Approaching talent in the workplace – Practitioner definitions and strategic implications

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Infallsvinklar till talang i arbetslivet
– Praktikers definitioner och strategiska implikationer

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Abstract
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Design/methodology/approach – Qualitative study using one-on-one and group interviews in combination with participation observation.

Findings – Workplace talent definitions of practitioners seems to be influenced by talent outside the workplace. Individuals involved in strategic formulation has in addition criteria in line with strategic goals. Influence on the employee-organisation relationship is discussed.

Practical implications – Practitioner definitions in line with an exclusive approach may be a challenge to inclusive initiatives. This conceptualisation may be dependent on culture, which has implications for a global perspective. A dynamic talent label may influence retention due to the psychological contract.

Originality/value – This study analyses talent definitions of managers and practitioners in-depth, provides a multi-dimensional approach to talent management, integrates a psychological perspective while providing empirical research in a Swedish context.

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Paper type – Masters thesis
PREFACE
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1 INTRODUCTION

In the introductory chapter, a historical perspective on talent and talent management is presented as well as why this particular study is of use to the scientific field. The research questions as well as the case are presented.

1.1 Background

The War for Talent is a term made popular by McKinsey & Company in an internal article published nearly two decades ago and has ever since been quoted frequently in the research on talent management (e.g. Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin & Michaels, 1997; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Minbaeva & Collings, 2013). In an expanding market, and with an increasing value of human capital, companies compete in order to attract and retain promising individuals. Even though management of such individuals by no means was an entirely new concept, this sparked research in what today may be referred to as the field of talent management.

Early research into what eventually morphed into talent management may be traced back to a model proposed by Williamsson (1981), where employment relations are discussed, and its boundaries established. This suggests that employees’ skills and competencies are valuable to the organisation, and as explored in the resource-based view of the firm as propagated by Barney (1991) may be a source of human capital advantage. According to Barney, this is accomplished by developing valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable resources. What the resource-based view formalised was the value of resources not usually present on balance sheets, such as human capital, and its role in competitiveness. Further, Lepak and Snell (1999) constructed a matrix of employment relations similar to the one used by the Boston Consulting Groups describing investment strategy (cf. Boxall & Purcell, 2016). What may have been of interest to talent management scientists is the area denoting high value and high uniqueness of human capital, suggesting internal development and a focus on commitment (Lepak & Snell. 1999), attributes associated with talent (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013)

The meaning of talent is, however, contested (e.g. Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014; Tansley, 2011). There is no single definition of talent agreed upon by talent management researchers, and while exploring the subject different approaches may be distinguished. Broadly, as described by Meyers and van Woerkom (2014), talent may be seen as either stable or developable. Further, it may be characteristics an individual may possess (an object approach) or the individual itself (a subject approach; cf. Bolander Werr & Asplund, 2017; Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries & Gonzálen Cruz, 2013). Due to the importance of best fit,
a single definition may even be detrimental, as depending on an organisations definition of talent different approaches to talent management may be more or less suitable (cf. Dries. 2013; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014).

Talent management may broadly be divided into an inclusive or an exclusive approach (cf. Dries, 2013; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). An inclusive, often referred to as a strength-based, approach to talent management, seeks to highlight the strength of every employee and develop them accordingly (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). An exclusive approach to talent management, in contrary, differentiates the workforce by selecting specific individuals and provides additional opportunities for them (cf. Collings & Mellahi 2009; King, 2016: Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). A talent management program is the collection of practices used in the implementation of talent management (cf. Bolander et al., 2017: Gelens, Dries, Hofmans & Pepermans, 2013).

Today, as compared to two decades ago, the scientific field of talent management has evolved, several authors argue that there is a limited amount of empirical research (Dries, 2013; Festing & Schäfer, 2014; Thunnissen, Boselie & Fruyter, 2013). The current academic literature is to a large extent conceptual, and some would say that the field is disorganised (Lewis & Heckman. 2006) or even ill-designed (Cascio & Boudreau. 2016), There seems to be a need for a multi-dimensional approach to talent management, integrating more perspectives (cf. Dries, 2013; Rotolo et al., 2018; Thunnissen et al., 2013), and more studies considering the organisational and cultural context (Al Ariss, Cascio & Paauwe, 2014).

By conducting a case study of an organisation currently developing a cross functional talent program, this study aims to somewhat amend this lack of empirical research. With additional data obtained by studying a Swedish organisation (ca 17 000 employees on the location in question), prominent theoretical conceptualisations may be discussed. This is of interest because, in talent management, practice has to a large degree driven research (Cascio & Bodreau, 2016; Tansley, 2011), and the consideration of practitioners are thus of interest.

1.2 Problematising
According to Tansley (2011), the meaning of talent in everyday language suggest an innate ability that manifests itself as outstanding performance in a specific field. In the context of talent management, this may prove problematic if the definition of talent practitioners know from their everyday life does not align with the definition of talent as specified by the organisation (cf. Dries, 2013; Dries, Cotton, Bagdadli &
Ziebell de Oliviera, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). For example, if the organisation utilises an inclusive approach to talent management program and practitioners expect employees to excel in all aspects, employees in less-skilled jobs may be overlooked due to the incongruence in talent perception (cf. Tansley, 2011).

Some may differentiate talent management from strategic human resource management (SHRM) by the spending of resources on an exclusive group of employees (cf. Gelens et al., 2013; Iles, Preece & Chuai, 2010). In those cases, the identification and selection of these individuals likely requires an internally consistent definition of talent, considering the importance of accurate selection in exclusive programs (cf. Makram, Sparrow & Greasley, 2017; Mellahi & Collings, 2010; Minbaeva & Collings, 2013). Often formal selection methods are used such as generalised mental ability (GMA) tests and performance appraisals (Bolander et al., 2017). However, some organisations utilise an informal approach based on the practitioner’s subjective appraisal (cf. Bolander et al., 2017). Reasonably, an organisation lacking a consistent internal definition of talent may receive a suboptimal selection if a practitioner’s personal definition differs greatly from the organisation’s as well as the intended purpose of the talent management program (cf. Dries et al., 2014).

Depending on the purpose of the talent management program, workforce differentiation might be of strategic value (Gelens et al., 2013; Silzer & Dowell, 2010). Differentiating between employees may however be a sensitive matter, as human capital naturally consists of human beings who may react when treated differently than others, be it in a positive or negative way (cf. Swailes & Blackburn, 2016). Researchers has explored the use of the psychological contract in relation to talent management, in the context of talent retention (Holland & Scullion, 2019), motivation and competence development (Höglund, 2012; Swailes & Blackburn, 2016)). The individuals impression of a talent management program may influence its outcome (Gelens et al., 2013), and employees may have differing expectations of both their contribution and the organisations (Rousseau, 1990).

Furthermore, the resources spent by organisations on selected individuals are considerable, whether it is development investment, performance rewards or management attention (cf. King, 2016; Silzer & Dowell, 2010). There may be a possibility that this isn’t carefully thought out considering, according to Makram et al. (2017), managers and practitioner may have differing views regarding the nature of talent management. Reasonably, underlying assumptions regarding talent may influence the way an organisation formulate talent management programs. In a study published by Meyers et al. (2019), there was no link between managers definition
and strategy formulated, however they only studied senior HR managers (Meyers et al., 2019). It may be of interest to study a broader spectra of HR professionals, especially when the researcher has the opportunity to select key individuals in an organisation and is not reliant on e.g. snowball sampling. When designing a talent management program, the first consideration is how it would increase the competitive advantage of the organisation (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Therefore, it is of interest to observe the key decision makers as well as key practitioners, and how they deal with these underlying assumptions in practice.

1.3 Problem formulation
Talent as used in everyday life does not per definition equate talent as sought after in talent management (cf. Dries et al., 2014; Tansley, 2011) and as consequence, the approach to talent management in organisations may according to the research sometimes be ill-advised (cf. Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). There have been wide attempts to conceptualise talent management (e.g. Festing & Schäfer, 2014; Gelens et al., 2013; Tarique & Schuler, 2010), integrate different theoretical approaches (e.g. Collings, 2014; Holland & Scullion. 2019; Rotolo et al., 2018) and present strategic approaches (e.g. Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006) at the expense of empirical research (cf. Thunnissen et al., 2013). There may be a link between HR-professionals talent definitions and the approach to talent management by the organisations, however this may be due to measurements previously used (cf. Dries et al., 2014; Meyers et al., 2019). Furthermore, depending on this approach the employee-organisation relationship may be affected due to differing expectations (e.g. King, 2016; Swailes & Blackburn, 2016).

1.4 Purpose and research questions
To study HR practitioners’ including managers’ subjective definitions of talent, and its influence if any on talent management strategy in a corporation. The implications will be discussed in relation to the employee-organisation relationship. Two interrelated research questions are constructed
1. How do the HR professionals in this organisation define talent in the workplace?
2. How is the talent utilised in accordance with firm strategy, and how may this influence the employee-organisation relationship?

1.5 The case
The subject organisation is a large multinational corporation with employees all over the globe numbering 52,000. The corporation is involved in the manufacturing of vehicles and development of transportation solutions, with customers worldwide. In
addition, the corporation is owned by a German manufacturing company. There is a regional centre in Sweden, where 17,000 people are employed. The corporation has several distinctive business areas in this location, which to some extent are decentralised. Some functions, however, aren’t. One of these is the recruitment centre, which is an opt in feature for the business areas albeit heavily used. During the spring of 2019 the corporation begun the expansion of the recruitment centre to include a talent development function, which in broad terms was to manage a cross-functional talent pool shared between the business areas as well as coordinate the existing talent programs.
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the following chapter, the theoretical framework is presented. In order to integrate conceptualisations of talent and talent management presented in relevant contemporary literature, the framework is structured in a way to provide understanding of the integral parts. Using these parts, an integrative discussion was made possible. In the first subsection, differing ways to define talent is presented concluding with previous research on definitions by practicing HR-managers and a framework for talent definitions. In the second subsection, practices associated with talent management and different approaches to talent management as well as the employee-organisation relationship and its relation to talent management are laid out. The third subsection is a summary of the above.

2.1 Defining talent

Defining talent has proven to be a challenging task for researchers. When conducting studies, it is not uncommon for researchers to, intentionally or not, avoid defining it considering the multiple avenues to approach the subject (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Furthermore, there are tensions inherent in talent (Dries, 2013), with perhaps the most defining one is to differentiate the workforce or not (cf. Al Ariss et al., 2014; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013). This exclusive respectively inclusive approach may be related to an organisations definition of talent, e.g. a focus on characteristics may lend itself to knowledge or competence management whereas one concerned with individuals may focus on succession planning and career management (Dries, 2013). These two approaches may be subdivided into an object and a subject approach (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013) In the former, talent is one or more characteristic displayed by an individual. These subdivisions are not by definition standalone nor polarised, and may exist on spectrums (Bolander et al., 2017), whereas in a subjective approach talent is the people. This distinction, while difficult to discern in practice, does carry implications for strategic approach to talent management (Dries, 2013). Combinations makes up what may be operationalised as talent (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013)

2.1.1 Object approach

Talent from an objective approach may be subdivided into a natural innate ability, mastery, commitment and fit (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013).

When talent is a natural innate ability it is by definition something that one cannot learn, thus it is unmanageable (Davies & Davies, 2010). It may however instead of
managed be enabled, where talent management instead provides the correct context for the talent to flourish (cf. Bolander et al., 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Talent as mastery is a function of experience and effort, where the individual measurably and consistently performs in a superior way to peers (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Further, it is differentiated from competence by its requirement of superior performance and talent as such is measured in past accomplishments. In essence, without past performances the individual may be gifted but is not talented. Defining talent as commitment refers to the use of commitment to either the individuals own work or to its organisation. On one hand, talent is intrinsic and takes the shape of a focus to start and see through projects others may not attempt. On the other, it may refer to an individual who invests more energy to the success of the organisation and may be reluctant to leave: one who’s goals are more aligned with the organisations compared to peers. Talent as fit is related to the context in which the individual operates, hence talent is not always fully translatable to other settings. An individual may be expected to perform either above or below his or her potential depending on the immediate environment, the leadership of superiors and team members involved. Talent may thus be defined in accordance with the culture, environment and type of work of the organisation in question.

2.1.2 Subject approach
Using a subject approach, talents may be understood as all members of an organisation where each have their own strengths, or as an elite group of individuals (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Differentiating between talent management, in accordance with the former, and strategic human resource management is difficult (cf. Iles et al., 2010). In some cases, it refers to the application of regular HR-practices, albeit faster. In a knowledge-based economy, the employees are what creates value in an organisation and an inclusive approach seeks to identify each employee's natural talent (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). To identify an individual’s strength is sometimes referred to as a strength-based approach. In some business models, this may be a solid approach to talent management as the equal treatment of every employee may promote a motivating culture enabling higher performance across the board. In addition, the drop in morale that may be related to talent management when a larger proportion of resources is concentrated to fewer individuals is avoided.

When talent doesn’t refer to an inclusive approach, an exclusive, differentiated, group is selected (Gallardo-Gallardo et a., 2013). This seems to be the most common type of talent management as discussed in the literature (e.g. Collings & Mellahi; 2009; Dries, 2013; Silzer & Dowell, 2010). The organisation can maximise return on investment by focusing resources on the individuals best equipped to utilise them,
and as such acts as a multiplier (Silzer and Dowell, 2010). The exclusive group may be chosen based on their high performance, or their high potential (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). A high-performance individual demonstrates exceptional ability and achievement in either a specialised technical area, a specific competency or on a more general area (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). These individuals are expected to be exceptional players and perform better as compared to peers (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013: Minbaeva & Collings, 2013). A high potential individual implies probable and quicker growth as compared to peers, that she or he can become more than what she or he is today and as such a possibility to reach a future specified goal (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013). Further, they demonstrate different needs, motivations and behaviours. In practice, a high potential label is often given based on past performance.

In theory, there is no set definition of talent, and different combinations may be used (cf. Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo, 2013). However, in practice one definition may lean towards specific sets of practices. Dries (2013) suggest that an exclusive approach to talent will coincide with a belief that talent is both innate and transferable, and talent management concerns itself with taking care of individuals. In contrast, if talent is mastery then talent management may include knowledge management. Implicit beliefs of the operating manager regarding the malleability of talent may however have an impact on the assessment of talent (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). It follows that it is imperative for the organisation to explicitly define if they want to approach talent as something to identify or develop in order to recruit or develop the most suitable individuals to or in their talent management program.

### 2.1.3 HR-practitioner definitions

The search for previous research into how talent is defined by HR-professionals has yielded few results. There are however some who broach the subject (e.g. Dries et al., 2014; Meyers et al., 2019). According to Dries et al. (2014), there are universal associations with talent across multiple cultures namely ability, skills, knowledge and potential. Furthermore, there are regional associations in the clusters measured. In the Anglo cluster (e.g. England and USA), these are performance, high potential, exceptionality and being a resource to the organisation. In the Germanic cluster (e.g. Germany and The Netherlands), these were innate abilities which lead to excellence as well as passion. There were little cultural differences in considerations of the developmental potential of talent, which on average was considered to be possible for over half of the population. Moreover, in those clusters talent in an organisation was considered to be associated heavily with excellence and exceptional performance.
Meyers et al. (2019) recently published a study which found significant associations between HR-managers talent definitions and their perceptions of organisational talent management. A manager who, for example held talent definitions coinciding with an exclusive approach were more likely to indicate that their organisation practices exclusive talent management. This implies that either a HR manager influences the HR practices of the organisation, or that the HR manager based on their perception interprets the actual organisation practice in line with their own belief. Reasonably, the latter may have implications for practitioners in an organisation lower in the hierarchy as compared to HR managers. While this study found no relation between talent definitions of senior HR manager and strategic formulation, this may be due to a forced choice measurement scale, and further investigations may be of use.

2.1.4 Talent framework
In organisations, a framework presented in Bolander et al. (2017) may be used to identify talent definitions. In accordance with Bolander et al., different talent practices may be placed on a continuum and they imply how an organisation apply talent management. Bolander et al., (2017) identify these as subject or object, inclusive or exclusive, innate or acquired, input or output and, lastly, contextual or stable. This is illustrated in the figure below.

![Talent definition model](image)

*Figure 1. Talent definition model (inspired by the authors interpretation of Bolander et al., 2017)*

Figure 1 illustrates that talent in an organisation may be compromised of different aspects, each aspect a spectrum (Bolander et al., 2017). This figure reasonably assumes an underlying intention in each aspect, which is no guarantee considering
the differing conceptualisations of talent individuals may have (cf. Dries et al., 2013; Meyers et al., 2013)

2.2 Managing talent
Naturally, with the wide selection of definitions used for talent, there are several definitions of talent management. These are the guidelines put forth by Silzer and Dowell (2010), who define talent management as the following:

Talent management is an integrated set of processes, programs, and cultural norms in an organization designed and implemented to attract, develop, deploy, and retain talent to achieve strategic objectives and meet future business needs (Silzer & Dowell, 2010, p. 18).

However, Iles et al. (2010) identify three strands of thought regarding the strategy of talent management. The first is that talent management simply is strategic human resource management, rebranded. Thus, this adds little to the understanding of how to manage the talents. The second is the use of strategic human resource practices, albeit on a smaller segment of the workforce: those identified as talents. The main focus is the attraction and retention of talents. The third is organisationally focused competence development, e.g. succession planning, talent continuity and leadership development. The development of successors, retaining competence in the organisation and managing the flow of talent through the organisation. In essence talent pipelines instead of talent pools

Depending on which strand of thought the organisation is interested in, different combinations of talent definitions may be used. It lies in the interest of the organisation to on a strategic level match them and develop a suitable talent management program (cf. Dries, 2013; Silzer & Dowell, 2010), especially if talent definition of a practitioner as compared to a manager also may interpret strategy in accordance with own belief (cf. Meyers et al., 2019).

2.2.1 Talent management practices
The framework proposed by Bolander et al. (2017) integrates five practices of talent management discussed in the literature. These practices represent different dimensions, and are as following: recruitment, talent identification, talent development, career management and succession planning and retention management.

The first practice being recruitment, it is defined as the activities an organisation uses to identify and hire external applicants (Bolander et al., 2017; Meyers, van Woerkom & Dries, 2013). In talent management, it may vary how high the
organisations reliance is on external applicants. In context, a highly reliant organisation recruits talent externally for positions at all levels, whereas a low reliance organisation may elect to develop employees from entry level positions (cf. Collings & Mellahi, 2009). These positions may either be tailored specifically to talents, or they may be regular positions (Bolander et al., 2017). In addition, the selection methods may either be formal or informal. Talent is a clearly defined concept with high methodological standards or it may be based on personal judgement, respectively. In the former, the assessor strives for objectivity using validated tools, and in the latter a holistic perspective.

The second practice as proposed by Bolander et al. (2017), talent identification, revolves around the finding of talent amongst the current employees of the organisation (Bolander et al., 2017; Meyers et al., 2013). Performance reviews may be carried out in the organisation in order to identify potential talent pool members, either with a strength based or exclusive approach also utilizing formal selection methods (Bolander et al., 2017). If not, an organisation may instead rely on succession planning or informal identification of talent. Furthermore, depending on the approach to talent, this process may be based on input or output: what does the employee bring such as motivation and fit, and what have the employee accomplished, respectively.

The third practice talent development, according to Bolander et al. (2017), regards activities to nurture talent. These may be either mainly program or experience based, and as such either take the shape of formal learning models (cf. Dries, 2013) or through job activities the like of challenging assignments. Moreover, the development opportunities of talents may be either inclusive or exclusive where all employees take part, or an exclusive group chosen by admission, respectively (Bolander et al., 2017). In addition, the organisation and existence of talent pools are considered, where some corporations encourage them to network together by events or joint programs.

The fourth practice, career management and succession planning, seeks the facilitation of talented employees into the right jobs (Bolander, et al., 2017). In essence, this concerns the utilisation of an organisation’s talents in an optimal way. Regarding career management, this may be either organisationally or employee driven. In the former, the needs of the organisation are prioritised, and the career practices are focused on upward mobility. In the latter, the careers are self-managed by employees themselves, and focused on their needs. As such, self-managed careers tend to be more boundaryless. Careers may also be more or less clear. A clear career path may be drawn up by the organisation, while a loosely-defined one to a higher
degree may allow the advancement in different ways adjusted by available talents and jobs (Bolander et al., 2017). Advancement may also be either vertical, as is tradition, or horizontal. In this case, a vertical advancement may also entail the development of skills within the same role. Lastly, it is of concern how the employee is matched to the right job, whether it is through regular reviews of talent capabilities and potential, or through pre-defined succession planning.

The fifth and final practice is retention management (Bolander et al., 2017). The organisation may to differing degrees create a strong employer brand and differentiate themselves from competing organisation. This may be done through an employee value proposition, which may appeal to talents and promote the organisation in question. Moreover, there are different specific measures an organisation may use to promote loyalty amongst its employees.

### 2.2.2 Strategic perspective on talent management

As compared to the definition of talent management as presented earlier by Silzer and Dowell (2010), strategic talent management as a field may need to further differentiate itself from SHRM (cf. Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Schreuder and Noorman (2018) claim the main purpose of strategic talent management is to identify the most impactful capabilities and positions, and fill them with top talent, in essence driven by organisational demand and exclusivity as compared to driven by available supply and inclusivity, which is supported in part by Minbaeva and Collings (2013). There may be a too large focus on qualifications for a job, instead of the output based on differential performance. Collings and Mellahi (2009) define strategic talent management as the following:

(…) activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organisations sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organisation (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 304).

The premise is based on the identification of important positions within the company, as compared to talented individuals, which reasonably positions strategic talent management as something more than a collection of human resource management practices (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013). Furthermore, it is of importance that these disproportionately influential positions, according to Collings & Mellahi (2009), are filled with high performance or high potential individuals. This, they suggest, may be accomplished by a differentiated human resource architecture as presented below.
Figure 2. A differentiated human resource architecture (adapted and reworked by the author from Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 306)

Figure 2 illustrates an exclusive approach to talent management and how a subject approach to talent (cf. Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013), a differentiated human resource architecture and accompanying workforce differentiation (cf. Bolander et al., 2017; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014) may promote rare and to the organisation valuable individuals which may constitute human capital advantage (cf. Barney, 1991). According to Dries et al. (2014), an organisation does not per se have to align their definitions of talent with individuals’ approach to talent management, it may be of use considering the practices in use by the organisation (cf. Bolander et al., 2017; Dries, 2013). The basis for allocation of organisational resources to talents instead of e.g. marketing or technological development is likely dictated according to strategic needs (cf. Lewis & Heckman, 2006), reasonably in order to create organisational process advantage. The role of a human resource function may be to sort through the overload of data through frameworks and concise explanations to decisionmakers (cf. Minbaeva & Collings, 2014; Vaiman, Scullion & Collings, 2012). Not unlike marketing and finance, by supporting decision makers HR may be able to facilitate informed decision making (Vaiman et al., 2012).

Guthridge, Lawson and Komm (2008), based on the response from more than 1300 executives worldwide, identified several barriers for a global talent management program. While this thesis does not have a global perspective (e.g. challenges and
opportunities as presented by Schuler, Jackson & Tariq, 2011), these hurdles also exists for non-global organisations (cf. Guthridge et al., 2008). Time spent by senior managers on talent management is lacking, perhaps preferring more pressing matter such as finance or market share. Furthermore, the organisational structures may impede the collaboration and sharing of resources across boundaries. In addition, there may be a lack of involvement in employee careers by line and middle managers. Managers may be unwilling or uncomfortable to explicitly acknowledge performance differences in employees. There may be a disconnect in managers and talent management strategy, where low involvement in strategic formulation leads to a limited sense of ownership and understanding of the benefits of talent management practices. Moreover, HR may lack competence, or the respect of decision makers, and implementation of talent management policies may as a result be lacking. Lastly, even though managers may know what to do, they may not be able to actualise this in practice.

2.2.3 Employee-organisation relationship
While not all investments in characteristics associated with talent are proven to be equally effective, talent management has an impact on employee commitment and contribution as well as motivation (cf. Höglund, 2012). Moreover, individuals identified as talented and told about it were more likely to perform higher, support strategic priorities and identify with the company than those not knowing the organisation considered them talented (Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Mäkelä, Smale & Sumelius, 2013). In comparison, individuals not in a talent pool reported feelings of lower support from the organisation, unfairness and had lower expectations of interest from the organisation (Swales & Blackburn, 2016).

With an exclusive talent management program, workforce differentiation is unavoidable: its very foundation rests on the assumption that disproportionate investments in a smaller segment of the workforce will yield higher results (cf. Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Swales & Blackburn, 2016). The organisation might want to consider if the higher performance of the talents outweighs the negative factors this may entail for the rest of the workforce (Swales & Blackburn, 2016) as compared to an inclusive approach where resources are distributed equally (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Talent programmes may however not be a cause for negative factors, as much as a cause for positive ones (cf. Björkman et al., 2013; Höglund, 2012; Swales & Blackburn, 2016). In essence, employees not participating in a talent program does not perform worse, employees participating does however perform better (cf. Swales & Blackburn, 2016), although this is not entirely certain and may depend on the individual as well as approach to talent management in the organisation (Ehrnrooth, Björkman, Mäkelä, Smale, Sumelius &
When talent is a dynamic label, employees are shown to become motivated and are compelled to develop skills desired by the organisation (Björkman et al., 2013; Höglund, 2012). This may, however, in some cases create disenchantment when employees previously considered talents no longer are (Swailies & Blackburn, 2016). If these talents are considered high performing and potential, disappointing them may be cause for greater alarm as it may have disproportionate consequences.

The psychological contract is, according to Rousseau (in Holland & Scullion, 2019, p. 8), “individual beliefs shaped by the organisation, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organisations”. The employee-organisation relationship evolves when seen as long term, where management act as agents for the organisation (Holland & Scullion, 2019). It starts out as stated in a legal contract, with terms, conditions and compensation etcetera, but over time the social and emotional aspect are more pronounced. The employee’s perception of what the psychological contract entails is influenced by perceived promises and rewards, none of which may be explicit (Rousseau, 1990). For example, when two parties can predict what each other will do in an interaction (both by inference and observation of past behaviour), a contract is formed. These psychological contracts are the individual’s belief of what the organisation is obliged to do when it is fulfilled. In an organisational setting, the psychological contract fills the empty space and assumptions not specified in a legal contract (Holland & Scullion, 2019). Moreover, these obligations may not appear the same to both the employee and organisation as both may hold differing expectations and the psychological contract lie in the eye of the beholder (cf. Rousseau, 1990).

There are two aspects of contracts, each on one end of a spectrum: transactional and relational (Rousseau, 1990). These contracts are less or more based on a long-term relationship, respectively, where the former is usually found more in corporations with short-term employment and the latter in long-term. For example, an organisation with short-term engagement may want to compensate employees generously, with the expectation that they may be let go intermittent. Further, an organisation with long-term engagement may want to provide a safe employment, with the expectation that employees are loyal. If this exchange isn’t perceived to be balanced, either side may adjust their contribution (cf. King, 2016). King (2016) argues that today, the talent label implies a promise from the organisation without it being explicit. In a short-term perspective, this may facilitate positive behaviour. Naturally, in a long-term perspective this may be cause for alarm should the employees expectations of promise not be fulfilled as this would be perceived as a breach in the psychological contract (cf. Kings, 2016).
2.3 Summary

In summary, there is a multitude of ways for a practitioner to define talent (cf. Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). While these definitions may be difficult to discern in practice, there are implications for practice (Dries, 2013). Different definitions align more or less well with the inclusive and exclusive approach to talent management, respectively.

As evident in this chapter, practitioners’ definitions of talent may vary (e.g. Dries, 2013; Dries et al., 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). There is some doubt regarding the link between managers definition and talent management strategy, as no such link was found in a study with a similar research question (cf. Meyers et al., 2019). This study however attempts to study this in a different cultural setting and incorporating a broader spectra of HR practitioners. Moreover, it is not unreasonable to assume that the link between managers talent definitions and their interpretations of organisational practice may extend to practitioners lower in the hierarchy. It may be of interest to study these concepts in a Swedish setting, as compared to the previously studied German ones, considering how talent definitions according to Dries et al. (2014) may vary depending on cultural context.

Moreover, while some practices are linked to talent management (cf. Bolander et al., 2017), some are more relevant depending on which talent definition the organisation utilises (Dries, 2013). Considering how practices are related to the inclusive or exclusive approach to talent management (e.g. talent identification leans to a more exclusive approach; cf. Bolander et al., 2017), it may be of interest to note how implementation and strategy is aligned in the corporation e.g. should a structured career management be the goal, is important positions identified (cf. Minbaeva & Collings, 2013). The literature seems to be dominated by the exclusive approach (e.g. Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Minbaeva & Collings, 2013; Silzer & Dowell, 2010), which reflects practice to some degree, but not entirely.

Furthermore, as a talent label has an implied promise (King, 2016), it is relevant to investigate what the organisations intends to communicate to talent program members should an exclusive approach respectively inclusive approach be used. Some may claim there are only benefits to an exclusive approach, as this may boost e.g. motivation (cf. Björkman et al., 2013; Höglund 2012; Swailes & Blackburn, 2016). One study published later claim this may vary between individuals and is no certainty (Ehrnroot et al., 2018). Furthermore, what is expected of the corporation by the employees (cf. Rousseau, 1990) may have implications for strategic goals (e.g. talent retention; cf. Bolander et al., 2017).
3 METHOD

In the following section the research design, method used and data the study is presented and motivated. Furthermore, the choice of informants and observations is motivated. The generalisability of the study is discussed, as is ethical considerations.

3.1 Research design

In broad terms, it is possible to divide research methods in two categories: qualitative and quantitative (Bryman, 2012). While some previous research has employed a quantitative design when faced with similar research questions (e.g. Dries et al., 2014; Meyers et al., 2019), it was determined that a qualitative approach may be more useful. This was due to three factors, namely (1) that in contrast to earlier studies this one concerns itself with not only HR-managers but also practitioners who to the author’s knowledge are not usually included in a study of this kind. Information would need to be gathered from employees with varying tasks and strategic influence, and information gathering may need to on the fly be adapted to the employees’ situation in order to extract relevant data. (2) This was a rare opportunity to study a cross functional talent program currently being developed. In order to accurately reflect on what took place, observation of strategy meetings as well as daily work was deemed to be an important source of information, information which was deemed difficult to quantify. According to Bryman (2012), to provide a measure of a concept, indicators that will stand for a concept are necessary. Due to the nature of observation as well as the possibility of differing interviews, it was judged that sufficient indicators to provide an accurate measurement was unrealistic. (3) Due to the large size and decentralised nature of the target organisation, it was deemed outside the scope of the study to identify key individuals in all relevant parts of the organisation. By limiting the informants to one key area, perspectives on individuals involved in talent management albeit not as identified conventionally (e.g. managers and decision makers), a more inclusive approach was made possible while still involving the main actors. In essence, work surrounding talent management involves recruitment specialists, talent program managers and to extent employee branding specialists as well as the decision makers deciding on strategy. As such, a qualitative approach was decided for.

Commonly associated with a qualitative approach is the inductive approach to theory (Bryman, 2012). In broad terms this, in contrast to deduction, allows the findings to determine theory. While a qualitative approach was decided for, it was determined that in order to further the research in a constructive way and not wholly reinvent the wheel, some aspects of deduction was necessary e.g. the use of established terms of talent definitions. According to Bryman (2012), the subject studied may be
considered to be a construction consisting of perceptions and actions of social actors, the practitioners. While some aspects may consist of an objective reality external to them, such as the hierarchy of the talent programs in the corporation, the data gathered reflects practitioners’ subjective opinions, and as such leans to constructionism as described by Bryman (2012). Furthermore, and according to Denscombe (2016), when a researcher wants to investigate an issue in depth and sufficiently explain the complexity of a real-life situation, a case study approach is appropriate. As this is in line with previous reasoning, and that the researcher was given a great amount of access by the corporation, it was judged that a case study successfully could capture the intricacies of the corporation.

3.2 Case study design
The focus of this study was the Swedish branch, more specifically the regional centre of the corporation as mentioned in 1.5. The organisation was chosen because they were in the process of developing and formalising their talent management programs, and a great deal of access was offered to the researcher. This enabled the study to incorporate the thoughts and motives of individuals responsible for implementation and practice, and investigate the subjective definitions of talent, implications for strategy and the employee-organisation relationship. Even though this by no means is a small or medium sized corporation where research is the most lacking as expressed by Thunnissen et al. (2013), this may enable the study to capture the local context and individual considerations (cf. Denscombe, 2016). This should in part illustrate the complexities of implementing a talent management programme in a Swedish context, and the difficulties that follow due to cultural and historical norms (cf. Dries et al., 2014; Vaiman et al., 2012).

The case in question may be described as one of a typical nature (cf. Denscombe, 2016). According to Denscombe, a typical case is similar in crucial aspects regarding other cases and findings may as such apply elsewhere. This organisation is in manufacturing and is a part of the same market as competitors. As follows, they are bound by the same restrictions as other companies regarding salaries and global trends. The customer expects certain things, and to some extent it is reasonable that these demands shape the operations of companies. Indeed, the structure of the company in question is traditional and hierarchic, and as such recognisable in a way a smaller entrepreneurial company may not be. Moreover, according to Denscombe (2016), a case might be selected because of its relevance with previous theory. In this case, the results might be expected to have been easily predictable due to the organisations and the challenge faced archetypical nature. However, due to the broad
spectra of theoretical conceptualisations in talent management, predicting a specific outcome proved difficult. This is discussed further in 3.6.

3.3 Selection
According to Bryman (2012), participant observation in combination with interviews is a commonly used method as it allows for the generation of intensive and detailed examination of a case. However, to obtain relevant data from interviews, informants generally need to be selected systematically (Denscombe, 2016). This is due to the limited number of interviews possible as compared to a questionnaire. Informants may have to be chosen both because of the key pieces of information they were perceived to possess, but also in the case of the group interviews to obtain a cross-section of the opinions of employees. As follows, individuals participating in this study was not chosen at random but strategically because of the perceived specific knowledge they were deemed to have (cf. Denscombe, 2016). The corporation is large, and practitioners responsible for the talent development function but a small part of it. It was in this case necessary to obtain the permission of decisionmakers to be able to conduct interviews, however most but not all requests were granted, and the organisation was supportive.

3.4 Data collection
The use of participant observation made possible the collection of qualitative data from daily life by observing, listening and questioning people four days a week from 2019-02-04 to 2019-04-12 to discern thoughts and motives regarding talent and talent management (cf. Denscombe, 2016). In this case, information gathering was mostly done during formal and informal meetings regarding strategy and performance management. According to Denscombe (2016), information that may have been hidden or glossed over in an interview or questionnaire was able to be processed. As such, details that may have remained unknown was brought into light no matter their importance and contributing to providing a fuller picture. This was of importance due to the nature of this case study, and its premise of in-depth information. In the case in question, the knowledge of there being an observer was known and consented to. Due to legal reasons regarding certain protocols related to handling and storing of data, this was necessary. Moreover, consent was needed from management due to participation in strategic meetings and the possibility of overhearing confidential material. Explicit permission was granted.

Eight interviews were conducted on an individual basis whereas two was conducted in a group setting composed of the interviewer and two informants. All informants were contacted in advance via email. In the emails, general information regarding
the purpose of the study, the general topic and expected timeframe was provided. Attached to the email was information regarding the general data protection regulation, which the informant was encouraged to read and accept. Of the 13 informants queried, 12 responded. When a response was received from the informant, a suitable time and place was booked through the internal scheduler. All interviews were classified as private, disabling other users from seeing meeting participants in the calendar software, and the public title of the interview was a simple “Meeting”, to somewhat preserve the confidentiality of the informant. The location of the interviews was limited by the timeframe acceptable to the informant, and as such a majority took place in the interview rooms provided for regular job applicants. These were located adjacent to the office and workplace for most of the interviewed candidates. One interview took place in another building in the area.

3.4.1 One-on-one and group interviews

The eight regular interviews were conducted per one-on-one basis, with one interviewer and one informant. Ideas or concepts presented by the informants were easily traced back to specific individuals, and the informant was more easily guided through the steps on the interview. In truth, a main advantage was the ease to synchronise schedules and find available dates during the timeframe in question, enabling the study to be conducted. Moreover, a one-on-one interview was easier transcribe accurately, with only one person speaking at a time and only two voices to recognise. While this is a practical consideration, it is also of importance to correctly assign accurately transcribed quotes to the correct individual should one want to withdraw from the study or simply review the personal information gathered in accordance with GDPR.

A disadvantage with one-on-one interviews is that it limited the number of informants due to time constraints, and as follows less information provided. To remedy this, group interviews were conducted when possible and suitable. In essence, suitable informants were individuals whose work tasks were perceived by the author to be similar. It was of interest to see if, even though their work may be similar, their views on talent and talent management may not. Conducting a group interview would provide more data for analysis, as compared to only interviewing one of them. In more practical terms, their schedules also often aligned. The group interviews were conducted in the same manner as the one-on-one, with the main difference being that a question now required answers from two persons instead of one. Moreover, participants weren’t discouraged from internal discussion, but the main focus of the interview was on the informants as individuals and not a part of an ingroup of the corporation in question. At times, informants were encouraged to
respond as per the perceived belief of their ingroup, but considering the size and diversity of the corporation, this focus was not emphasised.

During the all interviews, there were predetermined subjects to be broached by the informant (appendix A). In order to accomplish this, the interview was divided into sections, with each section having its own theme (cf. Bryman, 2012). Each section was structured as a funnel, with more open questions early on and specific questions presented later, should the need for concise answers on certain topics arise. This provided the interviewer with the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and encourage the informant to focus more heavily on subjects they themselves were knowledgeable about (Denscombe, 2016).

Sound was recorded during all interviews, enabling the interviewer to later review and transcribe what was being said. The informants’ involvement was however to be kept as confidential as possible. However, due to the nature of some of the informants’ job descriptions, the question was raised regarding the possibility of including material that may be directly traced to specific informants. Due to the insensitive nature of the data collected, all informants gave permission to publish this information provided the interviewer used common sense when publishing. An overview of the interviews is presented below. Numbers were assigned in no particular order.

Table 1
One-on-one and group interviews displayed. (The name which will be used to reference a particular individual, Alias; the length of the recorded interview in minutes, Time; whether the individual was involved in strategic formulation regarding talent management, Strategy)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One-on-one interviews</th>
<th>Group interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alias</td>
<td>I01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time (minutes)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in table 1, the strategic actors (except those absent at the very highest level who were excluded due to lack of access) are marked.

3.4.2 Participant observation
The use of participant observation provided the opportunity for a deeper knowledge of a particular workplace, and further knowledge of what may be of interest to observe and investigate more closely. Notes were taken after or during every major observation, in order to accurately recall certain situations. Some were written during the situation, assuming it was a large gathering and computers not out of
place. Notes were to a lesser extent taken from smaller gatherings, and in such cases, they were written as soon as opportunity arose, the same day. Minor observations, such as an overheard word at the coffee-machine, are not listed. Major points of observation are listed in the table below.

Table 2
*Mayor observation opportunities. (The name of which the observation will be referred to, Alias; the date the observation took place, Date; a short description of the situation observed, Description)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O01</td>
<td>2019-03-21</td>
<td>Follow-up departmental strategy meeting from 2019-02-21 involving all HR-personnel attached to the recruitment centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O02</td>
<td>2019-03-14</td>
<td>Introductory lecture by HR personnel for managers regarding the new architecture for performance reviews and compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O03</td>
<td>2019-02-21</td>
<td>Departmental strategy meeting involving all HR-personnel attached to the recruitment centre. Notes were taken during the meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O04</td>
<td>2019-02-06</td>
<td>Opening meeting with the managers of the HR function in which talent development will later fit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O05</td>
<td>2019-02-05</td>
<td>Interview and meeting with employee involved in the formulation of the organisations talent definition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table 2, five major points of observation are listed. These will be referred to later in the results under the aliases listed.

### 3.5 Analysis

The interviews were all transcribed close to verbatim, with some filling noises and repetitions omitted. The chosen approach in this study was, as previously stated, a qualitative one. As follows, the starting point of the analysis was the coding of transcribed material (cf. Bryman, 2012), which was done using NVivo 12. All transcribed material was imported to the program, where the initial familiarising with the material was able to be conducted in a structured manner. As the purpose of the study did to some extent lend itself to theory driven coding (cf. Boyatzis, 1998), and the use of an entirely inductive method e.g. grounded theory was decided against (cf. Bryman, 2012), and a thematic analysis was conducted. A theory driven approach to coding allows the researcher to identify themes relevant to the research questions (Boyatzis, 1998), and repetitions, similarities and differences as well as missing data formed the bulk of the themes (cf. Bryman, 2012). Theory was used as a springboard for themes, as this further helped in the identification of themes relevant to the research questions from a large number of nodes. For example, using
previous theory, some omissions on the part of the informants regarding aspects of talent was able to be discerned.

3.6 Generalisability
An issue with a qualitative approach is the extent to which a researcher is able to demonstrate the accuracy and appropriateness of data presented (Denscombe, 2016). While there is no guarantee that the data is accurate, steps may be taken to ensure that is reasonably so. According to Bryman (2012), when using more than one source or method, it is possible to use triangulation. In essence, by using three methods namely the participant observation, one-on-one and group interviews, the researcher is to a greater extent able to verify data by cross-checking with data gathered from different sources. In this study, the data gathered from the observations provided a context to data sourced from interviews. In addition, the interviews with decision makers was booked last and as such further explanations regarding information presented during meetings was possible to explore. As compared to a cross-sectional survey design, reasonably this enabled the researcher to further understand intricacies within the corporation which otherwise may have gone unexplored. While, according to Bryman (2012), it may be of use to have more than one interviewer or observer, the main focus of triangulation is on the methods and sources. In essence, by combining three methods it yields greater confidence in the findings. Moreover, the time spent on locations is, according to Denscombe (2016), a solid foundation for conclusion based on the data and adds to the credibility of the research.

When conducting a qualitative study which includes participant observation and interviews, there is always the issue of the researcher being part of the research instruments (Denscombe, 2016). While some may say that all data, no matter qualitative or quantitative is open to interpretation to some degree, the issue becomes apparent in the qualitative approach. In order to solve this, the researcher attempted to in detail describe the procedure, demonstrating that the procedures are reputable and decisions reasonable. Moreover, the researcher did attempt to approach the research with an open mind. It is the belief of the researcher that all has some conceptualisation no matter how developed of talent and talent management, and as such an open mind regarding the possibility of different views was kept in mind. For example, the researcher believe talent in everyday life is the (as compared to peers) mastery of a skill. This was kept in mind when constructing the theoretical framework and interview guide, in order to be open to other perspectives as well as the possibility of being “wrong”. It is the opinion of the researcher that different approaches to talent and talent management was sufficiently included, and that conflicting data which does not fit a previous view was included.
Furthermore, while this study makes no claim to be statistically generalisable, there may be a case for analytic generalisability (cf. Denscombe, 2016). According to Denscombe (2010), a case study may fulfil certain criteria and the findings can be expected to apply more widely. Criteria to be considered are the following: if the selection of the informants and the data from observation been adequately described and justified, how diverse are the sources and how many informants have been used, and lastly if the description of the sample allow comparison with others of its type.

Considering the first criteria, the informants selected for this study were all in some way in contact with what the organisation saw as their entry level talent programs, although in differing parts of the process. From delegated strategic responsibility, first contact with potential candidates, recruitment and program management to a lesser extent participation in the program. Missing was perhaps the localised HR perspective, but resources was not sufficient to accurately portray all participants in the process and restriction of the selection was done. The timing of the case study was a serendipitous finding, although some adjustments to the scope was made in order to accommodate the process observed.

Regarding the second criteria, the case itself is not a daily occurrence in an organisation. However, the challenge of the case is one highly relevant to organisations in today’s economy, where specialised competence is sought after (cf. Cascio & Boudreau, 2016; Chambers et al., 1997; Silzer & Dowell, 2009). Corporations and organisations undergoing the same transition may reasonably be facing the same or similar hurdles, and an in-depth understanding of mentality and consequence may be of value both to practitioners but also to aid researchers in pinpointing areas of reflection. The case as presented above describes the type of organisation, the situation in question regarding number of employees and organisational structure and their strategic goals, possibly allowing relative ease in understanding what may be of interest to the reader. Arguably, this case may be construed as typical of other instances as well (cf. Denscombe, 2016). There is nothing out of the ordinary in the process itself, and thus the results to an extent may be expected to be more widely applicable than the case in question, hence analytic generalisability.

And lastly, regarding the third criteria; the case in question could reasonably be described as typical instance (cf. Denscombe, 2016), as it is but one of many organisations developing and formalising talent management programs and they may have some of the hurdles it entails in common. Hence, the result may reasonably
be generalisable and intrinsically interesting as more organisations are likely to follow examples set by this large and established corporation.

There are however certain limitations with the chosen methods. According to Denscombe (2016), there are difficulties in generalising from participant observation. Indeed, those are likely chosen because of their convenience or due to possible access. Reasonably, the chosen method does open up the study to reliability issues, considering the difficulty of other researcher from replicating this exact study. Field notes are not sufficiently detailed for reliability testing. This is valid critique, and as such the use of observation in this instance was intended to put a context to findings in the interviews. As such, main findings may be transferable to some extent, but are to some degree subject to the bias inherent from the time period studied and access available to the researcher.

3.7 Ethics
According to Vetenskapsrådet (VR, 2007), there are four main pillars a researcher in the humanistic area must consider. These concern the areas of information, consent, confidentiality and utilisation.

Regarding the area of information (cf. VR, 2007), information concerning the goals of the study was shared both in written form (appendix B) and verbally. In the case of the interviews, the informants were obliged to read an attached letter as well as what the study entailed in broad terms. Moreover, informants were verbally notified that the material was only to be used for scientific purposes, and general information of the researcher’s purpose in the corporation was provided to employees expected to interact regularly with the researcher. Explicit information regarding the general data protection regulation was provided, and considering the insensitive nature of the material, this was the only concern most informants had. Time was set aside for eventual questions regarding data handling, enabling satisfying answers.

Regarding the area of consent (VR, 2007), all interviews required explicit consent, which was in all cases granted. A grey area may have been the larger strategic meetings where close to 100 employees attended, as reasonably not all of them could grant explicit informed consent. However, the focus during those observation was not the additional individuals, but the subject being discussed and the employees presenting it. In all those cases, explicit permission was granted beforehand. Moreover, considering the insensitive information presented, confidential material being excluded from the thesis, this reasonably presents little ethical problems. Perhaps there may have been a conflict regarding the participant observation, as the employees had little choice over the presence of the researcher. While there was no
objection during the time spent at the department, it is a possibility that some considered it an encroachment on their privacy. It was however made explicit during meetings that participation was voluntary, and information gathered from them could be removed should they express that wish.

Furthermore, individuals were, when possible granted confidentiality (cf. VR, 2007). No individuals are named in the report, and work tasks which may hint towards certain employees were removed. Some remain, but in those cases explicit permission was asked for and granted. Interviews was disguised as meetings, and while employees may surmise which individuals were informants due to spotting who the researched met with no informant made any effort to hide their participation. Reasonably, due to the insensitive nature of the study, information regarding participation spread by themselves were of little concern.

In conclusion, and regarding the last area of utilisation (cf. VR, 2007), no information gathered will be used for any commercial purpose except results published in the study. This thesis was paid for by the corporation (40 000 SEK), but all personal information was stored on the personal computer of the researcher and was not and will not be shared with any other entity.

3.8 Method discussion
Firstly, the language used in this study requires an explanation. While the main part of the study is written in English, the language spoken in the interviews and at the department studied with a few exceptions was in fact Swedish. As such, all quotes are translated by the researcher. Naturally, meaning and context may be lost in translation. However, the transcription process involved no translations, and the thematic analysis was done in Swedish. The quotes as seen in the study, while attributed to specific informants, are used for the benefit of the reader to exemplify and put sentiments in context. While informants were not asked to proof read their quotes, it is of the opinion of the reader that this does not detract from the overall credibility of the results. It may however impair the ability for a researcher not fluent in Swedish to scrutinise the method. However, the benefits of a wider population able to read the study, in the opinion of the researcher, outweighs this negative impact.

Regarding the choice of organisation, it is to be made perfectly clear that this is a study paid for by a corporation. However, while the overarching topic was suggested by the corporation, the details was decided by the researcher. As such, the purpose and methodology were chosen to benefit the scientific field. While this may have
Some implications, such as a subconscious unwillingness to paint the corporation in a bad light, the topic was of a very unsensitive nature and this was likely a non-issue.

Moreover, the study allowed for rare access to decisionmakers in the process of designing and implementing a new talent development function. Talent was, while not a new term, one prominently featured during strategic meetings. Serendipitously, a major part of the study was written while situated literally next to practitioners involved in the selection process for one of the entry level talent programmes. While these observations were not allowed to be written down due to the confidentiality of the candidates and process, this did grant insight into the working process of the operatives which provided context for other observations. Something missing in the methodology is insight provided by the much-referred to localised HR. Due to the large size of the corporation, both in terms of employees and in terms of campus area, identifying key players in the other business areas was deemed to resource demanding considering the limited time spent at the corporation by the researcher (ca. five months in total). While perspective provided by those individuals would have provided valuable insight, it was deemed

The unsensitive nature is exemplified in how on the part of the researcher, confidentiality was prioritised while comically, this was interfered with by the informants themselves. They had little qualms about announcing their participation to other employees, with some exceptions. Most of the interviews took place, as previously stated, in the interview rooms adjacent to the central office, and it was not uncommon to discuss recently transpired events with the informants in an area trafficked by other employees. Naturally, no information regarding what other informants shared was spoken of by the researcher, and when these conversations took place they were initiated by the informants.

The identity of the informants was however shared with the contact person in the corporation. While this individual did promise to keep this information to oneself, he or she may be able to discern who said what in the results chapter. Although the information is not of a sensitive nature, this is still an ethical concern. The selection was mostly done by the researcher, and while the contact at the corporation did help identifying some key individuals, these were based on criteria specified by the researcher.
4 RESULT

In the following chapter, the first subsection presents the approaches to and definitions of talent of informants. In the second, the intended strategy and utilisation of talent is presented as reflected upon by informants.

4.1 Informants’ definition of talent

Stated during strategy meetings is a desire to establish definitions of a specialist and a leader, both referring to individuals who are judged to potentially be successful in their designated areas. Moreover, these individuals are supposed to have transferable skills between the business areas of the corporation. In essence, they are to be able to perform in differing settings, not constrained by a particular environment and able to adapt to local conditions.

After several interviews and participation in the daily work in the organisations it has become apparent that while the upper echelons of the organisations have an ambition of a unified definition, the organisation is made up of employees who may have their own thoughts regarding the matter. The issue may be summarised in the following quote by one employee:

[Talent] are different things, that is what is difficult regarding the term. And that is what we must figure out, what it means for our corporation, our division and our unit. This is what is awkward with the term talent. (I02).

A common theme was the comparison to talent outside the world of work. A talent at its most basic is “to jump high, to jump far” (I08), to be “the team member expected to score a goal [in football]” (I11) or “to have an eye for art” (I06). Talent, as spoken of by the informants, is an individual in some way performing above average. Indeed, the talent as described here is physical prowess and creative ability in relation to peers. Parallels may be drawn to what a talent is perceived to be when younger. One informant (I04) reference the individual in the sports team who everyone knew who it was, and who almost carried the team. However, the informant states that this individual may not last, and five years later it was somebody else.

Then the question is, when talking of talent, are the characteristics and how they enable you to perform at a high-level talent? Are you still a talent if you lack the drive to practice hard, and is it possible to practice hard and become a talent? (I04).

This was a recurring theme during the interviews, if it matters if you have an innate ability assuming it was a requisite for talent if you are not able to utilise it. Moreover,
it was problematised that possibly that very drive to utilise an individual’s ability is what may constitute talent, although this was often stated in conjunction with potential of any kind. Few, however, had one set definition and more common was previously non-articulated thoughts on the matter. This will be explored further below.

4.1.1 Talent as an object

Talent as a completely innate ability is not an opinion expressed by the clear majority of the informants (I09). There are however tendencies to consider it as an essential baseline for future performance. Informants (e.g. I12; I04; I03) considers talent to be a baseline for the individual to discover and develop, as exemplified in the following quote:

I think it is about finding [your] talent, you are born with a potential, but then the talent can be developed by practice. I believe you can learn much of what may constitute talent. Some [parts] you are born with, some parts you have a natural preference for. (I12).

Some informants consider this heightened baseline to be genetic, while most let it be undefined as to one is born with it or if it is a consequence of the individuals upbringing and social factors. There is however a distinct, as exemplified by Informant I03 where the object talent (the innate ability) is constitute only a part of the subject talent (the individual) and this is once more removed from the label talent one might have in a workplace setting.

What is talent, and what is being talented? Talented is to be able to adapt to the individuals own circumstances. (...)To be a talent [in the workplace] is to use [the individuals] potential and be talented. (I03).

In order to be a talent, some reason, one must as such have a commitment to utilise it properly. This may in the world of work just as well as in the world of sport entail lots of practice. A line of reasoning presented is that just as Zlatan stayed after hours to practice his shooting, the individual must have the drive to improve (Informant I04). The corporation in this study stands before a competence shift whereas the future holds differing expectations of employee competences. There was an expressed desire for talents to not only be able to endure this shift, but to drive it and remain talents and what it may entail after successfully navigating it (O03; O01). This, informants reasoned, necessities individuals who have a drive to continuously improve and take responsibility for their own development. Individuals who have this innate ability and as such the potential, even if it was well developed at for example the time of hiring may not, per se remain a talent unless they continuously proves it, again and again every day (I11).
(….) It depends upon how you see it. It may be individuals who doesn’t want to improve, despite having talent. If so, then we won’t [offer developmental opportunities]. We do not want to force anybody. it has to be based on the aspirations of the individual. (I11).

Moreover, some informants express concern of how context may affect an individual’s potential to achieve talent status. “One may be a talent. but in the wrong context” (I05) brings to question how to rectify such a dilemma. Remember, there is an expressed wish of the organisation to have a talent pool that is cross functional, but these individuals are not expected to be at home in all the business areas of the corporation (I12; I11). While the culture does promote self-actualisation in a work context, this places a large demand on the manoeuvrability of the local work force where individuals may have to expect to try and fail in different positions, should their manager not correctly identify the most appropriate career path. As one informant puts it:

You may be in the wrong context, and your potential goes undiscovered. And then you end up in the right context, and your potential is visible. (…) That is my experience of what I have seen, of individuals who are talents. (I11).

Further, as this is a context is a large industrial corporation, there are formal demands on candidates for positions within the company (e.g. I08; I09; I10). New hires for the trainee program, loosely defined as an entry level talent program, are required to have formal credentials from higher education. The challenges of this corporations are further of a developmental nature, and as such efforts are directed towards white collar workers (I12). While this may not be considered mastery of a skill, a specialist is expected to be a highly educated and skilled worker, presenting barriers to the label talent. Therein lies a difficulty, as this workplace label of talent is hard to differentiate from mastery of a certain skill or task, begging the question if one can be very good at their work tasks, but without being a talent. This further highlights the confusion regarding the term talent. An individual may have a talent, a predisposition to be good at something, while not being talented i.e. having fulfilled the potential and further not being recognised as a talent by the corporation. Not only does this require, as per some of the informants (e.g. I12; I01; I11), commitment to individual development but also the ability to identify a nurturing environment.

To be noted is that there is a surprising consensus regarding the nature of talent, that everyone is talented at something. Individuals involved in the recruitment process may have a belief in formal requirements not articulated by management, but there is a general agreement regarding the characteristics a talented individual may demonstrate. Opinions do diverge regarding what talent as a label in an organisation should entail, where managers to a higher degree promote exclusive development of
selected talents, and practitioners either has few articulated thoughts on the matter or consider talent as innate abilities everyone possess albeit in differing areas.

4.1.2 Talent as a subject
A common albeit not exclusive denominator is that talent management refers to the management of a select few individuals who are deemed to be high potential individuals. Informants (e.g. I10; I06) frequently refer to how a large portion of the board of directors are made up of former trainees, and there is an expectation of future leadership. Which indeed is the stated purpose of the trainee program, “(…) to secure our pipeline of future key individuals and leaders for [the corporation]” (I07).

When discussing talent, informants (e.g. I12; I05; I06) to a high degree referred talents as individuals in addition to characteristics demonstrated who when confronted by new circumstances or challenges were those who were quick on the uptake. Individuals who are skilled in different things, but “(…) those who are sharper and progresses through the developmental curve quicker than others” (I12). The competence shift as mentioned earlier is often referred, and individuals who are flexible are a part of what may constitute a talented individual. One informant (I09) state the importance of potential above formal qualification, however the lack of mention of this from other informants may be due to the abundance of applicants. The corporation has the opportunity to be choosy, which resonates when sorting and selecting and exclusive group of candidates by general mental capacity testing, one informant reasoned.

While all informants do highlight the importance of high potential, there is less consensus regarding the selection of a high potential individual. Indeed, there are difficulties in predicting the future, but attempts are made e.g. using validated tests. GMAs are used to a high degree when recruiting for entry level programs, often in conjunction with a personality test and interviews (O04). For some programs a manager may nominate individuals deemed worthy (I01: I11). The goal is to identify potential leaders and specialists, talents deemed necessary for future competitive advantage, however there appears to be uncertainties regarding any chosen approach to identification. “Most importantly, a talent needs to deliver…” (I01), which was a sentiment shared by several informants.

A talent delivers above average solutions to problems, a more effective solution to a problem, a quicker solution to a problem. You get a different kind of solution [to a problem]. (I11).
Reasonably, this refers to a talent label in a workplace setting, though there appears to be some informants who considers an individual who is able to deliver a talent, in addition to having a potential to improve even more. Of note is that this mindset is hardly aligned with the school of thought where everybody is a talent in their own way, e.g. considering an individual mostly musically inclined may face difficulty in providing new solutions to complex IT-related issues. Naturally, this sentiment is expressed by none. It does however broach the subject of the importance of some talents as more valuable as compared to others in a workplace setting, and the development of individuals in possession of those differing qualities.

There are talents in the entire operation, otherwise it wouldn’t be a functioning production company or industry. Everybody has their purpose to an extent, and there is talent in what one does. (I08).

When questioned regarding the nature of talent management, all but one informant thought of it as the management of an exclusive group of some kind. The informant (I02) not in agreement however did express sentiment that exclusivity was necessary for certain competencies, albeit not under the banner of talent management.

Building on the characteristics presented in the previous section, an individual may have a talent, a predisposition to be good at something. This may constitute a high potential individual, identified using a mix of selection methods. Furthermore, in order to be identified by the corporation as a talent, a high performance is necessary, as most talents are deemed unworthy of development by the organisation and outside the scope of talent management. While there is a general agreement on the innate talent of everybody, only certain competencies are to be nurtured in talent management programs (cf. I01; I11; I12). Moreover, these individuals are required to be committed to their own development, and willing to work hard to prove this in differing contexts.

4.2 Utilisation of talent in the organisation
The stated purpose of talent management in the corporation in question is, as mentioned, to secure the supply of future leaders and specialists (e.g. I11; I12). The purpose of the talent function being developed is the cross functional management of talent between different business areas, in order to centralise the talent development and provide an overarching perspective. The planned structure is presented in the figure below.
Figure 3 illustrates the ambition to enable a talent journey from entry level programs or internal nominations to executive positions. Localised talent programs, while not the subject of this study, are intended to be a part of the centralised talent development function. There are, however, no guarantees for either an entry level program member or an individual nominated to end up in an executive position, far from it (e.g. I10; I11; I12). Remember, the individual aspiring to a talent label is required to continuously prove their worth to the organisation. There is however some doubt regarding the nature of the entry level programs. One strategic actor claims that while e.g. some talents are trainees, all trainees are not talents.

I can’t automatically claim they are talent programs. This has to do with the selection process and desired candidate criteria. (…) I believe they are necessary, but that something more is required. (I11).

Another informant (I12), when discussing the same programs claims them both to be talent management programs. There does seem to be some discord of what a talent management program may entail, and moreover how to achieve the stated purpose (I11; O05). There is the approach to identify and develop all talents in the organisation, in a manner benefiting the professional development of all employees. There seems to be little support of this, both by practitioners but more so considering the scope of the future talent function. To start with, the proposed number of individuals part of this talent pool is to number slightly below 50 in a global corporation employing roundabout 50 000 people, although this number is intended to be bigger in the future. There can be little doubt that the intention has been from the start to exclusively select an elite group of individuals.
Within the corporation, decisions made without the support of managers within the differing business areas has little practical value, as exemplified in the following quote: “(...) not even [the CEO] can decide something and make it happen without anchoring it” (I12). Considering informants has had some differing views regarding the content of some talent management programs (cf. I02; I11), it is not unreasonable to assume that the same may apply to the localised HR in the different business areas. Bearing in mind the talent journey as illustrated in figure 3, the programs are a part of an overarching talent management structure. The purpose is to internally develop individuals considered promising, by using a biannual performance and development reviews conducted by managers (I01; O02). Based on this review, a high performing individual may be nominated to a talent program or pool. The focus of HR-professionals is however more directed towards the retention of said individuals.

(...) We know that younger people today are more inclined to move [to a different corporation]. Even though one may enjoy the current position in the corporation, there is little thought of actually staying more than a couple of years [in that position]. (I07).

This, informants reason, is accomplished by the use of these entry level programs, where newly hired individuals are throughout the programs put into different positions within the company. This serve to provide these individuals with a lot of corporation specific information, and also providing avenues of advancement. By entering the corporation in what some informants (I12; O04) refer to as a kind of VIP lane, individuals may have an advantage when positions become vacant. A manager looking for a replacement may, as reasoned by one informant (I12), consider a known quality rather than an unknown one; and as such enables a high performing employee to more quickly climb the company ladder. While this may be considered a VIP lane with the potential to boost an employee’s career, it is also dependant on the individuals own commitment (e.g. I01; I11) and the potential as assessed by managers (I11). Considering an example regarding the leadership competence:

When a talent is identified, which level do we think this talent may reach? If we say it is level three, then [we] work continuously with development for this individual to reach level three. (I11).

As such the corporation does not concern itself with specific individuals to replace, but does consider the assessed potential of the individual and believed future managerial level attainable. Furthermore, while the corporation does enable developmental options for their talent program graduates, the demands on these individuals are higher as compared to employees entering the company the regular
way (e.g. I10; I11; I12). Moreover, as one informant put it: “when the program is over, the spotlight disappears (I10). As follows, when a program ends it is of importan

to an aspiring employee to take ownership of their developmental options (e.g. I01; I11). A certain amount of influence may however be ascribed to the candidate’s manager, as exemplified in the following quote.

It is very important to have an understanding manager who will help you on your journey onwards. That is one thing we experience all the time, (…) You are stressed when you move on to your first position, and if you enjoy it, it enables [the individual] to do a good job. Support from your closest manager is important in order to grow professionally. Otherwise, [the individual] may leave the corporation. (I05).

At the time of the writing of this study, professionals involved in management of the entry level programs do not officially stay in touch with graduated program members (e.g. I05; I06). Ownership of and support for career development hence becomes the responsibility of the individual in question, the localised HR function and the hiring manager, with mixed results.

Some has been very happy [with their position], but they have received good leaders and managers who has seen and understood the potentials and has been prepared for what [the organisation] has to do to challenge them. Some leaders and hiring managers are looking for an employee performing here and now and may forget to help them advance. (I09)

A common theme in the interviews was the expectation the corporation has on the aspiring talents (e.g. I01; I10; I11). To paraphrase I06, the talents in entry level programs are supposed to challenge established practices in the organisation. The corporation wants their knowledge. In return, they are given opportunities to explore the corporation and establish networks within it (e.g. I12; I01). These opportunities do however come with expectations to perform, as shown below.

It does however also mean that you must take a greater responsibility, that because there is a talent program that you are on a magic carpet and flying around and is granted various parts. You have to work for it, it is all about you rowing yourself. Not a free ride, but in return a higher degree of attention and opportunities to show off. (I12).

Furthermore, when there are greater opportunities (e.g. I06; I11; I12), the consequences for failure may be greater (I11). The informant further reason that while talent management has a large focus on attaining performance, a substantial portion pertains to caring, tailoring the program to the needs of the individual and silk gloves. “Naturally, with a clear focus on requirements and for the individual to deliver results” (I11). These needs do, however, be aligned with the strategic goals of the corporation. Regarding this matter, informant opinions do diverge. On one
hand, some informants claim that only certain talents are to be developed according the aforementioned needs of the corporation (e.g. I01; I11; I12).

Then it is talent for what. We need both leaders and experts. (...) and then which areas we need talents within. We are eagerly awaiting that. (...) This will be set in our new 2025 strategy, but there are areas we can make out already. (I12).

In contrast, some informants (e.g. I02: I07) reason that talent meanwhile is a broader term, encompassing a wider spectrum of competencies. Reasonably, these opinions do not per se have to be opposed. In the interviews there has been some divergence regarding the definition of a talent in a workplace setting. If the individual labelled as a talent by the organisation is the one who is supported by official means within it, it does not exclude other employees from being or having talent. It only excludes them from the official talent development programs. As I07 puts it:

[Development of everyone’s talent] does not have to be done in specific programs. In those cases, I believe it is more useful to work with development in general. Depending on [your] business area, to work closely with [the manager] with [the individuals] personal development. (I07).

Reasonably, this removes the opportunity cost of the development of all talents within the corporation, and focus on the ones judged to help the corporation achieve the stated business goals (O01; O03).

In summary, there was a surprising consensus regarding the nature of talent. Everybody is talented at something, and talents do demonstrate certain characteristics. There was however some discord regarding the label talent as applicable in an organisation, where thoughts did vary (e.g. I01, O02). Attempts are at the time of writing made to find one definition suitable to the entire organisation, with some subject to change depending on desired competence profile of the target (O04). This definition will however likely be heavily influenced by the future head of talent development, but it was made explicit by strategic actors that an exclusive approach is the sole alternative, even though some informants (e.g. I02; I03, I08) may consider a more inclusive approach. High performance individuals are sought after, and attempts will be made to develop individuals deemed high potential. All informants did agree of the importance of taking care of talents, although practices relating to talent management did vary: a high focus on talent retention (e.g. I05; I06; I10) as well as talent development through commitment (e.g. I01; I11; I12). The results will be discussed in the next chapter.
4.3 Observatory notes

During the time spent at the corporation, there were sentiments expressed and not expressed that are not obvious in the above result. As these to a higher degree are the product of the interpretation of the researcher, a distinction is made for the reader and they are as such not integrated into the text. They may however be able to provide context for both the discussion in the following chapter and the reader.

While talent management has been a major recurring event at strategy meetings, the subject is rarely broached in the workplace. Employees seem to be excited to have a new talent function nearby, however the tasks assigned to the function is loosely defined. They appear to a high degree to be decided upon by the of the future head of talent. It would possibly have been of interest to further investigate what the function is to entail, unfortunately this was not made possible due to time constraints imposed by the scope of the thesis. Moreover, the entry level program specified as talent programs and formally introduced as such are rarely if ever referred to as talent programs, except when asked directly to specify. Moreover, there is some discord as to the meaning of trainee: before being questioned if the trainee program is a talent program, it appeared as if this was the first time informants considered this aspect and answers varied. Furthermore, while recruiters agree upon criteria for trainees per ad hoc basis, the corporation has no formalised criteria. One may surmise that talent, as compared to talent management, is a subject not as heavily reflected upon by employees.
5 DISCUSSION

In the following chapter, the results are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework presented in chapter two. The first subsections concern the talent definitions, while the second the strategy and utilisation. The third contains a summarising discussion, and conclusions of the study are presented in the fourth.

5.1 Defining talent

As evident in the previous chapter, there are amongst practitioners’ conceptualisations of talent. It may be possible to draw parallels to these conceptualisations, considering the common use of the word talent, as discussed in Tansley (2011), where talent in European languages is an innate ability for a specific field or a person who has talent for a specific thing (cf. Svenska Akademiens Ordbok; http://www.saob.se/artikel/?unik=T_0185-0083.s2ii). These mesh well with the comparison to sports, as presented in the last chapter, individuals who by some metrics perform above average and has a higher potential as compared to peers.

There is however more to talent in the workplace as compared to talent as an everyday item, where it refers to more specific characteristics or individuals (cf. Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Figure 1 presented earlier allows a researcher to estimate how an organisation works with talent. In the following subsection, an attempt will be made to structure the practitioner’s thoughts on the matter and then after comparing it with the planned strategic initiative regarding talent management.

The first dimension to consider is if the practitioners consider talent characteristics demonstrated by an individual or if a talent is an individual (cf. Bolander et al., 2017; Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). While most informants do consider talent something everybody has, there is as previously noted an ambiguity. In the world of work, a majority of the informants did reason in terms of how a talent performs a task, or how recruiters were looking for talented individuals in the recruitment processes. A common theme is potential to perform on a high-level position. In comparison, there was little focus by the informants on the mastery of a task as a defining mark of talent. A talent is not required to measurably and consistently perform in a superior way in comparison to peers (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013).

At least, this is the case when informants describe selecting trainees, by many considered an entry level talent program. For these programs, potential as measured by GMA and personality testing is a requirement, while measured performance is less important. Certain competencies are measured, such as leadership. This may be
reasonable, considering the organisation, and as such some informants, has little in the ways of accurately and objectively measures of past performance when the candidate is not yet a part of the organisation. However, this may be compared to the talent programs requiring a nomination from a manager. In those cases, above mentioned tests are not used but participation is based on the candidates judged performance. To, in comparison with the line of thought of Bolander et al. (2017), assign one position on the scale of object to subject prove difficult. It may be possible that talent as either an object or subject is an approach formed by employees when interacting with talent management practices (cf. Meyers et al., 2019). If managerial practice influences the way practitioners interpret HR practices, it may help explain the different approaches to talent management even though the basic assumptions regarding talent remain relatively constant amongst informants. The approach currently active regarding talent programs heavily emphasise the entry level program members as high potential performing individuals who are valued by the corporation. There is however difficult to make the distinction between an object and a subject approach on an individual level (cf. Dries, 2013), considering the various streams of thought of informants when attempting to define the ambiguous concept of talent. This is hardly surprising, considering that talent according to Gallardo-Gallardo et al (2013) may be a combination of several factors which are neither exclusive nor polarised.

This may be recognised in the hiring practices of the corporation, where the ideal talent demonstrates not one but several qualities. There is little desire for an individual with great commitment to the organisation and the individuals own development, should the candidate not also demonstrate e.g. high potential and preferably high performance (cf. Bolander et al., 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). This may be due to several factors, however if there is no institutionalised definition for recruiters to follow it is likely difficult to synchronize criterions amongst different hiring teams. Furthermore, these criterions also differ as compared to the internal talent identification process, where performance reviews take preference. Reasonably, practical concerns surround this choice, as GMA testing on employees may seem excessive. This does however create a situation where the selection process for the label talent differs within the corporation, perhaps as a consequence or due to different conceptions amongst different individuals.

Indeed, there was a tendency by informants to describe talent as a combination of several factors. An innate ability (cf. Dries, 2013: Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013) was required, but there were more factors required for informants to consider an individual possessing innate ability to be considered talented. According to Davies and Davies (2010), if talent is an innate ability it cannot be developed, as either the
individual has it or not with no middle ground (Davies & Davies, 2010). Talent may however be enabled, should the correct context be sufficient for an innate talent to flourish. Perhaps the correct context may imply the ability for an individual to practice, or a context which allows for advancement. Reasonably, should talent be entirely innate there must still be factors allowing the individual to exercise its potential. Taken to its extreme, reasonably a hermit may not develop leadership skills even with a strong talent for it, just as an individual who early on due to social heritage is obliged to help provide for its family may miss out on a career in mechanical engineering due to a lack of formal education.

A requirement for the talent label may as such in this corporation be an individual who is born with some predisposition towards e.g. leadership (cf. Davies & Davies, 2010), but if this is not sufficiently developed the individual is not talented and further not to be included in the talent development program. When discussing talent in the world of work as compared to outside (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Tansley, 2011), one may have to consider that a single corporation does not wield a great amount of influence on individuals not currently employees, and while an individual has a predisposition or not may be of little concern if the resources required to enable it is to much of an undertaking. Remember, there are formal educational requirements for many positions in corporations which are not unreasonable.

Bolander et al. (2017) states that the contextual aspect of talent may be demonstrated in one or more situations, that an individual may be considered talented in a specific circumstance but not another. There is an expressed wish for talents in the corporation to be able to have transferable talent. An individual graduating an entry level program in this corporation may end up in contexts where they do not perform, but it is the individual’s responsibility to continue to prove their worth as a talent. Even though immediate environment, leadership of superiors and team members may hamper, or boost, the ability to demonstrate sought after qualities (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013), it is the individual who must be the driving force to enable a context where they thrive. Commitment to the individuals own development (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013) may be of a one true Scotsman kind, where one either has the commitment to remain a talent by adapting to local circumstance, or one is not talent at all. In essence, this would indicate a difference in the way individuals perceive talents as compared to a corporation, and has implications regarding the identification of talent as well as what kind of talent management fits the particular organisation.
The approach to talent in the organisation was with little doubt an exclusive one, considering the requirements needed to be considered for talent development (cf. Al Dries et al., 2014; Meyers & van Woerkom (2014). While every employee was considered to have talent, not all talents were to be supported by the corporation. The difference lay in the label talent, which mostly concerned itself with high potential leaders and specialists, both with formal qualifications. While there are developmental opportunities in the corporation for everybody, only individuals considered talents are to be formally developed.

To apply the figure as presented by Bolander et al. (2017) on an individual level was difficult, considering the differing conceptions of informants of what talents actually entails. Dries et al. (2014) presented two potential hypotheses to a similar question, where organisations had similar expectations of high performance and excellence while also talent was considered something all individuals had. One was that the organisation in question was top-loaded and the expectation of excellence was reasonable. The other was how the conceptions of talent was more multidimensional, and may include e.g. arts, sports and social action. In the corporation studied in the case, it may be fairly stated that is not top loaded, considering the roundabout 50 000 employees. While size is not a defining trait of a top graded organisation (e.g. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013), it has nowhere been stated that hiring practices support such a practice.

Moreover, the results of this study are in line with key findings regarding talent definitions of questioned HR professionals belonging to a Germanic cluster (Dries et al., 2014). While the subject corporation of this study is founded in Sweden, it is owned by a German corporation. It would not unreasonable to assume that ideas regarding talent management spread within the company as exemplified in Meyers and van Woerkom (2014). What may be of interest is however that the Germanic countries in Dries et al. (2014) demonstrate a lower aptitude for exclusiveness of talent management programs as compared to Anglo countries as presented in the previous chapter, whereas informants in this study to some degree considered the exclusive perspective a German influence on the corporation. While exclusiveness in talent management (cf. Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014) in Germany is by no means uncommon, subscribing to the thought that all talent management in Germany is exclusive may prove to be incorrect (cf. Dries et al., 2014). It is as such possible that this is an interpretation of talent strategy (Meyers et al., 2019).

5.2 Talent strategy and utilisation
Talent management as a field was a few years ago considered a field in its infancy (e.g. Tansley, 2011), and was troubled by a lack of coherence and rigor (Lewis &
Heckman, 2006). In the field today, one may be quick to draw similar conclusions due to the inconsistency in the use of the terms talent and talent management, and indeed some do (e.g. Cascio & Boudreau, 2016). However, due to the nature of best fit as compared to best practice, there will not be one solution applicable to all situations, and corporations are likely better off structuring their talent management programs according to their strategic needs (e.g. Bolander et al., 2017; Dries, 2013; Lewis & Heckman, 2006).

5.2.1 The corporation’s strategy
The corporation subject to this study has a clear and stated purpose of their overarching talent management structure, as illustrated in figure 3. They are looking for leaders and specialists to secure a future supply of high performance personnel (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). It is for this purpose that the new talent development function is constructed, to allow for an overarching perspective on organisational needs. Talented individuals are seen as an important part in shifting the organisation from a traditional industry towards supplying more service-based solutions.

In order to accomplish this, the corporations have to some extent imitated their parent companies model of talent management in order to prove talent to be an interchangeable component, hopefully enabling a more global recruitment pool and ensuring the right people at the right place, for the right price (cf. Schuler et al., 2011). The structure chosen to accomplish this is a one of exclusiveness and excellence, where potential talents are given resources to drive their own professional development. One may conclude that this is not strategic human resource management rebranded, consider that the developmental efforts are focused on a very small percentage of the total employees (cf. Iles et al., 2010).

Moreover, these are exclusively white-collar workers, and the production area of the corporation has little if not non-existent opportunity to participate. If all employees have talent as stated by most informants, all talent is not being developed. Naturally, this may be due to the broader definition of talent, and the difference to talent in the workplace (cf. Dries et al., 2014). A consequence to unclear communication regarding what talent entails in the workplace may indicate that individuals not being considered talents may infer that they are not talented, considering they are not participating in any program (cf. Swailes & Blackburn, 2016). In accordance with the literature, this is however unlikely (cf. Höglund, 2012; Swailes & Blackburn, 2016). More likely is that there is boost for the chosen individuals, instead of a weight on the individuals not chosen. While it may be true that the corporation consider their talents to lay outside the scope of the label talent the corporation has
the ambition to define, there may be little in the way of negative consequences on
the performance of individuals not having the label talent assuming no expectations
on the part of the employees are renegaded upon (cf. Rousseau, 1990).

Considering the nature of the intended talent management structure, one may reflect
upon the two remaining strands of thought (cf. Iles et al., 2010). Criteria for a talent
management program to be considered strategic use of human resource practices on
a smaller scale is the focus on attracting and retaining talents. A recurring theme in
the organisation was the retention of what the informants considered talented
individuals. This was, however, a sentiment to a higher degree expressed by the
informants who were not strategic actors. Whether this was due to how the strategic
actors generally were more in the know regarding the future talent development
function, or because they may hold differing views of talent management (cf. Dries
et al., 2014; Makram et al., 2017) is unclear. Reasonably, strategic actors involved
have to some degree more articulated thoughts regarding talent in the workplace,
and is as such more capable at expressing a more strategic perspective in an
interview. This may not, however, constitute organisational focused competence
development in more than theory (cf. Iles et al., 2010). Decisions in the corporation
needs to be anchored, and reasonably it is required of the practitioners to share the
vision of what constitute talent management in this corporation for it to be successful
(cf. Lewis & Heckman, 2006). It may be comparable to the lack of ownership
explained by Guthridge et al. (2008), where a disconnect between managers and
talent management strategy leads to a limited sense of ownership and understanding
of benefits of implemented practices.

It may be possible to draw parallels between the intended structure of the talent
management programmes and figure 2, as reworked from the model presented by
Collings and Mellahi (2009). Using entry level talent management programs, the
goal is to recruit individuals from the external labour market into their talent pool,
complimented using performance reviews to identify internal candidates. The role
of HR is to, according to Vaiman et al (2012) present the optimal way of doing this.
Reasonably, the size of the organisation and scope of the challenge would present a
challenge, considering that organisational structure may impede collaboration and
sharing of resources across boundaries (cf. Guthridge et al., 2008). Local HR
functions are to some extent independent of the central talent function, and may not
share neither vision for the talent program nor the talent type as prescribed by any
potential centrally agreed upon definition. Moreover, on one hand the local manager
responsible for the performance review may not consider an individual to possess
this kind of talent, and they would largely be responsible for the internal
identification of talent. On the other, they would consider to many individuals to be talented, and the system for identification would be overloaded.

As stated by Highhouse (2008, p. 1), there is a “stubborn reliance on intuition and subjectivity in employee selection” and considering how the identification process would proceed it is not unreasonable to assume that some amount of intuition would have to be used for the nominations. Compared to the entry level programs, where formalised tests are done to assess the potential of candidates and a provide a more objective approach, the overload of possible talent conceptualisations (cf. Vaiman et al., 2012) may be confusing for any individual. A manager with low involvement in strategic formulation and little ownership of the project may not see the benefit of talent management (cf. Guthridge, 2008), and this may influence his or her judgement to some extent. For example, it may be difficult for a manager to discern if the potentially talented employee does not have talent or is merely placed in an awkward context. Moreover, it may prove awkward for a manager who believes everybody has talent which should be developed, to exclusively recommend only a few. As such, it stands to reason that it may be of importance for the talent definition to not only be well designed, but also well motivated and linked to concrete strategic advantages.

Furthermore, if the ambition is to have a well-researched and motivated definition linked to strategy, the practitioners responsible for implementing practices may lack specific competence needed (cf. Guthridge, 2008). According to Bolander et al. (2017), when talent is a clearly defined concept, high methodological standards apply, and validated tools are used. Employees require knowledge of how to properly use these tools, which is recognised at the organisation in question, but the assessments are not calibrated across the different recruitment teams. It may as such be possible for two recruiters, using the same validated tools, to diverge in their selection perhaps based on personal bias (cf. Highhouse, 2008).

One of the recurring themes in the interviews was the importance of not recruiting talents but retaining them. Securing the talent pipeline is of high importance because of the future expected return on investment into these individuals (cf. Holland & Scullion, 2018), and individuals participating in the talent programs represent a loss in not only the loss of a valuable employee but also, reasonably, the opportunity cost of choosing an individual not intrinsically interested in staying with the corporation. Creating selection criterions for fit may however be difficult, and there may be various reasons for an employee to leave the corporation. According to Bolander et al. (2017), an organisation may accomplish this by differentiating themselves from other organisation, to create a strong employer brand or by conducting employee
value propositions (Bolander et al., 2017). While employer branding lies outside the scope of this study, a valuable aspect of the corporation is the developmental opportunities inherent in a large multinational organisation.

The corporation seek to develop entry level individuals with high potential to high value employees in the organisation (cf. Bolander et al., 2017). These individuals are ideally placed on important positions (cf. Minbaeva & Collings, 2013; Schreuder & Noorman, 2018), enabling the corporation to reach its strategic goals. It does this by using formal programs requiring special admission, either by nomination or by externally recruiting for them. These programs are however very limited in scope, and if we consider a regional scope of 17 000 employees, less than 1 % participate annually. In comparison, 16 % of the population may be considered high performing as in producing 19-48 % more, depending on job complexity, than an average worker (Hunter, Schmidt & Judiesch, 1990). This discrepancy is likely linked to the competencies defined as talent in the corporation, or due to practical concerns considering that the number of talents in the corporation is expected to grow slightly. This may also be linked to the way talent is described, that one has to continuously prove worthy of the label (cf. Swailes & Blackburn, 2016). A talented individual may as such possibly be labelled talented intermittently, or perhaps reach the potential assessed and stop qualifying for formal talent programs.

Participants may be given an edge in their career management by the networks accessible to them through these programs. The trainees are highly encouraged to both network together (cf. Bolander et al., 2017), forming a homogenised group, as well as connecting with employees at the various departments where they temporarily work. This may however be at odds with the way the corporation utilises succession planning. According to Bolander et al. (2017), a self-managed career is focused on the needs and wants of the individual, similar to the approach to talents as described by the informants. When a clear career path is desired, the organisation may however want to manage it in a more structured way (cf. Bolander et al., 2017). Consider the ambition to develop a cross functional talent structure: when a career is self-managed there is no assurance that this is a desired path. Some may want to advance laterally within the same role, and develop skills relevant to their current and future position. Depending on the needs of the organisation, this may be desired. Due to the stated goal of the talent function, to find future leaders and specialists, the structure to be used may have to be more controlled by the organisation.

If the focus is upwards mobility, as may be implied in leadership development focus, the organisationally may have to play a larger part in career management (cf. Bolander et al., 2017). The organisations utilise performance reviews in order to
determine career advancement, but there may be some doubt as to which degree this capture the actual potential of the individual. Remember, talent may be more or less pronounced depending on contextual factors (e.g. Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Considering the importance of matching an employee to the right role, the development of this talent function may serve as an overarching actor, monitoring talents and detecting hurdles in career management, providing support when needed. Moreover, through skilful selection, individuals aspiring to develop themselves in accordance with a broader perspective may reasonably be chosen, as to avoid differing expectations between the organisation and individual (cf. Rousseau, 1990).

5.2.2 The individuals’ considerations
Moreover, an individual may have differing expectations as compared to the corporation (cf. Rousseau, 1990). While it starts out as an employment contract, this change when considered long-term (cf. Holland & Scullion, 2019). The corporation in the study desires individuals willing to grow within it, and as such it may be reasonable to consider what may be expected of the organisation, in addition to benefits outlined in an interview. An individual’s expectation may be based not only on what is explicitly described, but also implicitly (Rousseau, 1990). Considering how the trainee program in particular is marketed as a leadership program, and that former trainees now inhabit half of the available posts on the board of directors, one may forgive trainees for having high expectations. Participation in a talent program may act as a motivating factor for trainees (e.g. Björkman et al., 2013; Festing & Schäfer, 2013; Höglund, 2012), should they perceive it as a talent label. While the talent label may be unclear to job applicants, it is not unreasonable to assume that trainees may draw parallels to talent programs considering the amount of differentiation that occurs between them and the regular employees. Indeed, according to informants this differentiation is encouraged by the corporation, in order to create a homogenised group.

Furthermore, according to King (2016), this talent label is an implied promise, which short-term facilitates positive behaviour. In the long term, however, this may entail a breach in the psychological contract. Consider, as one informant put it, some trainees have expressed the sentiment that the spotlight disappeared when the program ended. Perhaps this may be an example of when one party expected the other to perform in a certain way as an inference of past behaviour (cf. Rousseau, 1990). Should a psychological contract between e.g. a trainee and the corporation have been formed during the extensive trainee program, a lack of attention may constitute a breach in it. While the trainee programme, as informants described it, is a VIP lane, they are expected to perform and if they don’t, they are no longer a talent.
If, as one informant put it, talents may be trainees but not all trainees are talents this may further complicate matters. A trainee who is not a talent may expect to be treated as such, and when not, this may constitute a breach in a psychological contract based on the implied promise as exemplified in King (2016). The psychological contract may not appear the same to the individual as it may to the corporation (cf. Rousseau, 1990), and herein lies an importance in the perhaps casual use of terms (such as talent) which to some may imply differing things, be it practitioners, managers or candidates.

Assuming all trainees are talents as labelled by the corporation, disappointing them in such a way as it causes a breach in the psychological contract may have disproportionate consequences (cf. Swailes & Blackburn, 2016). The resources spent on the talent programmes are considerable and return on investment expected. An individual who leaves the organisation represents a loss and is to be avoided. Furthermore, if the individual perceives less support from the corporation, their own contribution may be adjusted (cf. Rousseau, 1990). While it is important to consider regular employees, any breach in these contracts directly affects individuals the corporation has judged to be high performing and to have high potential, hence the disproportionate consequences (cf. Swailes & Blackburn, 2016). There is an expectation of a long-term engagement, and short-term benefits such as higher compensation (cf. King, 2016) while provided is reasonably not sufficient in order to fulfil this goal. Safe employment, as exemplified by King (2016), is surely a bonus but individuals qualifying for a talent programmes will reasonably not lack employment opportunities and as such it may be of importance to match employee and employer expectations, not only during but also after any talent management program.

5.3 Summarising discussion
As previously noted in the discussion, while there may be a surprising consensus regarding the nature of talent, one may surmise that is more related to the concept of talent itself as compared to talent specifically in the workplace. Talent as a concept seems to be heavily influenced by activities outside the world of work, such as in sports or the arts (cf. the Germanic cluster in Dries et al., 2014). Informants to a high degree does not separate the individuals from innate abilities, and there is a clear stated link from an innate ability to both high performance and high potential (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). While it may not be a must have requirement, it is implied that most if not all talents have something special not available to all employees.
Moreover, these individuals all have a high drive, a commitment, both to the corporation and to their own development (cf. Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). This commitment may be an essential part of being a talent in this particular workplace, but it requires additional parts on the account of the prospective talent. Further, as talent is seen as individuals who may accomplish greater achievements as compared to peers, this is on the part of the informants a characteristic that may not be demonstrated in all situations and environments. Strategic actors did, however, consider the label talent as to be defined by the corporation to include the ability to perform in different contexts. It is unclear if this is due to the intended strategy, and interpretations of it (cf. Meyers et al., 2019). A purpose of the intended talent development function is to be cross-functional between the differing business areas in the corporation, and the current talent programs have an exclusive approach. While they all had surprisingly similar thoughts of what talent is, it was rarely definite and concise, which is similar to previous studies (e.g. Dries et al., 2014; Vaiman et al., 2012).

Reasonably, this may be due to a lack of communication regarding the exact nature of talent as sought after in the corporation, and as follows it is difficult for practitioners to internalise the intended definition (cf. Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Furthermore, talent as a concept may be a too broad of a term for the intended use. According to Lewis and Heckman (2006), there is a lack of clarity regarding the definition and goals of talent management. While this may be true, it may also be due to the best fit approach suitable to talent management (cf. Silzer & Dowell, 2010). In this thesis, talent as defined by this corporation has been referred to as a label. Considering the size of this corporation, it seems unlikely that only one approach, and as follows, one definition is the end all goal. A single definition may be of use, and should likely be (cf. Dries et al., 2014; Makram et al., 2017; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014), when selecting for exclusive and formalised talent programs. There may still be a use for knowledge management (cf. Dries, 2013), considering the competence shift the corporation is faced with and the development of the general workforce (cf. Minbaeva & Collings, 2013). While this may not be the talent management as envisioned by the organisation, it may be misleading to use the term talent which may have wide areas of application outside these exclusive programs, and it may aid the concretisation of the practice. (cf. Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014).

Furthermore, it may be useful to articulate the difference between the label talent, as intended to be used by the corporation and conceptualisations held by practitioners. The intended talent development function is likely to have a dynamic view of the talent label, meaning that one is not a talent because of participation in an entry level
program, but must prove oneself repeatedly (cf. Höglund, 2012; Swailes & Blackburn, 2016). Identification of these employees likely requires heavy involvement from line managers and localised HR, who may have differing definitions of talent if not clearly communicated and outcome may vary (cf. Highhouse, 2008; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Employees may further be motivated to develop should a possibility of joining a talent pool exist, however this requires knowledge on part of the employee of the programs in question. It is not unreasonable to assume that the size of the corporation limits communication between the business areas (cf. Guthridge et al., 2008), and clearly stated qualifications widely known may aid in the development of the general workforce (cf. Höglund, 2012; Rousseau, 1990).

In summary, it may be difficult to equalise an organisation’s definition of talent (cf. Bolander et al., 2017) with practitioner definitions, considering the practitioners are individuals who may or may not interpret an official guideline the same way (cf. Guthridge et al., 2008; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Furthermore, differentiating between different conceptualisation is, in practice, difficult (cf. Dries, 2013). While there may be an official definition, it competes with pre-existing conceptualisations of talent (cf. Dries et al., 2014). Strategic talent management may face difficulties when implementing due to the need to anchor the decision in a decentralised corporation (cf. Guthridge et al., 2008), where talent definitions may vary (cf. Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014), as the identification process (cf. Bolander et al., 2017) and the employee-organisation relationship (cf. King, 2016; Rousseau, 1990) may influence the outcome of a vision e.g. talent retention if selection criteria does not align with the stated definition (cf. Meyers et al., 2019).

5.4 Conclusion

Thus, the research questions may be answered. (1) How does the HR professionals in this organisation define talent in the workplace? While there is a surprising consensus regarding the nature of talent amongst practitioners as compared to the strategic actors, the practitioners rarely had an articulated vision of talent in the workplace. There seemed to be a high influence from activities outside the world of work, and amongst practitioners who were not involved in the formulation of talent management strategy this seemed to align with stated employee definitions. As such, most of the informants’ definitions were a composite of high performance and potential, an innate ability serving as a baseline and with emphasis on employee commitment. In addition, strategic actors involved in talent management formulation considered the transferability of talent to be an important aspect and had
a more concise view of talent even though they to a high degree expressed similar sentiments.

(2) How is the talent utilised in accordance with firm strategy, and how may this influence the employee-organisation relationship? The strategy as presented was in line with a conceptualisation of talent as a subject, where individuals and not characteristics are what the corporations labels as talent. Subjects are to some degree required to display characteristics. Further, in a differentiated career architecture (as seen in figure 2 as conceptualised by Collings & Mellahi, 2009 and figure 3), the subject approach does align well with the exclusive talent management programs, as caretaking of talented individuals are a high priority. This does have some implication for the psychological contract and employee-organisation relationship, as one may not be a talent indefinitely and this dynamic talent label may lead to unfulfilled expectations, on the part of both the organisation and the individual.

While the research questions are answered, one aspects of the purpose remain unknown, namely if the subjective definitions of talent have any influence on talent management strategy in a corporation. Due to talent definitions being concept practitioners had rarely articulated before this study, it was made difficult to discern a potential causal link between their sometimes inconsistent conceptualisations and formulation of strategy. Regarding the informants involved in decision making surrounding strategic formulation, their definitions did align with intended strategy. There are however some difficulties in concluding that this is a causal relation, as according to Meyers et al. (2019) there is reason to believe the subjective definitions of talent may influence interpretations of talent management. In the same study Meyers et al. did not see a relation between specific definitions and corresponding strategic formulation, and to claim there is one based on data gathered in this study may be considered a leap. This dimension is unfortunately left inconclusive and requires further research.
6 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

While more research is needed in the area, some practical implications may be useful to consider for further scientific study and practitioners facing similar challenges in their organisations.

6.1 Implications for practice

Consider talent as defined by the practitioners in this study. Even though talent management was a promoted concept in the corporation, there were not much differentiation between talent as an individual (or characteristic) as compared to the label talent as promoted in the corporation’s strategy. This may imply that organisations attempting to implement an inclusive perspective may face a challenge consisting of practitioners who believe talent to be an exclusive property not belonging to all, and which may or may not be developable.

Furthermore, this study was conducted in a Swedish setting utilising informants belonging to a relatively homogenised group in a small part of an organisation. It is not unlikely that this definition may be different in other parts of the organisation, where individuals may have different social context. The definitions have been shown to differ somewhat depending on the cultural context (cf. Dries et al., 2014), and definitions commonplace in a Swedish setting may not take the same shape in a global context. While the scope of this study was regional and not global, research does promote talent mobility (e.g. Minbaeva & Collings, 2013; Tariq & Schuler, 2010), and due to what may be an environmental influence on talent definitions of practitioners this may be food for thought of future talent management implementers.

A dynamic talent label, as desired by the corporation, may have interesting complications for the psychological contract. If the talent label implies a promise on the part of the organisation (cf. King, 2016) or past behaviour infer a certain treatment (cf. Rousseau, 1990), a consequence might be breach in a psychological contract. This is further complicated by the expressed desire to take care of the talents, as put by a strategically involved informant, and may require further clarification in the organisation as to exactly what or who is a talent, and what this implies in practice.

6.2 Future research

Mainly, it may be of interest to statistically investigate the potential link between talent definition and organisational talent strategy. A distinction may have to be made between practitioners and professionals involved in strategic formulation. For
example, the link between practitioners’ definition and practices in use by the organisation and the definition of strategic actors and strategy utilised by the organisation. This may have implications for talent management and highlight an eventual importance of clear communication and concise definition.

It may be of interest to further investigate the employee perception of talent management in organisations, and whether practices align with talent strategy, and implications for the employee-organisation relationship. While it lies outside the scope of this study, it is not too unlikely that there may be an association between the talent definition of manager, the way they perform their tasks due to interpretation of strategy and the psychological contract of talented individuals.

Moreover, while this study takes a cultural perspective into consideration (namely a Swedish one), due to increasing globalism it may be of interest to identify the factors within culture that influence talent definitions. How this is to be done is left to the next researcher, but this may be of use to multinational corporations of today.
REFERENCES


Appendix A – Interview guide

Intervjuguide (30–45 min)

Jag hoppas också kunna, i syfte att genomföra en tematisk analys spela in intervjun. Jag behöver transkribera materialet för att kunna använda det. Är det okej med dig?

Vidare har jag även skickat ut ett informationsbrev gällande information kring GDPR. Jag vet att du har svarat att du godkänner det, men jag frågar dig här en gång till, så har du chansen att ställa frågor alternativt ändra dig.

Har jag ditt samtycke till detta? Ja / Nej

Jag heter ju Filip Eriksson, och anledningen till att jag gör dessa intervjuer är för att jag skriver mitt exjobb här på [företaget]. Syftet med arbetet är att inom en organisation studera talent och talent management-strategi

I. Övergripande
   Vi börjar med lite övergripande frågor.

   1. För protokollet, vad är ditt fullständiga namn?
   2. Vad har du för titel på [företaget]?
   3. Beskriv din position på [företaget]?
      o Vad är dina arbetsuppgifter?
      o Vad har du för ansvar?

II. Definiera talent
    Här tänkte jag att skulle fråga dig om begreppet talent.

   4. Enligt dig, vad är talang?
      o Något som en individ har, eller får?
   5. Delar din (yrkesmässiga) omgivning den uppfattningen?
   6. Så hur definierar du talang (om du har en definition)?
   7. Hur kan talang identifieras?
   8. Hur kan talang mätas?
   9. Hur kan talang, om möjligt, utvecklas?
  10. Hur kommuniceras detta med berörda parter?
      o Rekryterare
      o Chefer
      o (Framtida?) kollegor

III. Vem eller vad är talang?
Här tänkte jag att du ska få möjligheten att prata om talangprogram, både i egenskapen av deltagare och designer. [Anpassa efter respondentens professionella roll]

12. Vad anser du att talent management innebär?
13. Vad är syftet med [företaget]s talangprogram?
14. Vad innebär TM-programmet för talangerna?
   o Utvecklingsmöjligheter?
      ▪ Vad innebär det?
   o Extra resurser?
   o Extra tid?
   o Högre lön?
   o Kontakter?
15. Vilka fördelar marknadsför ni till talanger?
16. Vilka förväntningar har ni?
17. Har alla möjlighet att delta?
   o Vilka kan inte delta?
18. Informeras de som betraktas som talanger om detta faktum?
   o Varför då?
19. Informeras de som inte betraktas som talanger om detta faktum?
   o Varför då?

IV. Strategi
   Här tänkte jag att du ska få möjligheten att prata om tanken bakom talangprogram. [Anpassa efter respondentens professionella roll]

20. Har du varit involverad i arbetet kring talang på [företaget]?
   o I vilken kapacitet?
21. Hur tänker ni kring TM och [företaget]framtidna utmaningar?
22. Hur arbetar [företaget] med talanger?
   o Vilka utmaningar har ni stått inför i detta arbete?
23. Vad är målet med detta arbete?
24. Vad eller vilka har ni inspirerats av?
   o Varför?
25. Ni har exempelvis varit på studiebesök
   o Hur har dessa valts ut?
   o Vilka erfarenheter har dessa?
   o År det något som ni tycker varit extra viktigt, som de bidrar med?
26. Hur är [företaget]s strategi med talanger utformat för att nå detta mål?
27. På vilket sätt kommer arbetet med talanger att främja er konkurrensfördel?
28. Vilka praktiker ingår, eller kommer ingå, i talent management-arbetet?
29. Hur utvärderas det om det gällt bra?
30. Hur utvärderas det om rätt individer mäts?
   o Vad blir konsekvenserna av en eventuell utvärdering?
31. Hur tror du [företaget]s arbete med talanger kommer se ut i framtiden?
   o På vilket sätt tror du att du kommer vara delaktiv?
Appendix B – Information letter

Förutsättningar för intervju i enlighet med GDPR
Innan intervjun börjar behöver jag ditt skriftliga samtycke till att dina personuppgifter får behandlas av Linköpings universitet. Ditt frivilliga samtycke är den rättsliga grunden för behandlingen av dina personuppgifter, så jag vill kort informera dig om hur jag kommer att använda materialet. Personuppgifter rör namn, ljudupptagningar samt arbetslivsrörade uppgifter. Syftet med att hantera uppgifterna är genomförandet av ett examensarbete på mastersprogrammet HRM/HRD.

Personuppgifterna kommer hanteras på följande sätt: Uppgifterna kommer att lagras digitalt på mina privata arbetsverktyg samt på LiUs interna servrar. Enbart jag som författare, min handledare och i begränsad utsträckning andra studenter och lärare där examensarbetet seminariebehandlas och kvalitetsgranskas kommer att hantera uppgifterna. Uppgifterna kommer inte att lämnas ut till externa mottagare, och vi delar inte dina personuppgifter med tredje part. Dina personuppgifter kommer i högsta möjliga mån inte kunna länkas till dig som person i den slutgiltiga publikationen av examensarbetet. [Alternativ mening utskickad till aktörer som kunde förväntas ha arbetsuppgifter som gör dem urskiljbara: Med din tillåtelse kan dina personuppgifter komma att länkas till dig som person i den slutgiltiga publikationen av examensarbetet.]

Samtycket är giltigt tillsvidare, och uppgifterna kommer att behandlas till examensarbetet är klart och godkänt. De kan också komma att behandlas i framtida vetenskapliga arbeten. Du har rätt att när som helst få tillgång till dina uppgifter, få fel rättade, och ta tillbaka ditt samtycke. Detta gör du genom att kontakta mig eller Linköpings universitet. På LiUs hemsidor finner du också mer information om detta.

Har jag ditt samtycke till detta? Ja / Nej

Vänligen läs igenom och bifoga ditt svar till mig innan intervjun.