Integrating a talent management approach to knowledge management: Are there benefits to be had?

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Abstract  
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine how the principles of talent management (TM) can be leveraged to enhance an organization’s knowledge management (KM) initiatives.  
Design/methodology/approach – This paper critically reviews the literature pertaining to the emerging concept of TM and specifically that which focuses upon ‘smart talent management’ i.e. the fusion of TM and KM concepts.  
Findings – We find that the fusion of the two concepts holds promise but has so far only been considered by human resource scholars who have tended to examine how learning’s from the field of KM can be leveraged to advance TM. We confront the issue in reverse and identify four KM concerns – identifying key knowledge workers, knowledge worker positioning, developing knowledge competencies, and preventing a knowledge loss crisis – which we argue can be advanced through the application of TM principles.  
Originality/value – The fusion of TM and KM has so far only been considered from a HR perspective. This paper examines the fusion of the two concepts from a KM perspective and details four specific KM concerns which can benefit from the integration of a TM approach.  
Keywords – Knowledge management, talent management  
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1. Introduction  
Knowledge is now regarded as the most strategically significant organizational asset (Drucker, 1988, Nonaka, 1994, Grant, 1996a), with companies emphasizing capabilities and intangible resources as competitive tools (Kiessling and Harvey, 2006). However, knowledge may also be the organizational asset managed least effectively (Schutz and Carpenter, 2008). Much of the knowledge that serves as a source of advantage is tacit in nature (McDonnell et al, 2007), which is difficult to formalize and share due to its highly personal nature and its embeddedness in people’s actions and experiences. Organizations vary greatly in how they manage knowledge workers who possess this tacit knowledge. Some organizations primarily focus on maximizing their productivity; others focus on the importance of collaboration and team work for knowledge sharing; while others heavily invest in their training and development and structure knowledge work for flexibility and change (Lepak and Snell, 2002). This diversity of management approaches is reflected in the significant variance in the...
performance of knowledge intensive companies within the same industry (Guthridge et al, 2008). Organizations need to adopt a more strategic approach to managing knowledge workers (Tymon et al, 2010), as superior performance is linked to tacit knowledge, the retention of employees who possess this knowledge and the ability to continuously harvest their knowledge and expertise (Kiessling and Harvey, 2006).

Therein lays the focus of this paper. It examines the emerging field of talent management (TM) in order to identify what TM practices can contribute to knowledge management (KM). Both the TM and KM fields have growing bodies of literature, however only HR academics have begun writing about a fusion of the two concepts. The HR literature generally considers what KM can contribute to TM; however, this paper confronts the issue in reverse by considering how TM can benefit KM. The contribution of this paper is twofold. From a theoretical perspective, it extends the knowledge-based view of the firm by focusing on those few employees who contribute the most value to the firm. From a practitioner point of view, it identifies the potential benefits of combining KM and TM. The structure of this paper is as follows. Section two discusses KM’s evolution, detailing its development as a vehicle for change in other fields. Section three reviews the TM literature and introduces the concept of ‘Smart Talent Management’, which encapsulates a fusion of TM and KM practices. Section four considers how TM can contribute to addressing four key KM organizational concerns. Section five draws conclusions on the paper’s contributions.

2. The KM field – a discussion of its evolution

The field of KM first emerged in the mid 1980’s in response to the growing strategic importance of the firms’ knowledge assets. A review of KM’s evolution to date reveals that the concept has been used as a vehicle for change in other fields such as IT, strategic management, and HR. Initially, the KM field was synonymous with IT. While it was generally recognized that KM had something new to offer, it seemed to be in danger of being hijacked by the IT community and turned into a vehicle for marketing new IT systems (Coakes et al., 2002). Firms with a genuine interest in KM in the 1980’s were advised to adopt IT-centric solutions which usually involved investing in systems such as Lotus Notes to capture, codify, and store every imaginable variety of knowledge, including best practices, competitive intelligence, observations about customers, learnings from previous projects, and so forth (Davenport, 2005). While the KM field has come to learn the value of informal and community based approaches (Wenger et al., 2002; Cross and Baird, 2000; Hansen et al., 1999), the influence of the IT community is still prevalent today. Organizations are now being advised that online applications such as blogs, wikis, and user tagging systems facilitate knowledge work in ways that were not possible before (McAfee, 2006; Tapscott and Williams, 2007).

The field of strategic management has also adopted a knowledge perspective in order to progress models of how competitive advantage is achieved. Scholars have criticized the dominant equilibrium-based paradigms, such as Porter’s Five Forces (Porter, 1985) and the resource-based view (Barney, 1991), for failing to explain sustained competitive advantage in dynamic industries (Eisenhardt and Santos, 2002). These paradigms only explain superior performance at a point in time and offer little in understanding how this performance can be consistently achieved. Consequently, strategy theorists turned their attention to developing dynamic theories of sustained superior performance (Porter, 1991; Teece et al., 1997) and one significant stream has focused on the knowledge asset (Grant, 1996a; Grant, 1996b; Kogut and Zander, 1992; Spender, 1996). The culmination of this field of enquiry has seen the
emergence of the knowledge-based view of the firm, an influential stream of literature within strategic management.

Evidence of the processes and practices associated with KM being utilized for change initiatives can also be found in the field of human resource management (HRM). One of the key challenges faced by HRM professionals is the effective transfer of knowledge among employees, teams, departments, and divisions (Gourlay, 2001). HRM professionals have adopted the people centric approaches advocated by KM in order to improve employee performance (Parise, 2007). In recent years, the concept of TM has received much attention from HR academics and practitioners. It has also emerged as the latest concept to leverage KM with HRM scholars asking the question ‘how can TM be advanced through KM?’ In order to mature into an academic discipline in its own right, KM needs to be seen as more than a vehicle of change for other fields. The purpose of this paper is to make a contribution to this task by assessing how the principles of TM can contribute to KM.

3. Talent management
Since McKinsey consultants coined the phrase the “war for talent” in the late 1990s, TM has become an important managerial activity (Hartmann et al, 2010; Scullion et al, 2010). It is generally concerned with practices associated with developing strategy; identifying talent gaps; succession planning; and recruiting, selecting, educating, motivating and retaining talented employees through a variety of initiatives (Groves, 2007; Guthridge and Komm, 2008; Ringo et al, 2010). Many authors regard TM as a managerial strategic priority of the 21st century (Farndale et al, 2010; Guthridge et al, 2006; Mäkelä et al, 2010; Mellahi and Collings, 2010). Employees’ knowledge, skills and competencies are an important competitive weapon, hence talent needs to be maximized and recognized as a distinctive source of competitive advantage (Bhatnagar, 2007; Björkman et al, 2007; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Lewis and Heckman, 2006).

Employee skill and capabilities add varying degrees of value to the organization, hence the “everybody counts mantra” (Lepak & Snell, 2002) is an overly simplified view of organizational talent. For example, research by Heinen and O’Neill (2004) reports that the best 10%-15% of organizational performers give rise to performance output improvements ranging from 19%-120%. Ultimately, this is where TM differs from other HR approaches. TM is concerned with identifying the key positions which have the potential to differentially impact the competitive advantage of the firm and in turn, filling these with ‘A performers’ (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2007; Huselid et al. 2005).

Despite many citations of an organizational lack of proficiency in TM (Boston Consulting Group, 2007; Guthridge et al, 2008; Cappelli, 2008; Ready and Conger, 2007), a 2008 CIPD report “the war on talent” found that organizations are now placing greater scrutiny on their TM processes (CIPD, 2010b). Further, a 2008 Hewitt survey revealed that almost half of the companies studied planned to increase or sustain employee learning and development budgets during the economic slowdown (Beechler and Woodward, 2009). Despite this increased emphasis on TM, to date there has been a limited understanding on how competitive advantage can be supported through the interaction of KM and TM. KM researchers have not established a link to specific TM practices necessary to ensure knowledge creation, sharing and retention (Vance and Vaiman, 2008). Effective KM depends on the effective management of the organizational talent who possess key knowledge, in terms of talent recruitment, training, performance management, rewards management, succession planning, knowledge sharing and so on. KM provides a common purpose in
effectively co-coordinating and integrating these TM practices within the HR functions. Vance and Vaiman (2008) coined the term “smart talent management” to encapsulate the fusion of KM and TM in order to achieve organizational objectives. They define the term as “the smart or effective management of all human resources, who embody an organization’s knowledge capital and capability in generating, acquiring, storing, transferring and applying knowledge in support of company goals and objectives”. Despite this attempt to fuse TM and KM concepts, it is still unclear from their contributions how TM can specifically address key KM challenges. It is also interesting that Vance and Vaiman (2008) adopt the position of viewing all organizational employees as talent to be harvested. As outlined above, this approach contrasts with the majority of current thinking which emphasizes the high potential and top performers as the key talent sources.

This paper addresses this gap in the literature. The following sections examine how different TM practices can be used in addressing four of the key KM concerns faced by organizations today. We argue that TM can help organizations to identify, develop and retain the key knowledge workers critical to organizational success; deploy their skills where they are needed; and disseminate knowledge and practices throughout the organization irrespective of where they originated.

4. How managing key talent can contribute to KM

4.1 Identifying Knowledge Talent

The KM Challenge

Organizations need to strategically manage talent flows so that individuals with the needed competencies are available, when needed and are aligned with the right jobs based on the organizations strategic objectives (Iles et al, 2010; Tarique and Schuler, 2010). The difficulty with identifying organizational ‘A performers’ stems from the fact that talent is a tacit resource; it considers potential and not just actual performance (Mellahi and Collings, 2010). Nonetheless, 98% of the companies studied by Ready et al (2010) purposefully developed high potential talent lists. Organizations need employees who possess knowledge that will help them to address problems and create innovative solutions. Hence, employees need to be identified to fill knowledge gaps as opposed to fill narrow, specialized roles (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Lengnick-Hall and Andrade, 2008). Decisions with respect to key talent are also dependent on the KM approaches adopted in the organization. For those pursuing a codification strategy, organizations need to emphasize individuals who can identify problems, articulate them and articulate what they know in a form that can be captured in a knowledge database, and use information to solve problems. For those emphasizing a personalization strategy, organizations need to focus on individuals with critical and analytical skills, who can share knowledge with others through their social networks (Lengnick-Hall and Andrade, 2008).

The TM Initiatives

Effective TM practices for identifying key knowledge workers involve initially considering how individuals can help the organization to achieve its vision, mission and strategic goals, and highlighting what skills and talents are required (Jones, 2008). Hence, the organization’s strategic direction determines which jobs and which employees are most important to achieving success. To help ensure that the most appropriate talent is effectively deployed throughout the organization, some researchers (for example Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Huselid et al, 2005) focus on those pivotal talent positions that may impact on organizational competitive advantage. Talented employees are subsequently identified to fill those positions through recruiting ahead of the curve. This is similar to the Exclusive Positions perspective of
TM which seeks to fill ‘A positions’ with ‘A players’, fill support positions with ‘B players’, and outsource ‘C players’ (Iles et al, 2010). The following TM initiatives help ensure that key knowledge talent is identified both from the external market and internally:

**Talent/Performance management reviews:** Performance management helps in identifying those knowledge workers within the organization who are performing best, and aims to provide feedback and guidance on employees’ roles and expected performance standards (Debowskii, 2006). Application of success metrics helps quantify performance, monitor progress and identify those who contribute most to knowledge initiatives. Value metrics, for example, revenue per employee or ROI on people programs, as opposed to activity-based metrics, for example, number of training hours or number of hires against plan, are important in communicating TM’s success (Farley, 2005) and employee’s contribution to business results. As an example of a performance review process, General Electric (GE) has developed a well known structured leadership review cycle called Session C for assessing its leadership talent and determining its performance level, job accomplishments, strengths, potential, development needs, career interests etc. This is a multi-level cascading review process involving the CEO and his direct reports, the operating business leaders and their direct reports and so on until the process reaches the first line supervisors. The various individuals review roles that are two or three levels down the ladder and leaders are rated on their performance (top, highly valued or least effective) and their promotion potential (limited, medium or high) using a 9 block matrix (Cairns, 2009). This process helps in identifying the organization’s high performers and in implementing initiatives for addressing their and the organization’s developmental needs. However, it has been argued that such talent identification metrics need to be tailored when applied to knowledge intensive environments (Whelan et al 2010). Such settings are characterized by collaborative efforts rather than individual accomplishments. Thus, talent programs which focus on individual accomplishments, such as GE’s fabled 9 block matrix, can be erroneous when used to identify key talent in knowledge intensive settings.

**Talent recruiting:** Recruitment has significantly evolved, from a time consuming process that was bound by traditional communication channels’ limited geographic distribution, market and circulation to a sophisticated one, heavily influenced by web technology. While the greater market reach of web recruitment increases the pool of applicants, the challenge of sifting through this applicant pool to identify key sources of talent becomes greater. Online screening and analysis tools, such as resume analysis programs and online pre-employment assessments facilitate the process (Frank and Taylor, 2004). In recruiting, organizations tend to favor individuals who have flexibility to cope with new external challenges, competition, and changed processes. In addition to functional skills, TM involves identifying additional desired competencies that can be transferred to different contexts (Debowski, 2006). Guarino (2007) describes a Quick Screen approach to talent recruiting that serves as an evaluation mechanism to determine the match between a candidate’s competencies and key aspects of the position. It also helps to assess intangible characteristics such as the individual’s intuitiveness, analytical ability, character, perseverance, attention to detail and so on. Such an approach helps organizations source high performers from the external market, whose knowledge competencies may then be further developed through initiatives such as those outlined in section 4.3. However, during the current economic recession, the focus of many organizations has been on downsizing as opposed to recruitment. For example, GreatPlaceJobs (2009) employment study found that 86% of the Fortune 100’s largest US companies had laid off workers during the previous year and a half. Therefore, in this climate, the emphasis on identifying key talent is more likely to be placed on the
organization’s internal environment through talent performance reviews as opposed to external recruitment.

4.2 Knowledge positioning

The KM Challenge

The importance of social networks and personalization strategies has been well documented in the KM literature. However, the role of the small number of individuals who occupy pivotal network positions and who are disproportionately influential in coordinating knowledge flows have been given far less attention by the KM field (Whelan et al, 2010). Finding these star performers is not the only issue; a bigger problem is actually what to do with them (Cohn et al, 2008). In TM terminology, this is often referred to as ‘talent positioning’ i.e. having the right talent at the right place at the right time with the needed competencies and motivation at all levels and locations of the firm (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). A better understanding of these key individuals is particularly important in today’s era of open innovation (Chesbrough, 2003), which promotes the importance of internal and external networking in order to exploit new knowledge (Swan et al, 1999).

The TM Initiatives

In an extensive series of studies, Rob Cross and colleagues studied the networking activities of those individuals who were deemed key talent by their organizations (Cross et al., 2002; Cross and Parker, 2004; Cross and Prusak, 2002; Cross and Thomas, 2009). These studies revealed that individuals who occupy particular network positions – such as the central connector, broker, and peripheral expert - are hugely influential in ensuring that workgroup objectives are delivered. Central connectors are people whom others consult frequently for information, expertise, or decision-making help. Brokers are people who connect different subgroups such as departments, functions, physical locations, or hierarchical levels together. Peripheral experts are individuals on the outside of the network who possess specific technical knowledge that they pass on to others when needed. Many leading organizations have TM programs which target and maneuver these individuals into positions where they can contribute most value. The following TM initiatives promote effective knowledge positioning:

Organizational Network Analysis (ONA): This is an established social science approach of studying human relations and social structures by disclosing the affinities, attractions and repulsions between people and objects (Moreno, 1937). ONA views social relationships as nodes and ties that can be illustrated visually and mathematically. As such, it can provide an x-ray of the inner workings of a particular network. With this tool, important patterns become visible, the relationships between people can be better understood, the health of a group can be assessed, and the people playing key roles within the group can be identified (Cross and Parker, 2004). In recent years, ONA has been increasingly used by leading organizations as part of their talent positioning efforts. KM can incorporate these techniques, not just to identify key knowledge networkers, but also to identify the gaps in their knowledge flow networks. Suitable employees can then be facilitated in filling these positions thus contributing to KM activities by breaking down knowledge silos, promoting knowledge sharing, identifying state of the art knowledge, and ensuring strategic knowledge reaches those who need it.

Mobility opportunities: Internal mobility opportunities in the form of horizontal employee movements to other organizational units can reduce barriers and encourage co-operation and knowledge sharing between different areas (de Vos and Soens, 2008). Looking externally,
expatriates fill a boundary spanning role that facilitates development of social capital; they can transfer valuable knowledge from the parent company overseas and also import knowledge which can be exploited by the repatriating organization upon their return (Lengnick-Hall and Andrade, 2008). Job rotation enables employees to grow their network contacts and facilitate transfer of company culture (Collings et al, 2007). Talent managers can support KM by determining the appropriate timing for employee transfers that enable them to capitalize on group cohesion, social ties and diverse experiences.

**Network mentoring:** Once high potential knowledge workers are identified, smart organizations will assign a mentor in order to connect them to other key knowledge holders inside and outside the organization. Over time, this will enable the high potential to extend their network and to tap into the expertise of others when needed. Mentoring is particularly important for those rising stars that are deemed peripheral experts. A study of R&D engineers by Whelan et al. (2010) finds that these knowledge workers add value to the organization by scouting for and introducing new technologies into the internal social network. Maintaining a large number of ties with their work colleagues can result in peripheral experts becoming disconnected from the latest developments externally. Instead, peripheral experts were most effective when they were mentored by a colleague who possessed an extensive internal network and who distributed the external acquired knowledge on behalf of the peripheral expert.

### 4.3 Developing knowledge competencies

#### The KM Challenge

Talent availability is of limited strategic value unless it is effectively developed (Mellahi and Collings, 2010). Organizational performance is correlated with its employees’ competencies i.e. the underlying knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics needed to carry out an organizational role. Competencies possess three fundamental characteristics: 1) resources in terms of theoretical knowledge, procedural knowledge, know-how and know whom, 2) the context in which the competency is situated and 3) the objective in terms of achieving a goal, mission or task (Abel, 2008; Macris et al, 2008). In general, KM related competencies involve expertise related to collaboration, management, strategic planning, information skills, and relationship management (Debowski, 2006). These are predominantly soft skills, and therefore are developed over a longer timescale. The organization’s key challenge in competency development lies in the tension between personal goals and organizational constraints. Knowledge workers tend to learn in an informal, self-directed manner; however this learning needs to be aligned with organizational requirements. How this alignment is achieved remains an issue of debate. In current approaches to competency development, there is disconnect between competency descriptions and task performance, which may lead to unclear assessment results that are not linked to the work context (Ley et al, 2008). In addition, the delay between identifying and filling competency gaps through learning remains too large (Capuano et al, 2008).

#### The TM initiatives

TM initiatives seek to develop the talented employee’s capacity for flexibility and fit with dynamic strategic needs. This helps an organization identify and address new competitive situations (de Pablos and Lytras, 2008). The talented employee’s competencies are developed through work integrated learning, which considers a future learning needs, personal competencies, and work domain (Ley et al, 2008). Information regarding tasks performed in the past highlights an individual’s available competencies and identifies areas for future
development through critical skills gap analysis (Bersin, 2006; Marcis et al, 2008). The following TM initiatives promote competency development:

**Competency-based training:** Training solutions should be responsive to dynamic competitive conditions and aligned with competency requirements. High quality training programs help assess employee skills through rating; identify required competencies; develop skills, knowledge and attitudes; and improve performance (Abel, 2008). Effective competency-based training regards employees as active participants in the training process, emphasizes problem-solving and demonstration performance methods during on-the-job training, and needs to be performed in a positive, supportive learning environment. Such training solutions can range from single event training workshops to expansive training programs aimed at sustained cultural change (Debowski, 2006). As an example, Capuano et al (2008) describe an innovative approach to technology enhanced learning (TEL) that tightly integrates employee learning and business processes, through optimizing a knowledge worker’s learning with respect to business processes and optimizing business processes to take advantage of available competencies.

**Succession planning:** This involves preparing for the organization’s next senior team, developing a talent pool for internal recruitment by cross skilling employees, and/or ensuring the organization is future proofed with respect to skills availability (Hills, 2009). In the KM context, succession planning focuses on how the organization plans to replace key knowledge holders and how to ensure that high potential successors have been prepared to fill these key roles (Bersin, 2006; Debowski, 2006; Lengnick-Hall and Andrade, 2008). Succession planning that involves continually recruiting, training and promoting employees is not only necessary to prevent a brain drain of corporate knowledge, but is also important in identifying required competencies and communicating needed skills (Jones, 2008). TM needs to continue to train and develop high performers for potential new roles, identify their knowledge gaps, and implement initiatives to enhance their competencies and ensure their retention (Cairns, 2009). Hills (2009) suggest five strategies for effective succession planning: 1) aligning succession planning with business strategy; 2) assessing leadership potential based on the 3Cs of fit – competence, connection and culture; 3) involving talent in the succession planning process; 4) using a mix of experience, outside or executive coaching and formal learning experiences in talent development and; 5) drawing from a wider net of potential successors.

### 4.4 Preventing Knowledge Loss

**The KM Challenge**

Knowledge loss resulting from employee turnover - whether through competitor headhunting, redundancies, or retirements - exposes an organization to considerable risk (Brittain, 2007). It can significantly reduce operational effectiveness and efficiency until that knowledge is relearned (Schutz and Carpenter, 2008). Departing employees leave with more than just what they know; they also take with them critical knowledge about who they know. This relational capital is crucial for getting work done in knowledge intensive environments (Parise et al, 2006). Additionally, the departure of some employees causes more of a splash than others (Massingham, 2008). These employees often possess rare or difficult-to-imitate knowledge which make them important to the organization’s success. Strategies for preventing knowledge loss have become a critical organizational concern today principally due to the economic downturn and the resulting workforce layoffs, but also due to demographics which sees 60% of experienced US managers retiring by 2012 (ref). Hence, retaining those key knowledge holders who are of strategic value is of considerable importance. Yet, retaining key knowledge holders is difficult for a number of reasons. Firstly, a change in the
psychological contract between employees and employers is evident, with the new Generation Y workers typically demonstrating lower loyalty and changing organizations more frequently (Burke and Ng, 2006). Workers are now more likely to favor “boundary-less” careers based on self direction (Terjesen and Frey, 2008). Chambers et al (1998) found in a study of 50 senior executives that the average executive typically worked in five companies during his/her working life. This figure is likely to be even greater now. A second area of interest concerns employees exploiting their competencies to avail of more attractive opportunities at other firms. This is particularly evident with respect to retention of expatriates (Collings et al, 2007). International assignments are often seen as more beneficial in building an individual’s social capital, as opposed to the organization’s capital, and many employees leave their repatriating organizations within two years of return to the home country (Scullion et al, 2007).

The TM Initiatives

Much has been written in the TM literature on factors contributing to talent retention. Tymon et al (2010)’s research in India found that the key predictors of employee’s intention to leave are satisfaction with and pride in the organization and perception of the employer as being socially responsible. Further, hygiene factors (compensation, benefits, location) have a direct effect on career success, while career success and intrinsic rewards indirectly contribute to reducing talent loss. Intrinsic rewards affect employee work-life quality, organizational effectiveness and perception of career success, and through their positive impact on organizational satisfaction levels, they may improve talent retention. Other key factors include building trust and open communication channels into the employer-employee relationship (Frank and Taylor, 2004) and fostering employee engagement (Bhatnagar, 2007; Meisinger, 2006; Tarique and Schuler, 2010). The following TM initiatives are important in retaining key talent and preventing knowledge loss:

Reward and recognition programs: Failing to appropriately reward key knowledge holders results not only in them eventually leaving the firm but also absenteeism, disruptive office politics, disengagement, and poor productivity. Planning effective programs that include both monetary and non monetary incentives requires an understanding of the organization’s accumulated knowledge base and of what motivates talent to come to work, to be productive and develop expertise. Many factors influence motivation, for example an individual’s attitudes, beliefs, past experience, personality traits, personal preferences as well as external factors such as rewards, feedback, career expectations, job status and level of responsibility. Several reward and recognition models are adopted by organizations including traditional compensation packages, executive compensation, flexible compensation, perks, and informal and formal recognition (Debowski, 2006; Inskeep and Hall, 2008). For some employees, recognition of their knowledge activities may take the form of providing career development programs that match the individual’s career aspirations (Lazarova and Tarique, 2005).

Knowledge transfer mentoring: Mentoring promotes direct transfer of critical tacit work-related knowledge from an experienced and knowledgeable employee to a protégé and can increase an individual’s social capital through exposing him/her to the mentor’s social network (Lengnick-Hall and Andrade, 2008). It can enhance employee motivation and commitment through achieving a relational psychological contract between employer and employee (Hartmann et al, 2010). This is a more sophisticated concept than shadowing where the individual simply observes a more experienced employee in his/her daily work (Lengnick-Hall and Andrade, 2008). These mechanisms ensure that even if a key knowledge
worker leaves the organization, his/her knowledge is retained through its transfer to other employees.

5. Conclusions
KM has been traditionally viewed as a vehicle for change in other disciplines such as IT, strategic management, and HR. Indeed, the emerging discipline of TM is but the latest concept to attempt to leverage the lessons of KM to advance its own field of study. We have argued in this paper that for KM to mature into a respected academic discipline, it needs to move beyond merely being viewed as a vehicle for change. In this effort, this paper considers how the principles of TM can be effectively leveraged to support KM initiatives. We identify and describe four KM concerns which can be advanced through the application of TM principles. These are summarized in Table 1.

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Table 1 – TM initiatives addressing KM challenges

Organizations face many challenges in implementing an effective KM process. Given the value of tacit knowledge, identifying the high potential and top performing knowledge workers from the external market and from within the organization’s structure is not easy. Once acquired, knowledge worker availability is of little sustainable value unless their competencies are developed in a manner that ensures their flexibility and fit with dynamic strategic needs. Knowledge held by these workers and in organizational databases etc needs to be made available where and when it is needed; hence the importance of effective knowledge worker positioning in coordinating knowledge flows through for example building and maintaining collaborative personal networks. Finally, retaining the knowledge developed over time within the organization is of immense importance. Identifying these key KM challenges enabled us to highlight the TM initiatives which may help companies address their KM concerns.

This paper contributes to the advancement of the KM field by proposing an approach that focuses on those few knowledge workers who are deemed to be key talent. It is well established that organizational knowledge assets are critical to competitive success in dynamic business environments. The strategic value of knowledge embedded in individual know-how, actions and collective experiences and expertise suggests that effectively managing the top performing knowledge workers is necessary for enhancing organizational performance and competitiveness. It is therefore surprising that to date KM academics have not addressed in-depth how TM initiatives can help address KM challenges. We find in our review of the literature that there is a dearth of research with respect to how the principles of
TM can be leveraged to enhance the KM process. Yet, the drawbacks of integrating a TM perspective into knowledge intensive work environments must also be noted. An obvious concern relates to those not designated as key talent. These individuals may be left feeling their role is of little value to the organisation. Such resentments can lead to serious drops in productivity. Thus, practitioners are urged to proceed with caution when contemplation adopting the principles described in this paper.

While much has been written about these initiatives in the HR and TM literature, this paper fuses them with KM research in both a theoretical and practical manner that addresses real KM concerns. Our contribution therefore takes a further step in enhancing the currently sparse body of ‘smart talent management’ literature. Future research needs to empirically examine the impact of implementing these TM initiatives on the KM process.

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