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Defining ‘talent’: Insights from management and migration literatures for policy design

Lucie Cerna and Meng-Hsuan Chou

Abstract

Taking the case of defining ‘talent’, a term that has been widely used but its definitions differ by discipline, organisation, policy sector, as well as over time, we demonstrate how the basic definition of a policy subject may affect policy design and the assessment of policy outcomes. We review how ‘talent’ is defined in two sets of literature, talent management and migration studies, and find that definitions fall under one of two categories: *binary* (‘talent’ as qualities) or *composite* (‘talent’ as a relational concept). The implications of our findings are epistemological and ontological; the findings point to diverse epistemological effects of definitions through developments of indicators, as expected, and they also reveal the policy designers’ ontological starting points. Ontological perspectives are significant because they ultimately determine whether the policy assessments carried out differ in degrees or in kind. In the case of defining ‘talent’, this means determining which objectives the designers would set (e.g. recruiting vs. cultivating vs. introducing competition), the policy instrumentation for achieving the goals (migration measures vs. education vs. lifelong learning vs. human resource policy), and the type of assessment for measuring policy outcomes (single vs. multiple indicators, qualitative vs. quantitative).

Keywords

Definition, indicators, indices, literature review, migration policy, policy design, talent

Introduction

Assessing policy outcomes relies on at least two policy components that may be surprisingly difficult to delineate and identify in advance and in practice: clear policy objectives and a set of indicators to measure the attainment of these objectives. The starting point of this article is that this challenge is far more accepted in contemporary public policymaking than ever before due to a growing awareness—among policymakers, as well as political and policy scientists who study these developments—of the *crosscutting nature* of policies, which requires far more horizontal coordination (i.e. across sectors) than previously practised (Chou 2012; Gornitzka 2010). For policymakers, this awareness has led to measures that seek to foster or require inter-agency consultation and input before a proposal or policy can be advanced to the next stage. For scholars of policy processes, appreciating this feature of contemporary policies has led to addressing methodological issues concerning developing indicators to measure, for instance, different types of immigration policy (Bjerre et al. 2015; Boucher and Cerna 2014; Cerna 2016; Helbling 2013; Helbling et al. 2017; Ruhs 2013)—the very thematic focus of this special issue.

This article seeks to contribute to this special issue on ‘Studying Immigration Policy: Advances in Theory and Measurement’ by addressing a fundamental question concerning measures of policies: How does the *basic definition* of the policy subject affect policy design and the assessment of policy outcomes? While measuring the effects of policies is of utmost interest to practitioners keen to ensure that their proposed policies have achieved the target and to policy scientists who investigate these developments, it has recently emerged as a particular challenge of interest to migration scholars. Much of the research in migration studies on policy measurements has utilised

either binary indicators or counts resulting from binary indicators. Essentially, scholars tend to label a specific piece of migration legislation as either ‘restrictive’ or ‘inclusive’ and add it to their counts. However, as comparative scholars of citizenship and immigration policies have argued: not all legislation has the same impact nor does it affect the same number of people (Bjerre et al. 2015; Boucher and Cerna 2014; Cerna 2016; Helbling et al. 2017).

By focusing on an important policy subject in contemporary policymaking—‘talent’—we aim to contribute to this special issue by improving our understanding of the limitations in policy design, measurement, and assessment of policy outcomes due to terminology and definitions. Our contribution complements several articles in this special issue. For instance, Berkman et al. (2018, forthcoming) argue that measuring complex state welfare policies has led to a diversity of measurement approaches, which in turn has generated incomparable results, contradictory findings, and restricts our overall understanding of these developments. In the same way, our study on how talent is defined in several literatures reveals a similar trajectory: the different ways in which state and organizational actors define and conceptualize talent have resulted in difficult-to-reconcile approaches in what ultimately constitutes a ‘good’ policy for attracting and retaining talent. Indeed, like Filindra (2018, forthcoming), we argue that it is particularly important for organizational and state actors interested in attracting and retaining talent to seek out evidence of result consistency across multiple conceptualizations of talent before embracing a specific approach. Similar to Reich (2018, forthcoming), the categories of talent definitions we identified contain variant and invariant aspects. Here, our invariant dimension refers to the innate qualities talents possess, whereas the variants are visible when talents are compared (within and between organizations and across time). Our review also reveals the dichotomy that Goodman (2018,

forthcoming) identified between Europe and the US in how they approached the indexing of immigration and integration policy (in the former, there is increased rigour in conceptualization, policy design, and measurement, while the latter retains generality in its approach). In our case, we show how talent management studies have focussed on conceptualizing and defining talents with sophistication, while other literatures have not. We found that the difference in rigour has resulted in a multiplication of talent definitions, as well as different policy designs (cf. Monogan, 2018, forthcoming).

Ultimately, our findings would contribute to (a) providing greater conceptual and definitional clarity of the term ‘talent’, which can then help to develop indicators and measures of policy outcomes, (b) moving beyond binary categories and ensuing discussions to acknowledge the complexity of the term ‘talent’, and (c) showing how two sets of literature—talent management and migration studies—that do not speak to one another, but should, complement their respective conceptualisation of ‘talent’. We will do so through the case of defining ‘talent’, a term that has been widely used to refer to both domestic and foreign highly skilled individuals, the ‘best-and-brightest’, and the ‘crème de la crème’. For instance, in businesses, ‘talent’ has been used to refer to the top 5, 10, or 20 per cent of employees in organisations (Dries 2013; Gagné 2000; Ready, Conger and Hill 2010; Smart 2005), as well as individuals with specific skills and behaviour (Tarique and Schuler 2010; Ulrich 2007). Indeed, we observe that definitions of talent differ by discipline, organisation, policy sector, country, as well as over time. At the same time, in the knowledge economy and society of today, a ‘talent’ is paramount to the survival and advancement of an organisation, company, industry, or even a nation (cf. Dries 2013). The founder of the World Economic Forum—Klaus Schwab—has already argued in 2012 that we have entered an ‘age of

talentism’ in which ‘talents’ have replaced capital as *the* economic currency (Tarnowski 2012). If so, then the role of ‘talents’ in the current Fourth Industrial Revolution, where innovation and artificial intelligence are said to determine the shape of future humanity, requires a closer look. Examining how ‘talent’ is defined across different sets of literature would thus enable a structured discussion of how the very basic definition of the policy subject may affect policy design and measures of potential policy outcomes—both issues that have been attracting significant methodological interests in recent years as the contributions to this special issue confirm.

This article begins with the analytical debates in which we situate our contribution—the extant literature on policy design, where a new design orientation is emerging (Howlett and Lejano 2012; Howlett and Mukherjee 2014) and receiving strong criticisms concerning its conceptual utility (Colebatch 2017; Hoppe 2017; Turnbull 2017). In this section, we set out more clearly how our three central themes—‘policy design’, ‘talent identification and recruitment’, and ‘immigration policy’—relate to one another. Our contribution will underline the importance of the ontological starting point for the current debate on policy design, which has revolved around practice vs. theory as the departure point for policy design. Specifically, we argue that attending to how policy subjects, such as ‘talent’, are defined will reveal the multiple pathways towards measures of policy, as well as previous and future frames for policy reformulation and implementation. Next, we describe our case selection and methodology for the literature review before presenting our results.

Our review of two sets of literature—talent management and migration studies—reveals that definitions of ‘talent’ fall under one of two categories: *binary* (‘talent’ as qualities: ‘talent’ is either an intrinsic or extrinsic quality) or *composite* (‘talent’ as a relational concept: ‘talent’ has these

qualities and can be located at these levels or at specific times). We show that the categorisation of talent determines how policies are measured through indicator development (an epistemological issue, as would be anticipated) and, more importantly, the categories unveil the policy designers' competing ontological departure points, some of which cannot be reconciled. For practitioners, competing ontologies mean that existing measures and practices for 'talent' could very well undermine the positive effects of any implementation. For scholars and those keen to measure policy outcomes, competing ontologies suggest that measurement may be impossible because assessment needs to be grounded in a specific understanding of reality. We use empirical examples from the talent management literature and migration studies to illustrate the tensile points that competing ontologies introduce into the policy process. We conclude by discussing the epistemological and ontological implications of our findings for policy design.

Significance of definitions for policy design

At the heart of the policy design approach is the recognition that design, generally defined as 'sets of fundamental elements' of a policy (Schneider and Sidney 2009: 104), has implications for implementation and subsequent policy evaluation, especially if these two sets of policy activities were predicated on a set of indicators determined prior to implementation (i.e. during the policy formulation stage where design generally takes place). This recognition has led design scholars to move from their initial focus of understanding the contextual elements of policymaking and implementation to the more contemporary emphasis on the selection of policy instruments during the policy formulation stage, and the design environment (Howlett and Mukherjee 2014: 60; Linder and Peters 1984; 1988; 1991). Much of the emphasis of the new design orientation has been

placed on analytically identifying the right sets of tools for the tasks at hand, the idea being that this exercise would ultimately facilitate the attainment of effective policy outcomes (Peters et al. 2018).

In the special issue titled ‘Questioning Policy Design’¹, Colebatch (2017), Hoppe (2017), and Turnbull (2017) posit another perspective on conceptualising policy design, which could be generally summarised as ‘praxis’ vs. ‘theory’, with the authors of this special issue arguing for the significance of policymaking practice informing all design activities. Their starting point is that design rarely occurs in a vacuum where prior knowledge, assumptions, and biases do not colour the perspectives of the designers involved in the policymaking process. In this context, the assumption that there is a ‘best’ design—in normative and absolute terms, as well as at the start of the design process—is questioned. The contributors of this special issue on policy design argue for conceptualising the design process as a procedural exercise, where participants collectively and continuously ‘puzzle’ and ‘power’ for the most acceptable outcome. In their view, only when embracing a more practice-based viewpoint could the theory-building activities of policy design advance beyond its current state.

In light of the debate between scholars of the new design orientation and their critics, the case of defining a policy subject can illuminate the value-added perspective each offer to the study of policy design. Definitions are significant. Indeed, as Socrates already stated, ‘the beginning of wisdom is the definition of terms’. What this implies is that the sharing of common understandings

¹ The articles are published as OnlineFirst articles in *Public Policy and Administration* in May and June 2017.

of key concepts and terms forms the foundation of knowledge accumulation and eventual application. In terms of theory building, this means sharper causal explanations and even predictions. This is why many scholars are increasingly focussed on the role of definitions as a topic of their research. For instance, in a recent methodological contribution to assessing the strengths and weaknesses of several indices that measure immigration policies, Bjerre et al. (2015) begin with defining what they consider as an ‘immigration policy’. Their decision to do so is based on their perception that ‘the term immigration has not been defined in a rigorous and systematic manner’ (Bjerre et al. 2015: 558). In their view, extant definitions ‘offer either specific, country case-related examples or rather broad definitions of immigration policy regime types that are lacking in specificity and discriminatory power’ (Bjerre et al. 2015: 558). For them, and building on Munck and Verkuilen’s (2002) approach, a clear definition is the starting point to identifying what they perceive as the ‘three sequential and interrelated stages of index-building process that need to be evaluated: (1) Conceptualization, (2) Measurement, and (3) Aggregation’ (Bjerre et al. 2015: 556). Definition is the first aspect they evaluate at the stage of conceptualisation (Bjerre et al. 2015: 567). We agree with Bjerre et al. (2015) that terminological clarity or ambiguity has strong implications for assessing policy and programmatic outcomes: an explicit definition provides a clearer understanding of a concept, and a proper conceptualisation then allows for the development of indicators and the measurement of a concept. We go, however, one step further to emphasise the centrality of definition in any assessment (of policy design, of implementation, of outcomes and so on): how a definition is formulated is indicative of the policy designers’ ontological starting point that may be very difficult to reconcile. For instance, the assumption that there is a ‘best’ design out there that only needs to be discovered is diametrical to the one that postulates that the ‘best’ design is socially constructed or is one accepted by all veto players. As

Hay (2011: 461) reminds us, ‘Ontological assumptions [...] are logically antecedent to the epistemological and methodological choices more usually identified as the source of paradigmatic divergence in political science’. By focussing on revealing the ontological origins of talent definitions through reviews of two sets of literature (talent management and migration studies), we seek to contribute to widening the recent methodological debates about assessing and designing for attainment of desired policy outcomes—as discussed elsewhere in this special issue.

In so doing, our study addresses three main themes—‘policy design’, ‘talent identification and recruitment’, and ‘immigration policy’—and we conceive of their relationship as follows. *Policy design* is an intentional act and, we assume that, when it occurs, it can take place in any policy sector (e.g. in the *immigration policy* sector). The empirical problem and ultimate goal for *policy design* is to identify a ‘good’ design, which would enable the designers to tackle the identified policy problem (this problem can include, for instance, an ageing population or labour shortages). How to *identify and recruit talent* are both specific policy acts that generally occur during the policy formulation stage when policymakers explore a variety of alternatives and instruments available for the identified problem. The ways in which policy actors define and specify talent thus have an impact on the range of substantive and procedural policy instruments perceived to be relevant or accessible at the given time. *Immigration policy* is one sector in which a policy instrument (e.g. scientific visa) for an identified policy problem (e.g. scientific labour shortages) can be situated. Although these themes are implicitly related, they are generally less discussed and examined within a single context. By focussing on how ‘talent’ is defined in talent management literature and migration studies, we seek to highlight the importance of the ontological starting point for policy design. In short, how one defines ‘talent’ would determine what constitutes a

‘good’ policy design, the instrument selected for the attainment of policy objectives, the policy sector within which such an instrument can be implemented, and, most importantly, the ways in which the effects could be measured. In the next section, we further elaborate on the importance of defining ‘talent’ when we discuss our case selection and methodology.

Case selection and methodology

We selected the case of defining ‘talent’ for several reasons. To start with, we decided to focus on identifying how ‘talent’ is defined because our previous and current research on highly-skilled and highly-qualified migrants (Cerna and Chou 2014; Cerna 2016) have revealed that the term is frequently used across multiple fields of research with or without conceptual rigour. This insight compelled us to begin exploring the potential implications of this development and this article represents some of our undertaking. Our reading of the seminal book *War on Talent* by McKinsey consultants (Michaels et al. 2001)² further inform our conviction that this is a needed exercise if we are to understand the relationship between policy design and how policy outcomes are measured. Specifically, the authors of *War on Talent* tell us that ‘A certain part of talent eludes description: You simply know it when you see it’ (Michaels et al. 2001: xii). This sweeping statement, although enticing, can be problematic. For instance, as Brown and Hesketh (2004) explain, ‘Such a statement gives corporate employers a lot of leeway to make self-interested and unfair recruitment and promotion decisions, and provides dubious basis on which to build a whole raft of sweeping reforms in employment, immigration and education policy’ (quoted in Brown and

² In the talent management literature, the notion of ‘war on talent’ originated from an earlier McKinsey study and survey in 1997 and its promotion of the ‘talent mindset’.

Tannock 2009: 387). What this indicates is that the lack of conceptual rigour in defining ‘talent’ has real world implications: it can lead to corrupted practices in internal human resource management, or differentiated policies/packages offered to attract and retain individuals perceived or identified as ‘talented’.

A clear definition of ‘talent’ is also significant for policymakers in developing a concrete set of policies and approaches because how ‘talent’ is defined affects the kinds of policies that can be made and determines which ministries or agencies have regulatory power to implement the adopted policies. To give one simple empirical example: if ‘talent’ is defined as focussing on individuals who are nationals of the country in discussion, strategies can be developed in, for instance, the education sector (i.e. identifying and/or cultivating ‘talent’ at a young age; enhancing ‘talent’ at later stages in life through government sponsored courses on life-long learning...etc.). If, on the other hand, ‘talent’ is defined to also include non-nationals, then other policies can be made and other policy sectors activated; for example, immigration policy to address the administrative processes for admitting individuals considered as ‘foreign talents’ or a differential tax policy to attract talented non-nationals to come into the country. In short, the very act of defining delineates the boundaries of what and which ministries are considered relevant for the policymaking process. While this example highlights two tensile points—fostering domestic talents vs. attracting foreign talents—that political actors have to carefully reconcile should they wish to remain in office, it clearly points to the political significance of definitions in the policy process. Political and policy scientists have long recognised that it is essential to identify the ways in which the main policy subject is defined and perceived to grasp the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of a

proposed policy, and ultimately its outcome. These insights have, for instance, informed the vast literature on policy framing (Daviter 2007; Rein and Schön 1991; Weiss 1989).

Finally, the salience of the term ‘talent’ in contemporary governance across multiple levels (organisational, national, regional) and across different settings (businesses, public sectors, universities) demands a deeper examination into how it is defined. There is a pervasiveness of the term in today’s political economy and everyday life; this is because ‘talent’ evokes positive connotations in terms of excellence, competitiveness, economic and company growth, cultural diversity, creativity, and innovation—all characteristics that any organisation or country would be keen to possess, especially as we are now purportedly in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Florida (2005: 26) explains that the world has entered ‘the creative age because the key factor propelling us forward is the rise of creativity as the prime mover of our economy’. It is the ‘creative talent’ that really enhances economic competitiveness. This led Cohen (2001: xvi) to state that ‘the talent of top performers has become the critical difference between those companies that grow and innovate, and those that falter or merely survive’. Our interest in how ‘talent’ is defined thus reflects a ‘phenomenon-driven’ approach in the talent management literature (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2015: 264). To sum up, we have chosen the case of defining ‘talent’ because it is a ubiquitous term that is often arbitrarily defined even though it has become significant for contemporary public policy with real-world implications in both corporate and public sector recruitment.

Methodologically, we carried out a literature review by analysing how the concept of ‘talent’ is defined and employed in two overarching sets of literature that do not speak to one another, but should: talent management and migration studies. We came to focus on these two fields through

the research strategy of abduction (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009) which proceeded as follows. First, we applied a deductive reasoning in order to achieve a wide coverage of available publications (e.g. to include published articles, conference papers, working papers, and book chapters) by accessing three search engines: JSTOR.org, Google Scholar, and Ingenta Connect. We searched for research published in English by using the following keywords: best and brightest, global talent management, highly-educated, highly-qualified, highly-skilled, international human resource management, knowledge workers, literature review (of the chosen keywords), migration, and talent. The search was conducted with one keyword at a time, which ultimately yielded an Excel database of more than 3000 publications, which we organised by year of publication, author, title of publication, outlet of publication (e.g. journal or book titles), keywords used, and URL sites where the publication is located.

Next, we cleaned the data by manually removing duplicates before applying two sets of exclusion criteria: (a) articles that do not define talent, and (b) articles that use ‘talent’ as shorthand to refer to a specific subset of people (e.g. international students) without engaging further or at all with concept development. Our decision to adopt the above two sets of exclusion criteria is based on our research objective of identifying how the basic definition of a policy subject affects policy design and the assessment of policy outcomes: articles without any definitions of ‘talent’ or use ‘talent’ to refer to, for instance, ‘international students’ offered limited insights for our undertaking or narrowed our scope to such an extent that the discussions about policy design would only be relevant to a specific group of individuals. In so doing, we eliminated a large potential field for review—higher education studies—which has implications for the generalizability of our findings as we shall elaborate in the Conclusion section. This, however, still left us with many fields to

examine and we decided to concentrate on ‘talent management’ because of this field’s *exclusivity* on ‘talent’ and ‘migration studies’ because of this field’s *inclusivity* of (migration) research from other fields³. After narrowing our two literature fields, we expanded the database by (1) going through the reference section of the more cited publications to further identify those articles that may not have appeared in our original database, and (2) widening the time horizon from the initial timeframe of ‘up to 2014’ to ‘up to 2016’. Together, our database yielded more than 200 articles that fulfilled the above criteria.

To decide which articles to analyse in detail, we applied an inductive logic in selecting more cited and representative articles, papers, and chapters before systematically reading and extracting their definition of ‘talent’, as well as their research focus. In so doing, we acknowledge our limitations to thoroughly read through all publications identified in our database, which is less our focus than our objective of illustrating how the basic definition of a policy subject may affect design and the assessment of outcomes. Our inductive reasoning informs how we assess the implications of identified ‘talent’ definitions for policy design: first, we consider whether the definitions point to similar trends that can be reconciled. If the definitions are mutually *inclusive*, it implies that a ‘good’ policy design concerning ‘talents’ is feasible. If the definitions are mutually *exclusive*, then it means that an ultimate ‘good’ policy design may very well be socially constructed. Our findings are presented in the next section and the representative definitions from each set of literature are given in Table 1 in the Appendix. While the articles we read may not be exhaustive of extant publications on ‘talent’, our findings below constitute an initial attempt to synthesise the definition

³ Migration studies is a highly interdisciplinary field that includes, *inter alia*, scholars from development studies, economics, geography, law, political science, public policy, and sociology.

of ‘talent’ in both the talent management literature and migration studies in order to discuss how the basic definition of a policy subject may affect design and the assessment of policy outcomes.

Findings: defining ‘talent’ in the migration and management literatures

The word talent is ‘thousands of years old, and lexicologists have identified how the term has varied greatly with time, people and locality’ (Tansley 2011: 267). Understanding the origin and evolution of talent will already shed light on the different ideational and conceptual channels that inform contemporary discussions and the burgeoning research on the competition for talent. From the Greek *tálanton* (τάλαντον), the Romans derived *talentum*, the root for *talente* in Old English, referring to a specific unit of measured weight and coin possessed by the very rich (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013). In the thirteenth century, talent was used to denote an inclination, the natural qualities, a person had towards particular course of action (Hoad 1996). In the Late Middle Ages, talent meant the mental ability divinely entrusted to individuals for personal use and improvement (Hoad 1996; Knowles 2005). A similar view of talent was held throughout the seventeenth century—i.e. talent as inborn aptitudes and skills possessed by special people, albeit without reference to divinity (Knowles 2005). Turning to modern-day dictionaries, we find talent being defined as ‘a natural ability to do something well’ (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2006) and ‘a special aptitude or faculty; high mental ability, a person or persons of talent’ (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1990).

As the definition of talent and valued skills have changed, so too have the scale and intensity of the competition, which now includes more countries and more regions, all the while soaring to

new heights and ever increasing stakes. According to Michaels et al. (2001: 3), the war for talent began in the 1980s with the birth of the Information Age when hard assets declined relative to intangible assets such as brands and intellectual capital. For them, ‘The meaning of talent, then, has grown in abstraction—from a unit of weight to a unit of money to a person’s innate abilities to gifted people collectively’ (Michaels et al. 2001: xiii). This transition, Shachar and Hirschl (2013: 76) pointed out, is seen in the contemporary organisational and policy focus, which has shifted towards ‘targeting and recruiting the sharpest minds, the greatest innovators, and other top performers in the arts, science, and sports’.

The evolution of ‘talent’—in both definition and potential value-added—has led to the proliferation of phrases used to discuss this phenomenon, including ‘critical talent’, ‘talentship’ (Kim and McLean 2012), ‘talent mindset’ (Michaels et al. 2001), ‘talent surplus’ (Tarique and Schuler 2010), ‘appropriate regional talent strategy’, and even ‘talent raiding’. This growth in vocabulary has only diversified the ways in which ‘talent’ is defined and leads us to ask: What are the main features of ‘talent’? To what extent is ‘talent’ a relational concept? For example, are we only able to identify and define ‘talents’ when they are in an environment of their peers, or in a specific organisational arrangement? Our literature review of talent management and migration studies reveals that the definitions of ‘talent’ fall under one of two categories: *binary* (‘talent’ as qualities: ‘talent’ as either an intrinsic or extrinsic quality) or *composite* (‘talent’ as a relational concept: ‘talent’ has specific sets of qualities and ‘talent’ can be located at these levels, groups or across time). We describe each of these categories in detail below and, through examples, explain how they affect policy design in terms of the objectives set to achieve the goal, and how they

determine policy instrumentation, which ultimately decide the types of assessment for measuring policy outcomes. Put simply, how ontology informs epistemology.

Talent as qualities: intrinsic vs. extrinsic

One of the key insights from the talent management and migration studies literature concerns the main features of ‘talent’. Here, these two sets of literature have presented ‘talent’ as a binary feature; specifically in the talent management literature, ‘talent’ is either an intrinsic or an extrinsic quality a person possess. *Intrinsic* refers to innate quality and abilities. In this vein, Michaels et al. (2001: xii) define talent as ‘the sum of a person’s abilities...his or her intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, judgement, attitude, character and drive’. Similarly, Thorne and Pellant (2006: 8) see a talented individual as ‘someone who has ability above others and does not need to try hard to use it. They excel with ease and grace. A talented person has a certain aura in their ability that others wish to emulate and from which lesser mortals draw inspiration’. Nijs et al. (2014: 182) consider ‘talent’ to mean ‘systematically developed innate abilities of individuals that are deployed in activities they like, find important, and in which they want to invest energy’. For example, musical or sporting talent is often considered to exist in certain people from birth (Tansley 2011: 267). These innate qualities are then seen as strengths a ‘talent’ embodies: it is a pattern of thought, feeling, and behaviour that is associated with success on the job (Tansley 2011: 273).

On the other side of the spectrum is *extrinsic* quality, which means that ‘talent’ can be cultivated, for instance, through talent development programmes. This refers to other types of ‘talent’ (besides

sporting and musical) as it is assumed that they can be learned (Tansley 2011). Gagné (2000: 67) defines talent as ‘the superior mastery of systematically developed abilities (or skills) and knowledge in at least one field of human endeavour, to a degree that places the individual in the top 10% of age peers who have (or have not) been active in the field’. These individuals have the necessary capabilities to make a difference in any given field, such as academia, arts, leisure, sport, social action, technology or business. This led Solimano (2008: 22) to distinguish different types and forms of ‘talent’, ranging from technical talent to scientists, academics, international students, professionals in the health sector, entrepreneurs, managers, professionals in international organisations and cultural talent. ‘Talent’, to put it simply, emerges from the ability an individual acquires through learning experience (Gagné, 2000). The learning aspect is very important, as ‘talent’ is seen as a quality that can be developed over time. In these instances, ‘talent’ can be defined as a high potential individual who has ‘the ability, engagement and aspiration to succeed in more senior, more critical positions’ (Tansley 2011: 272).

The approach of defining ‘talent’ either as an intrinsic quality or as an extrinsic quality (‘talent’ as qualities) that are ultimately identified through behaviour already differentiates the types of design policymakers are more likely to adopt. If policymakers focus on ‘talent’ as primarily an intrinsic quality possessed by an individual, they are also likely to believe that there is a finite (vs. infinite) number of ‘talents’ in existence at any given point around the world. This assumption is likely to lead policymakers to instrumentalise policies that concentrate mainly on *amassing* ‘talents’. These policies can take on a variety of forms, including, for instance, the classic immigration instruments that seek to attract and recruit foreign ‘talents’, or the more extreme measures of limiting the mobility of nationals identified as ‘talented’ through the controlled issuing of, *inter alia*, passports,

obligatory service bonds, or exit visas. What these types of instruments have in common are their focus on regulating the inward and outward movement of ‘talented’ individuals. The assessment of policy outcomes could then be measured by a comparison of the initial estimate of ‘talents’ in existence worldwide, which can vary year-on-year and require different indicators to compute, against the actual numbers of ‘talents’ recruited from abroad and those who are retained. This assessment becomes more sophisticated if we introduce cross-country or time-series dimensions and, certainly, does not measure the actual performance of the ‘talents’ recruited and retained for the assessment period.

If policymakers define ‘talent’ as mainly an acquirable extrinsic quality, they are more likely to design policies that would promote learning and the cultivation of specific skillsets. These types of policies are qualitatively distinct from those that are concerned with migration and mobility management. For instance, policymakers could introduce curricular reforms or extracurricular activities across educational levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) geared towards the attainment of ‘talent’ abilities, or programmes to incentivise lifelong learning or knowledge transfer from those identified as ‘talented’ to ‘talents-to-be’. In the same way, the assessment of these policy outcomes would require different measures involving, for instance, the specification of ‘talent’ abilities in advance (which may change over time given rapid technological advances, especially if the skills are technical in nature) and tests to ascertain that these skillsets have been obtained. It is important to emphasise that these above examples are merely illustrative to show the ways in which policymakers define ‘talent’ as qualities—either as an intrinsic or extrinsic quality—affect the design of the policies, the types of instruments that could be selected to achieve the objectives, and how outcomes could be assessed.

The bifurcation of ‘talent’ as a binary feature (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) is recognised in the management literature as the ‘talent-as-object’ approach and concerns the exceptional abilities and attitudes demonstrated by an individual (Gallardo-Gallardo 2013). From the perspective of ‘talent-as-object’, there are approaches that conceptualise ‘talent’ as a natural ability; approaches that operationalise ‘talent’ as the mastery of systematically developed skills; approaches that associate ‘talent’ with commitment and motivation; and approaches that stress the relevance of fit between an individual’s ‘talent’ and the context within which he or she works (in terms of organisation and position) (Gallardo-Gallardo 2013: 29; cf. Tansley 2011: 271). What these multiple approaches delineate is that it is essential to consider the broader dimension within which ‘talent’ is situated—to go beyond ‘talent’ as qualities—and it is to this that we now turn.

Talent as a relational concept: the organisational, behavioural, and time dimension

The other approach that the talent management literature has distinguished is the ‘talent-as-subject’ approach, which primarily focuses on people in an organisational setting (Gallardo-Gallardo 2013). Here, a further distinction is made: the inclusive approach (i.e. ‘talent’ as a whole organisation), or the exclusive approach (‘talent’ as a subset of the employee population). In the exclusive approach, ‘talents’ are the high performers or high potentials (Gallardo-Gallardo 2013), or a combination of the two. This approach is the most widely used in human resources management, and measures ‘talent’, irrespective of position, by three variables: performance, potential, and competence, but some definitions consider the position of employees in an organisation (Zhang and Bright 2012). From this distinction, we identified our second category of

how ‘talent’ is defined in the literature: ‘talent’ as a relational concept, possessing composite features. It is relational because ‘talents’ are identified *vis-à-vis* their (organisational) environments or singled out among their peers. Unlike ‘talent’ as qualities, ‘talent’ as a relational concept is seen as consisting of composite features because it conceptualises ‘talent’ as someone (a) within an organisation or at a certain time period being recognised as (b) possessing multiple sets of specific qualities (intrinsic and extrinsic as discussed above) (c) observed through behaviour. These three distinct features would thus be of interest to policymakers from a design perspective, but, as we shall discuss below, policymakers are only likely to have regulatory authority concerning one of these features in most instances.

The combination of both innate abilities and skills, and the requisite behavioural components for achieving success, has led a number of authors to conceptualise ‘talent’ either as an addition or a multiplication of different components. For example, Renzulli (1986) sees ‘talent’ as consisting of three clusters: high ability (general or specific), commitment to task, and motivation. For Ulrich (2007: 32), talent equals competence times commitment times contribution: ‘Competence means that individuals have the knowledge, skills and values that are required for today and tomorrow. Commitment means that employees work hard, put the time in to do what they are asked to do, giving their discretionary energy to the firm’s success. Contribution means that they are making a real contribution through their work—finding meaning and purpose in their work’. ‘Talent’ can thus be considered as a rather complex amalgam consisting of the employees’ knowledge, skills, potential, and cognitive ability (Tansley et al. 2007).

Adopting the relational perspective enables us to capture the evolving definition of ‘talent’, especially over time and in different contexts. Historian John Ferrie (2010: 15-16) observes that the specific set of desired skills and occupations defining the highly-skilled have changed ‘according to the time period, location, and nature of the technologies in use’ (in Shachar and Hirschl 2013: 76). According to Ingham (2006), this is why there is no universal definition of ‘great talent’: different organisations need different talents, depending on the organisation’s business strategy, type of firm, industry or occupational field, and overall competitive environment (cf. Tansley et al. 2007; Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo 2013). Therefore, Elegbe (2010) argues that ‘talent’ cannot be defined without reference to his/her *relationship* with the environment or the individual context since ‘talent’ is situation-specific. In a similar vein, Kim and McLean (2012) maintain that the meaning of ‘talent’ should be defined taking into account the organisation’s business context and strategies.

So how does defining ‘talent’ as a relational concept affect policy design and the assessment of outcomes? To begin, policymakers should recognise that both public organisations and businesses find greater value in formulating their own meaning of ‘what talent is than accepting universal or prescribed definitions’ (Tansley 2011: 270). For example, at Gordon Ramsay Holdings, ‘talent’ is viewed as the creative flair of chefs. At Google, those regarded as ‘talented’ are referred to as being a ‘Googler’, which is an ‘ideas person’ and ‘a challenger who thinks outside the box’ (Tansley et al. 2007). At Pricewaterhouse Coopers, ‘talented’ individuals are those who possess ‘drive, energy, an applied intelligence, a willingness to take on challenges and demonstrate the ability to make a distinctive difference to the business’ (Tansley et al. 2007). Comparing three Asian countries, Poocharoen and Lee (2013) find three sets of managerial values to be central in

talent management in the public sector: (1) education vs. equity-based merit-selection processes, (2) exclusive vs. inclusive approaches, and (3) competency vs. performance-based appraisals. These values explain why ‘talent’ is defined more narrowly in Singapore than in Thailand and Malaysia: the City State is more interested in the ‘best talent’ and not in potential ‘talents’ and late bloomers (Poocharoen and Lee 2013).

The above examples point to the general absence of regulatory authority that policymakers have in defining who is a ‘talent’ within a non-public organisation. What this means for policy design is that policymakers have different tasks in comparison to those we discussed earlier concerning the definition of ‘talent’ as qualities (e.g. amassing ‘talents’, or promoting learning). Assuming that policymakers accept that ‘talents’ have skillsets observable through demonstrable behaviours within organisational settings and timeframes, and that most organisations prefer their own definitions of ‘talent’, then the policymakers’ tasks are more likely to focus on establishing the (working) environments where ‘talents’ could thrive. Here, environments could be conceptualised in many ways, including, for instance, an *internal* and an *external* environment demarcated by a country’s borders. This more expansive conceptualisation enables policymakers to adopt a variety of measures depending on which environment and objective (e.g. to reduce or increase competition) are the design focus. A non-exhaustive list of instruments could include tax incentives for creating value companies, programmes to promote quality of life, or protective measures for sheltering infant industries. Similarly, the assessment of policy outcomes is dependent on the instruments adopted and could include, for instance, measuring what types of jobs, and how many, were created. In short, how ‘talents’ are defined—either as qualities or as a relational concept—matters in determining the types of design policymakers could consider, the

variety of instruments that could be adopted to achieve the objectives, and how policy outcomes are measured. In the next sub-section, we focus more on how ‘talent’ is defined and conceptualised in migration studies to show its complementarity with the talent management literature.

Migration studies and ‘talent’: from binary to composite and critical

In the migration literature, interestingly, definitions of ‘talent’ reflect the dichotomous categories of binary vs. composite. For example, in the binary approach, labour migrants are either low- or high-skilled, with the latter being generally considered to be the equivalent of ‘talent’ in the management literature. Furthermore, receiving countries are either classified as being open or closed to foreign ‘talents’ at different periods of time, or under different governments. This duality is reflected again when examining the effects of high-skilled mobility: it either creates a ‘brain drain’ (for sending countries) or ‘brain gain’ (for receiving countries). For policymakers who perceive ‘talent’ flows from this perspective, they are liable to design policies that are also similar to those discussed earlier about ‘talent’ as qualities. The binary categorisation approach is recognised in the migration field as a facile summary of the overall phenomenon; it reduces complexity—and the human agency behind this development—into simplicity and hides the real variables of explanatory interest (politics, power, legitimacy, policy, race and so on). While appealing, the field has moved on from this starting point into examining ‘talent’ migration.

One of the earlier composite approaches seeking to go beyond the binary approach has defined ‘talent’ in relations to occupations and educational levels. For example, in Salt’s (1997) schema, the highly-skilled is categorised into a variety of occupations, ranging from intra-corporate

transferees to technicians, professionals, entertainers, sportspeople, and academics. Recognising ‘talents’ in this way facilitates policy design: policymakers may decide how to regulate each of the categories according to labour market demands. At the same time, this exercise of being specific brings up another set of issues related to its utility. For instance, one may ask: who exactly shades into the ‘talent’ group and who does not? Defining talent in migration beyond binary categories also has consequences for the measurement and building of composite indicators, which other contributions of this special issue aim to highlight. In a related work, Koser and Salt (1997: 287) argue that the difference between the highly-skilled and ‘talent’ may actually be far more difficult to distinguish simply based on occupational identifiers as it has been suggested in migration studies (see, for example, Cerna 2016; Kapur and McHale 2005; OECD 2000); this is because ‘many graduates are not employed in jobs requiring high-level expertise’ (Yeoh and Lai 2008: 235). While more targeted, Shachar and Hirschl’s (2013) study on ‘super talents’ similarly reflect an academic interest in delineating ‘talent’ from others. Referring to those at the top of the ‘talent’ pyramid, Shachar and Hirschl (2013: 74) identified the legal criteria for assessing ‘super talents’ as developed by recruiting destination countries and repatriating countries of origin. These include the applicant’s proven track record, international reputation, specialised skills and acumen. Some examples are elite athletes, world-class artists, acclaimed scientists, successful entrepreneurs, and innovators.

Beyond occupation and education identifiers, the migration literature also considers ‘talent’ in relations to space: physical and value mobility. This stream of literature has evolved since the 1970s, with the original emphasis more on physical mobility (and associated negative connotations related to this move) than value mobility (positive connotations). For instance, the ‘geography of

migration by the highly skilled' (Koser and Salt 1997) from the UK to the US in the 1970s highlighted concerns of 'brain drain' from developed to developed country. This debate has since developed more fully in light of the migration-development nexus and its attempt to move beyond the 'brain drain' vs. 'brain gain' debate to truly understand how developing countries may gain from the mobility (and often permanent settlement) of their nationals in developed countries. This came about largely due to the recognition that migration flows are generally far more heterogeneous in practice than assumed. At the same time, the 'brain' debate has become more fine-grained when in the 1990s emergent concerns about 'new' migration from Eastern Europe was resulting in 'brain waste', with skilled workers from the former Soviet bloc taking on jobs that did not require the application of their skills.

From the space perspective, the notion of 'talent' is also connected to international mobility, with movement across international borders in itself enhancing the symbolic value and social-cultural capital of the 'talented' individuals who make this move (see Findlay et al. 1996; Beaverstock 2005). These individuals are perceived as scarce and in great demand globally; they are highly mobile, often circulating from one global city to another global city. These 'talents' are constructed relationally and often with respect to the notion of the 'knowledge economy' (Machlup 1962; Drucker 1969/1992). Tulgan (2001: 37) asserts that firms today are heavily dependent on 'human talent', 'judgment', and the 'human brain', in order to successfully navigate the 'new economy' characterised by a high-speed business environment that requires organisations to be able to deploy resources at a just-in-time pace. In these instances, 'talent' is broadly understood as a resource that adds value to the higher ends of the economic chain, as it combines education, knowledge, skills,

creativity, and spans various fields, including entrepreneurship, education, research and development, services and creative industries (cf. Yeoh and Lai 2008; Papademetriou et al. 2009).

By rescaling the analysis of ‘talents’ and their value from the level of the ‘firm’ or the ‘individual’ to the global and national knowledge economy, it also becomes apparent that issues such as ‘brain drain’, ‘brain waste’, ‘brain gain’, and ‘brain circulation’ are not entirely separable from such frames of understanding (Findlay 2006; Oommen 1996; Mahroum 2000). It is here where migration studies offer a critical perspective for those interested in macro global talent management (GTM) (see Khilji et al. 2015). The macro GTM literature identifies the role of respective governments in poaching skilled workers, using an integrated country-level human development agenda related to talent development. While migration studies has long focused on the role of governments in designing policies to attract high-skilled individuals, the macro GTM literature’s consideration of country-level factors now brings the two literatures closer together. Most of these issues revolving around ‘brain’ are often cast in the frame of a developed country vs. developing country, or discussed along the North-South and East-West divide, in which there are clear losers and winners: the migration of human capital results in a ‘brain drain’ for less developed countries and a ‘brain gain’ for the more developed ones. By highlighting these issues, the migration literature is often far more critical of the systemic effects of ‘talent’ migration (on origin countries) than talent management scholars. At the same time, the contemporary public policy framing and the exponential growth of the ‘race for talent’, through various strategies, has sought to level the competition field. Once the race for talent has begun, the pressure to engage in targeted recruitment increases, as no country wants to be left behind. Indeed, countries are seen to be willing to go as far as to reconfigure the boundaries of political membership, proactively using

their exclusive control over the granting of citizenship to gain the net positive effects associated with the recruitment of, for instance, ‘super talents’ (Shachar and Hirschl 2013: 79). In so doing, countries (and the firms in their geographical territories) are no longer necessarily tied to, or motivated by, cyclical domestic skills shortages. Rather, it is about building up a ‘talent pool’ and how ‘talent’ is defined will have strong implications for policy, as well as the people seeking to be recognised as ‘talent’.

The categorisation of ‘talent’ has an impact on the measurement of policies through indicators. As already mentioned earlier, a number of researchers have developed indicators and indices to measure immigration policy, including talent migration policy (e.g.; Bjerre et al. 2015; Boucher and Cerna 2014; Cerna 2016; Helbling 2013; Helbling et al. 2017; Ruhs 2013). Additionally, there are several indices that seek to measure the competitiveness of countries that attract ‘talent’, including the Global Talent Pyramid, the Global Talent Index, the IMD World Talent Ranking, and the Global Talent Competitiveness Index. Most of them, however, use their own definitions of ‘talent’ and the proposed indicators are usually not based on a theoretical framework to justify selection criteria; so the indices assess different aspects of policy outcomes at different times (see Bjerre et al. 2015 for an excellent critique of indices). This makes it difficult to elaborate effective policies to recruit and retain talent. In a way, once a term such as ‘talent’ is loosely defined, this has important consequences for indicator development and measurement. A conceptual looseness can result in diminished purpose of the design process because of the failure to scientifically conceptualise, design, select instruments and then measure ‘talent’. As a result, the initial ambiguity and plethora of definitions only contribute to further confusion during the policymaking and design processes for talent management programmes.

Conclusions: insights from defining ‘talent’ for policy design

Taking the case of defining ‘talent’ in two sets of literature (talent management and migration studies), we set out to address the question: How does the basic definition of the policy subject affect policy design and the assessment of policy outcomes? Our review shows that ‘talent’ has been defined and conceptualised in two different ways: in *binary* terms (‘talent’ as either an intrinsic or extrinsic quality), or as *composite* (‘talent’ as a relational concept: a ‘talent’ possesses specific qualities and can be identified within particular organisational settings or time). We showed through multiple empirical examples that these distinct conceptualisations of ‘talent’ point to radically different fundamental assumptions about what ‘talent’ is and how it is identified. In so doing, we demonstrated that having a common policy design concerning ‘talent’ and a set of accompanying measurement standards to assess outcomes is very difficult.

We situated our contribution in the broader context of the policy design literature, in which a lively debate is currently unfolding between scholars of the new design orientation and their critics concerning the better starting point for theorising policy design (from the perspective of practitioners or academics). In our view, this debate, as many others in the social sciences, encapsulates the different pathways that theoretical assumptions may follow depending on the ontological starting point. While this may seem academic, these different ontological starting points have strong epistemological implications for the policy sciences that are closely engaged with the act of providing policy solutions. Our findings indicate that the many definitions of ‘talent’ in the talent management literature and migration studies constitute at least two distinct strands of

definitions that are mutually *exclusive* and difficult to reconcile ontologically. Specifically, the definition of ‘talent’ as an intrinsic quality is simply incompatible with the definition of ‘talent’ as an extrinsic quality or ‘talent’ as a relational concept in the design process. While our limited review is unable to conclusively confirm that a ‘good’ design concerning ‘talent’ is not feasible, it does suggest that a ‘good’ design may be socially constructed.

Our article seeks to provide a steppingstone for researchers and policymakers interested in better understanding of how the basic definition of a policy subject (such as ‘talent’) affects policy design and the assessment of policy outcomes. To have a more comprehensive analysis and to develop a more extensive list of potential empirical implications, a possible next step is to include how ‘talent’ is defined in other fields of research such as higher education studies, which may reveal a definition that emphasises the human capital approach and the significance of capturing potential ‘talents’ at an earlier age. This definition would suggest an entirely different understanding of ‘talent’ than the ones we identified in the talent management literature and migration studies, which focussed on demonstrable qualities. In short, definitions matter for policy design and the assessment of policy outcomes. Our article is just a starting point in a currently underexplored but potentially very rich area of definition, conceptualisation, and measurement of key terms such as ‘talent’. Indeed, only with further research is the development of a ‘science’ of policy subject possible, the design of a policy meaningful, and the measurement of policy outcomes feasible.

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Table 1: Selected definitions of talent in the literature (organised by authors)

Author(s)	Focus/discipline	Definition of talent	Type of definition	Examples of talent
Bethke-Langenegger (2012)	Management	‘We understand talent to be one of those worker who ensures the competitiveness and future of a company (as specialist or leader) through his organisational/job specific qualification and knowledge, his social and methodical competencies, and his characteristic attributes such as eager to learn or achievement oriented’ (p. 3)	Talent as relational concept	
Brown and Tannock (2009)	Education	Talent tends to be narrowly defined in terms of formal education credentials, market value and business interest	Unclear	
Cerna (2016)	Migration – public policy	Talent are high-skilled immigrants, who are highly educated and work in sectors ranging from information and communications technology (ICT), engineering, finance and biotechnology to health care	Talent as qualities	
Cheese, Thomas and Craig (2008)	Management	Human talent as ‘the combined capacity and will of people to achieve an organization’s goals – is a productive resource. . . with a unique capacity to add value to an organisation’ (p. 1)	Talent as relational concept	
Cooke et al. (2014)	Management	Talent are those ‘who are highly educated and (have the ability to be) high achievers/performers in the organisation’ (p. 234)	Talent as relational concept	

De Vos and Dries (2013)	Management	Talent refers ‘to the human capital in an organisation that is both valuable and unique’ (p. 1818).	Talent as relational concept
Ewerlin (2013)	Management	Talent is defined as ‘employees who have an above-average performance potential based on their talent and perform their responsibilities (very) well. In addition, it is necessary for them to be willing and able progress further’ (p. 281).	Talent as relational concept
Gagné (2000)	Social psychology	‘The superior mastery of systematically developed abilities (or skills) and knowledge in at least one field of human endeavour, to a degree that places the individual in the top 10% of age peers who have (or have not) been active in the field’ (p. 67)	Talent as qualities
Gallardo-Gallardo (2013)	Management	Talent has ‘three central characteristics: manifestation in excellent performance, developed innate abilities, and passion—with the latter further subdivided into “motivation to invest” (i.e., activities to invest energy in) and “interests” (i.e., activities one likes and finds important)’ (p. 240)	Talent as qualities
Hinrichs (1966)	Management	Talent is a native ability: ‘(...) a unique mix of innate intelligence or brain power, plus a certain degree of creativity or the capacity to go	Talent as qualities

		beyond established stereotypes and provide innovative solutions to problems in his everyday world, plus personal skills which make him effective in his relationships with his peers, his superiors, and his subordinates'		
Höglund (2012)	Management	Talent as 'specific behaviours and/or qualities the organisation defines as essential for the achievement of its current and future goals' (p. 127)	Talent as qualities	
Horvathova and Davidova (2012)	Management	'A talented individual is a man who gives both a high performance and shows a high potential' (p. 761).	Talent as relational concept	
Ingham (2006)	Management	Definitions of talent will depend upon an organization's business strategy, type of firm and competitive environment	Talent as relational concept	Definition could cover the following types of talent pool: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the current leadership team; • other people in key roles; • senior people with particular capabilities, networks and relationships which would be difficult or time consuming to replace; • individuals with skills that are scarce in the employment market; • high performers who make a particular

			contribution to value-adding processes; and • high potentials, which could include graduates in early career grades, or employees at positions just below the leadership team.
Jackson, Hitt, and DeNisi, 2003 (in Tarique and Schuler 2010)	Management	Talent as ‘knowledge workers’, defined by having special skills developed through extensive education and training and capable of having a significant impact on the success of the company	Talent as qualities
Kapur & McHale (2005)	Migration – economics, development	Talented individuals are those ‘who provide specialized skills, build institutions, or even simply make large fiscal contributions’ (p. 180)	Talent as qualities
Koser and Salt (1997)	Migration - geography	Talent as highly skilled individuals	Talent as qualities
Laroche et al. (1999)	Economics	Talent is ‘human capital which could be defined as the aggregation of the innate abilities, knowledge and skills that individuals acquire and develop throughout their lifetime’ (p. 89)	Talent as qualities
Lewin, Massini and Peeters (2009)	Management, business	‘Talent’ refers to highly qualified individuals with advanced university degrees. Technical talent refers to Master and PhD graduates in Science and Engineering (S&E), and experienced workers (p. 922)	Talent as qualities

Manning, Massini and Lewin (2008)	Management, business	Talent is broadly defined here as personnel with appropriate skills and qualifications. S&E talent refers to talent with S&E skills and qualifications.	Talent as qualities	(mostly young) engineers, mathematicians, physical scientists, and computer scientists with advanced university degrees
Martin in Kuptsch and Peng (2006)	Migration - economic policy (O-visa in the US)	Foreigners with ‘extraordinary ability’ in the sciences, arts, education, business or athletics’ further defined as ‘a level of expertise indicating that the person is one of the small percentage who have risen to the top of the field of endeavour (p. 91)	Talent as qualities	
Michaels et al. (1997/2001)	Management	Talent is the ‘the sum of a person’s abilities...his or her intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, judgement, attitude, character and drive. It also includes his/her ability to learn and grow’ (p. xii)	Talent as qualities	‘A Level’ employees who rank in the top 10 to 20%.
Ng (2011)	Education	Talent are those defined as the ‘best’	Unclear	
Papademetriou, Somerville and Tanaka (2009)	Migration – public policy	Talent are the highly skilled, broadly defined ‘to comprise those with more than a bachelor’s degree in growth supporting occupations, those in persistently scarce disciplines (such as mathematics and the physical sciences) and those in occupational categories that refer to experienced “managers” and “professionals” (p. 5).	Talent as qualities	Mathematicians, engineers, scientists and information and communications technologists, and particularly the elite class among these professionals

Ready, Conger and Hill (2010)	Management	Top 3-5% as 'potentials who 'consistently and significantly outperform their peer groups in a variety of settings and circumstances. While achieving these superior levels of performance, they exhibit behaviours that reflect their companies' culture and values in an exemplary manner. Moreover, they show a strong capacity to grow and succeed throughout their careers within an organisation - more quickly and effectively than their peer groups do.' (p. 3)	Talent as relational concept
Renzulli (1986)	Social psychology	Talent is 'combination of three clusters, namely general or specific high ability, task commitment and motivation.' (p.76)	Talent as qualities
Robertson and Abbey (2003)	Management	Talent as 'the best and the brightest'. They are an elite group of high-impact, but high-maintenance individuals who can deal with more complexity but are more complex in themselves.	Talent as relational concept
Schuler (2015)	Management	'Individuals who are special, have competencies valued by the company, behaviours aligned with the company's values, are hard to find, are hard to replace, can add a great deal of value to the company, have options to leave at any time, and	Talent as relational concept

		can help shape the future strategic directions of the company' (p. 48)		
Schuler, Jackson and Tarique (2011)	Management	Highly talented individuals are known as ““valuable contributors”” including high level executives, those with high managerial potential, and those with rare technical skills’ (p. 507)	Talent as relational concept	
Shachar (2006)	Migration - law	Talent is ‘the college-educated, professional with marketable skills’ (p. 204). Skilled migrant's talent is measured, for example, through post-secondary educational attainment and cutting-edge technological skills	Talent as qualities	Talent is used interchangeably with knowledge migrant and highly skilled migrant.
Shachar and Hirschl (2013)	Migration - law/ political science	Super talent: ‘those at the top of the talent pyramid, taking cues from the legal criterion for assessing such talent as developed by recruiting destination countries and repatriating countries of origin. These include the applicant’s proven track record, international reputation, specialised skills and acumen’ (p. 74)	Talent as qualities	Elite athletes, world-class artists, acclaimed scientists, successful entrepreneurs and innovators.
Silzer and Dowel (2010)	Management	‘In groups talent can refer to a pool of employees who are exceptional in their skills and abilities either in a specific technical area (such as software graphics skills) or a competency (such a consumer	Talent as relational concept	

		marketing talent), or a more general area (such as general managers or high-potential talent). And in some cases, “the talent” might refer to the entire employee population.’ (p. 13-14)		
Smart (2005)	Management	‘A’ players [that] are the top 10% of talent available in all salary levels, best of class.	Talent as relational concept	
Solimano (2008)	Economics			Directly productive talent; academic talent; talent in social and cultural sectors
Tansley et al. (2007)	Management	Talent is ‘a complex amalgam of employees’ skills, knowledge, cognitive ability and potential’ (p. 2).	Talent as qualities	
Thunissen and Van Arensbergen (2015)	Management	Broader approach regards talent as a complex of multiple, interrelated components, and takes the impact of the organizational context and of the different actors involved into account.	Talent as relational concept	
Ulrich (2007)	Management	‘Talent equals competence [able to do the job] times commitment [willing to do the job] times contribution [finding meaning and purpose in their work].’ (p. 3)	Talent as relational concept	
Williams (2000)	Management	Talent ‘describe those people who do one or other of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> regularly demonstrate exceptional ability-and achievement-either over a 	Talent as qualities	These abilities can be measured through demonstrable track record, and unproven but suspected potential.

		<p>range of activities and situations, or within a specialized and narrow field of expertise;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consistently indicate high competence in areas of activity that strongly suggest transferable, comparable ability in situations where they have yet to be tested and proved to be highly effective, i.e. potential.’ (p. 35) <p>Talent is considered to be, variously, high ability, giftedness and/or high potential</p>		
Yeoh and Lai (2008)	Migration - Geography	‘Talent’ is broadly understood as a resource that adds value to the higher ends of the economic chain, as it combines education, knowledge, skills and creativity and spans various fields, including entrepreneurship, education, research and development, services and creative industries.	Talent as qualities	Highly mobile skilled workers such as business creators, technical experts, technology innovators, health professionals, and those in scientific, educational and cultural sectors (based on Solimano 2008)

Sources: Authors, inspired by Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz 2013: 291 and Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunissen 2016.