

The Jungle of Talent Journey: Complexity and Change in Employee Perceptions of Being Recognized as Talents

Why do organizations implement talent management programs? Usually, to motivate and retain their most valuable employees: those who possess rare and critical skills for organizational success. However, recent research has shown that the opposite results can occur: After recognition, some talents feel stressed, dissatisfied, and frustrated. Based on signaling theory, the current study examined how talent perceptions evolve over time and what factors cause the talent journey to be perceived as a positive or negative experience. The data was collected in winter 2022/23 and consists of 33 qualitative in-depth interviews with employees recognized as talents in an international industrial company headquartered in Switzerland. The results demonstrate that while talent recognition is generally perceived as a positive signal, the absence or ambiguity of further signals related to talent management has a long-term negative impact on talent attitudes and behaviour. Our findings suggest that organizations should plan the talent journey carefully, communicate it clearly, and aim at providing equal conditions for all talents. Left to chance, the talent experience is likely to result in disappointment, stress, or even the loss of the most valuable employees.