



Book Review

S. Horner. (Ed.), *Talent Management in Hospitality and Tourism*, Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Oxford (2017). xiv + 318 pp., (Pbk.), £34.99 ISBN 978-1-910158-67-8

'Talent management' has been a buzz-word in organisations since the late 1990s, whether a relabelling of existing work practices and processes, or deployed as a truly new and different strategic people-agenda for forward-thinking sectors. Global firms pioneering these practices are typified by 'mainstream' or 'knowledge intensive' industries, for instance, GE, Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, and the originator of the 'war for talent', professional services firm McKinsey & Co. In academic publications, the topic is characteristically examined in general theoretical terms and associated as the preserve of large, multinationals in mainstream industries. That said, over the past 15-plus years there has been a growth in critical dialogue, research, and evaluation concerning talent management in hospitality and tourism: notably articles and special journal editions and books, including this contribution edited by Susan Horner.

Comprised of five parts, this book benefits from a range of perspectives by authors with academic and/or practitioner experience. These are labelled 'global', although in reality this means contributions from the UK predominantly with additions from India, Switzerland, USA and China. As such, it omits emerging cultural perspectives and practices, which is likely a reflection on the state of research, rather than oversight. In the preface, the changing competition in international hospitality and tourism is contextualised, including markets, consumers and nature of business itself. These factors force increased competition yet simultaneously necessitate reduced operating costs (including staffing) to optimise competitive returns. As a consequence the editor stresses the management of 'talent' as an organisational imperative: this is both the foundation of the business case for talent management as a concept, as well as the rationale for this book.

Part One (Chapters 1–3) offers an assortment of content, from defining the topic (Chapter 1), context and challenges (Chapter 2) and a personal critique of the education environment (Chapter 3). While somewhat separated, individually these chapters establish that talent management continues to be practiced in its constituent parts of sourcing, recruiting, developing, retaining, deploying, and engaging, versus being deemed greater than the sum of its parts. The point that talent management should be considered more than a continuous organisational process and embedded in culture is well made, although could be a stronger thread throughout the book. The opinion-piece (Chapter 3) is thought-provoking, yet might have been better positioned later in the book.

Focusing on personal career development, which offsets the more usual focus on organisations, the strength of Part Two lies in the diversity of topics. This enables educators and students to 'dip in' as required to practical aspects such as career journeys (Chapter 5), youth employment (Chapter 8), and professional bodies (Chapter 9), and more theoretically-grounded lenses such as 'trust' and mutual-

equivalence (Chapter 7) and work-based learning (Chapter 10). Arguably, in attempting to offer broad perspectives, at times some content is not given the space needed to expand further. A case in point is an important examination of the implications for talent depending on suggested 'leadership' styles (see Fig. 4.3, p.62). Here, Lashley posits the dominant practice in hospitality is often a 'directive' style with (untrained) idiosyncratic managers abdicating (management) responsibilities. This raises the 'leader vs manager' debate from leadership theory, although this is omitted it would be worthwhile to recognise the nuances of leadership language and key debates.

Part Three (Chapters 11 to 15) expands the agenda and delivers a deeper critique on issues around talent 'meanings' within the industry. In my view, this is the highlight of the book. Notably, Chapter 11 stimulates a debate surrounding the use of talent management in this low-paid service sector, characterised by marginalised employees and the use of peripheral workforce and where work-life balance is questionable. There is also a timely (for the UK at least) discussion related to interns and placements (Chapter 12). Chapter 14 challenges the Westernised view of talent management, and introduces a view of cultural, political and historical differences in Asian countries, although further research is needed to make any conclusive arguments.

The sole chapter in Part Four considers the Editor's view on the future of talent management. This is not just a summary of the previous chapters but a more thoughtful and considered section. Horner offers a simple model to highlight interrelationships between talent management in applied research, educational teaching, organisational needs/processes, and individual career/talent development. Ten predictions for talent management in the hospitality and tourism arena are set out, providing a particularly useful 'compass' for organisations, students and academics.

In Part Five, four case studies explore the application of talent management in practice. The inclusion of SMEs (The Rick Stein Group and L'Aubier) is significant as it recognises that too often the industry focus is directed at large, multinational hotels. While the latter are included (The Taj Hotel Group and Red Carnation Hotel Group), the authors recognise that such entities comprise a small percentage of the overall market. At different points in this book, contributors have acknowledged the changing nature of hospitality and tourism businesses and barriers to market entry. As such, SMEs and entrepreneurs as key sources of talent might have received greater consideration and attention.

Overall, this book's structure is straightforward and plainly written, with learning outcomes and relevant industry case evidence, aimed to stimulate different perspectives through 'questions and discussion points'. Most chapters end with activities for educational purposes. In the concluding section, the editor acknowledges that the hospitality and tourism sector is people intensive, diverse and complex, comprised of a range of organisation sizes and legal entities, combined with a mix of core and peripheral resources, across a variety of contract types: essentially this complexity is the business case for talent management for practitioners. At times, contributors include content that can be found elsewhere, e.g. the underlying nature of the industry, or the basics of

strategic HRM and talent management (Chapter 6). That said, the very nature of the industry requires a particular consideration of what ‘talent’ is and when/how it is needed, thus there is a purpose in echoing such notions in one publication and to demonstrate the relationship to, and influence on, hospitality and tourism.

Having been advanced nearly 20 years ago, talent management is not a new concept. That said, in the hospitality and tourism sectors, as talent management does not have universal meaning nor implementation, this edited book is a worthwhile and opportune collection of perspectives. Where the book has gaps is in the sector-specific empirical evidence to underpin the future evolution of the concept, both as a field of academic education and research, as well to develop future practice, a limitation the editor recognises. Further, Swarbrooke's personal reflection (Chapter 3) raises a challenge regarding academics without industry experience. Based on this reviewer's professional HR

background and ‘people’ research interests, there is equally a need for HR-subject educators to integrate their practitioner experience of talent programme design, development and implementation into teaching and learning, and/or initiate and advance empirical research contributions.

The end result of this edited book is a collective focus on talent management within the sector, which to-date has not been available as a compendium for students. While the value to practitioners might be queried, the book is highly relevant and is recommended for teaching purposes. Specifically, educating future hospitality and tourism resources is key for the strategic and operational management of talent of the future, on both a personal and professional level.

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