Innovative Business Practices

Innovative Business Practices: Prevailing a Turbulent Era

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CHAPTER ONE

KNOWLEDGE HYBRIDIZATION: AN INNOVATIVE BUSINESS PRACTICE TO OVERCOME THE LIMITS OF THE TOP-DOWN TRANSFERS WITHIN A MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION

HELA CHEBBI, DORRA YAHIAOUI, DEMETRIS VRONTIS AND ALKIS THRASSOU

Introduction

This chapter proposes a theoretical analysis framework to highlight the challenge of the knowledge transfer between headquarter and subsidiaries and how the intra-organisational hybridization could overcome the limits of the top-down transfer. By highlighting the added value of local subsidiaries, this chapter focuses on the features of the knowledge hybridization as a new managerial practice tendency. Two main questions will be answered: What are the limits of the top-down transfer in Multinational Corporations? And how could companies integrate the knowledge hybridization as an innovative practice to develop their activities? These multinational corporations require to be studied in isolation to other firms whose size, structure and style often allow for flexibilities and adaptive qualities impossible to be replicated or even imitated (Thrassou and Vrontis, 2008; Bresciani et al., 2012).

Due to the globalisation of economic activity and the resulting increase in foreign direct investment, a growing number of companies are managing entities in several foreign countries. In order to create synergy, develop the competitive advantage of the parent company, build a sense of community, or simply for the sake of convenience, multinational companies (MNCs) often transfer the management practices in operation within the parent company to foreign subsidiaries (Smith and Elger, 2000). Even if MNCs adopt a divided structure, “type M” or network, the same practices are generally applied. Therefore, these practices rooted in MNCs become real organizational routines and create sometimes difficulties within the foreign subsidiaries. The awareness therefore, of the challenges inherent in this situation, prompt the Headquarter to rethink its operations and develop new practices such as the hybridization of its knowledge; which could lead to innovative products and services more suitable to the different local contexts of its subsidiaries. Hybridization as a new practice and as an organizational innovation is a combination of sharing knowledge held by the parent with that of its subsidiaries (Chebbi et al., 2011).

This chapter highlights firstly the challenge of the knowledge transfer within MNCs and secondly the features and added value of hybridization. Finally, it focuses on hybridization in MNCs as an organizational innovation.

Knowledge and Creative Innovation

To think about the uphill phases of the innovation process, we have to study the generation, selection and assessment of ideas. Thus, creativity and the transition to innovation can take on a truly strategic character for all innovating firms, with knowledge in the epicentre. Some authors have attempted to integrate creativity into the process of innovation.

Getz (2002) suggests that research and development (R&D) activity is removed from the reality of the market. This is why it should be included in what he called “the execution of the idea”. Creativity can even be considered as the first step toward “intrapreneurship” (Carrier, 1997) by making innovation more dynamic. Another important work has been presented by Flynn et al. (2003), who propose an integrator model called “the Innovation Funnel”. This model integrates a sub-creativity and a sub-innovation process. The authors distinguish two main funnels: the first one concerns the creative process (environment analysis, identification of opportunities and ideas generation); the second transforms creative ideas into real innovations (objectives, teams and resources). In their model, the authors focused mainly on creativity, while proposing a tool, based on creativity techniques (like brainstorming for example).

Although all these quoted authors have the privilege of introducing the first integrative reflections on creativity in the innovation process, this research underlines the lack of operationalisation of the ideas' transformation steps. According to Stoycheva and Lubart (2001), this transient phase is strategic because it can be included within a "pre-conception" logic: selecting projects, reducing risks and time to market (TTM). This research's extensive review has encountered only one work (Hatchuel and Weil, 2003) that really covers this phenomenon. They, while studying the innovation strategies within "Sekurit Saint Gobain", showed that each enterprise must think about new creative tracks, without cutting down on planned objectives. Thus, they developed the R-I-D (Research-Innovation-Development) model. Embedded in collective action theory, this model marks the passage of the reflections dealing with innovation to those studying the innovating organizations. Their so-named "I" function consists of managing the "*fields of innovation, which are conductive to new programs of product developments and new questions for research*". It creates value and manages the process of the emergence and structuring of new knowledge.

According to Hatchuel and Weil (2003), this knowledge-based strategic dimension appears on three levels:

- *Piloting by concepts* - Innovation activity is characterized by a "prudential" logic. It aims to explore the strategic space in order to generate new ideas with potential value;
- *Joint learning* - The learning takes place at the internal level and with customers;
- *The conception of strategy* - The strategy is based on the previous two kinds of piloting.

Additionally, knowledge surfaces again as a key component in larger companies' exploration activity, calling for various kinds of knowledge: design of services, marketing, information systems and networks, technology, etc. Chebbi et al., (2012) found that the ideas of new business concepts to explore are formulated by their owners in the setting of an exploration file: a procedure that guarantees better homogeneity and internal coordination. In this setting, for each concept under study, the actors are invited to exchange their thoughts about the aspects summarized in table 1.

Type of exchanged Knowledge	Features
Knowledge linked to services and customer uses	Evolution of customer uses, uncertainty, divergences / convergences
The group's strategy	The adequacy of the potential offering within the group's services portfolio, the ecosystem
Technological knowledge	Risks, problems, infrastructure and technical network
The cost structure	Profits, uses, costs
The customers' knowledge	Tests and technical experiments, customer perceptions
Knowledge linked to materials	Technical specifications to consider, design, universality, potential industrial partners, integration of the service
Business needs	Pricing, media and sales plan

Table1. The content of explorations (Chebbi et al. (2012)

As shown, exploring and analyzing innovative concepts require a continuous knowledge exchange among the actors, which facilitates the transition of a creative idea to a real, market-accepted innovation.

Knowledge transfer within Multinational Corporations

The phenomenon of intra-organizational knowledge transfer within MNCs is a fundamental subject of research (Kotabe et al., 2007). To achieve a successful transfer, improve capability of the receiving unit and enhance the innovatory performance, MNCs should use replication and adaptation (Williams, 2007). However, learning and experimentation, based on these two activities, depend on whether flows are vertical (between Headquarters and subsidiaries) or horizontal (between subsidiaries).

The top-down knowledge transfer was often used from Headquarters to subsidiaries (Inkpen, Dinur, 1998; Szulanski, 1996). In fact, these transfers were fostered by some specific factors: ownership, transaction costs and exploitation of specific advantages linked to market imperfections. In this case, Headquarters formulates the global strategy and specifies the results expected from each subsidiary. The local units receive and implement the global knowledge and sometimes adapt it to their context. The predominance of this model can be justified by three theoretical approaches: reducing the transaction costs, dependency on Headquarters resources (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978) and the agency theory (Jensen and Meckling, 1976). The Headquarters play the role of “leader” while subsidiaries play the role of “agents”. We can assume that this practice is used exclusively by MNCs, which design and implement a global strategy (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989). This strategy is based on a second assumption that customers’ needs are homogeneous throughout the world, resulting in products standardization (Vrontis and Thrassou, 2007; Vrontis et al., 2009).

With the new design of the MNC as a differential network (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989), valuing subsidiaries has grown. As a result, the “bottom up” transfer, also called « *Reverse transfer* » (Håkanson and Nobel, 2001) is more and more developed. Considering that the subsidiaries have a close collaboration with local customers and suppliers, the wealth of local contexts has become a source of technological know-how, production, knowledge management or marketing (Björkman et al., 2004). The subsidiaries can be seen as major players once they contribute to increasing the knowledge capital of the Headquarters and “sister” units. In fact, knowledge transferred from subsidiaries is more than just exploited. It can be newly developed (Almeida and Grant, 1998) through a learning/experimentation process. Unlike the "top down" transfer, "bottom up" flows characterize any MNC following a multidomestic strategy. This means, according to Bartlett and Ghoshal (1989), the implementation of a local innovation process within subsidiaries.

These two complementary facets of knowledge transfer appear to be very dichotomous. Indeed, dyadic knowledge transfer between two actors has been studied either on the Headquarters' or on the subsidiary's side. This remains an extraction of knowledge from its original context and its move to a new context. On the one hand, the top down transfer, knowledge circulates between different institutional contexts. In this case, local adaptations are very difficult. On the other hand, the "bottom-up" transfer depends heavily on the absorption capacity of the Headquarters (Cohen, Levinthal, 1990) and its degree of NIH (Not Invented Here) syndrome sensitivity (Katz and Allen, 1982). In order to overcome these difficulties, MNCs have to devise new practices based on communication and reciprocity to foster more interaction between Headquarters and subsidiaries (Monteiro et al., 2008). Mixing local and global knowledge becomes so very important. According to Bartlett and Ghoshal (1989), this could be established when MNCs have transnational strategy. Network, exchange, hybridization are the key words of this orientation. The following section focuses more on this aspect.

Knowledge hybridization

Hybridization appears as an organizational practice based on activities of successive adjustment between the initial model of Headquarters and the subsidiary, leading to the joint construction of a final hybrid model. But what about its characteristics, content and added value?

Characteristics

Hybridization can be implemented when two actors (or more) are interacting in a given context leading to a new managerial model. That means that this practice is more than the simple adaptation to the local environment. It is emerging as "*the interaction between different national systems, legal or institutional, different political contexts, different labour markets and structures of skills, different infrastructures*" (Tolliday et al., 1998). According to this definition, knowledge transfer will not be possible if hybridization does not occur. In this context, knowledge must be modified in a first step and then it becomes possible for organizations to transfer it in a second step.

Many researchers studied the hybridization in various forms of collective actions such as networks, clusters, alliances or acquisitions. This is more linked to inter-organizational collaboration. In the inter-firm networks, companies develop close and dynamic linkages to achieve a common strategic action (Gulati et al., 2000). In the specific case of clusters, the competitiveness can be enhanced through knowledge hybridization between two main actors: the industrial cluster (firms) and the institutional infrastructure (higher education campuses, technology transfer agencies, R&D units) (Asheim and Isaksen, 1997). An economic coordination can also be established through the local user-producer interaction and the combination between local and global available R&D competencies (Lundvall, 1992). Hybridization can also occur in a learning perspective in the context of strategic alliances (Hamel, 1991; Doz, 1996). In this configuration, inter-organisational relationships are channels that promote and enhance information flows and other resources from one position to another within a social structure. For cross-alliances and joint ventures, resource combinations between partners are seen as a key for success (Antonelli, 2005).

Studying knowledge hybridization within an inter-organizational relationship is indeed important but it is not relevant for MNCs. In fact, the context, the aim and the relative power between the actors are different. We noticed that MNCs often prefer the “top down” knowledge transfer with standardized procedures, although these multi-dimensional organizations become more and more conscious about the lack of efficiency of this practice. In fact, applying top down transfer means that Headquarters cannot use the resources of subsidiaries in an efficient way and this can lead to a reduced innovation performance. To avoid this situation, a company can develop a new hybridized practice to improve its transnational innovation capabilities. Within MNCs, knowledge hybridization could result from multiple interactions between diffusion (global) and adaptation (local). On one hand, Headquarters tries to keep its knowledge in each subsidiary. So it diffuses processes, methods, human resource management and marketing practices and also technical know-how to ensure the same way of working throughout the group. On the other hand, adaptation is the adjustment of global practices to the specific institutional host countries. The effectiveness of knowledge hybridization depends on the subsidiaries' involvement, the reciprocity and communication (Yahiaoui, 2007).

Content and added value

Despite the importance of the balance between global and local in transferring knowledge, few researchers studied the hybridization practice within MNCs. In the field of International Human Resource Management (HRM) for example, Yahiaoui (2007, 2010) studied the adoption of transferred HRM practices by Headquarters to their foreign subsidiaries and highlighted that certain practices are strongly hybridized or unilaterally transferred such as the career management. Others are neutral or insensitive and are either moderately transferred or moderately hybridized such as compensation or recruitment. She highlighted the importance of allotting more space for isomorphic needs through the analysis of the reactions of subsidiaries' stakeholders, and the interactive management practices involving the co-decision making between Headquarter and the subsidiaries. This co-hybridization of HRM practices leads to the development of new practices more suitable to the subsidiaries local context. Therefore, several components of the hybridization process influence these practices and should be taking into account factors such as the nature of the practice, HR organization and its level of centralization, firm structure, categories of employees, stakes for the actors, local training programs, organizational procedures, international HRM policies and strategies, etc.

Considering hybridization in the innovation context, many researchers identified various types of knowledge to be mixed with the global ones, such as: local needs, local constraints, local results and commercial knowledge (Gupta and Govindarajan, 1991; Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989; Subramaniam and Venkatraman, 2001). By taking into account these types of knowledge, the Headquarter obtains other hybrid knowledge to conceive a new transnational product.

This variety of context leads us to highlight the importance of hybridization in producing new knowledge. It enhances the integration of global considerations and local specificities (institutional pressures, national cultures) on different levels and the improvement of the Headquarter-subsidiaries relationships and communication (Chebbi et al., 2011). In the strategic context, the combination of local and global knowledge creates suitable innovations to be adopted by customers in several countries (“glocal” products). In fact, for MNCs, the convergence between the knowledge of the Headquarters and that of the subsidiaries succeeds in becoming an integrated process (Subramaniam, 2006; Thrassou et al., 2012a, b).

Towards a MNC hybridization framework as an organizational innovation

It has already been stressed that “top down” and “bottom up” flows of knowledge fall respectively under the global strategy and multi-domestic innovation; and that hybridization relates more to transnational strategy. By mobilizing the design of Bartlett and Ghoshal (1989), it was considered that the creation of new knowledge is made through the combination of local requirements with a high degree of standardization, leading to hybridization. Therefore, knowledge hybridization, in MNCs, is defined by this research as “a *process which combines universal/global practices with local ones; a mixture between knowledge of actors implicated in common strategic action*”. As described previously, this process seems dynamic, involuntary and non-deterministic. Indeed, the multiple interactions, between the Headquarters and its subsidiaries, can take the place of ad hoc attempts at adjustment. This knowledge creation process joins the model of knowledge conversion developed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995).

Within the innovation field, hybridization could be considered as an organizational innovation. While technological innovations have been the subject of numerous researches, organizational realities are less apprehended (Damanpour et al., 1989; Godowski, 2003). According to the literature on organizational innovation in MNCs, more importance must be placed on new organizational practices (Malnight, 1996). Indeed, for the divided, decentralized, and network structures, the transfer has become a dominant practice, an organizational routine widespread in these complex organizations. To be more competitive, new practices should be created. Thus, organizational innovation is defined by this research as “*the implementation of a managerial practice seen as new by the organization, which affects the functioning of its social system both in the relations between individuals and in their own work*”.

According to Rogers (2003), this is linked to a “reinvention” process since the transferred knowledge is transformed. This is what Boyer et al. (1998) qualify as “creative hybridization”. On the other hand, when the subsidiaries use their strong resources as an argument to apply pressure and to change the content or the sense of each innovation, it becomes a “resistive hybridization” (Ferner et al., 2005).

As summarized in figure 1 below, in order to combine global and local knowledge, the exchanges between actors (Headquarter – subsidiaries) are essentially based on a continuous communication and an important degree of involvement. Thus, a dynamic negotiation process is very important to take into account subsidiaries’ knowledge. The subsidiary has to convince the Headquarters to integrate this knowledge in different levels. For example, it could be the case of the new product development process. Towards this aim, the subsidiary must identify its own market needs within its local context (Vrontis et al., 2006).

The success of the implementation of knowledge hybridization requires a high degree of reciprocity between the actors, an integration of the transnational innovation capabilities and the awareness of the embedded knowledge within the local context. Consequently, the NIH (Not Invented Here) syndrome must be ousted. This Hybridization takes place between headquarter and subsidiary but it occurs also between subsidiaries.

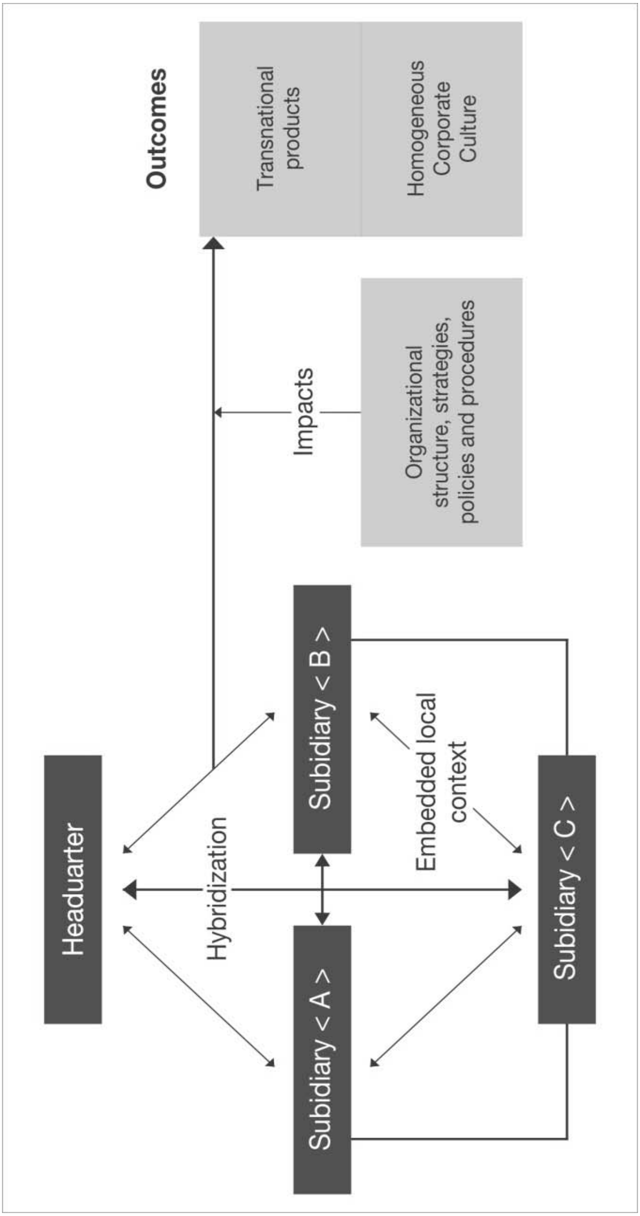

Figure1. The knowledge hybridization process

Conclusions

This chapter presents hybridization as an innovative organizational practice in MNCs. In fact, the knowledge combination from the Headquarter and its subsidiaries constitutes a new practice that leads to various added values on different levels such as a homogeneous corporate culture of MNC and transnational innovation capabilities (Chebbi and Yahiaoui, 2012). This new practice breaks off with all centralization of knowledge transfer and underlines the importance of taking into account the local specificities such as the institutional and cultural pressures (Yahiaoui, 2007; 2010), local needs and constraints, commercial knowledge, etc. (Chebbi et al., 2011). Otherwise, hybridization is often an involuntary process. It is based on the involvement of each actor from the subsidiaries. Besides this, the innovation process is enriched with both global and local practices while improving the competitiveness of the whole enterprise. This chapter puts in evidence the importance of hybridization for developing new products within MNCs. In order to increase the understanding of this new practice, an aggregated analysis of its development mode is deserved which will contribute to future studies of transnational innovation strategy.

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CHAPTER TWO

RETHINKING TALENT MANAGEMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS: TOWARDS A BOUNDARY-LESS MODEL

CARRIE FOSTER, NEIL MOORE AND PETER STOKES

Introduction

Talent management has been promoted as an important success factor for organizations ever since Steven Hankin from the consultancy firm McKinseys coined the term The 'War for Talent' in 1997 (Agrawal, 2010; Collings and Mellanhi, 2009). This has become even more the case in the turbulent arena of innovative business practice of the twenty-first century. In terms of a *prima facie* definition talent can be a special skill or ability that a person may possess. When linked to strategy the long term control and management of talent has on-going benefits and can enhance the potential of an organization. This gives rise to the hybrid term *strategic talent management*. In recent years, strategic talent management has emerged as a central aspect of many Human Resource (HR) strategies and is based on a belief that managing talent delivers organizational performance and business results (Lockwood, 2006).

The expansion of academic and practitioner literature on the subject has generally focused on how organizational leaders should manage and develop talent in a strategic and systematic way. Much of this writing is concerned with achieving competitive advantage through HR processes which tend to adhere to particular assumptions and ways of viewing, representing and executing talent selection, recruitment and retention in line with the strategic aims of the organization (Iles, 2010; Lewis and Heckman, 2006).

While a considerable amount of energy has been dedicated to exploring talent management, it is noteworthy that academic commentaries that aim to expand more theoretical or conceptual understandings have been surprisingly under-developed (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Lewis and Heckman, 2006). In the practitioner realm, although much laudable work has been conducted in specific areas such as leadership development little attention has been focused upon releasing the talent potential of the *wider employee population*. Thus, in its normative context 'talent management' is foremost about providing a platform for ensuring that recruitment and retention processes deliver sustained stability and the desired knowledge, skills and attitudes for a limited and privileged number of identified roles and individuals. As outlined above, typically, these roles are considered to be strategically important to future organizational performance whilst nevertheless remaining firmly rooted in the current organizational activities and culture.

Nevertheless, in the same way a production line can be efficient and effective but not leave extensive room for flexibility, extant strategic talent management processes often dedicate limited energies to what may be considered to be 'non-standard' talent. In essence, many presentations of talent management seem to operate akin to a mass production process rather than on an individual basis. In other words, current models of talent management arguably show relatively minor contextual variegation in relation to the many factors that may be at play in relation to talent in a given setting. For example, in relation to leadership and talent management, issues of talent are likely to be driven by the given situational context, the environment and culture and the performance requirements of the organization at a given time (Smith, 2011). The next stage of this conceptual discussion and exploration takes stock of the existing literature on talent management with a view to identifying over looked and unrecognized domains that will provide a challenge to the current boundaries around the area.

The Literature on Talent Management

The discussion thus far has made an initial attempt to broach the concept of talent and, in particular, has raised questions regarding the issues of variety in relation to the strategic processes of talent management. One of the challenges in addressing these issues is the confusion over differing definitions of the field because of the variable use of the term to describe *inter alia* an output, a process and/or a mind-set within the field of HR

(Lewis and Heckman, 2006). For the purpose of the present discussion, we will start by citing a widely espoused conventional meaning of talent management as referring to Human Resource Management (HRM) processes which encompasses a *bundle* of HR practices and strategies - recruitment, selection, induction, engagement, development, performance management, reward, succession planning and career management (Green, 2011). Moreover, talent management has been defined as:

> *"…activities and processes that involved the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organisation's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of differentiated HR architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organisation."* (Collings and Mellahi, 2009).

Therein are many of the common treatments of the area based on 'systematic', 'competitive advantage' and the notion of a small and elite 'pool'. This is echoed in the language employed by representative bodies. For instance, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) defines 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."* (Iles, 2010).

Therefore, perhaps logically, talent management in the organizational setting has tended to develop into a strategic management tool aimed at delivering the skills and knowledge that the organization supposedly requires at a time when they believe they will require it. By focusing on recruitment and retention strategies the organization seeks to construct the future shape of the talent that the organization requires to remain competitive and deliver strategic objectives. Indeed, the emergence of the very notion of talent management developed around the same time as HRM practices started to become influential. Thus, it is little surprise that talent management is aligned with the often metric-oriented and reductionist approaches of 'Hard HRM' which emphasises the deployment of the organization's human capital to achieve strategic goals and tends to dedicate less space to more critical notions of variety, irregularity, shifting boundaries and delineations (Beardwell and Claydon, 2010; Stokes, 2011).

Although talent management can be tactical, the normative purpose of strategic talent management is to deliver a high performing organization and sustainable organizational effectiveness. Some potential confusion over talent management can be attributed to the co-development of 'strategic' HRM over the last twenty years. As the profession has sought to move away from its rather staid payroll, 'tea and tissues' personnel reputation in search of a seat at the boardroom table, HR practices have begun to evolve from a focus of managing employees to that of delivering business outcomes (Tyson, 1995) however, this evolution is far from complete.

In relation to talent management, McKinsey's earlier mentioned proposition regarding the 'War on Talent' was prompted by the lack of excellent leadership talent within the marketplace and the idea that organizations would have to battle to attract and hold onto individuals demonstrating leadership skills and potential. The issue with this proposition - the foundation stone of strategic talent management and indeed many other definitions is that they imply that only a small proportion of employees have 'talent' which might merit managerialistic attention and managing and which contributes to organizational performance (Francis, 2012). In a business and organizational setting, talent and the management thereof most often refers to a HR process with the 'talent' being a *particular* human capital resource which the organization requires, or will require, in the future in order to be successful. In this context, talent management refers not to a process of managing general talent, i.e. all employees, but a specific focus and fit of talent that is considered to be strategically important to the organization. In practice, this tends to be limited to leadership and the key expertise that the organization requires for it to achieve its strategic goals (Garrow, 2008). This is reinforced by Hansen (2007) who writes that a Towers Perrin Survey, indicated that senior HR leaders use the term talent

> *"…to identify the core group of leaders and key contributors who drive the business forward. These defined talent pools make up, on average, no more than 15 per cent of the workforce."*

It is the contention and argument of the present discussion that this may represent a myopic perception.

Rethinking the Literature on Talent Management: Exploring the Concept

Talent management is widely discussed and HR practitioners and management consultants analysing and debating organizational and individual performance extensively use the term ‘talent’. However, what is meant by the concept of talent, is rarely explored in-depth and, even when it is, a wide range of interpretations are generally on offer (Tarique and Schuler 2010; Edenborough and Edenborough, 2012). In this vein, Iles (2010) suggests that talent is about:

> *“…those individuals who can make a difference to organisational performance, either through their immediate contribution or in the longer term by demonstrating the highest levels of potential”*

However, he goes further to note that, in fact, the word ‘talent’ is more commonly used as a way of describing employees or positions (Iles, 2010). From this we can see issues of identity affirmation and the associated status and power that are ascribed to those allegedly bearing ‘talent’.

In the wider public domain, the term ‘the talent’ is commonly used when referring to, for example, entertainment celebrities. Here ‘talent’ refers to those individuals who make a living from an ability to perform on stage or screen. In this context the intention is to encourage a search for ‘undiscovered talent’ and, in attempts to do so, the quest often unearths ‘raw talent.’ However, what constitutes talent is very much about perspective and is driven as much by personal preferences of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ as by something clearly definable. For instance, a popular television show cites successful individuals as having the ‘X-Factor’ with the ‘X’ referring to an indescribable quality that constitutes or denotes a special talent. The end result is that the winners of the show, that is the ‘talent’ who, by winning are believed to have the X-Factor, aren’t necessarily guaranteed a successful or sustainable career. This is because they might not after all possess the indefinable, unexplainable and unidentifiable X that will make them successful outside of the talent show. The type of talent that is associated most often with this type of entertainment show, and also with celebrated artistic and sporting ability, is often believed to be a *natural* talent - an innate ability that enables the individual to be excellent in an specific area or perform with excellence with little training, development or intervention from external sources.

This points up a difference with many corporate and managerialistic perceptions of talent where talent is portrayed as a palpable and tangible artefact that can be clearly delineated and managed. Nevertheless, the search for talent in the organizational context is perhaps more successful than ‘X-Factor’-type searches because the capabilities that are recognized are arguably more readily definable qualities that are supported by a number of talent management tools and processes, which, in turn, can be validated - for example, the ability to use a particular marketing or accounting or business development tools. According to Lewis and Heckman (2006) a notable aspect of talent in an organizational setting is that it is something that can be replicated, learnt or taught as opposed to something that is innate. However, in contradiction of this it could be suggested that Lewis is merely pointing up what might more readily be termed skills rather than talent.

Thus, talent in this context presents something of a paradox - it must be both something that is capable of being duplicated whilst at the same time delivering a unique competitive advantage that cannot be copied or imitated by competitors (Lewis and Heckman, 2006; and Lawler, 2008). However, many of the descriptions used to define talent in an organization are similar or the same as talent ‘competencies’ used in other organizations. Talent definitions are by necessity broadly illustrated by action-orientated statements like for example ‘Drive for Results.’ This breadth is necessary in order to cover the context in which the talent is being assessed, usually across a multitude of organizational functions and roles. This breadth simplifies the processes of assessing talent but also adds complexity because measuring talent becomes difficult and is likely to be based on perspective and judgement. For instance ‘Drive for Results’ is easy to measure in a sales role, where it is easy to determine whether or not targets have been met. But how can talent in ‘Drive for Results’ be measured satisfactorily in an engineering, medical, or intellectual role? Does one use quantity or quality of work done? Similarly, in situations where outputs are intangible or outputs are the result of complex interactions, how do we decide what constitutes a demonstration of talent?

However, being naturally pre-disposed to an area of ability can potentially be applied to any human activity whether that is the ability to excel in science, maths, social skills, organization, child rearing, and animal husbandry and so on and so forth (Fleming and Asplund, 2008). It might indeed be argued that everybody has an innate talent at something. It is