectives, is usually based on management practices that are tailored to the talents of the people concerned. Therefore, these practices must be appropriate and applied fairly if they are to be effective and contribute to the proper functioning of the organization. Lastly, a number of talent management approaches are based on an integrative mechanism in the form of a universal set of competencies used for identifying, developing and remunerating talent.

Talent management, which first emerged in the private sector, particularly to address constraints imposed by competitiveness issues, is now gradually making its way into the public and parapublic sectors, mainly in response to the following three challenges: the need to make service delivery more efficient in response to budget cuts; the difficulty of hiring and retaining people with the most outstanding talents due to competition from the private sector; the need to improve the development of people and their competencies so that they can better cope with change, which has become more prevalent and profound than ever before. In a socioeconomic context involving new operational and performance standards, talent management is an attempt to address the issue by consolidating certain contributions and establishing the means for achieving that goal. To ensure that this approach is accepted and effective, it should be implemented by taking into account the need for solidarity in facing current challenges. As Labruffe (2005) has noted, “We all join forces in order to deal with a threatening environment, and it is only through cooperation within organizations that each one of us will be more satisfied and therefore more efficient” (our translation). In other words, focusing on the management of certain people should not mean that other people or the good of the organization as a whole are neglected.

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