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Original Citation

Swales, Stephen and Downs, Yvonne (2012) Problematising the 'war for talent': using Sen's Capability Approach as a new framework for thinking about talent management. Working Paper. University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, UK. (Unpublished)

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Problematising the ‘war for talent’: using Sen’s Capability Approach as a new framework for thinking about talent management

by

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Working paper 12/01, August 2012 (unpublished)

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This working paper is part of an ongoing research project looking at the more ethical evaluation of talent management programmes.

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ABSTRACT

This article uses Sen’s Capability Approach primarily to conceptualise an evaluative framework for organizational talent management strategies but also to suggest a more human basis for identifying and recognising talent. Challenges presented by the Capability Approach to organizations in relation to workforce development are elaborated and are used to frame the development of a set of principles and questions that corporate leaders and human resource practitioners can use to evaluate proposed or existing talent programmes from a practical and ethical standpoint. The article provides an early contribution to the social and ethical evaluation of talent programmes and provides a basis for new theorizing in the field.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational talent strategies centre around the management of high performing and high potential employees (Bjorkman, Fey and Park, 2007; Iles, Preece and Chuai, 2011; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Lubitsh, Devine, Orbea and Glanfield, 2007; Ready and Conger, 2007). They have evolved in response to the growth of the neo-liberal knowledge economy and are sustained by narratives of scarcity in relation to the high level skills that organizations think they need (Beechler and Woodward 2009; World Economic Forum 2011). Although interest in talent management has increased in recent years, much of the research has focused on the design of talent programmes and their operation particularly in multinational enterprises (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Tarique and Schuler, 2010). Talent programmes, however, are applicable to a much wider range of organizations and there has been very little critical or ethical evaluation of the ways that organizations design and implement them. This is surprising since talent management raises some serious ethical and moral questions, for example, about the extent to which organizations can objectively identify talent and the effects on people who are included in or excluded from talent programmes. In the absence of any clear frameworks for evaluating the social and ethical performance of talent management Amartya Sen’s capability approach (hereafter CA) is used to develop a set of principles and questions that can be used by corporate leaders and human resource managers to shape the ways in which employee development is viewed in their organizations.

Applications of the Capability Approach must be seen as highly contextualized and, in respect of the issues that will be considered here, CA works in two ways. Firstly, while it is not a fully developed theory in itself, it does provide a broad conceptual framework for the formulation of policies and programmes that claim to foster the development of others and, secondly, and importantly for our discussion, an evaluative framework for measuring the success of such programmes. While CA appears to have potential and relevance in the field of talent management, some difficulties that might attach to using CA in this way need to be acknowledged. Some of these difficulties pertain to the approach itself, to its nature and its genealogy. Other difficulties attach to its application. These difficulties are addressed along with a fuller and more critical treatment of CA than is usual in the organisational, management and business literature. CA is used to address two core challenges facing organizations in terms of talent management; identifying and

recognising talent (terms which we later problematize) and the evaluation of talent programmes. We maintain that CA offers an alternative practical and ethical way of going about this, one that is underpinned by the concept of human beings not human capital. Indeed, using CA amounts to much more than tinkering with current approaches; the article is intended to provoke organizations into radically rethinking what they are doing in relation to talent management.

The article is organized into three sections. The first section considers definitions of talent and talent management and outlines the salient points of the Capability Approach. The second section is theoretical and elaborates the relevance of CA to talent management including an interrogation of the challenges this presents as well as highlighting what it brings to the evaluation of talent management programmes in the way of new perspectives. The final section moves the discussion on from its theoretical premises and addresses the practical application of CA to talent management, although the links between theory and practice are maintained as we set out how CA provides the basis for naming rather than identifying talent. Some underlying principles that inform an evaluative framework are proposed along with a list of specific questions to ask in the evaluation of talent programmes. The main contribution of the article is to extend CA into an evolving area of the organization-employee relationship and to provide a usable, practical evaluative framework.

TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

Talent, as a socially constructed phenomenon, can take different meanings in different professional and managerial cultures (Tansley, 2011) and also could be seen in relation to the strategic position and challenges facing an organization. The extent to which talent can be truly and fairly identified is linked to the ways that employees manipulate their organizational reputation (Martin, 2005) as well as their popularity and likeability. This complex identification problem is touched on below in relation to naming talent, but for the most part and for the purposes of applying CA the conventional managerial common denominator in the construction of organizational talent is used namely that, whatever the sector or position of the organization, the talented are believed to deliver or have the potential to deliver a disproportionately higher contribution than other employees (Lubitsh et al., 2007). The leading UK professional body for human resource practitioners defines talent as 'those individuals who can make a difference to organizational performance either through their immediate contribution or in the longer term by demonstrating the highest level of potential' (CIPD, 2009: 2). Although talent can be seen across all sectors of a workforce, organizational talent programmes usually focus on management and leadership capabilities (Farndale et al., 2010). High levels of technical and professional skills are asked of the 'talented' but they alone are not in themselves seen as talent; good technical ability serves as a passport to organizational talent competitions.

By definition, therefore, the talented make up only a small percentage of a workforce. 'High performance' and 'high potential' underpin definitions of talent (eg., Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Farndale, Scullion and Sparrow, 2010; Lubitsh et al., 2007; Makela, Bjorkman and Ehrnrooth, 2010, Tarique and Schuler, 2010) and, while it rests with each organization to define what 'high' means, it usually captures the top few per cent of employees in a particular grade based on performance appraisals. A more qualitative definition of talent is that it is the current capability or future potential of an employee to deliver exceptional performance in relation to what the organization wants to achieve. If this small group was to leave the organization then

its departure would be assumed to have an adverse effect on organizational performance far greater than the numbers of employees involved would suggest.

In contrast to talent, talent management relates to a set of processes concerning 'the strategic management of the flow of talent through an organization' (Iles et al., 2011: 127). The CIPD (2009: 2) saw talent management as, 'the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention and deployment of those individuals with high potential who are of particular value to an organization'. As part of this management process, Collings and Mellahi (2009) emphasized the importance of identifying key positions that have a disproportionate influence on the business, pooling high performers and creating a 'differentiated human resource architecture' that ties the talented to the organization. It is difficult to get statistics on the types of talent programmes in operation although a survey of 900 medium and large organizations across five countries found that only 25% included all staff in their talent programmes. The majority focus on high potential employees, talent pools and senior management succession (Taleo, 2009). Talent management typically manifests therefore as an elitist and exclusive process that focuses on the few per cent of a workforce identified as having the 'X-Factor'.

Talent management typically involves the creation of a set of criteria (eg. a competence framework) that capture the ways that talent is imagined in organizations. Employees are evaluated against the criteria often through tough appraisal and rating schemes and selected or rejected for a talent development programme. Selected participants experience a development programme including, for example, teamwork on strategically important projects and job rotation to experience how other parts of the organization operate. Self-understanding and self-development usually feature prominently as can psychometric assessment and multiple mentoring arrangements with executives. Confidential counselling and support can be included to help employees cope with the demands of high-stretch jobs that inevitably risk impacting on work-life balance (Gupta and Wasylshyn, 2009). For the purposes of this article, this mainstream, elitist approach to talent development is used as a starting point although the ability of CA to serve in a more inclusive reconceptualisation of it is later demonstrated.

THE CAPABILITY APPROACH

The approach was initially proposed and developed by the economist Amartya Sen who was critical of the way Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was used to measure the well-being and the quality of life of a nation. He proposed instead that the measure should be the real opportunities each *person* has to be and do what they value and have reason to value (Sen, 1992) and in doing so shifted the unit of analysis for judgements of quality of life to that of the individual. To put it another way, on Sen's terms every person matters and every person counts. He also leaves it to the individual to decide what matters to them, even to the point where realizing one's goals may not include one's own well-being (Sen, 1992: 56). An example would be the whistleblower who decides to follow that route even though they know this might have an adverse impact on their life.

Sen came up with two basic concepts to encapsulate these ideas: capability or capabilities (over time the two terms have become interchangeable) and functionings. Capability 'represents the various combinations of beings and doings that the person can achieve' (Sen, 1992: 40). Functionings are 'the various things a person may value being and doing' (Sen, 1999: 75) and have reason to value being

and doing (Sen, 1992, 1999) and there has been a great deal of debate about the distinction between capabilities and functionings. Martha Nussbaum (2011: 25) uses the example of a starving person and a fasting person to illustrate the difference. Both have the same functioning in respect of nutrition yet they have different capabilities because the fasting person has a choice about whether to eat or not and the starving does not. The latter therefore does not have capability.

In many situations and cases capabilities and functionings are interdependent (Gandjour, 2008; Migheli, 2011). The difference between them is often simply a matter of identifying what is possible (capability) and what has actually been realized (functionings) (Robeyns, 2005; Walker, 2006). Talent for example might be seen as a capability and being talented as a functioning (a point that will be taken up again later). The salient point is that these concepts were always intended to be applied to actual situations rather than to remain as philosophical and abstracted ideas. Real freedoms and actual achievements are at stake here, as much as the ideas embedded in the approach are debated and contested by philosophers and political economists.

Capabilities and talent management

An important feature of CA is that Sen (1993, 2004) deliberately refuses to specify how it might be used, insisting that it can be used for a number of purposes. That said, his concerns lie largely with conditions of, often extreme, deprivation; concerns that have also been picked up by the philosopher Martha Nussbaum. Although she and Sen disagree on a number of points, not least the fact that Nussbaum has provided a 'list' of ten basic capabilities, which Sen takes issue with, together they set up The Human Development and Capability Association. Even when CA is used in settings of affluence, it is more readily applied to analyses of disadvantage within those settings (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007). On the one hand, therefore, there is a broad and unspecified set of ideas and no guidelines as to how they might be operationalized in a specific context. On the other, they are applied in settings that are completely removed from the context of organizational elites. Proceeding to the mainstream view talent management not only removes CA from the arena of deprivation and disadvantage, it brings it into conditions of extreme advantage.

The approach, however, has been used to analyse a range of management situations including workplace equality (Gagnon and Cornelius, 2000), human resource development (Kuchinke, 2012), employability (Orton, 2011), careers of senior managers (Cornelius and Skinner, 2008), disability policy (Trani, Bakhshi, Bellanca, Biggeri and Marchetta, 2011), health care (Gandjour, 2008), entrepreneurship (Gries and Naude, 2011) and business ethics (Bertland, 2009). As CA does have the potential to open up new evaluative spaces (Robeyns, 2007) the article sets out some of the ways in which CA, or at least certain aspects of it, might be used in evaluations of talent management programmes. This requires some pre-emptive work, with a focus on evaluating CA itself, including a critical look at some of the challenges it presents, as CA cannot be seen simply as an alternative 'system' that could be superimposed over, or fitted round, existing talent management structures, which is not to say it cannot be reconciled at all. However, there needs to be awareness of those challenges before this can be done.

Sen or Nussbaum?

Is it the Capability Approach of Sen or the Capabilities Approach of Nussbaum that would lend itself more readily to an association with talent management? The main difference between them is that Nussbaum specifies a list of what she calls 'combined capabilities' whereas Sen is against the idea of a list for all time, although he is not against *lists* of capabilities in specific contexts if they are arrived at through

a process of democratic deliberation (Drèze and Sen, 2002). Because Sen has not specified a list of capabilities, one is faced with the problem of first establishing such a list that could inform talent management policy and against which management of talent might be evaluated.

Sticking to the letter of Sen's ideas, this would involve a process of 'democratic deliberation' that included everyone in the organization, although it could reasonably be argued that a truncated process might be adopted provided it adhered to the spirit of Sen's intentions. Even so, the usefulness of the selected capabilities would need to be tested before they might be considered operational and even if this project were to be configured as a root and branch evaluation of the goals and mission of the organization it is probably a costly and time consuming exercise. Against this it could be argued that the costs would be recouped if everyone in the organization were more fully realising their potential.

In contrast, Nussbaum has specified a list of capabilities some of which might also be seen as applicable to at least some degree to talent management. Of particular interest are being able to: use senses, imagination and thought to produce 'works and events' of one's own choice; have emotional attachments and not have them compromised by fear and anxiety (as might arise in a high pressure development programme); conceptualize what is good and reflect on how this affects the 'planning of one's life'; experience self-respect and the absence of humiliation (which could derive from inclusion or exclusion from a talent programme); and, enter meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers'. (Nussbaum 2011)

On the other hand, there are also difficulties in simply adopting or even adapting Nussbaum's (2011) list of capabilities. Quite apart from the drawbacks of any 'one size fits all' approach, Nussbaum's list has been criticized on the grounds that it has more *immediate* salience to situations of deprivation and to the field of human development (Nussbaum, 2000), although Nussbaum herself has argued it is universal and cross cultural, and indeed could even be applied to the realm of non-human species (Nussbaum, 2011). Sen's primary focus is also on deprivation and human development but, as an economist, his ideas also connect with many others working in so-called developed or affluent societies and whose concern is to re-integrate political and moral economies, to restore values and ethics to economic and political life and to re-embed economic life into life itself (Sayer, 2011). Thus the underpinning rationale for his development of the approach lends itself more readily to studies of situations where some of the basic freedoms of the kind Nussbaum proposes (such as bodily health and being adequately nourished) are generally taken for granted. The next task is therefore to consider CA as an alternative to more prevalent approaches to managing talent before going on to look at why, despite the complexity involved, it provides a solid platform on which to site talent management programmes and policies.

New perspectives on talent management

Capability Approach is often conceptualized as a space in which one must take a radically different perspective and ask different, often counterfactual, questions. The most basic of these would be, for example, to question the very meaning of talent itself. Whilst this is still debated in the field of talent management, with some organizations claiming to take an 'inclusive' view of talent rather than adhering to a Paretoesque 'law of the vital few' (Ford, Harding and Stoyanova, 2010; Taleo, 2009), it is still the organization that decides whether to adopt an inclusive or exclusive view for the benefit primarily of the organization. Capability Approach would ask instead how any definition of talent would increase the freedom of the individuals concerned. In other words, the power of CA lies in its transformative potential and its ability to

generate new meanings and understandings that offer real alternatives to the conceptualisation of talent and its management. Therefore 'alternative' here is a more radical notion than one that merely implies a range of options. What is being alluded to here is a far-reaching and deep-seated troubling of some basic assumptions, processes and rationales commonly attaching to conceptualisations of talent and talent management which is expanded upon below. The underlying idea is that the transformative potential of CA arises out of the ethical quality of its composition.

Most fundamentally, CA transforms a managerial view of human resource management that positions it primarily as a means of serving organizational effectiveness, to one in which the focus is shifted away from the needs of the organization to the freedoms of the individual. In this sense CA is also antithetical to a Darwinistic view in which the most talented employees are those that are deemed to be adapting most successfully to their changing organizational environments (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). CA is also opposed to processes in which an individual's distinctive behaviour and attitudes are relegated to and subsumed within some organizational ideal that could be expressed in competence frameworks used to assess employees. Human diversity is at the heart of the Capability Approach such that, if it were not, the approach would add little to Rawls' (1972) theory of justice or to Dworkin's (2000) theory of 'equality of resources', both of which CA claims to transcend.

Finally, the evaluative criteria of CA transform the meaning of 'working for the greater good'. Unlike Utilitarian tests, in which the success of a talent programme would be judged in terms of whether it has produced good leaders who have generated new business and thus ensured job security for others, within the capability space the 'greater good' is encapsulated in the notion of agency achievement, a qualitatively different idea to that expressed in Utilitarianism. There is a sense in Utilitarianism that some individuals will not count, indeed they may be sacrificed for the benefit of a greater number of individuals. In the capability space, each individual counts equally. This means on the one hand that no one person will have a surfeit of freedom as appears to have happened at Enron where a few 'talented' individuals were arguably allowed too much freedom without the responsible leadership needed to control the risks to others (Bolchover, 2010). On the other hand, it means creating conditions in which the freedom of each person to work towards the achievement of goals they value and have reason to value is assured. In an organizational setting it is worth noting that this includes working for the greater organizational good, if only to ensure their continued livelihood.

In short therefore, there seems little about CA that suggests easy complementarity with some conventional elitist conceptualisations of talent and how to manage it. Most notably CA does not rest easy with the 'war for talent' analogy (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 1997) for a number of reasons. Firstly CA is not compatible with the idea that only some people 'count', indeed within the approach we all count equally, no less and, importantly, no more than anyone else. Secondly the discourse of the 'war for talent' relies on an instrumental conceptualisation of the individual (the motivation in the 'war' for talent to get results *through* a person) rather than seeing each person as inherently valuable, as an end in themselves. Thirdly, war for talent narratives are also sustained by discourses of scarcity (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Ready and Conger, 2007; Towers Watson 2011; World Economic Forum, 2011). CA is built on a discourse of abundance calling on organizations to provide the conditions in which their employees can function and flourish; everyone matters. The important point to remember, however, is to consider

the underlying purpose and motivation for action and how this impacts on the concept of capabilities.

Designations and labels such as ‘human capital’, ‘A player’ or ‘B player’ are also out of kilter with CA which assumes that people are ends in themselves, that they matter for who they are and not for what they can be used for. That said, Sen states categorically that, ‘the bettering of a human life does not have to be justified by showing that a person with a better life is also a better producer’ (Drèze and Sen, 1995: 184). Moreover, although human diversity is at the heart of the approach there is no sense that this implies differential status or a hierarchical evaluation of the worth of individuals based on the differences between them. These points of departure between talent management and CA are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Points of departure between Capability Approach and Talent Management

Aspect	Talent management	Capability approach
Primary beneficiary	The organization	Freedoms of the individual employee
Benchmark	A set of competences adopted by the organization	Human diversity
Underlying ethical position	Utilitarianism; benefiting the majority counts	Human agency; everybody counts
Scope	Narrow, developing an elite who will benefit the organization and, indirectly, other employees	Inclusive, developing all employees to achieve what they value.
Democracy	Workforce differentiation on the basis of actual or potential contribution	Recognition of individual diversity

Bringing capabilities and talent together

So far the focus has been on the challenges presented by using CA in respect of talent management. This was important to do, not only because it brought inherent difficulties out in the open but also because it introduced the idea from the start that these challenges were not insurmountable and could be re-configured as strengths. Secondly, the qualities of CA have been shown to provide a transformative space that can offer a radical alternative to existing conceptualisations of talent management. This was necessary to provide a platform on which to bring CA and talent management into closer proximity. This now done, the practical applications of CA will be set out. The main focus here is on evaluating talent programmes but before doing so the article steps back to briefly touch on a second application namely an alternative to the idea of ‘identifying’ talent

Capability Approach and the naming of talent

Although it is usual to talk about ‘identifying’ or ‘recognising talent’ these terms are argueably problematic and do not accurately convey the meaning of the processes involved. In the first place, the concept of talent is contextual. A talent for writing crime fiction may be identified but would hardly be recognized in the kitchen of a Michelin starred restaurant. A talent for closing deals may go unidentified if an employee sits in administration rather than sales, or if they apply this talent in other ways or in other settings. Thirdly, and most significantly, identification and recognition are hardly neutral or value free activities. The gendered nature of leadership (Miller, 2009), gendered speech practices (Baxter, 2011), personal attractiveness (Biddle and Hamermesh, 1998) and other biasing influences in performance appraisals (eg.,

Lefkowitz, 2000; Mellahi and Collings, 2010; Wayne and Liden, 1995) all undermine the possibility of identifying and recognising talent. The consequence of this is that some employees and potential employees, and the numbers here may be significant, are slipping through the net. In Europe and the United States, for example, women's participation in corporate boards is typically considerably less than 20% (EPWN 2010; Soares, Cobb, Lebow, Winston and Wojnas, 2011) and white working class participation in higher education in England remains the lowest of any other single group (National Audit Office, 2008). These raw statistics have consequences not only in terms of equity and social justice but also in terms of lost opportunities to organizations. For these reasons, therefore that it is better to say that organizations are naming talent rather than truly identifying it and that the term 'naming' more accurately reflects what is actually happening.

Although Nussbaum's combined capabilities were discussed above she has made further distinctions between different types of capability (Nussbaum, 2011: 21). The first of these are *internal capabilities* which are not the same as 'innate equipment' but which, Nussbaum states, can be trained and developed in interaction with the various environments in which a person may find themselves and she attaches great importance to this. On these terms, any kind of talent, skill or competence could arguably be regarded as an internal capability. The second are basic capabilities which are innate powers that can be nurtured. She is not implying here that basic capabilities are 'hardwired in the DNA'. She insists that they are also 'environmentally conditioned'. However, '(b)asic capabilities are the innate faculties of the person that make later development and training possible' (2011: 24).

It does not take a leap of faith or imagination to see the usefulness of these categories of capabilities in formulating inclusive talent programmes that seek to eliminate the current waste of talent. In many ways they simply provide a conceptual language to express the underpinning ideas of such programmes. However, they also operate at a practical and procedural level because they mesh with ideas that are already embedded in many talent programmes, particularly the emphasis on development and self-awareness. The main difference here, and that which appeals to the ethical aspects of CA, is that it would be up to the individual to decide what mattered to them in terms of their own development. Whilst this may seem antithetical to the importance of organizational well-being, it is worth recalling that the latter is often closely bound up with the well-being of the individuals in it.

CA and the evaluation of talent programmes

We return now to the main rationale for this article, that there is still work to be done in understanding how organizations evaluate their talent programmes and, in particular, a need to develop a framework that is simultaneously theoretical, practical and ethical. The theoretical arguments for the potential of CA in this respect, and the challenges this might present, have been given above and it is necessary now to address some of the practical issues and questions that might be used by human resource practitioners for the evaluation of talent programmes within the capability space in ways that address ethical considerations. This evaluation could occur at a planning stage or to evaluate an existing programme but in translating theory into ethical practice, the following five principles need to be incorporated into the evaluative process and programme.

1. Individuals within CA are to be regarded as an end in themselves not a means to an end and this principle has implications for training and development. In effect this would amount to a shift in perspective, one that has an important ethical dimension, rather than having a significant impact on practice. Training and development of talent are seen here as the nurturing of

basic capabilities and the development of innate capabilities rather than, for example, the moulding of an individual to fit an organizational ideal as a means of increasing productivity. In practice it is also likely that people with particular innate and basic capabilities would have reason to value the training and development provided and the chance to contribute to the greater good of the organization and the people in it. However, the shift in perspective would still need to be acknowledged because training and development that improved a person's performance whilst ignoring the person themselves or restricting individual freedoms would be antithetical to CA, as well as being unethical.

2. In the light of the above, the expansion of one person's freedom cannot be done at the expense of restricted freedom for someone else.
3. The focus on the individual as an end in themselves and on their capabilities does not equate to a 'free-for-all' approach to training and development or to the management of talent in which employees can have whatever development they want. If CA insists that every person matters it also insists that they are ethical individuals. The ethical individual, far from being completely self-serving, sees themselves as a social being with obligations to others. Hence they would want to work in ways that would benefit others. Selfishness has no place here and organizations must scrutinize their programmes in the light of this fact. It would be legitimate for the organization to stop giving resources to the selfish employee who continues to consume resources but who is unwilling or unable to perform differently as a result.
4. Attention must be paid to the issue of recruitment of people from other organizations. For example, an organization that recruits people from outside that it deems talented must evaluate how far the talented new employee is being seen as an instrument to realize a particular objective, perhaps to increase revenue, and how far the organization itself will be providing the conditions in which the individual might flourish in a way they could not in their former organization. How far are they capable to be and do what they value and have reason to value as a result of the opportunity afforded them by moving organizations? Note that CA is not incompatible with organizational self-interest here as long as these individual freedoms are being addressed.
5. In any evaluation the focus must be on capabilities and not on performance.

These then are the general areas that require attention if talent programmes are to be evaluated within the capability space. However, there is still the matter of how these translate into a plan of action and this is addressed below.

Questions for evaluating talent programmes

In order to proceed from the general principles that should underpin the development of a talent management programme, some specific questions could be used to interrogate the extent to which these principles have actually been incorporated into the programme itself. It is not possible to provide a blueprint here because, to re-iterate, a key feature of CA is its context specificity. However, human resource practitioners might use the questions below to evaluate talent programmes from a practical and ethical standpoint.

1. How democratic was the process of deciding what being talented means?
2. How far do the unique contributions of everyone in the organization inform the understanding of talent?
3. In what way does a talent programme see those unique contributions as valuable in themselves and to those who make them, as well as to the functioning of the organization?

4. How far does the talent programme provide opportunities for everyone in the organization to develop basic and internal capabilities?
5. To what extent does it appreciate and take into account the influence and effect of factors outside the organization on the potential of those within it? (These might include labour market conditions or an individual's social circumstances).
6. How far does it encourage people to consider and then to realize what matters to them in-line with the interests of the organization?
7. Are the conditions being created to develop particular functionings, given that employees will fall into three categories; those with no talent of value to the organization, those with talents of value but which are not being appreciated (eg, the employee who is in the wrong job in the organization) and those who have been named as talent?
8. What is the organization doing to help the employee move to an environment where their talents will enable them to function in a way they want to (ie flourish)?
9. What is the organization doing to recognize latent talents and to (re)locate them, inside or outside the organization, again to enable human flourishing?
10. How does it support those whose personal goals are adrift of those of the organization to move on?

These questions have been developed in-line with the theoretical arguments that were set out at the start of the article and they provide a tool that can be used by human resource professionals. However, they are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. The unifying thread running through each is the matter of the extent to which being in a talent programme enhances the individual's capabilities and this underlying rationale should inform all evaluations of talent programmes within the capability space.

CONCLUSIONS

This article argues that CA offers a critically different take on traditional managerialist approaches to the development of high performing employees. Elitist approaches to managing organizational talent are compatible with CA but only so long as certain conditions and considerations are met. If an elitist programme is the primary vehicle for development in an organization then CA would be concerned to ask questions about what the organization was doing for everyone. In short, an elitist programme on its own is not enough for CA - the organization must not lose sight of the workforce overall. The issues and questions put forward here are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive but they do give a flavour of the kind of practical considerations that are prompted by a Capabilities Approach to talent management. Further work could usefully address how CA can be used in determining how 'talent' is conceptualised.

A fundamental question to ask is how far organizations should go in providing development opportunities beyond the bounds of organizational self-interest and the boundaries set by the skills and competences of individual employees in relation to the particular job they have. This question was tackled by setting out the qualities and history of CA and addressing rather than glossing over the challenges that attach to its application and, in doing so, CA was applied to examine a widely used employment practice. Although the article has considered how CA might be put to practical use, it can do no more than make suggestions and give a flavour of what

this might entail because part of the quality of CA is that due consideration has to be given to how it fits in specific circumstances. A limitation of using CA is that it does not lead to a theory and associated propositions that can be tested through empirical research. As such, there can be no general blueprint that everyone can adhere to, as each organization will have a particular and specific set of conditions and circumstances into which CA must be incorporated. However, organizations are under increasing societal pressure to show more responsible leadership and organizational responses can, in part, look to the ways that they are selecting and developing employees. If more ethical approaches to employee development are sought, then the argument being made here is that CA does provide a way forward. The article does not claim to provide a complete ethical solution and there is no pretence that one is offered. However, it does set out a first step in what might become a more protracted engagement between employers and what CA has to offer.

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