



# Corporate Talent Detection and Development

Yves Richez



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## Corporate Talent Detection and Development



*Series Editor*  
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**WILEY**

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## Foreword

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“Absolute systems have always seduced  
souls who yearn for some ideal”

William JAMES

“No one culture constitutes the privileged place  
from which one can judge other cultures”

Basarab NICOLESCU

“[...] No etymology has the privilege  
of infallibility, thank God”

Marcel DÉTIENNE

“Heterotopias desiccate the subject, stop words on themselves,  
challenge, from the root, any possibility of grammar; they unravel  
myths and strike sterility at the lyricism of sentences”

Michel FOUCAULT

Important books are measured by the impact they have on the most intimate as well as the most “public” of the audiences who read them. They are revelators, inciters to change. As much and even more so than what they bring to their readers in terms of knowledge, they are worthy in that they raise questions to be faced and actions to be taken in their readers’ lifetimes and thoughts. These books, in fact, liberate their readers from desires buried beyond their usual horizons of expectation, marked by repugnance, recklessness or resignation. In short, these books triumph over us, by what is best in us.

Hence, I strongly recommend this book by Yves Richez to an audience that exceeds the expected and desired readership of managers and officials at all levels of companies, teams, schools, trades, administrations, cooperatives, groups, associations and communities of all kinds, old or new, towards a wider public that is less specified, but no less concerned. I recommend this book because it can break down barriers and bring together what is often separated in terms of theory and practice, that is, knowledge and know-how, techniques and ethics, reputable intellectual work and so-called manual tasks. It opens up internal spaces, as it invites everyone to de-compartmentalize their categories and transform them, in cooperation with others, contemporaries, beyond the hierarchies of the place and forced reverences of the moment.

In more direct terms, this book concerns us all insofar as we do not conceive of human life as, on the one hand, a simple succession of individual consumptions imposed by a simplistic material interest and, on the other hand, a succession of rules of command to be followed in the name of respect for the authority established. This caricature of classical “economic science” and old-fashioned management, a curious and mismatched couple, will not do, with each one of us touching little or nothing, mixing pain and delights, with the life of men in society, with education, to the planning of our time and space, to the benevolent and responsible organization of the world, to adventure as well, to art, in short to the pleasure of doing, conceiving and testing together, which is, we will agree, the very meaning of politics (politics being something else). This book speaks of politics, but in its own innovative and even overwhelming and segmental way, capable of the largest extension. Why is it capable of disrupting many lives globally?

The answer quickly appears to any bona fide reader. This book concerns the cultural data of our existences, which the author interrogates with a scholarly and applied curiosity, drawn from the best sources and rigorously tested. There is no naivety in this examination, neither is there any arrogance, nor enlightened charlatanism. A culture, if it is alive, is a collective experience to be constantly reinvented. The one that Yves Richez refers to is much more than that: asserted, examined, sifted through, that is, criticized, in the classical sense of the term, negative and positive, active and therefore vital. This culture, which is our culture, with a Greek–Latin origin and a Middle Eastern background, is in fact critical, in other words, prospective and self-controlled; this is what has distinguished it from all the others for a long time, especially since the time of the assumption of modernity (end of the Middle Ages, Renaissance), ensuring its planetary success.

For this culture is no less pervasive than others, even more so despite its critical aspect, thanks to the efficiency, no less brutal than elsewhere, which it has demonstrated over the centuries. We may have a tendency to identify it with “nature”, which made it able to decipher, analyze and submit to its theorizations and

experiments: to fulfill its projects, to control in short, and to fortify. As Francis Bacon said at the beginning of the 17th Century, knowledge is power. However, beyond the reflections on the limits that every sorcerer's apprentice encounters (expressed by the myth of Faust, which underlines the tragic face of the modern European spirit), we must meditate on the strong and simple words of Michel de Montaigne, stated a few years earlier, at the very dawn of the disbanding of this triumphant modernity: if custom is willingly regarded as a second nature, nature may very well just be a first custom. Indeed.

Three major characteristics, namely philosophy, democratic form and science, or rather, science and technology, that are in continuous development today, are the results of these cultural orientations that have been settled for millennia by means of practices, gestures, beliefs and devices in all areas, but no less fundamentally by the languages that carry them and think them, or if preferred, the plural "European language" that has promoted this slowly constituted cultural space. If it were limited to this, Yves Richez's book would still be part of a well-defined set that draws on the essentials in order to develop organizational effectiveness and the enlightened detection of appropriate talents for the various positions of intervention, responsibility and work in the social whole in an ever-changing world.

However, he does even better, and beyond that, because he sees further and he hopes for more. Simplifying the management of his routines and purging him of certain modes, antidotes as risky as they are ineffective, he takes the trouble to question "our" culture, "our" philosophy and "our" presuppositions, turning for this purpose to another possible human being historically developed without any reciprocal influence (it is, in all honesty, the only one), who has emerged in China and more generally in the Far East. In this manner, Yves Richez takes on the counterpart of the simplistic dogmas, summary slogans and low-cost advertising revenues based on individual wisdom that are so widely disseminated today. Let us be attentive to his way of proceeding, which he endeavors to characterize and found with honesty, with care and even with relentless determination, for in this case we cannot be too wary, too cautious or too precise.

Better observation, better speaking, better operation. This goes through, in a beneficial change of scenery, by a discipline intended to abide by our syntax and vocabulary, even before our uses, to what is invented step by step, page by page. A mixture of happy liberation movements and repeated efforts are essential to remain clear while striving for accuracy. If Yves Richez's work questions ontological or essentialist presuppositions, it is because he refuses to be in a position based on a substantial conception of the immutable "being", a Greek invention taken up by monotheisms, an entity that is both fixed and divided, half-immanent half-transcending and not one for the patient observation of natural processes in which humanity, without residue, is included. If he attacks psychologizing prejudices, it is because he has measured the inanity, and the harmfulness, of a detection of abilities

aimed at individualized “subjects”, able to bend men and things according to their “will” and, in the best of cases, their “genius”, in addition to not embracing flexibility, intelligence and patience processes likely to reveal, when they occur, potentially favorable situations. How can we ensure that resources that need to be appropriately updated are recognized and developed? That is what is at stake.

To take advantage of these patient investigations, we must read this explicit and ambitious book, which asks its readers to question themselves without hesitation and without laziness. We can see how he is ultimately reporting the discrepancies he sees, and which are therefore in no way different “natures”, and even less opposed once and for all, but possible modes of acting and human thought, the influence of languages and alphasyllabic writings (Phoenician, Greek, then our European languages). An extraordinary, extraordinarily efficient invention, particularly in mathematics and physics, whose limiting effects, no less remarkable, are methodically demonstrated in the sphere of knowledge and the practices that characterize living and social life.

Is this a new path? Yes, as long as it can be seriously experienced and shared. However, this is not a call for a total conversion, on the contrary, nor for magical exclusives that would have us burn what we love, and vice versa. We are no different from the Chinese. Just as they do, we change and invent, as well as make mistakes and errors. But that is not the essential part. We have explored, in reading this book, possible divergences from the depths of human time; within the same humanity, countless bridges are being built, indispensable because hieroglyphic-agglutinating systems manifest their limits as well as their qualities, of which we cannot claim to be blindly bragging. It is time, with the help of Yves Richez’s book, to put them in full light (which is now possible) and to make the best use of them with discernment, but without false compromise.

Thus, this work attempts to relate ancient Greek notions, such as Homer’s earlier Greek concepts, or in parallel manner, the *logos* invention in the 4th and 5th Centuries BC (discourse, reason), such as *metis* – where technical skills are combined with the clever flexibility of the merchant, the sailor, the soldier or the politician to concern any person who has to make decisions or orientate himself in the uncertainty of his life – with, for example, the Chinese notion of *che*, or the notion of “not acting”, misnamed because our language is not suitable to it (“making sure that nothing is done”), to be discovered through the pages: we leave this necessarily progressive discovery to the readers of this book. Yves Richez obtained the highest university degree, which is certainly insufficient to revolutionize thought, but very necessary to acquire his patents of seriousness and scholarship. He knows how to draw on recent studies, based on a renewed classification of practices and professions, of which the bibliography gives a glimpse, but also on the far-reaching philosophical work of François Julien,

philosopher and sinologist of international renown, who, far from being an unambiguous supporter of the tradition of Chinese thought, knows how to question and promote this world of thought with the precision and rational subtlety peculiar to our countries.

No more than his mentors, Yves Richez is neither brief nor expeditious. He is nothing, as has been said, of an Orvietan merchant or the fanatical prophet of a new religion. He is a dynamic and efficient businessman, who has proven himself in the field and never left. He is so much in love with the field that he never ceases to travel the world in search of all kinds of practices that he questions with passion, to study and test the principles that he sets out and the rules that he proposes in the world of management, which is his own and which he widens by the breadth of his vision. Denouncing the rigid and sclerotic notion of identities through work and empathy, he emphasizes the openness of the worlds in our global world, at an age when each component must at one time or another be tested and thought, in its multiple forms, as interacting and dialoguing. Against the too easy, erroneous opposition between, on the one hand, theoretical knowledge that is too easily accused of taking off from what is “real” and, on the other hand, supposedly atavistic and spontaneous practices, he knows how to rely on demanding de-categorizations in order to promote equally demanding strategies for the management of men and groups, in their greatest anthropological diversity.

Is it not the whole of politics that we were talking about at the beginning of this brief foreword? Probably, I guess. But it is a very significant vision of it, even more remarkably – in the renewed version that he offers us with arguments sifted through the sieve of thought and experience – sensitive to the rich complexity and fluidity of human and non-human life on our planet. A generous citizen of the world, tenacious laborer of the concrete, patient observer of nature and daring thinker of the management of human communities, Yves Richez raises a voice that, once heard, becomes unforgettable and engaging. Let us listen to him, let us follow in his footsteps. What he has to say to us, what he invites us to do with him or by his example can leave no one indifferent.

Pierre CHARTIER  
Emeritus professor at Paris-Diderot University



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## Acknowledgements

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Thanks to my family, this island of healing and exchange, for which the term “love”, that is, accepting the other without conditions, is observed and lived daily.

Finally, I thank Françoise for being “there”, which makes everything else possible.

Part 1

# Theory, Principles and Methods



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## Rethinking the Issue of “Talent Development”

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### 1.1. Crisis at stake: the crisis is that of thought. We’ve forgotten where we think from

#### 1.1.1. The forgetting of an “ability to think” attitude

Over the last two months, the human resources departments of two companies have been verbalizing a problem for which they do not know how to “get out” of or how to “think” about it. In both cases, this issue might have seemed trivial, as it was inserted into a broader discussion of talents and skills. However, if we look at the latter from a strategic point of view, we detect weak (but increasing) signs that allow us to draw a correlation and consequently a *trend*.

The first company – with more than 180,000 employees – finds itself stuck in its jobs “site” because of years of technical and declarative writing related to the organization’s professions. None of these professions, like all the companies that we know of in France, including those run by foreign parent companies, address the question of the *abilities* and *skills* (in the operative sense and not the “human qualities” sense) underlying competencies. Blocked by semantics rationalized by decades of concepts of “suitcase expressions” and (meaningful) words without (meaningless) observable principles, this company, like so many others, finds itself caught up in the meshes of its model, like a fisherman, falling then drowning in his own nets, unable to untangle himself. The HRD we met told us: “the repository is more focused on technical definitions than on capabilities [...]; the importance of semantics leads us to clarify this... But how? [...]; we are obligated to start over from scratch [...]”.

The second company – with 2,200 employees in the world (and more than 50 nationalities) – is radicalizing the subject. It does not want any more “market” concepts, exhausted by semantics that do not “mean” anything anymore and clutter the mind: “we don’t like the words of the market”, they say, “this requires us to reinvent talent”; so how can we “tackle the HR process without falling back on the tools that the “solutions” of the market offer?”

The corporate crisis – its problem (*problema*) – is neither economic, nor human, nor even linked to identity: it is a *thought* crisis. When we say *thought*, we imply cultural “thinking”, in other words, from *where* do we think about our daily lives? This crisis can manifest itself in an endemic inability to re-create and re-energize our language; this may be the reason why corporate operators “zap” concepts once they are exhausted by the colonization of inappropriate ideas. To put it another way, when a word can re-energize the company, a conquering intellectual interference unfolds and systematically colonizes its resources through a dictatorship of truth (*aletheia*). Six Sigma, lean management, leadership, coaching, manager-coach, agility, emotional intelligence, talents, high potential, mentoring, empathy (etc.), are just a few examples of systematic *occupation-conversion* by the ontological (science of being, *nous*) and rational (*logos-mathesis*) models.

NOTE.– We can note a form of similarity with the invasion of the Inuit by the southerners called *qallunaat* in the 1950s. In less than 50 years, a century-old people who have lived for thousands of years in a difficult, flexible and adaptive environment, speaking a syllabary language, found themselves “seduced” by a commercial, bureaucratic, linguistic and religious model.

In a work from 1836, misplaced by time, it is possible to read: “There comes a time when languages are no longer enriched, because the true richness of languages consists in providing thought with all the instruments it needs, and this need has limits [...]” [NOD 36]. By producing tools and milestones, the company’s language, and perhaps a few others, has become sedentary and consequently stopped enriching itself; additionally, as the same authors state: “It [the French Academy] left a large part to the fruitful lexicographer industry that grew with all the others, a large part to neologism and fantasy [...]”. It seems to us that the word “talent” has been widely explored by this fruitful lexicographic industry.

### 1.1.2. A background of thought focused on ontology and mathesis

The thought model of enterprise, but also of education, overwhelmed by this consummation of ideas, leads them to agony. It is not that the latter is "bad", but it is now *negative*, because it has been exhausted by decades of linguistic rationalization, abstract concepts and verbal marketing: the latest concepts are, for example, *agility* and *talent*. If "bad" refers to a moral judgment, "negative" refers to a situation. In terms of thinking about the company, its "talents" are negative because it creates a gap with the original intentions and, consequently, with the expected result. In both cases, we observe a common ground of understanding: success, development, performance, empowerment, finding the meaning of one's life, betterment, efficiency, innovation, creation, happiness, etc. The word *talent* thus found itself besieged by the referential of Being (ontology) and that of *agility* (efficiency). *Talent* and *potential* are sustained by a language of truth (*aletheia*), that is, a true discourse pronounced "by right and according to the ritual required" [FOU 71, p. 17]. Decorated with its initial base of agreement, they are *made to say* what makes "business" more convenient. We will come back to that later. This is how we sway the "right", under the pretext of a few professional-university legitimacies, in order to define it on the basis of "one's opinion", justifying it by "the latest" research in neurosciences, or by some ambiguous analogies. Thus, like the literacy of society in the Early Middle Ages overseen by the clergy (owners of knowledge oriented by the glory of God), the aim is to make the message of the Holy Scriptures (Talents, Intelligence, Potential, etc.) accessible to the illiterati.

He who masters the "knowledge" of words has power over those who do not. The case of the word "talent" or "potential" is similar to that of literacy for illiterates. This method of invasion has been tried and tested:

- enter a new word with potential;
- "fill it up" with old standards, old ideologies;
- define it according to a translated process, that is, by operating an analogy not related to the initial rule;
- write a book to legitimize the subject matter/opinion/model;
- replace the resource provided by the word with its own template and language that is "acceptable" to the reader;
- create new abstract words/concepts – through the use of neologisms – consolidating intellectual "occupation";
- train and certify operators to *lock* the market that the promise and potential of the "word" offers;
- control the "word" and its market by creating institutions based on power.

This colonizing process uses the Trojan Horse trick. At the height of the war/crisis (the problem), the conqueror proposes an apparently “peaceful” solution to the people who have been invaded; then he identifies the most telling “symbol” for the latter. He then infiltrates the “symbol” with his ideas – soldiers. Once the horse is in the city – in the company – he frees the conquering *ideas* and lets them spread through the city. He thus ensures a rapid conquest by conversion of the people in place. The initial word dissolved by the conquering ideas is now an empty shell.

The challenge – here the opportunity and not the risk – for the company is to reshape its resources by reinvesting its language; whoever knows how to name (by word or sign) what he observes can unambiguously communicate his idea, his project, his strategy, his vision. It is our intention to propose a resource from which operators of the company can work and make their own tools to think. If they have to acquire it from the outside, they will be able to look “inside” at what is in it.

We propose two parts for this. The first presents the theoretical and epistemological resource (study of knowledge), from which the second part (practice) can be used by professionals. Theoretically, we specify what field observation and experimentation suggest as useful knowledge. The theory differs from the concept, in that it is biodegradable, evolutionary and hypothetical (agreed to evolve or “die”). The concept, on the other hand, can be immutable. It most often refers to a general idea that synthesizes scattered notions. “Skill” is a concept, just as “gifted”, “talented” or “high potential” is. We specify two types of concepts, the *abstract concept* and the *operational concept*:

– the *abstract concept*, like an “object” of thought, is not intended to favor a concrete application, nor to understand an observable principle; it explains a “state” or “phenomenon” through the use of a sum of ideas. Its modality is explanatory (*explicare*), in other words, it poses knowledge on a situation: what to do, say, understand (intelligibility) and know. This model responds to the “what it is”, the “what”. The explanation places the risk of locking up the “reality” in a decorated signifier of said reality. This is what we observe in the field of *talents*, many abstract concepts using many words (superlatives, adverbs, qualifiers), but few favor a factual (and therefore scientific) observation of what is called “talent”;

– the (functional) *operational concept* is constructed from an explanation modality, that is, one which begins with a situation to make useful knowledge (*utilis*) visible and available. For example, let us take two operational concepts developed by François Jullien: *Les transformations silencieuses* [JUL 09d] and *La propension des choses* [JUL 92]. The latter, enriched by a tension between Chinese and Western thought, explains *modus operandi*, complex principles, without locking the reader in. Through the use of simple examples, precise (unambiguous) semantics, Jullien makes accessible what words can “show” to the mind. It is from

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