

# **TALENT FOR THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY?**

**A CASE STUDY OF RUSSIA AND THE SEARCH FOR  
KEY PEOPLE FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH**

**Research report, May 2017**



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## ABSTRACT

The transition from a locally planned economy to a global knowledge economy in Russia features several conflicts between the old and the new. At the center of Russian restructuring stands the young talented. Considering the significance of talent for economic growth it is important to explore how talent is understood and managed by different Russian types of organizations. A group of experts ( $N = 46$ ) were therefore selected to participate in the study representing government, business, and education. Data were gathered by means of semi-structured interviews on location in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, Russia. The study was descriptive in nature and a straightforward qualitative content analysis, as constituted by the categorization of data, was employed. Results showed that all stakeholders identified talent as both high-achieving and creative. They also recognized structural difficulties in implementing talent support. Also, different groups had different understandings of the nature and societal purpose of talent. This article is concluded with focusing issues, derived from the data analysis, important to consider when establishing talent-dependent organizations or businesses in current Russia.

**Keywords:** Russia, war for talent, talent support, knowledge economy, educational policy, Soviet legacy

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# INTRODUCTION

## RUSSIA AND HER TALENTS

The war for talent is on! The search and competition for individuals of extreme skills, original creativity, and considerable achievement, is on-going worldwide and is showing no tendency of diminishing (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, *et al.*, 1998; McDonnell, 2011; Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001). If anything, the search for talents—or key players—for the global knowledge economy is becoming increasingly more fierce for good reason. About 10 to 26 percent of productivity is likely to come from one to five percent of talented employees in any given organization (O’Boyle & Aguinis, 2012).

Russia is of particular interest in this development due to its transition from a planned economy to a market economy with explicit aims to develop a knowledge economy. This development is also taking place in parallel with a long tradition of recognizing and taking a considerable interest in talented individuals. While

recognized as a necessity for development it is historically, however, a grand tradition of some ambivalence.

On the one hand, talent support commencing already in tsarist Russia was also continued during the Soviet Era. Artistically talented children were sent to Saint Petersburg (Leningrad) and Moscow to attend prestigious specialized schools (Freeman, 2002). Vertical social mobility during the Soviet Era was unprecedented in history and was made possible by structural changes (e.g., Yanowitch & Fisher, 1974; Kosova, 2011). This new situation in Soviet society *increased* the possibilities for talented individuals from the lower strata of the Soviet society to develop and embark on successful careers. The need to support talent was indeed expressed officially. Official documents announced, for example, the necessity of 'identifying and carefully bringing up young talents' (Narodnoe obrazovanie v SSSR , 1974, p. 51). The specific reason for such talent support was to more or less train personnel for the growing military-industrial complex and to find young talents for its defense branch. Note that in the USSR about two-thirds of all research and all recognized patents produced in the Soviet Union at the time were directly related to national defense (Berdashkevich, 2000).

On the other hand, the Soviet Government, paradoxically, simultaneously expressed a considerable suspicion towards its

talents since there was always a risk of national assets 'going rogue' turning into dissidents. A few of these, with a global reputation for tremendous skill and talent, all forced to leave the country, were for example Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Andrey Sakharov, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Joseph Brodsky, and many others (see Horvath, 2005; Sosenko, 2013; Zhilin, 2011).

Yurkevich and Davidovich (2005) have suggested that talent support in a more Western and contemporary fashion was introduced in 1958, by the opening of the first special school in mathematics and physics in Moscow. Such special schools grew in numbers over time, particularly during the Perestroika Period under Mikhail Gorbachev prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. By the early 1990s there were 1500 regular schools in Moscow. About half of these were host to enrichment programs for particularly bright children (Freeman, 2002). Lately, however, in Post-Communist Russia, talent has again become a specific focus of interest to the Russian Government. While being a necessary focus for developing a knowledge economy, how this renewed interest is to be understood and implemented, and which role that the talented in modern Russia should have, is far from clear. This ambivalence is a potentially a problem to Russian organizations or businesses expanding their markets into Russia.

## **EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Russian economy has changed considerably since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It has transformed itself from a centrally planned and isolated economy to a more market based global economy. Russia's fortune lies in the energy industry, and is heavily dependent financially on this sector. Oil revenues are used to fund government policies and these have so far constituted the main source of economic growth. Between 1998 and 2008 the Russian gross domestic product doubled, wages more than tripled, and unemployment and poverty decreased by half (Gurieva, 2009). Currently, however, Russia is at a stage where further growth can only be achieved by knowledge-based industry. This has become more important than ever due to low oil prices contributing to a current Russian recession (Luhn, 2016). This is exactly the point made by both current President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev on many an occasion. *The Concept of Long-Term Socio-Economic Development*, prepared by the Russian government, emphasizes the need for a competitive research and development sector (Ministry of Economic Development, 2013), comparable to the European 2020 development plan with similar objectives (European Commission, 2010). One example of this new focus on knowledge-based development is the *Skolkovo Innovation Center*, near Moscow, initiated by the Russian government in 2009 and commissioned to promote intellectual capital as well as to

encourage the development of various innovative technologies. It is intended to be the Russian equivalent of Silicon Valley in California (e.g. Pakhomova, 2013).

In Russian society, however, there remains a weak link between the level of earnings and education doing little to motivate the younger generation to invest in education to the degree that is needed for economic growth. This disenchantment with education became especially noticeable during the 1990s causing a considerable domestic brain drain. Approximately 10% of the entire Russian student body withdrew from higher education, fully or partially, in favor of taking on jobs as taxi drivers, street traders, or even involve in criminal activities (Fan, Overland & Spagat, 1999; Kitaev, 1994). Other issues stifling the desired economic development being a reminder of the Soviet Union legacy, have been poor corporate governance, selective law enforcement, and widespread corruption (Ledeneva, 2006). Transparency International ranked Russia as number 119 (of 168) in 2015 suggesting that corruption is indeed a current problem at all levels of society. This has affected the perceived value of education also. 'Diplomas are for sale,' Nastassia Astrasheuskaya (2010) reported on behalf of Reuter's News Agency; 'bribes to the right people have become new shortcuts for young people chasing quick money in business and government jobs' (no page number).

These structural obstacles to continued economic development have not gone unnoticed by The Kremlin. As a result education reforms have been set into motion including a renewed effort to find and train talented individuals. In fact, the need to find young and talented Russians is now an officially stated priority. Dmitry Medvedev, current prime minister and former president of Russia, has not too long ago approved an education plan termed *Concept of a National System for Identifying and Developing Young Talents*. Included are key objectives such as implementing a national system for identifying talents, developing the professional skills of their teachers and mentors, providing quality educational content, and also introducing state-of-the-art teaching aids (President of Russia, 2012).

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND DEFINITIONS**

During the on-going efforts to reform the Russian education system different groups with vested interests in Russian talent seem to construe the notion of talent differently. While the lack of a consensual definition talent is a well-known and somewhat daunting problem to both business and its management (Dries, 2013), such differentiation has been explained as one of societal function rather than one concerned with the finer points of scientific theory (Persson, 2009, 2014). In other words, how talent is defined and understood tends to depend on which group in society has a vested interest in it. The motivation for supporting Russia talent is

therefore likely to vary with each group of stakeholders with an interest in supporting, educating, and utilizing talent in a knowledge economy. We have identified five such groups of stakeholders in Russia, namely business, education, research, government-affiliated organizations and non-governmental but often business-affiliated organizations (NGOs).

Hence, this case study intended to explore the differentiation of young talent (individuals perceived as talented 14 – 30 years of age) between different groups of stakeholders in contemporary Russia in the light of the economic transition from the old Soviet system and to the new globally integrated market-based economy. The more specific research objectives were a) how do stakeholders differ in their understanding of young talent, and b) how do these differences relate to societal change as influenced by the transition from one economic system and to another? Also, c) what conclusions may be at least tentatively drawn from these results for the benefit of Human Resources work in Russia or focused on Russia?

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from one economic system and to another? Also, c) what conclusions may be at least tentatively drawn from these results for the benefit of Human Resources work in Russia or focused on Russia?

# METHOD

To cull data from different groups of stakeholders interviews were deemed the most suitable method of data collection. We chose to interview experts suited for probing the diverse understanding of talent. Experts in this context are defined as individuals in high positions in charge of development and implementation, or in control of talent-related strategies, problem solving, and policies. Such individuals usually have privileged access to information about people within their remit as well as of the more important decision processes in their organizations. They also tend to have a considerable knowledge and insight difficult for anyone else to gain access to (Gogner, Littig, & Menz, 2005; Thomas, 1995).

Participants were purposively sampled. However, a few were selected by snowball sampling. Participants themselves proposed other experts whom they felt would be of interest to the study. Such suggestions were always reasonable and therefore accepted by the research team. All participants were nevertheless selected in

accordance with the following four criteria: 1) He or she must hold a high-level office in a stakeholder organization relevant to talent; 2) he or she must also have considerable knowledge of talent and human resources; and 3) she or he should preferably also be a networked individual involved in a task force or in various committees that are, in one way or another, focused on policy issues for young talent. Furthermore, 4) every participant must also have had at least five years of experience working with talented individuals in their respective organization.

In all, 46 experts fulfilled these criteria and were asked to participate. All consented verbally to participate and were interviewed between November 2011 and July 2012. Each interview was 45 to 60 minutes in duration and was performed in Russian by experienced interviewers on location in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. The interviews were recorded with the participants' permission. Each recording was transcribed verbatim immediately after each interview and transcripts were checked for possible errors. Importantly, the anonymity of each participant was guaranteed and has been stringently kept. No participant has been mentioned by name, gender, or age, nor has the organizations which they represented been named by any other means than by type and function. Participants represented the following types of organizations:

*Government affiliated organizations* (f = 7). These were politically initiated, administered, and institutionalized projects. Amongst these were public organizations aimed at working with innovations focusing on young talents (including private charities, foundations, and business associations). Part of this group of stakeholders was also labor market organizations such as recruitment agencies, and career centers oriented towards the talented and highly educated younger Russian generation.

*Business affiliated groups* (f = 4). Charities, foundations, and innovation centers; all non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were represented by this group.

*Business* (f = 16). Participating were also notable Russian companies and corporations, including government-run companies, as well as notable international companies aimed at the development of talent management.

*Education* (f = 10). These included universities whose aim it was to a) attract participants and winners of Russian science olympiads; b) to be involved in innovative, scientific, and enterprising activities, c) and also to stage science olympiads for students (e.g., Gordeeva, Osin, Kuzmenko, Leontev & Ryzhova; 2013; Ushakov, 2010).

*Researchers* (f = 7). Included in this group were individual researchers from research institutes and laboratories focusing specifically on the psychology and education of talent

## **INTERVIEW CONTENT**

Interviews were exploratory in nature and examined participants' experience relating to the support of young talent and its management. Interviews were semi-structured on the basis of the following five main topics prompted by Russian official policy documents outlining current education reforms (particularly Our New School Reform) as well as the more specific *Concept of a National System for Identifying and Developing Young Talents* (President of Russia, 2008, 2012; Russian Federation, 2010).

*Definitions and understandings.* Respondents were prompted to discuss their use of a term like talent and whether they used it in their daily work. If so, for what reason? The experts were also asked how they understood the term, and which criteria they considered were particularly important in being defined as talented.

*Young talent in action.* Respondents were also asked to outline activities in their daily work that included young talents. To what degree are they involved and how important is their contribution to the work that the experts did themselves?

*The need for talent in Russia.* In addition, participants' perceived need of young talent in Russia was focused. Who did they feel have the most to gain in supporting talented individuals?

*Means of talent support.* Knowledge and experience of the means and use of talent support methods were explored as well. While the Russian State has declared young talent a national resource, were the participants aware of any specific and consistent implementation of talent support? If so, could they describe this in detail? Did the different stakeholders feel that some means of support were more effective and successful than others? Were there perhaps ineffective methods also?

*Access and availability.* Questions on availability and access were raised. Which was the participants' position on supporting, for example, young but also economically disadvantaged talent? Did they perceive obstacles in supporting these? If so, what could be perhaps done to remove obstacles to promote such support?

The interview style was casual and allowed for flexibility. Respondents elaborated on given topics but were also encouraged to bring additional issues and more personal and spontaneous reflections into the conversation.

## **CONDITIONS FOR DATA COLLECTION**

During data collection it became clear that although we had included the currently most important stakeholder groups in Russia representatives of non-profit organizations, being more or less affiliated with the government, did not actually contribute original and first-hand data for later analysis. Rather than responding to

questions with personal insight and their own unique experience, these participants consistently and exclusively referred to official and readily available policy documents relating to education and talented youth. In our assessment, while government-affiliated participants were *high-risk* stakeholders every other type of participant was rather a *low-risk* stakeholder. That is, they were experts with a perceived lower risk of reproach for having spoken their own personal view not necessarily agreeing with stated official policy.

While perhaps not necessarily unique to Russia (see Grindle, 1996; O'Donnell, 1993), this type of behavior brings to surface some of the lingering problems of the Soviet Union legacy. Answering questions in accordance with official policy rather than by personal experience and conviction is somewhat typical of employees in Russian state-oriented organizations. Organizations tend to be deficient in terms of established routines valid for all employees. If employees on occasion do act independently, however, they appear to do so with no consideration of their official remit, sometimes becoming, as Bunich (1995) has put it, 'highly corrupt and acquiring a mafia-like aspect' (p. 139). It needs to be said, however, that this is not unique or exclusive to Russia. It is a problem in much of the former Soviet sphere of interest including also the newer member states of the European Union (Walker, 2011). For this reason, it is important to stress that institutionalized

projects, non-government organizations, charities, and foundations in Russia, initiated by business or political decree and engaged in young talent support, as a rule, often fail to implement their officially assigned function. In addition, there is little action towards resolving this problem. Instead, such organizations tend to occupy existing infrastructural voids in which inertia is more common than intentions to actively pursue given or agreed-upon tasks (e.g., Ryavec, 2003).

## **DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS AND CODING**

Since the objective of this study was descriptive in nature a straightforward qualitative content analysis, as constituted by the categorization of data, was employed. The analysis process was both inductive and deductive. The initial descriptive categories were arrived at inductively, whereas deriving meaning and understanding from the pattern of these categories required a certain deductive process drawing from the logic of the entire body of text as well as from external validation by comparing tentative findings with already published other research from several research fields and traditions (Persson, 2006; Strauss, 1987).

The body of data was first placed in spreadsheet columns where every column corresponded to each main research issue; that is, main questions and related follow-up questions: young talent in action; the need for talent in Russia; means of talent

support, access and availability, and so on. The data were extensive enough to allow for hierarchical levels of coding. One example of this is how talent was conceptualized by participants: A first level was constituted by personality attributes derived from published research, whereas a second level consisted of attributes of achievement as observed by the participants. Finally, a third level appeared more pragmatic and was therefore assumed to describe the application and usefulness of talent.

The content of each spreadsheet column was then analyzed in the light of research objectives. Data were coded in accordance with the emerging pattern. This process was performed twice and independently by each of the two Russian native-speaking research team members. Each transcript was reviewed separately. Discrepancies in coding between the two separate analyses were resolved to achieve a more reliable coding scheme valid for all data. Statements made by respondents that could be coded to fit into more than one category were as a rule incorporated into all suitable categories.

# RESULTS

In the following results will be presented in the same order as the main topics were brought to the attention of the participating experts.

## **DEFINITIONS AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF YOUNG TALENT**

The aggregation of expert definitions suggested a hierarchy of definition content. The first level was constituted by personality attributes derived from published research on giftedness and talent (e.g., Janos & Robinson, 1985). A second level consisted of attributes of achievement as observed by the participants themselves. Finally, the third level was more pragmatic and described the application and usefulness of talent in society.

The aggregated understanding across all participating stakeholder groups had three components: 1) Talent has certain individual and psychological characteristics; 2) talent means

achievements rising above those of most others, and 3) talented behavior suggests the use of these achievements for gain. While each of these three conceptual components represented how the different groups conceptualized talent, each group nevertheless envisioned different functions of talent in society and had different aims and logic by which to implement the Russian government directive to support young talent.

Every group recognized talent as being high-achieving and creative. However, government-oriented organizations understood such individuals as *talented performers* following orders, whereas business-oriented organizations rather viewed them as *talented producers* for greatest possible gain and profit. Education and research organizations, on the other hand, construed them idealistically as *highly skilled professionals* ready to serve society and in so doing also satisfying their own personal needs and wishes (see Figure 1 for a conceptual overview). These findings largely concur with Persson's (2014) postulated talent differentiation as characteristic of an emerging knowledge economy: that is talent understood as corporate leadership, corporate production, popular appeal, political vision, developed genetic potential or developed ability irrespective of genetic ability, all of whom are construed by different groups in society as either fitting into societal structures or generally lacking social fit because of individual characteristics too extreme for general acceptance.

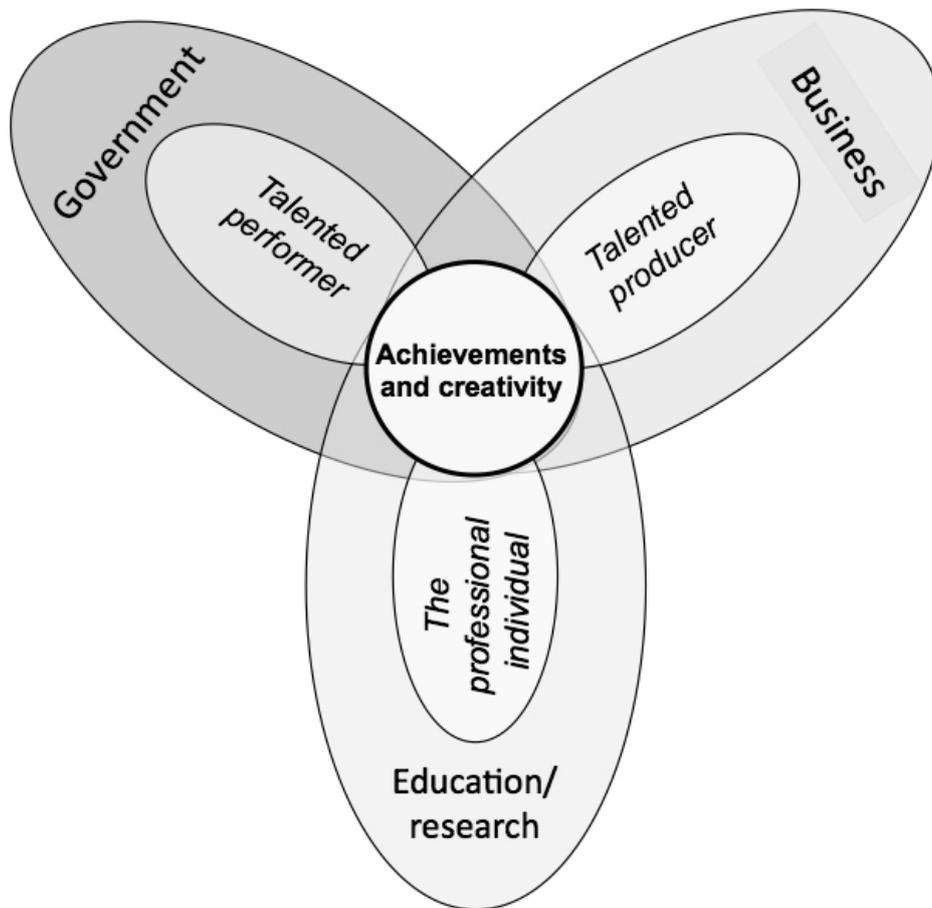


Figure 1. A graphical representation of the differential understanding of participating Russian stakeholder groups

## **TALENT IN ACTION**

In asking the participating experts what young talent actually does, or perhaps should do, a typical and often spontaneous response was this: 'As we started to discuss young talent, two words immediately sprang to mind: Olympiads and competitions'. In other words, to a majority of respondents, irrespective of stakeholder group, a talent is someone doing well in, or winning,

one or several of Russia's many types of competitions in a variety of subjects (see Ushakov, 2010). Olympiads and other similar events generally function as both identification and development of talent. Such events are financed and sponsored either by the Ministry of Education, by a business-affiliated foundation, or directly by business organizations.

Intensive training programs, such as summer and winter camps or individual training programs, were the most commonly mentioned activity initiated for talented youth. Also financial support by means of grants and stipend programs were common with all of the stakeholder groups with the exception of the researchers.

## **THE NEED FOR TALENT IN RUSSIA**

Entrepreneurial skills were mentioned as the most profitable—and the most needed type of talent for Russian society—by about half of all the participants. In arguing the need for supporting talent most experts understood talent as 'young innovation capacity'. Participants from several groups pointed to the new and developing knowledge economy and the fact that this is an economy based on the promise of innovation. For this reason talent has become essential and the demand for, according to participants, is increasing. These participants were also in agreement that talent constitutes the driving force behind IT-companies, governmental

organizations, as well as businesses. Particularly the participants from business and research regarded the science and research of talent as currently being much in demand. Several participants stressed Moscow and Saint Petersburg particularly as the primary hotspots for innovation and talent.

However, there is one notable exception to the experts foreseeing a relatively bright future for young talent in the Russian effort to develop a strong knowledge economy. One expert, representing education, pointed out that the need for talent is not obvious only to official Russian society, but there is also a need for talent in the criminal world. Such talent, the participant argued, would focus on fiscal practices making unnoticed tax evasion possible as well as on improving computer hacking practices. This participant was thus proposing that there exists a temptation for talents to choose a criminal career rather than a traditional and culturally acceptable, but probably less lucrative, career; an observation made also by other researchers (e.g., Pridemore, 2002; Volkov, 2002).

## **MEANS OF TALENT SUPPORT**

Russian businesses have initiated talent support, training, and the identification of young talent on their own without awaiting political initiatives and implementations. According to participants, this is done by making deals with suitable partners in the Russian

education system allowing what it has to offer to be customized for the specific needs of the market. Hence, initiatives such as these are taking place independently of Russian government policies and programs.

Olympiads as well as available intensive summer and winter courses in Russia tend to be financed by business and business-affiliated organizations. Businesses support a variety of different talent support projects. However, there seems to be no well-considered system by which to provide and implement such support. As described by the participants, while financial support does exist, it also constitutes a considerable haphazard patchwork of educational and financial initiatives.

## **ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY**

'For talented youth Russia is a high-risk country', commented one of the participants from the business group; 'they cannot find what they seek in this country'. Participants in other groups agreed to this and pointed out that there are currently not enough opportunities available for the young and talented. Technology-based enterprising, laboratories, and so on, are of particular interest to contemporary Russia, but all are also slow to develop. When participants spoke of academic talent brain drain was argued to be, more or less, a necessity. If young talents are to develop and reach their full potential they will have to leave Russia. Laboratories are

generally underfunded and talents will need to seek their fortune elsewhere. The main problem, according to participating experts, is the gap between available education, the needs of the market, and a lack of government consistency regarding how to pursue and implement talent support. The latter has thus far resulted mainly in formal decisions as well as in inventories of earned resources reported back to the government in lengthy written reports none of which have resulted in, or have been conducive to, practice and proper implementation.

More surprisingly, the experts also stressed a *decreasing* respect for the talented in the world of Russian business. As one participant phrased it: 'Better to work with highly motivated but non-talented individuals. They are safer and provide less of a problem when interacting with others'. Another representative of the business group further argued that 'success [in business] needs willpower and hard work *only*. IQ has limited impact.' These are paradoxical statements. In a world fighting a war for talents talent in Russia appears both celebrated *and* disapproved of. While this remains in line with Russian tradition historically—particularly considering the Soviet relationship to talent—it is a paradox nevertheless but one not unique to Russia or the former Soviet Union. A London City business manager has expressed the very same sentiment as a representative of the current London City business culture: '... These people are extremely difficult to

manage—they are easily bored and refuse to accept the authority of a boss just because he is the boss. This is why most companies, despite all their propaganda, actually do not want talented people’ (as quoted by Robertson & Abbey, 2003, p. 28).

Statements like these suggest a divide between talent as a theoretical and academic construct often relying heavily on IQ and a much more market-oriented and pragmatic understanding of talent emphasizing high achievement as something practical in terms of production ability only (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Persson, 2014). While this divide is not limited to Russian society it appears more critical in Russia due to the somewhat archaic Russian education system continuing to cater to the needs of the Soviet Union rather than to the needs of an emerging knowledge economy (Fan, Overland & Spagat, 1999).

## **EXPERT RECOMMENDATIONS**

In concluding the interviews the participating experts were asked what the solution is to resolve the difficulties that they have encountered in regard to talent and talent support. They suggested education flexibility and adaptability reflecting the need of the new economic climate. They also proposed career counseling, as well as an emphasis on application rather than theory in higher education. In addition, they wished for an increased orientation towards the needs of the market.

Russian school children rarely have access to career counseling. As one participant in the Business-affiliated group observed: 'Much in youth culture is based only on popular trends. These used to emphasize technology and physics [during the Soviet era] and created our space program. Nowadays emphasis rather ought to be on cutting edge information technology [but there is currently no incentive nor any interest for young talent to go in this direction]'

# GENERAL DISCUSSION

This study explored the Russian differentiation of young talent 14 – 30 years old in different groups in contemporary Russia with a vested interest in engaging and supporting talent, in the light of economic transition from the old Soviet system and to a more globally integrated market-based economy. The more specific research objectives were a) how do stakeholders differ in their understanding of young talent, and b) how do differences relate to societal change as influenced by the transition from one economic system and to another? And no less important, c) what conclusions could possibly be drawn from these results for the benefit of HR-work relating to Russia?

Results showed that all stakeholders recognized talent as high-achieving and creative. However, government and government-affiliated organizations understood such individuals

additionally as *talented performers* willing to follow orders, whereas business-oriented organizations preferred to view them as *talented producers* for the greatest possible gain and profit. Educational and research organizations, on the other hand, construed them as *highly skilled professionals* ready to serve society and in so doing also satisfying their own needs and wishes.

In Russia the war for talent to support and make possible a knowledge economy, as this research has shown, currently takes on additional dimensions. Apart from the struggle finding, attracting, and retaining talent there is also the ideological contention between Russian market forces and much of higher education and research institutions on how to support talent and which role talent should have in Russian society. Current political leadership has initiated much needed educational reforms, officially even prioritizing the identification and training of young talent. But there are obstacles on individual, organizational, institutional, and corporate levels in terms of inordinate amounts of bureaucracy, applications for funding, both personal and organizational, are complicated and difficult to obtain. Hence, the war for talent in Russia currently entails an additional war with what could perhaps most suitably be described as *bureaucratic inertia*.

While Russia has had a world-renowned tradition of catering to the highly able for a long time; establishing elite education both

in tsarist Russia as well as during the Soviet era (Freeman, 2002; Yurkevich & Davidovich, 2005), and more recently confirming this tradition by politically bringing it to the forefront of societal development by ratifying the *Concept of a National System for Identifying and Developing Young Talents* (President of Russia, 2008; 2012; Russian Federation, 2010), it would appear that, in spite of this, as suggested by this research, it has paradoxically never been more difficult to cater to young talent in Russia. As Grigorenko (2000) observed, Russian provision for the talented remains best described as 'a mosaic of traditional and innovative forms—an uneasy combination embedded in a context of pedagogical, financial, social, and political challenges' (p. 735).

Thus, in the light of our research, Human Resource departments of both businesses and organizations within Russia and international businesses and organizations intending to establish a branch in Russia will most likely need to thoroughly consider the following:

Talent in Russia has a relatively weak infrastructural support and 'brain drain' is not unlikely. The Brain Drain Propensity Index for Russia is 5.52 (where 1.0 is low and 10.0 is high). In comparison, the Index for the United States is 1.45 and for Venezuela 8.31 (Kapur & McHale, 2005). These figures should, however, be understood with some caution since they have not been updated

since they were published in 2005. An educated guess is, however, that due to the continued downward spiral of Russian economy, the urge of Russian talents to find their fortunes outside of Russia has increased.

Due to the legacy of the Soviet Union corruption, bureaucratic inertia and a certain degree of infrastructural anarchy are forces to be reckoned with.

One needs also consider the fact that while Russia has an admirable pool of talent current problems may well be that they are not necessarily prepared for the demands and skills of the global knowledge economy due to the lingering somewhat archaic education system (see Demmou & Wörgötter, 2015).

It may well also be an issue that since the very brightest sometimes have given up in trying to find their way in the societal system they could potentially take to more clandestine careers outside the of the system.

It seems to us, that under current Russian circumstances, personal networking initiated by the talented themselves, which was also suggested by the participants of this study, may well be one of the most important resources that current Russian society and its growing knowledge economy have at their disposal. It is an issue that certainly merits special attention (see Lonkila, 2011). For the HR staff member this means that if one talented individual is successfully hired he or she could also be the key to finding other

talents.

In conclusion, this exploratory study yields several suggestions for future research. The more exact nature and dynamics of good intentions falling so very short in Russia needs to be further explored with an intention of suggesting a plan of action to improve the situation by making talent support possible to implement despite of infrastructural difficulties.

The results of this study also have a bearing on any country seeking to implement a knowledge economy based on talent. If the world is to develop towards a knowledge economy, being the stated policy of for example the European Union (European Commission, 2010), then there needs to be a consensus on what is meant by talent as well as a shared vision of what such talent should be able to achieve. For politicians to view young talented individuals as controllable performers; for business and finance to view young talents as high-achieving producers, and for education to rather understand the gifted and talented as highly skilled, but self-determined professionals by choice and vocation, is a differentiated view that rings true in much of the Western World (Persson, 2014). How to reconcile the many interests in talent and the many claims to defining and using it, it seems to us, would be a *much* needed—and if successful—ground-breaking research effort in any country indeed.

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