

# THE VALUE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT ARCHITECTURES TO MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

HEBA MAKRAM

PhD in Management

This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy



Department of Management, Lancaster University, Management School, Lancaster,

LA1 4YX, United Kingdom.

E-mail: [h.makram@lancster.ac.uk](mailto:h.makram@lancster.ac.uk)

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions and understandings of two groups of strategic actors (HR and talent leaders as system designers and business leaders as system implementers) in multinational companies (MNCs). Moreover, to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of how multinational organisations think about and define Talent Management (henceforth shortened to TM) and whether and how they perceive their TM architectures to add value to the organisation. It examines two research questions. First, 'do strategic actors believe that the TM architectures implemented within their organisations add value to the organisation, and if so, what value do they believe it adds?' Second, 'how may TM architectures add value?' This question is examined through a sub-set of four research propositions in relation to a series of theoretically established value processes (value creation, capture, leverage and protection). The research draws upon ideas from three academic disciplines: Strategic Management and the role of strategic actors and the nature of strategy-as-practice, Strategic Human Resources Management (henceforth shortened to SHRM) and the study of HR systems, High Performance Work Systems (henceforth shorted to HPWS) and TM architectures, and the resource-based view (henceforth shortened to RBV) of the firm in relation to value and value creation - in order to address the problem of value and TM. It develops a series of propositions to suggest how TM architectures might add value through four enabling value processes. The findings are used to draw inferences about these potential value-adding processes.

The research uses an 'explanatory' multi-case study design based on an empirical study conducted in five MNCs. The study uses a qualitative research approach, drawing on 52 in-depth interviews. The findings show that the absence of a formal TM definition led to a lack of consensus among strategic actors about the meaning of TM. Instead, there was a common perception that TM is another HR process which includes traditional practices such as the recruitment, selection, development and retention of talent. However, introducing the concepts of 'value' to the discourse of TM demonstrated how borrowing notions from the non-HR literature can contribute to our understanding of the role played in TM by strategic actors. The use of a theoretical framework – the value model - helped in understanding the value of TM architectures against each of the four value processes.

This study makes a number of contributions. It empirically deconstructs the understandings of strategic actors about TM. It addresses the definitional problem currently evidenced in the literature and provides new insights to help academics understand the value of TM. It provides direction for future research. The study also contributes to practice by providing system designers and system implementers with a blueprint which could guide the design and implementation of the TM architectures introduced in their organisations to ensure that these architectures are aligned to corporate and business strategies and contribute to the enablement of value.

**Keywords:** Talent management, Talent management architectures, Value, Value creation, Value capture, Value leverage and Value protection.

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## DECLARATION

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I declare that the PhD thesis titled “The Value of Talent Management Architectures To Multinational Companies” is my own work and effort and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

I confirm that appropriate credit has been given in this thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

This thesis has been completed under the supervision of Professor Paul Sparrow and Dr.Kay Greasley at the University of Lancaster.

### Publications

Aspects of the work presented in this study have been published in the following journals:

- Makram, H., Sparrow, P. and Greasley, K. (2017) 'How do strategic actors think about the value of talent management? Moving from talent practice to the practice of talent', *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 4(4), pp. 259-378.
- Sparrow, P. R. and Makram, H. (2015) 'What is the value of talent management? Building value-driven processes within a talent management architecture', *Human Resource Management Review*, 25(3), pp. 249-263.
- Sparrow, P. R., Otaye, L. and Makram, H. (2014) 'How should we value talent management? *Centre for Performance-led HR White Paper 14/01*. Lancaster University Management School.

*To my mother for all your sacrifices, sleepless nights and hard work, so I could become who I am today. I owe it to you!*

*To my father for your unconditional love. Your love gave me strength every step of the way. May you rest in peace!*

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the research problem '*How May Talent Management Architectures Add Value to Organisations?*'. Section 1.2 of this chapter summarises the theoretical background of the research and positions the research problem. In Section 1.3, I elaborate on the purpose of the study and list the specific research questions in order to explain what I will empirically examine in this research. I then move on in Section 1.4 to highlight the significance of the study and how it contributes to knowledge and understanding and hopefully the development of the TM field. Before I present an overall view of the research design and approach and the methodology used for data collection (in Section 1.6), I introduce the definitions and concepts which I have developed, and which are used throughout this study (in Section 1.5). These definitions were derived from the literature review and refined on the basis of the findings. I then (in Section 1.7), conclude the chapter by presenting the structure of the thesis and an outline of the chapters.

## 1.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Ever since its conception in the late 90s, the topic of TM has gained increased attention in both academic literature and managerial discourse (Lewis and Heckman, 2006, Boudreau and Ramstad, 2007, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, Scullion et al., 2010, McDonnell et al., 2010). This increased interest in TM appears to be premised on the assumption that TM is a source of sustained competitive advantage. For a long time, academics have attempted to conceptualise

the term 'talent management' in order to define its scope and boundaries. One of the most common definitions is that of Collings and Mellahi (2009), who describe TM as a set of processes and activities employed by organisations to systematically identify key positions, establish pools of high potentials to fill these positions and develop specific HR architectures to manage these employees.

Moreover, with the internationalisation of business, a more 'global' dimension of TM (i.e. Global Talent Management - GTM) has emerged - for example, Scullion and Collings (2011) define GTM as the organisational activities undertaken to attract, develop and retain talent in strategic positions on a global scale. Their definition recognises the global challenges organisations face to attract and acquire talent (Farndale et al., 2010, Hartmann et al., 2010), and therefore suggests that there is a need to manage the highly competitive global environment by developing a unique set of HR practices to attract, retain and develop global talent. Despite the different views on what TM is and the various attempts to define it, there is a consensus in the literature that TM, is fundamentally premised on attracting, retaining and developing a unique group of people who are of particular value to their organisations (Makram et al., 2017).

The TM literature rests on a number of implicit value claims, each of which suggests the importance of TM to value creation and sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991, Becker, 1998, Lepak and Snell, 1999, Lewis and Heckman, 2006, Wright et al., 2001a, Collings and Mellahi, 2009). Yet, there has not been enough research to test many of these claims, nor has there been any attempt to comprehensively explain how TM architectures may add value to organisations. What is more, TM researchers have borrowed ideas about 'value creation' from other fields and have applied them to their own area without defining precisely the

meaning of value (i.e. what value is) or how is value created and captured. Nevertheless, even the language of value is imprecise and needs interpretation. The fact that no one has paused to ask these deeper questions about value and TM has hindered the development of the HRM field in general and the TM field in particular and has resulted in a lack of conceptual and empirical evidence to support many of the claims made about value in relation to TM.

This research, therefore, aims to bridge this academic gap and address the problem of TM and value by answering important questions about *the value of TM architectures*. More specifically, the research problem is *'how may talent management architectures add value to organisations, as perceived by strategic actors in multinational organisations?'*

This study is intended to fill the gap in our knowledge and understanding by examining the *value of talent management architectures*, and to do this, a theoretical model of value was developed and derived from the literature to guide the research process. This model brings to the fore, four different value processes that may be used to examine the usefulness or otherwise of a TM architecture.

### **1.3 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to address important questions about TM and value which have so far not been answered in the TM literature, and to provide conceptual and empirical evidence to explain whether and how TM architectures add value to MNCs. My objective in this study is to examine whether strategic actors in MNCs perceive TM architectures to add value to their organisations, and to examine how the value of TM is understood and described in practice. In doing this, I also intend to explore the meaning of TM (how TM is defined in organisations, if it

is defined at all). The intention here is to surface how organisations understand the concept of TM (through their strategic actors) and observe how this understanding might evolve once the ideas of 'value' are introduced into the TM discourse. I am also interested in identifying the different TM practices that organisations invest in as part of their TM architectures. In this, the intention is not to delve into how these practices are implemented by organisations, but instead to examine whether these practices are deliberately designed, keeping in mind how they relate together to form the TM architecture of the organisation. I thus seek to understand whether the idea of TM architectures is reflective and is considered in practice. For the purpose of this study, I have developed a theoretical value model which borrows the ideas of 'value creation', 'value capture', 'value leverage' and 'value protection' principally from the strategic management literature. The objective of using this model is to examine how TM architectures may contribute to these four value processes.

More specifically, the study aims to address the following research questions:

- 1) Do strategic actors believe that the talent management architectures (practices, processes and policies) implemented within their organisations add value to the organisation or not, and if so, what value do they believe they add?
  
- 2) How do talent management architectures add value in relation to four value processes (creation, capture, leverage and protection)?
  - a) How may TM architectures enable the creation of value?
  - b) How may TM architectures enable the capture of value?
  - c) How may TM architectures enable the leverage of value?

- d) How may TM architectures enable the protection of value?

## 1.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study are significant for both academics and practitioners.

- First, this study suggests a new way of thinking about the value added by TM architectures in organisations, and deconstructs the understanding of strategic actors of the meaning of TM from an empirical base.
- Second, it contributes to the theoretical development of the field by examining a series of propositions which explains how TM architectures may enable the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value.
- Third, it provides empirical evidence from five multinational companies to bridge the gap between theory and practice.
- Fourth, it surfaces the implicit assumptions and often contended debates and dialogues which are shaping current practice and policy within TM, thus providing a good foundation to guide future research.

For practitioners, or more specifically professionals in the HR and talent area (i.e. HR and Talent Directors) and other decision-makers in organisations, the findings in relation to different strategic actors in organisations provide a framework which can guide their thinking and their approach to TM. It challenges them to think more strategically about TM and directs their attention to the importance of value and value-creating resources (in this case, talent resources). In that, the value model looks at four different value processes, and provides a



blueprint for the TM practices which organisations should consider when they are thinking about value in the organisation.

## 1.5 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

From the literature review, I developed a series of definitions to guide me through this study.

For ease of interpretation, I provide definitions of key terms here in the Introduction:

- Talent Management Architectures: the combination of the TM systems, processes and practices developed and implemented by an organisation to effectively manage its talent;
- Value Creation: activities which enable the organisation to effectively manage its value-creating resources in order to increase the worth of its goods, services or its business overall;
- Value Capture: activities which enable the organisation to recover some or all of the value created by its value-creating resources;
- Value Leverage: activities which enable the organisation to improve and extend the capabilities of its value-creating resources.
- Value Protection: activities which enable the organisation to protect its value-creating resources from being captured or duplicated by competitors.

Subsequently, in the light of the findings from the data analysis, I refined the definition of 'Talent Management Architectures' to:

- Talent Management Architectures: the deliberate bundle of practices designed and

implemented by organisations to enable the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value.

I also developed a new definition of 'Talent Management' (in relation to the concept of value) to define its boundaries and scope. This definition is based on the findings and the theoretical development of this study:

- Talent Management: is an exclusive strategic approach which enables organisations to create, capture, leverage and protect value through the effective management of an élite group of talent.

## 1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, I chose to adopt a multiple and explanatory case study design, and conducted five case studies in MNCs. The sample size was guided by that used in previous TM case study research, which has ranged from four to seven cases (Iles et al., 2010, Hartmann et al., 2010, Preece et al., 2011). These MNCs were selected for the sophistication of their HR and talent practices and the extent to which identifiable TM strategies were in place; this was established through an informal interview with the head of HR prior to negotiating access.

To gain access to these cases, I drew upon my professional network and the relationships I managed to build through my organisation. The organisations targeted were large American MNCs (i.e. with more than 15,000 employees) except for one British MNC, with strong global and regional presences. The study focused mostly on regional access, predominantly in the Middle East and African (MEA) region, but also included a few Asia-Pacific and European countries. Four of the organisations were in the information technology sector, and one in the

healthcare sector.

Given the nature of the research problem and the need to generate rich and detailed accounts, I adopted a qualitative approach and conducted a total of 52 semi-structured (face-to-face or Skype) in-depth interviews with strategic actors. These actors were selected because they were system designers (i.e. HR and TM professionals) and system implementers (i.e. executives and line managers). The number of interviews ranged from 6 to 10 in most of the organisations, except for one, where I gained full access and conducted 19 interviews. Because of the number of interviews conducted in this organisation, it played a significant role in the data analysis and the development of the thematic framework. I used this case as a basis for developing the thematic framework and subsequently structure, and organising the data sets from the other organisations.

The semi-structured interviews enabled me to understand how these actors understood TM, and to capture their self-generated logics which were explanatory of their practice. The interviews focused on surfacing:

- the meaning of TM, and the practices that constitute TM architectures,
- the value of TM as perceived by strategic actors,
- the meaning of value, and how is it created in organisations, and
- how TM architectures enable the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value.

Becoming fully familiar with the data was pivotal, and so the data analysis journey began by transcribing the recordings of the interviews. I took it upon myself to personally transcribe all

52 interviews (60 hours of recorded material, all of which was transcribed verbatim). This allowed me to become more familiar with the data and engage with each interview as a whole to gain a better understanding of the key debates and issues and to identify an initial list of potentially important themes. To further immerse myself in the data, I used three modes of reading: literal reading, reflexive and finally interpretive reading (Miller and Crabtree, 1999). The reading stage made me aware of the variety of views which emerged, and enabled me to record key observations and identify more themes. I subsequently adopted a thematic analysis approach (Ritchie et al., 2014). The thematic analysis approach enabled me to break data down into chunks and identify links between them using provisional and data emerging codes (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). The coding process included first-cycle and second-cycle coding (Saldaña, 2009). I used NVivo to analyse and navigate through the data sets; I initially identified more than 150 nodes, which were then further reviewed and reduced to 98. NVivo enabled me to string the data together and to build logical chains of evidence which illuminated and explained how strategic actors perceived TM to add value to their organisations.

Given that this was an iterative process, it was important to continuously review the thematic framework and reflect on the data sets before sorting and indexing. I then developed data summary displays (using Excel spreadsheets) to summarise and compare data sets in terms of themes/sub-themes and to establish a broader picture of the data, which revealed patterns of similarities and contradictions between the interviewees and the case study organisations (Ritchie et al., 2014). This allowed me to draw inferences and cross-case conclusions and build plausible arguments and interpretations which were supported by the data.

## 1.7 THESIS STRUCTURE AND OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The following chapters are organised in a way which provides the reader with a logical sequence to the study.

- **CHAPTER TWO:** Literature Review - Talent Management in Theory

In Chapter 2, I provide a detailed review of the TM literature, its background, current state and philosophies. I also present the key debates and arguments among academics and writers in the SHRM field. In the SHRM literature, I focus mostly on the work that has been done on HR systems and HPWS, from which I borrow the notion of ‘architecture’ to describe the range of talent processes, practices and systems used by organisations to manage their most valuable talent effectively.

- **CHAPTER THREE:** Literature Review - the Value Perspective on Talent Management

I begin Chapter 3 by detailing the research problem and explaining the logic behind the research questions. I then present ideas from the strategic management literature, or more specifically the literature on value creation, dynamic capabilities and the RBV of the firm, and explain how this non-HR literature informed the research and supported the investigation. I also discuss in more detail the four value propositions (relating to value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection) which guided the collection and analysis of the data.

- **CHAPTER FOUR:** Research Design and Methodology

In Chapter 4, I provide a detailed explanation of the key decisions and choices I made with regard to the research design and methodology. I also explain my philosophical stance and

describe the strategies of enquiry and the methods I used for data collection. I also provide a full account of how I handled the data at each stage of the study. I conclude the chapter with a reflective review of my role as a researcher, and discuss the ethical and confidential issues I considered in conducting this research.

- **CHAPTER FIVE: Research Findings**

In Chapter 5, I present my findings from the five case studies. While each organisation was analysed separately, it is important to note that I present the overall findings rather than the individual findings for each case. The opening section of the chapter presents the findings which resulted from the use of a dichotomy of strategic actors (i.e. system designers and system implementers) to explain how these actors perceived their role in influencing the design and implementation of the TM strategy in their organisations. I then present findings relating to the first research question: *“Do strategic actors believe that talent management architectures implemented within their organisations add value to the organisation or not, and if so, what value do they believe they add?”*. I then present the findings relating to the second research question: *“How may talent management architectures add value in relation to the four value processes (creation, capture, leverage and protection)?”*.

- **CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, I provide a detailed discussion of the research findings and present my own arguments. I open the chapter by discussing the findings for both research questions – what strategic actors think about the value of TM, and how TM architectures may enable the four value processes. I then reflect on the value model – how it is understood, and its usefulness as perceived by actors. I conclude the chapter by discussing three topics: first, the dichotomy of

strategic actors and its usefulness to this study; second, the notion of 'architecture' and how it is used and understood in practice, and then the issue of how TM differs from traditional HR.

- **CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusion**

In this concluding chapter, I provide a summary of the study and the findings of this research. I discuss how the study contributes to knowledge and understanding, and its implications for practice. I conclude by acknowledging the limitations of the research and outlining opportunities for further research, and close by providing a reflective account of the journey I have taken to complete this study.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW - TALENT MANAGEMENT IN THEORY

---

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this opening chapter, I shall review the TM literature and begin to identify some of the current research gaps in order to delimit the area of research I am interested in examining. In the next chapter (Chapter 3), I shall detail the research problem and list the research questions. In that chapter, I will also bring in relevant non-HR literature to explain how I intend to address some of the current gaps in the talent management field.

This chapter presents the major debates in the TM and the SHRM literature. In the opening discussion (in Sections 2.2 and 2.3), I provide a brief overview of the history of TM since its inception and summarise the current state of the TM literature. I then present in Section 2.4, how the terms ‘talent’ and ‘talent management’ are defined, and the different philosophies underlying each. Finally, I turn in Section 2.5, to the SHRM literature, and more specifically to the work that has been done on HR systems and HPWS. The objective here is to understand how these systems are assumed in the literature to contribute to value creation and sustained competitive advantage for the firm. From the theoretical developments in the SHRM literature, I borrow the notion of ‘architecture’ and explain how this may similarly be used to conceptualise ‘talent management architectures’, and what constitutes these architectures.

### 2.2 THE ORIGINS OF TALENT MANAGEMENT

Almost two decades have passed since the topic of TM first emerged in recognition of the importance of an organisation’s precious talent. Since then, TM has gained mainstream interest, first from practitioners and then from academics, and has become a topic of



considerable debate in the literature (McDonnell et al., 2017). The emergence of TM is mainly attributed to McKinsey & Company (one of America's largest and most prestigious management consulting firms) and the great concern expressed by a group of their consultants about the increasingly competitive landscape for the attraction and retention of talent, resulting in a "war for talent" (Chambers et al., 1998). Their concerns and claims were based on the outcome of research in which they examined 77 companies (from different industries), surveyed almost 6,000 executives and managers and case studied 20 large multinational corporations (MNCs) in order to understand the richness of their TM philosophies (Michaels et al., 2001). In 2000, McKinsey updated this study and again confirmed that there was a war for talent. They found that almost 90% of respondents believed that the attraction and retention of talent had become even more difficult than before, and that companies investing in the attraction and retention of 'A Players' (top performers, best in class) (Smart, 2005) had experienced better results, improved operational productivity and an increase in revenues and profits compared to organisations operating with average performers.

(Axelrod et al., 2001, Dries, 2013b) argue that the popular 'war for talent' notion is rooted in two assumptions:

1. an organisation's talents are a source of competitive advantage and are critical to organisational success, and
2. the attraction and retention of talent have become increasingly difficult.

Such assumptions emphasise the importance of TM to organisational success and bring to the forefront its direct positive impact on bottom-line and competitive advantage (Economist, 2006, Clake and Winkler, 2006).

This early discussion of TM brought issues around the management of talent to the attention of leaders in organisations, with more than 66% of CEOs identifying leadership development and talent pipelines as a key priority for their organisations (PWC, 2012, Collings, 2014b). The attraction, retention and development of high-potential talent was characterised as a pressing global challenge facing many MNCs, and the effective management of talent was therefore perceived as one of the most critical capabilities which distinguish successful organisations from others (Vaiman and Vance, 2008, Tarique and Schuler, 2010, Garavan et al., 2012).

Recent changes in economics, technology, demographics, government policies and social trends are reshaping the global labour market (INSEAD, 2015). For example, changes in global demographics are demonstrated by the unprecedented shift in age distribution among the general population of workers, and driven by the decline in birth-rates and the growing number of elderly people (an ageing workforce) in many developed economies (Beechler and Woodward, 2009). Moreover, the increased number of workers willing to relocate outside their home countries has contributed to increased and unprecedented levels of global mobility, thus creating new challenges for the retention and attraction of talent (McDonnell et al., 2017). In addition, the increased internationalisation of businesses and the movement towards a more knowledge-based economy have heightened the competition for talent (Tarique and Schuler, 2010).

Whilst these changes raise many opportunities; they create significant challenges as well. For example, attracting, developing and quickly deploying talented people with the requisite capital (be that human, social, intellectual or political) remains a challenge for many organisations (McDonnell et al., 2017). The realisation that TM is not easy has led organisations to

acknowledge the importance of *effective* TM for corporate success, as well as the strategic role that 'high potentials' play in creating economic value and enhancing organisational performance (Amit and Belcourt, 1999, Tymon et al., 2010). Organisations have begun to think more carefully about the nature of talent and the practices, systems and processes they need to implement to manage their talent. They are investing more time and effort than ever before to ensure the effective attraction, development and retention of those talent who can support their success and growth.

### 2.3 THE CURRENT STATE OF THE TALENT MANAGEMENT LITERATURE

According to Collings, Scullion, and Vaiman (2015), TM has become one of the fastest growing topics in the management field. The widespread interest in TM is evidenced by the increased number of publications (many incorporated into special issues) which are mostly dedicated to exploring and understanding the concepts and practices of TM in different regional and sectoral contexts. For example, the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality* (D'Annunzio-Green, 2008), the *Journal of World Business* (Scullion et al., 2010, Al Ariss et al., 2014), the *European Journal of International Management* (Collings et al., 2011), the *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resource Management* (McDonnell, 2012), the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (Vaiman and Collings, 2013) and the *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance* (Vaiman et al., 2017) have all published special issues on the topic. Such a variety of journal outlets demonstrates the increased interest and relevance of TM to a wide group of communities such as the HRM community, the international management community, the general business community and sector-specific communities (e.g. health care) (Thunnissen et al., 2013). There have also been major contributions from a

practitioner perspective by consulting firms such as the Boston Consulting Group, McKinsey and Deloitte, as well as joint efforts between consultancies and universities, such as Adecco and INSEAD and other non-governmental organisations such as the World Economic Forum (Morley et al., 2015).

The literature review shows that our understanding of TM is based on theoretical research, with a diverse set of perspectives and traditions. Some of the most notable disciplines that have been used to inform our understanding include Human Capital (Lepak and Snell, 1999, Wright and McMahan., 2011), Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), Human Resource Management (HRM) (Lado and Wilson, 1994, Wright et al., 1994, Becker and Huselid, 2006), the Resource-based View (Barney, 1991, Barney and Wright, 1998, Bowman and Ambrosini, 2000), Marketing (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2004), and the Supply Chain (Cappelli, 2008). Although there is a common belief that most of what we know about TM has been fundamentally shaped by Anglo-Saxon views (Collings et al., 2011, Thunnissen et al., 2013), the TM literature has also witnessed an increased number of studies which have attempted to examine its practices and systems within different regional and organisational contexts, for example the corporate environment of the Asia Pacific region (Hartmann et al., 2010, Tymon et al., 2010, Cooke et al., 2014), Europe and Eastern Europe (Vaiman and Holden, 2011, Skuza et al., 2013, Oltra and Vivas-lópez, 2013, Festing et al., 2013, Valverde et al., 2013) and the Middle East (Ali, 2011).

Despite the substantial number of publications on TM in the last decade or two, the current literature can still be criticised for remaining narrow and one-dimensional. It is still characterised by a managerialist and unitarist orientation, and has a limited view of the human

resource practices which might be involved (Thunnissen et al., 2013, McDonnell et al., 2017).

In their most recent review of the literature, McDonnell, Collings, Mellahi and Schuler (2017) recognised that despite the early view that most papers were theoretical and conceptual in nature (Lewis and Heckman, 2006, Collings and Mellahi, 2009), there seems now to be an increasing number of papers drawing mainly on empirical evidence, with the common methodological approaches being either mixed methods (20% of papers) or quantitative methods (56%), but also a significant use of case study investigations.

Despite the growing interest of academics in the topic of TM, the literature is dominated by consultants and practitioners research which has aggressively driven the TM discourse (Al Ariss et al., 2014, Cascio and Boudreau, 2016). This is demonstrated by the limited amount of peer-reviewed literature (although this is growing), and suggests a continuing gap between academic and practitioner interests in TM (Cappelli, 2014). One can list a number of gaps and shortcomings which continue to hinder the development of the field. For example, despite increased attempts to define TM and the multitude of definitions in both academic or practitioner papers, there still appears to be a lack of consensus on the conceptual boundaries of the field (i.e. what TM encompasses and what it does not) (McDonnell et al., 2017). There, therefore, remains a need to resolve the existing definitional problem of TM, frame the boundaries of TM and explain how TM differentiates itself from traditional forms of HRM.

Moreover, there is a lack of sound empirical research which closely examines the configurations of TM practices (i.e. attraction, identification, development, and retention) and their effectiveness in adding value for organisations (Festing et al., 2013). Despite the manifest growth in empirical research, many questions remain unanswered, and the field remains in

need of greater rigour and more nuanced research designs which will enable researchers to develop in-depth accounts and perspectives in relation to TM and its practices.

The literature review also demonstrates that there is little knowledge about how TM systems are designed and implemented in organisations. Moreover, there has also been limited interest in examining individual elements of TM practices. The main focus instead is on understanding the broader context of TM without delving into the practices or processes which organisations use to effectively manage their talent (McDonnell et al., 2017). There is thus a need for researchers to investigate the practices that are employed by organisations to manage talent and explain how these practices might (or might not) differ from other traditional HR practices. The literature is also driven by narrow organisational views on the nature of TM. This organisational view pays limited attention to the actual talent (i.e. individual human beings) and fails to examine their perspectives and their experience of TM (Thunnissen et al., 2013, McDonnell et al., 2017). Accordingly, there is a need for more empirical research which takes individual talent as its main unit of analysis and examines how talent perceive/experience the practices of TM implemented by their organisations.

Moreover, the influence of different actors on the conceptualisation and implementation of TM is underexplored (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Therefore, there is a need to extend academic efforts to examine the impact of multiple actors on TM. Although there is an increasing number of implicit claims being made (see Chapter 3, Literature Review) suggesting that TM is a source of sustained competitive advantage (Wright et al., 2001b, Barney and Clark, 2007, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, Bowman and Hird, 2014), there seems to be a dearth of empirical evidence to support them. Thus, there is a need for dedicated research which focuses primarily on examining the value of TM and how it may contribute to organisational success

and competitive advantage.

Arguably, the discourse of TM has brought many issues to the attention of academics. Whilst the issues raised are all important and require examination by academics, the topic which is of particular interest to me and to this research is that of understanding *how TM architectures may add value to organisations*. I am interested in examining the value of TM architectures by soliciting the various views of multiple actors in MNCs.

My interest in this topic has been triggered by a number of beliefs:

- 1 understanding the value of TM will help address the current definitional problem of ‘what is talent management?’,
- 2 borrowing and building on theoretical developments from non-HR literature such as strategic management relating to value, value creation and dynamic capabilities will provide a useful lens through which to understand ‘what is the value of TM?’,
- 3 recognising the different TM practices which constitute a TM architecture may help to understand how they contribute to value creation and sustained competitive advantage, and
- 4 examining how multiple actors impact the design and implementation of TM allows comparisons between different perspectives and the development of a better understanding of the role of actors in shaping the practice of TM.

In the next section, I provide an overview of how terms such a ‘talent’ and ‘talent management’ are described and defined by academics in the literature.

## 2.4 UNDERSTANDING TALENT MANAGEMENT

### 2.4.1 The Meaning of 'Talent'

To understand the meaning of TM, it is important first to understand the meaning of 'talent', a term which continues to be surrounded by confusion and imprecision about what it means. Many scholars such as Lewis and Heckman (2006), Garrow and Hirsh (2008) and Tansley (2011) argue that the development of the construct TM is hindered by an inadequate operationalisation of the term 'talent'. Whilst it is important to develop a working definition of 'talent' (to ensure robust TM practices), many organisations are rarely precise and clear about what they mean by the term and the implications this might have for their TM practices (Tansley et al., 2007). Accordingly, the meanings associated with 'talent' are either taken for granted or are heavily dependent on how business leaders define it. This is unfortunate and rather disappointing, because defining what an organisation means by 'talent' is critical, not only to inform the TM practices and processes they implement, but also to understand what type of talent they need and how they will go about the identification of such talent.

The term 'talent' goes back to Ancient Greeks and Biblical times, when it was first used to represent a unit of weight and then became a unit of money. It then underwent considerable change and was used to refer to an individual's natural abilities and aptitudes (Silzer and Church, 2009, Tansley, 2011, Meyers et al., 2013). From then on, the term has been conceptualised in different ways. For example, in the HRM literature, 'talent' is operationalised as an organisation's human capital, with a set of skills, competencies, knowledge and attributes which enable them to advance the organisation's competitive position (Farndale et al., 2010). Proponents of the human capital approach to TM such as Lepak and Snell (2002) and Huselid



and Becker (2011) describe 'talent' in relation to the value they add to organisations, drawing inspiration from the RBV (Barney, 1991). The RBV view argues that valuable, rare and inimitable resources are sources of competitive advantage. In his seminal article, Barney describes human capital as the knowledge, skills, capabilities, intelligence, relationships and experience of the firm's employees. The RBV view has put valuable, rare and inimitable human capital resources on the radar by asserting its strategic importance to organisational success and sustained competitive advantage.

However, if we are to understand how talent may contribute to sustained competitive advantage, there is a need to recognise the different philosophies underpinning it. The underlying assumptions behind these talent philosophies influence the way in which TM practices are shaped and thus impact their effectiveness. In the literature, a talent philosophy is defined as the "fundamental assumptions and beliefs about the nature, value, and instrumentality of talent that are held by a firm's key decision-makers" (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014, p. 192).

Two opposing views on what 'talent' is can be identified in the literature. The most salient philosophies are concerned with whether talent is innate or acquired (Meyers et al., 2013). For example, some scholars believe that talent is innate, i.e. pertaining to an individual's unique characteristics, such as natural abilities, cognitive (brain power) and creative abilities, personality, and motivation (Silzer and Church, 2009). This view implies that talent is born and not made (one either has talent, or one does not). On the other hand, there are others who believe that 'talent' is an outcome of deliberate practice; it comprises abilities which are developed through learning from experience (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006). This implies that

'talent' is built through continuous development and learning from experience.

Other terms such as 'high performance' and 'high potential' are also used interchangeably to describe talent. For example, Smart (2005), Tansley et al. (2007) and Silzer and Dowell (2010) view 'talent' as a select group of high performers, 'A players' who can make a difference to their organisation's performance. The term 'high' in this context denotes the small top percentage of employees, presumed to surpass others in their performance and potential. In their seminal paper, Silzer and Church (2009), and subsequently Church and Silzer (2013), refer to organisational talent as a group of high potential individuals who have the skills, knowledge, competencies, motivation, experience and abilities which enable them to perform in higher level positions.

To describe what they mean by 'potential' they propose three dimensions: these are:

- 1 the foundational dimension, which includes cognitive capabilities (i.e. intelligence, strategic and conceptual thinking, breadth of thinking and the ability to deal with complexity and ambiguity) and personality characteristics (i.e. social and interpersonal skills, assertiveness and dominance, maturity, resilience and emotional self-control);
- 2 the growth dimension, which includes two building blocks. These are learning skills (i.e. adaptability, learning interest and orientation and openness to feedback) and motivation skills (i.e. drive, initiative, career aspiration, organisational commitment, risk-taking, and results and achievement orientation); and finally
- 3 the career dimension, which includes two building blocks, namely leadership skills (i.e. managing people, and motivating, influencing, inspiring and developing others) and functional capabilities (i.e. technical or functional expertise and business knowledge).

These building blocks are perceived to be critical indicators of success in a designated career path.

In their often-cited article 'Are you a High Potential?', Ready, Conger and Hill (2010) describe 'high potentials' as individuals who outperform their peers while exhibiting behaviours which reflect the culture and values of their companies and show a strong capacity to learn, grow and progress in their careers compared to others. They differentiate between high potentials and other individuals through what they refer to as the 'X Factors': these individuals are recognised for having the drive to excel, they are driven to go the extra mile in order to achieve. They are catalysts of learning who have the ability to come up with new ideas and the common sense to translate them into learning and productive action. In addition, they possess the spirit to leave their comfort zone, challenge themselves and take risks. Finally, they are dynamic sensors who can weigh and skirt risks easily and make the right decisions at the right time.

Sparrow et al. (2011) describe high potentials as possessing four types of capital: Human Capital (i.e. analytical skills and strategic competency), Business Model Capital (i.e. knowledge of and insights into the business model), Social Capital (i.e. the ability to build a wide range of social networks) and Political Capital (i.e. the ability to handle forms of legitimacy and power). With such a wide spectrum of views on what talent potential are, it becomes very difficult for practitioners to identify or relate to any one model of potential, and more challenging to find a single-dimensional approach to assessing and identifying potential.

In their research on the meaning of the term 'talent', Gallardo-Gallardo et al., (2013) argue that organisations view their talent in one of two ways: they either adopt an inclusive approach, where they consider all employees as talent, or an exclusive approach, where they differentiate

and segregate a small group of élite employees. The inclusive - exclusive debate, in turn, gives rise to assumptions about why each might be preferable, and about the extent to which talent can be developed or is innate. Proponents of the inclusive approach argue that every employee within the organisation has the potential to create value and contribute to its success (Buckingham and Vosburgh, 2001), or argue that organisational success is reliant on “capturing the value of the entire workforce, not just a few superstars” (O'Reilly and Pfeffer, 2000, p. 52). The exclusive talent approach, on the other hand, is the dominant approach in organisations (Ready et al., 2010, Sparrow et al., 2011, Stahl et al., 2012). In this approach, talent is viewed as a highly select group of individuals, referred to as an élite, who are characterised by their ability to deal with complexity and to positively impact organisational performance by demonstrating high levels of potential, either through their immediate contributions or in the long-term (Robertson and Abbey, 2003, Tansley et al., 2007). These two approaches suggest different sets of opportunities and challenges for the organisation and require different practices and systems to effectively manage them.

A key conclusion, then, is that there is terminological ambiguity around the working definition of 'talent'. There is no single definition of 'talent' - instead, there are many different interpretations and ways of defining the term. Yet despite these definitional variations, there seems to be a common set of qualities that are used to distinguish talent from others in the organisation. These qualities usually include cognitive abilities, learning agility, leadership potential, skills and knowledge, commitment levels, aspirations and drive (i.e. a variation of innate and learned qualities). To compound these problems of definition, scholars and practitioners tend to use a variety of other terms to refer to talent, such as 'high potentials', 'star performers' or 'key employees'. The variety of terms used has given rise to considerable

debate about the nature of TM and the extent to which it is inclusive (i.e. the idea that all employees are talent and can potentially contribute to competitive advantage) or exclusive (i.e. that there is a small set of high potential individuals who can contribute to performance and organisational success). I, therefore, argue that we should not underestimate the importance of having a working definition of 'talent' to inform the practice of TM.

#### **2.4.2 The Meaning of 'Talent Management'**

In this section, I present how 'talent management' has been described and debated in the literature by outlining the many definitions developed in an attempt to define the boundaries and scope of TM.

Since its origins in the late 1990s, TM has been extensively debated in the literature, with an increased interest in how it is defined (Collings, 2014b). A review of the literature reveals the various debates around the conceptual boundaries of TM, and indicates that there "isn't a single consistent or concise definition" (Ashton and Morton, 2005, p. 30), of TM. Indeed, one of the factors that have hindered the development of TM has been the lack of consensus around its definition and the absence of a uniform understanding of its conceptual boundaries (Al Ariss et al., 2014, McDonnell et al., 2017). This is perhaps evident in the number of streams of thinking which have endeavoured to define TM. A review of the literature points to wide variations in how TM is defined in the academic literature (Scullion and Collings, 2011, Vaiman et al., 2012, Cappelli and Keller, 2014), as well as in how it is explained and understood in practice (Cascio and Boudreau, 2016).

For example, in their influential article, Lewis and Heckman (2006), propose three different streams of thought to describe TM. The first stream simply defines TM as a collection of typical

HRM practices (Chowanec and Newstrom, 2011). The second stream describes TM as a process to ensure the flow of talent in organisations and adopts concepts from succession planning and HR planning (Jackson and Schuler, 1990, Rothwell, 1994). The third stream relates to performance management, where employees are classified in relation to their performance as 'A', 'B' or 'C' Players, and suggests that organisations should strive to fill all positions with 'A performers' or those with 'top-grading' (Smart, 2005), while managing out 'C Players' or 'poor performers' (Michaels et al., 2001). The problem with these streams of thought is that they focus on addressing a single aspect of TM and accordingly fail to develop a clear and widely accepted definition of TM.

In addition to these three streams, Collings and Mellahi (2009), introduce the fourth stream in an attempt to broaden the approach taken in TM and take into account the strategic roles which talent might occupy. They define TM as the “activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organisation's 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” (p. 304). What this definition tells us is that the starting point for any TM system should be the identification of critical key positions (those which contribute to the sustained competitive advantage of an organisation), thus differentiating between strategic and non-strategic roles. Organisations should then develop a pool of high performers and high potentials to take on these strategically critical roles. This definition is premised on the idea of differentiation.

Another definition by Silzer and Dowell (2010), suggests that “talent management is an integrated set of processes, programs, and cultural norms in an organisation designed and implemented to attract, develop, deploy, and retain talent to achieve strategic objectives and meet future business needs” (p. 18). While this definition lists the set of processes that constitute TM, it also makes an important reference to the role played in TM by cultural norms within an organisation. This raises the need to explore potential linkages between TM and the culture of an organisation, a less developed area in the TM literature which requires more attention from academics.

Another definition, by the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, defines TM as a systematic approach that includes any activities related to the attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention and deployment of those individuals recognised for their potential to have long-term or immediate impact on organisational performance (Clake and Winkler, 2006).

Swales (2013) also makes an important contribution in his differentiation between TM and general HRM. He argues that TM uses distinctive practices to identify, develop and deploy ‘high potential’ employees, and that its main purpose is to develop the organisation's leadership capabilities to maximise the contribution of high potentials in critical roles (i.e. succession planning). By contrast, HRM covers all HR functions, including the development of policies and procedures for effectively managing the employment relationship with all employees (regardless of grade or role). According to Swales, then, the boundaries and scope of TM are defined on the basis of the group of employees it focuses on, which is the high potential and high performing employees.

Finally, from a global perspective, Scullion and Collings (2011) refer to global TM as the organisational activities used to attract, develop and retain talent into strategic positions on a global scale. This recognises the global challenges which organisations face in attracting and acquiring talent (Farndale et al., 2010, Hartmann et al., 2010), and therefore the need to manage the highly competitive global environment by developing a unique set of HR practices to attract, retain and develop global talent. Similarly, Tarique and Schuler (2010) draw on the SHRM literature to define global TM in the context of IHRM as “systematically utilizing IHRM activities (complementary HRM policies and policies) to attract, develop, and retain individuals with high levels of human capital (e.g., competency, personality, motivation) consistent with the strategic directions of the multinational enterprise in a dynamic, highly competitive, and global environment” (p.124).

A notable feature of the literature on TM is that it continues to position TM as the process through which organisations anticipate their need for talent to take on critical and strategic roles (Cappelli and Keller, 2014). The policies and practices of TM are specifically created and implemented to meet the TM challenges organisations face, such as the attraction, selection, retention and development of the most talented employees (Schuler, 2015).

### **2.4.3 The Philosophies of ‘Talent Management’**

In this section, I elaborate on the two key philosophical debates that were briefly presented in Section 2.4.1. The first centres on the distinction between the inclusiveness (egalitarian) and exclusiveness (differentiation) approaches to TM (Al Ariss et al., 2014, Morley et al., 2015), and the second on whether the differentiation efforts of TM should focus on differentiating between individuals first, or differentiating between jobs (Cappelli and Keller, 2014).



Proponents of the inclusive approach argue that all employees are talent (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013), and thus have potential to create value and contribute to the success of the organisation (Buckingham and Vosburgh, 2001). Therefore, organisations should make an effort to capture the value of the entire workforce and not just a few elite employees (O'Reilly and Pfeffer, 2000) and provide opportunities for everyone to learn, grow and fulfil their potential (Walker, 2002, Stainton, 2005). On the other hand, proponents of the exclusive approach advocate differentiation within the workforce based on performance and potential, and thus call for preferential treatment to attract, acquire, develop and retain a small group of talent, identified by the organisation as their 'A Players' (Lepak and Snell, 1999, Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005, Becker and Huselid, 2006).

While concerns have been raised about the exclusive approach involving risks for the organisation (Pfeffer, 2001), it is nonetheless the dominant approach to TM in MNCs (Ready et al., 2010, Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). The exclusive approach is rooted in the RBV of the firm, which suggests that human capital resources are deemed valuable if they have the potential to contribute to the organisation's competitive advantage and core competencies (Lepak and Snell, 1999). Despite being the dominant approach to TM (both in practice and among academics), the exclusive approach has attracted criticism. For example, Pfeffer (2001) argues that differentiating between employees and labelling the special few will lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy among those labelled less able (i.e. that they will become less able). In addition, he argues that overemphasising performance is dangerous for organisations because it undervalues teamwork and collaboration (and encourages internal competition and hinders learning).

Moreover, Downs and Swailes (2013) argue that the exclusive approach ignores important social and ethical dimensions. Because of its focus on the management of high-performing and high-potential employees (Björkman et al., 2013), they argue that the mere act of selecting a minority of élites for their contributions and differentiating them from all the rest is in itself dehumanising, and might lead to lower self-efficacy among those who are excluded from the TM programmes. The question they ask is whether TM is ethical (regardless of its intentions) or whether it is ethically problematic.

Given that the focus of the exclusive approach is on a small group of employees, a second debate has emerged around whether the focus of differentiation should be on individuals or on jobs (Cappelli and Keller, 2014). Differentiating between employees is based on the assumption that 'high-performing' and 'high-potential' employees contribute more than others to organisational performance, and that they are many times more valuable than others. Organisations should thus design their TM practices around the identification and development of 'A Players' (Smart, 2005). If TM is focused on the job, however, then the underlying assumption is that some jobs are more strategic (pivotal) than others (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). The implication here is that talent identification should take into account the criticality and strategic importance of certain roles first, and only then identify those who have the potential to take on these roles.

Regardless of whether organisations choose to adopt an inclusive or an exclusive approach to TM, they need to make important decisions about the nature and type of the TM practices they design and implement. For example, (Schuler, 2015) argues that TM practices and policies should include specific types of recruitment, performance assessment, compensation, career

development and redeployment processes. Having said that, it is worth noting that despite the extensive research in TM, up to now little is known about which practices constitute a TM system. The literature lacks a clear description of the relevant TM practices involved in TM (Dries, 2013b). Moreover, the implementation of TM remains problematic for many organisations because the key elements necessary for a TM system are not integrated and aligned (Sparrow et al., 2014c, Morley et al., 2015).

## 2.5 TALENT MANAGEMENT ARCHITECTURES

To understand how TM architectures may enable value creation and sustained competitive advantage, it is important first to understand what a TM system is, and what constitutes it. To develop this understanding, in this section I turn to the SHRM literature, and more specifically to the research done on HR systems, HPWS and HR architectures (Becker, 1998, Lepak and Snell, 1999, Becker and Huselid, 2006), and borrow concepts (such as the notion of architecture) and apply them to the TM discourse.

That TM is important to value creation and sustained competitive advantage has been claimed by many in the academic sphere (Barney, 1991, Becker, 1998, Lepak and Snell, 1999, Wright et al., 2001a, Lewis and Heckman, 2006, Collings and Mellahi, 2009). Such claims seem to be based on two assumptions: the first is that human capital is a potential source of sustained competitive advantage, and the second is that there is a strong relationship between a firm's HR systems and its financial performance (Huselid and Becker, 1997, Lepak and Snell, 2002, Wright et al., 2001b, Wright and McMahan., 2011). The link between HR systems and organisational performance has been the focus of extensive academic research (Arthur, 1992, Huselid and Becker, 1997). Previous research suggests that HR systems can have an

economically significant effect on a firm's bottom line and can thus contribute to value creation and sustained competitive advantage (Wright and McMahan, 1992, Lado and Wilson, 1994, Becker and Gerhart, 1996b, Becker, 1998). This is premised on the idea that people (human capital), more than any other organisational resource, are a potential source of competitive advantage (Pfeffer, 1994). Becker and Huselid (1998) suggest that the interrelatedness and the systematic nature of HR systems (i.e. practices and process) is what makes them inimitable, so that they, therefore, constitute a strategic lever for organisations. In their view, a consistent and interrelated HR system can act as a basis for acquiring, motivating and developing the intellectual assets (valuable employees) which can be a source of sustained competitive advantage.

In organisations where human capital is considered to be a source of sustained competitive advantage, an interrelated HR system may ultimately elicit from employees the behaviours which are necessary for strategy implementation and value creation (Jackson and et al., 1989, Jackson and Schuler, 1995). This might indicate the sort of linkage which exists between a firm's strategy and its orientation towards specific HR systems (Arthur, 1992). The underlying logic here is that different organisational strategies require different forms of behaviour for successful implementation (Miles, 2003). Building on this behavioural perspective, one might assume that firms would most likely develop different HR systems depending on both their strategic orientation and the different employee groups they might have. This implies that extensive investment in and reliance on people (human capital) is critical for the successful implementation of a firm's strategy (Lepak and Snell, 2008).

So, what is an HR system? Lado and Wilson (1994) define an HR system as "a set of distinct but

interrelated activities, functions, and processes that are directed at attracting, developing, and maintaining (or disposing of) a firm's human resources" (p.701). Huselid and Becker (1997) define HR systems as 'High Performance Work Systems' (HPWS) designed to include a set of organisational HR policies and practices which can produce a motivated and flexible workforce which in turn has an economic effect on the organisation's performance. Similarly, Evans and Davis (2005) describe HPWS as an integrated set of HR practices that are consistent both internally (i.e. in terms of the way they are interrelated) and externally (i.e. in relation to overall organisational strategy). HPWS have also been defined as "a group of separate but interconnected human resource (HR) practices designed to enhance employees' skills and effort" (Takeuchi et al., 2007, p. 1069). Traditionally, these systems include a set of structured and comprehensive approaches to recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation and benefits, performance-related pay and rigorous performance appraisals (Huselid, 1995, Becker, 1998, Takeuchi et al., 2009).

Although there is no conclusive evidence, the literature suggests that there are links between HPWS and a number of factors such as productivity, profitability, growth, innovation and the metrics of performance in organisations (Arthur, 1994, Macduffie, 1995, Huselid and Becker, 1997, Messersmith et al., 2011). Several researchers have also suggested that HPWS influence employees' skills and motivation and their opportunities to contribute to the organisation's success (Liao et al., 2009). The notion of HPWS is thus underpinned fundamentally by a number of ideas:

- first, "it is the *combination* of practices into a bundle, rather than individual practices, which shapes the pattern of interactions between and among managers and

employees" (Macduffie, 1995, p. 200). These practices are interdependent, so that the inclusion of one practice necessitates the inclusion of others as well (Zacharatos et al., 2005),

- second, the employment practices of HPWS are designed to influence the ability, motivation and opportunities of individuals to perform towards achieving organisational goals (Macduffie, 1995, Huselid, 1995, Liao et al., 2009),
- third, the establishment of HPWS is based on the logic that not all employees are able to make equal strategic contributions to competitive advantage (Lepak and Snell, 2008), so it is in the nature of these HR systems to differentiate between employees (i.e. as 'A', 'B' and 'C' Players) (Huselid et al., 2005).

Although the precise design and configuration of HPWS practices vary from one organisation to another, the theoretical treatment of HPWS focuses on investment in an aggregated set of HR practices rather than investment in individual (isolated) HR practices (Becker, 1998). Evans and Davis (2005) argue that although individual HR practices might have different impacts on the employee relationship, it is the collective and integrated nature of HR systems (i.e. aggregated practices) which influences organisational performance. Proponents of the RBV suggest that individual practices "have limited ability to generate competitive advantage in isolation," but instead "in combination they can enable a firm to realise its full competitive advantage" (Barney, 1995, p. 56). The idea of considering HR systems as strategic assets, i.e. a "set of difficult to trade and imitate, scarce, appropriable, and specialized resources and capabilities that bestow the firm's competitive advantage" (Amit and Schoemaker, 1993, p. 36) makes HPWS a source of an "invisible asset" (Itami, 1987) which creates value and prevents imitation

when it is deeply embedded in the organisation. The difficulty of imitating HPWS derives from their causal ambiguity and path dependency (Collis and Montgomery, 1995). The causal ambiguity of HPWS lies in the difficulty of identifying the precise interplay between the organisation's HR practices and the policies that contribute to value creation.

Moreover, these practices and policies are developed and evolved over time. They are therefore precluded from immediate imitation because of the time it takes to fully implement them (Becker and Gerhart, 1996a). However, although it is argued consistently in the literature that HPWS are a potential source of sustained competitive advantage, it is not the practices themselves which produce such competitive advantage, but rather the human capital which is developed by these systems (Wright et al., 1994, Huselid, 1995, Wright et al., 2001a, Patel et al., 2013). In terms of the RBV, Barney (1991) argues that human capital is a potential source of sustained competitive advantage if it enables the organisation to implement value-creating strategies, if these strategies uniquely contribute to its success, and if they are un-substitutable and difficult to imitate. Therefore, the value of an HR system resides in its ability to positively affect employees to contribute to organisational outcomes (Messersmith et al., 2011). This raises questions about whether there is one best HR system with universal applicability, or whether there are a number of HR systems which can be designed to manage different employment relationships.

To answer this question, it is important to first note that in the SHRM literature, researchers such as Huselid (1995), Snell and Dean (1992) have tended to aggregate all employee groups as though they are managed within a single dominant HR configuration. While this might ensure consistency in how employee groups are managed, it reduces the ability of organisations to

strategically manage and match the specific requirements of employee groups. Accordingly, Lepak and Snell (1999) argue that it is inappropriate to simplify the nature of human capital in this way, and suggest that there is no one optimal HR system for managing all employees, but that there should be subsystems of HR for managing different employment groups. This is based on the argument that different groups of employees possess skills and knowledge that are more valuable to a firm's competitiveness than others, and therefore the HR architectures (practices, processes and systems) are likely to vary accordingly (Jackson, 1989). In many ways, the increased interest in a differentiated workforce mirrors the increased importance of knowledge management and thus continues to evolve based on the need to manage both the stocks and flows of employee knowledge (Lepak and Snell, 2008).

Although organisations may be predisposed to adopting an overarching HR system for managing all employee groups, Lepak and Snell (2008) suggest that adopting an HR architecture raises the issue of how different employee groups add value to the organisation. They argue that this brings to the surface two key problems: first, different strategies require different processes to achieve competitive advantage, and second, not all employees are equally critical for value creation. In their work, Lepak and Snell (1999) argue that the design of the HR architecture is very much determined by the value and uniqueness of the skills of the organisation's human capital. Drawing primarily on the RBV (Barney, 1991, Barney and Arkan, 2001, Barney and Clark, 2007), they argue that the value of people (human capital) is inherently dependent upon their potential to contribute to the core competencies and the competitive advantage of the firm, but that the uniqueness of people (human capital) is dependent upon their possessing skills and knowledge which are not readily available to other firms. Accordingly, the people who constitute the firm's human capital are most likely to contribute to achieving



competitive advantage on the basis of what they know and how they use that knowledge to add value to their organisations (Lepak and Snell, 1999). As a result, organisations have a particular interest in investing in and developing these employees (Lepak and Snell, 2008), and to do so, they tend to invest in implementing a set of HR systems, i.e. their HR architecture, to manage their human capital based on the value they add to the organisation.

The notion of architecture is therefore used to describe the collective set of “systems, practices, competencies, and employee performance behaviours that reflect the development and management of the firm’s strategic human capital” (Becker, 1998, p. 899). In relation to ‘strategic human capital’, it is central to the design of HR architectures to differentiate between employee groups and to develop HR configurations which match the requirements of these groups.

My thesis brings together the debates on talent management philosophies and the role of HR systems and architectures. On a theoretical level, I develop a plausible argument similar to that of HPWS and HR systems and suggest that that well-designed and integrated ‘talent management architectures’ may add value to organisations and can be a source of sustained competitive advantage. This, however, led me to ask two important questions:

- First, what is a ‘talent management architecture’? And what practices constitute it?
- Second, how may TM architectures create sustained value?

Before attempting to answer the first question, it is worth noting that TM is seen by many as a collection of activities and components or practices which should be connected and integrated into a broader system (Sparrow et al., 2014b). In addition, some perspectives on TM have been

aired in the HR bundles debate (Macduffie, 1995, Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014), where much of the thinking which is implicit in the 'HR architectures' literature (Lepak and Snell, 1999, Lepak and Snell, 2002, Becker and Huselid, 2006) has been adopted by TM researchers. Accordingly, reviews of the literature (Ellis and Saunier, 2004, Carey and Odgen, 2004, Lewis and Heckman, 2006, Stahl et al., 2007, Sparrow and Balain, 2008, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, Beechler and Woodward, 2009, Tarique and Schuler, 2010, Schuler et al., 2011, Fernández-Aráoz et al., 2011, Sparrow et al., 2014c) suggest that TM architectures involve key activities and practices such as attracting and identifying talent by building an HR reputation (i.e. the creation of an employee value proposition and an employer brand). This is complemented by appropriate recruitment strategies and systematic approaches to identifying internal and external talent, deploying talent by managing talent flows (i.e. succession planning and career management practices), and developing talents' skills and capabilities (i.e. coaching, mentoring, leadership development, secondments and rotations), managing talent performance (i.e. talent review processes and performance management practices), retaining and engaging talent to minimise attrition, protecting talent from being lost to competitors and building a TM culture. Therefore, I argue that TM architectures constitute the practices and activities required to effectively manage the 'talent life cycle' (Schiemann, 2014). For the purpose of this study, I define TM architectures as "the combination of the TM systems, processes and practices developed and implemented by an organisation to effectively manage its talent".

Answering the second question (how may TM architectures create sustained value?) is more problematic, because although conceptually the TM literature makes several implicit value claims, the analysis so far is limited in that it does not explain *how* a TM architecture, in reality,

adds value to an organisation, or at least is considered to add value in the minds of the relevant strategic actors involved in the design and implementation of the TM architecture.

The thesis takes the HPWS logic one step further to develop a plausible argument which suggests that a highly integrated TM architecture designed to influence the skills and motives of talented employees is also a source of value creation and sustained competitive advantage. This argument is based on the assumption that talented employees are distinguished from others by the value and uniqueness of their capital (be it their knowledge, capabilities, skills, contributions or competencies) and by their potential to enable organisations to enact value-creating strategies and achieve sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991, Wright and McMahan, 1992).

So, what constitutes a TM architecture? In terms of common practice, TM architectures rely on two key HR activities, namely recruitment and career development. Bringing these together led to the development of a life-cycle approach which suggests that central to TM are the processes for recruiting, developing and retaining talent (Sparrow et al., 2014a). Others have perceived TM architectures to include practices and activities which enable the organisations to attract, onboard, develop, retain and even exit talent in order to achieve strategic objectives (Avedon and G. Scholes, 2010).

The review of the literature has shown that an increasing number of scholars (see for example Ellis and Saunier, 2004, Carey and Odgen, 2004, Lewis and Heckman, 2006, Stahl et al., 2007, Sparrow and Balain, 2008, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, Tarique and Schuler, 2010, Beechler and Woodward, 2009, Schuler et al., 2011, Fernández-Aráoz et al., 2011, Sparrow et al., 2014c) suggest that TM architectures involve the key activities and practices which enable the

attraction and identification of talent (i.e. recruitment and selection), the management of talent flows in the organisation (i.e. succession planning and career management), the extension and development of talent capabilities (i.e. formal and informal training), the management of talent performance, and the engagement and protection of talent to avoid them being lost to competitors. In a nutshell, TM architectures constitute the practices and activities required to effectively manage the 'talent life cycle' (Schiemann, 2014).

At this point, it is important to note that although TM architectures might appear to be the same across all organisations (i.e. echoing the point made in the HPWS literature that it might be argued that there is a single set of TM practices that work best), in reality, the assumptions underpinning these systems are different. They are mostly dependent on business strategies, the insights of organisational decision makers, and the inherent TM philosophies of the organisation (Paauwe, 2004, Boxall, 2012). Although there is an increasing number of implicit value claims suggesting that TM contributes to value creation and sustained competitive advantage (Wright et al., 1994, Barney and Arikan, 2001, Barney and Clark, 2007, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, Boxall, 2012, Bowman and Hird, 2014), explaining how TM architectures in practice may create value and achieve sustained competitive advantage is somewhat problematic, and requires first that we understand 'what value is' and 'how value is created'.

Accordingly, to understand the meaning of value and the process of value creation, I shall turn in the next chapter (Chapter 3) to the literature on strategic management, value creation and dynamic capabilities, and develop a number of plausible propositions to explain 'how TM architectures may add value to organisations'.

## 2.6 CONCLUSION

The topic of TM has become increasingly important among small and large organisations and emerged as a key challenge for both HR professionals and leaders (Farndale et al., 2010, Scullion et al., 2016). Interest in TM has mushroomed over the last decade or so, with global factors such as the shortage of leadership talent being identified as one of the greatest HR concerns for MNCs (Cappelli, 2008) and organisations directing their attention to the attraction, development and retention of talent. Definitions of 'talent' and 'talent management' abound. The literature has witnessed increased efforts to define both terms to provide a useful lens through which to understand how TM is different from the traditional practice of HR. Although the approach to TM might differ from one organisation to another (for example in being egalitarian or exclusive), at the core of TM is the argument that talent must be found and placed in pivotal positions which are critical to the firm's competitive advantage (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005). This is firmly based on the assumption that strategic human capital has the potential to create value and achieve sustained competitive advantage in organisations. Drawing on the RBV, strategic human capital is distinguished from other employees by the uniqueness of their skills, knowledge, ideas and capabilities (Becker and Gerhart, 1996a) and their potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the firm, exploit market opportunities, and/or neutralise potential threats to achieve sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Because of this, they ultimately require a different set of HR policies and practices which match their specific needs.

SHRM theorists (Huselid and Becker, 1997, Becker, 1998, Lepak and Snell, 2002) have provided explanations which link HR systems to organisational performance. At the core of this work is

the assumption that differences in employment modes are likely to reflect differences in the value and uniqueness of human capital, and are complemented by variations in the HR configurations (systems, processes, practices) used to manage employees (Lepak and Snell, 1999). Scholars have used the concepts of 'HR systems', 'HPWS' and 'HR architectures' to describe a set of interrelated practices and systems designed to affect both the ability and motivation of employees (Huselid, 1995, Takeuchi et al., 2007, Takeuchi et al., 2009). The overarching goal of such systems and practices is to attract, retain and motivate human capital towards the achievement of organisational goals and attain competitive advantage (Patel et al., 2013). Scholars in this area (e.g. Wright et al., 2001, Wright et al., 1994, Huselid, 1995, Lepak and Snell, 1999) have consistently argued that it is not the practices themselves that produce competitive advantage, but rather the human capital developed by these systems. Although organisations might vary in terms of how they design these systems, it is important to note that a single optimal HR architecture for managing all employees is not ideal, and that instead there should be a number of different systems designed to match the specific requirements of particular employee groups (Lepak and Snell, 2002).

While our understanding of the TM topic has no doubt expanded significantly in the last decade or so (Dries, 2013a, Al Ariss et al., 2014, Sparrow et al., 2014b), a key limitation of much of the work in the area so far relates to the growing number of implicit value claims which suggest that TM contributes to value creation and sustained competitive advantage without any empirical base to support them. My interest in conducting this research is therefore to address this gap and empirically examine 'how may talent management architectures add value and contribute to sustained competitive advantage'. Borrowing the notion of 'architecture' and drawing upon theoretical developments in other strategic management fields, this research

develops a theoretical foundation to explain what constitutes a TM architecture and how it may contribute to the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value.

## CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW - THE VALUE PERSPECTIVE ON TALENT MANAGEMENT

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I explored the TM literature and borrowed notions from the HPWS literature to develop an understanding of what constitutes TM architectures and how they may add value to organisations. To further develop my understanding, I now turn to non-HR literature and present a more detailed discussion of the notion of value. In so doing, I draw upon several debates such as those in the strategic management, dynamic capabilities, RBV, and the value creation literature. The main objective of this chapter is to explain how the literature has helped to inform my research problem and subsequently the development of my research questions.

I begin this chapter (in Section 3.2), by first introducing the research problem and explaining how I intend to address it. I also provide a brief description of the types of strategic actors I aim to engage in this research. I then in Section 3.3 outline the research questions I wish to address. In the second half of the chapter (in Section 3.4), I first explain what is meant by the term 'value', and then move on to the different strands in the literature which have informed and supported the development of my four main research propositions. These propositions are intended to examine how TM architectures may add value to organisations in terms of four value processes, namely value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection.



### 3.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Much of the HRM literature argues that the strategic management of people contributes to sustained competitive advantage (Wright et al., 2001a). Empirical research in this area has focused mostly on examining the relationship between HR systems and organisational performance, and has thus provided a broader understanding of how systems of HR (i.e. HPWS) may influence organisational performance (Huselid, 1995, Becker, 1998). As noted in the previous chapter (Chapter 2), the central argument underpinning the HPWS discourse suggests that HR practices do not operate in isolation, but instead work together (Macduffie, 1995), and thus it is the dynamic bundles of such practices which contribute to achieving organisational objectives (Wright and Boswell, 2002). Similarly, proponents of the RBV argue that valuable, rare and inimitable human capital is a source of sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991), and that consequently the systems and practices through which such resources are managed are a source of sustained competitive advantage if they enable human capital to contribute to organisational outcomes (Messersmith et al., 2011). Many of these assumptions have found their way into the TM literature, where in recent years we have witnessed an increased number of value claims suggesting that TM contributes to value creation and competitive advantage (Wright et al., 1994, Barney and Arkan, 2001, Barney and Clark, 2007, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, Boxall, 2012, Bowman and Hird, 2014). While these claims seem to make sense, insufficient evidence has been presented to support them.

There seems to be a lack of sound empirical research which closely examines configurations of TM systems and practices (i.e. the attraction, identification, development and retention of talent) and their effectiveness in adding value to organisations (Festing et al., 2013). Similarly,

although there is great variation in the bundles of practices and principles through which talent systems might operate (Sparrow and Makram, 2015), there is hardly any empirical research which examines the configurations of these TM systems (i.e. the practices, processes and policies which might constitute such systems) and how these systems may add value to organisations.

The development of the field is obstructed by the increasing number of (sometimes taken for granted) assumptions and philosophies which are being surfaced by the questions posed by more critical research. There is not always enough empirical evidence to support these assumptions. Therefore, one aim of this research is to confront some of these limitations and address the problem of value and TM. More specifically, the research focuses on the implicit value claims which suggest that TM is a source of competitive advantage.

However, in order to address this issue, I realise that I first need to understand the meaning of 'value' and the possible value processes that an organisation engages in. I should then be able to develop a series of theoretically-driven propositions which encapsulate the possible ways in which TM architectures may add value to organisations.

To do this, I decided to draw on non-HR fields in the literature. This research therefore draws upon ideas from academic disciplines such as: strategic management (the role of strategic actors and strategy as practice), SHRM (the study of HR systems, HPWS and architectures), the RBV and literature on value and value creation, in order to address the problem of value and TM and thus examine 'how talent management architectures may add value as perceived by strategic actors in multinational organisations?'

It is important to note that it is not the intention of this research to examine the individual TM

practices implemented in organisations; instead, the intention is to build on ideas from the HPWS and HR architectures literature (Huselid, 1995, Lepak and Snell, 2002) and examine on the macro level the bundle of practices that constitute TM architectures and how these may add value and contribute to sustained competitive advantage. To examine the question of value and TM, I have made a number of important choices.

The first choice I made is to turn to the strategic management literature, and more specifically to the value and value creation discourse, to gain an understanding of the meaning of value and the processes of value creation and value capture. I use the arguments presented in this field to frame the research questions and define their boundaries. In addition to work on value creation and value capture, I identify literature on two further value processes, namely value leverage and value protection. These two processes have been implicitly described, yet the literature provides some interesting insights which can be used to address the research problem more comprehensively and explain 'how TM architectures may add value to MNCs'. Accordingly, I propose and use a four-dimensional conceptual model of value to enable me to explore how may TM architectures add value in relation to four value processes, which are:

- value creation,
- value capture,
- value leverage, and
- value protection.

I present a conceptual value model (See Appendix Four) to summarise these four processes and to introduce the assumptions and tentative theory which support and inform this research (Miles and Huberman, 1994, Robson, 2016).

It is also important to note that the fundamental premises of this model are expressed through my four research propositions, which in turn developed organically as an outcome of the literature review. Each proposition has a distinctive purpose and focus, and is used to guide data collection and discussion. I also intend to use these propositions to spur further research and to shine a light on how future researchers might be able to arrive at more definitive conclusions about the relationship between TM architectures and the value processes. I treat these research propositions as predictions of the most likely responses/explanations which can be inferred or reasoned from the current understanding of the literature, and this is why they are a critical element of this research.

I used these propositions because when trying to answer these particular research questions (listed in the next section), research hypotheses are not appropriate. A research hypothesis is used when the phenomenon being investigated is a known entity, and can be measured and therefore tested (and refuted if appropriate). However, I argue that that the concept of 'value' is still open to debate, and this is, even more, the case when I think about the different 'processes' which constitute value – i.e. value creation, capture, leverage and protection. These four processes are derived from the literature, but must remain conceptual construct by nature. There is as yet no precision in their definition, no consensus on how best to measure them, nor any understanding of the associations that might exist between them. Hence the use of 'Research Propositions'. Propositions are useful in situations where there is little hard evidence, as in the present case, or still considerable debate about how evidence might be interpreted. They are best used when the purpose is to better understand a construct (to demonstrate a

connection which future research may be able to measure as a result of investigation). A proposition simply argues that it can be reasonably assumed (from appropriate research literature) that there is some link between the constructs used.

The second choice I made is to adopt a research approach which takes into account the practices (social norms, analytical frameworks, symbolic and material tools through which strategy is done), the practitioners (the strategic actors engaged in the construction of practice) and the praxis (collective social activity through which strategy is accomplished) (Whittington, 2006, Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009, Björkman et al., 2014) which together influence the design and implementation of TM strategies. More precisely, I am interested in capturing the potentially complex - or perhaps simplistic views and meanings that strategic actors assign to TM. Strategy-as-practice research positions strategy as something that people do, and thus draws attention to the importance of strategy practitioners (or in other words strategic actors) in making strategy (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). I thus use 'strategic actors' to refer specifically to the actors who are involved in the construction and implementation of TM practices in organisations, on two levels:

- HR or TM Directors (system designers), and
- Line Managers (system implementers).

I intend to find out whether these actors believe that TM architectures add value to their organisations, and how in their own ways they describe what this value is (if it exists). I believe that examining TM through the ways in which strategic actors perceive the factors influencing the development of TM in their organisations and the contextual rationales they draw upon in their thinking is critical for addressing the research problem and developing a sound

understanding of how TM architectures may add value to organisations.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I provide a detailed account of the different arguments which have informed much of the thinking behind this research, and demonstrate how these arguments have been used to develop the research propositions and address the research problem and questions. Before proceeding to the literature review, however, I outline the research questions.

### 3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As I explained in the previous section, the research problem is 'how talent management architectures may add value to organisations as perceived by strategic actors in multinational organisations'. To address this problem, I formulated two research questions. In response to the first question, I examine whether or not strategic actors believe that TM adds value to their organisations, and explore how they think about 'value' and 'talent management'. The first research question therefore is:

1. Do strategic actors believe that the talent management architectures (practices, processes, policies) implemented within their organisations add value to the organisation, and if so, what value do they believe they add?

I hope that through this question, I will also be able to determine how 'talent management' is described and understood by strategic actors, and how the discussion of 'value' might influence the meanings they ascribe to it. I use this as my opening question, before I introduce the value model and lead strategic actors into a discussion of value processes.

The second research question is broken down into a subset of four value questions, and is:

2. How may talent management architectures add value in relation to four value processes (creation, capture, leverage and protection)?
  - a) How may TM architectures enable the creation of value?
  - b) How may TM architectures enable the capture of value?
  - c) How may TM architectures enable the leverage of value?
  - d) How may TM architectures enable the protection of value?

As I explained earlier, these value questions are premised on a conceptual value model, and the four propositions developed and used to guide this research. In the next section, I present the literature review and outline these propositions.

### **3.4 HOW MAY TALENT MANAGEMENT ARCHITECTURES ADD VALUE TO ORGANISATIONS? UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF 'VALUE'**

To understand the meaning of 'value', we need to understand how the concepts of 'value' are presented and argued in the literature. I therefore first explore the positioning of the term 'value' in the RBV literature. One of the major contributions of the RBV has been to explore the various resources of the organisation, and how protecting these resources from imitation by other firms can make them a source of sustained competitive advantage (Mahoney and Pandian, 1992, Amit and Schoemaker, 1993, Black and Boal, 1994). There are two main arguments underpinning this contribution:

1. an organisation can be regarded as a bundle of resources (Amit and Schoemaker, 1993), and
2. resources which are valuable, rare, inimitable and imperfectly substitutable are a firm's main sources of sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991).

In his seminal article, Barney (1991) refers to a firm's resources as all the assets, capabilities, knowledge, attributes and information which enable a firm to devise and implement strategies to improve its efficiency and effectiveness (Daft, 2010). These resources can then be classified into three categories: physical capital resources (i.e. technology, equipment, plant, geographical resources) (Williamson, 1977), human capital resources (i.e. training, experience, intelligence, relationships and insights) (Becker, 1993) and organisational capital resources (i.e. the formal reporting structure, controlling and coordinating systems, formal and informal planning and informal relationships) (Tomer, 1987).

In attempting to define 'valuable resources', Barney (1991) suggests that a resource is valuable if "it exploits opportunities and/or neutralizes threats in a firm's environment" (p.105). He also suggests that resources are valuable when they enable organisations to develop and implement value-creating strategies which improve efficiency and effectiveness. Other writers such as Amit and Schoemaker (1993) suggest that the value of a firm's resources is dependent on their applicability to a particular environment. They argue that the more difficult resources are to buy, sell, imitate or substitute, the more strategic value they have, and the more specific, durable and scarce they become, the more valuable their deployment is to the firm. Resources are also deemed valuable if they enable a firm to satisfy its customers' needs at a lower cost than competitors (Barney, 1986b, Peteraf, 1993).



While the RBV literature tends to focus on 'valuable resources', it leaves a number of questions unanswered:

- a) defining the term 'value',
- b) defining what makes a particular resource valuable, to begin with, and
- c) explaining how organisations manage and transform their resource base to drive value creation and achieve sustained competitive advantage.

So, what is value? Vargo, Maglio and Akaka (2008) argue that the nature of value is elusive and the reason behind its elusiveness stems from the meanings of value which are strongly embedded in the foundations of economics and the study of market exchange. The nature of value has been widely debated and discussed in the literature. In his attempts to understand the meaning of value, Aristotle (1959) was one of the first to discuss the concepts of 'exchange value' and 'use value'. To understand exchange value, he initially deliberated about whether 'money' and 'need' were conterminous (sharing common boundaries) with exchange value before rejecting both, explaining that money should not be a measure of value, and that a person's need lacked a unit of measurement. Aristotle was one of the first to consider these concepts, but they were subsequently picked up and elaborated on by other academics (e.g. Ambrosini and Bowman, 2000).

Despite contributions by leading scholars on issues pertaining to 'value', 'value creation' and 'value capture', there seems to be little consensus on the meaning of 'value' and the determinants of value creation and value capture (Pitelis, 2009). To better understand the concept of value, we can turn to the strategic management literature on 'value' and 'value creation'. The topic was closely examined by many scholars in a special forum (Academy of

Management Review, Lepak, Smith & Taylor, 2007). Lepak et al. (2007) suggest that this lack of consensus is perhaps the result of a number of factors. Firstly, they argue that the multidisciplinary nature of the field of management introduces a plurality of perspectives related to the targets of value (i.e. who is value created for) and the potential sources of value (i.e. who creates value), and this introduces a number of challenges, including developing a definition of 'value'. Secondly, they argue that the difficulty of differentiating between the content of value and the process of value creation (i.e. what is value, who values what and where value resides) makes it difficult to understand value creation. Finally, they suggest that confusion about the processes of value creation and value capture has contributed to the existing disagreements and confusion surrounding the terms 'value' and 'value creation'.

A number of scholars have attempted to address the definitional problem surrounding the term 'value'. For example, Bowman and Ambrosini (2000) define two aspects of value:

1. 'perceived use value', i.e. how customers perceive the quality and value of a service or a product in relation to their needs. Use value is "the specific qualities of the product perceived by customers in relation to their needs" (p2);
2. 'exchange value', i.e. the monetary amount customers are willing to pay in exchange for a desired good or service. Exchange value is "the monetary amount realized at a single point in time when the exchange of goods takes place" (p3).

Both definitions suggest that value is subjective and is therefore predominantly dependent on the perceptions of customers and their willingness to exchange a monetary amount for the value received.

Similarly, Pitelis (2009) defines 'value' as the 'perceived worthiness' of a product or service for a final target user. The perceived worthiness of a product can be affected by a decreased price or increased differentiation in quality. More recently, Bowman and Ambrosini (2010) argue that 'value' has a different meaning for different stakeholder groups, and categorise a firm's key stakeholders as its customers, suppliers (of separable inputs and human inputs) and owners (Clarkson, 1995). They further suggest that for customers, value is the subjective judgment of the quality of a product or service compared with the price customers are willing to pay to obtain it (i.e. value for money). On the other hand, for suppliers, and more specifically suppliers of separable inputs, value is the monetary amount received for supplying a service or product, while for suppliers of human inputs, value is the monetary amount they receive for supplying their efforts and work to a firm. Finally, value for the owners or investors is the monetary amount they receive in return for their investments.

In summary, then, value means different things to different stakeholders depending on their motivations and what they aim to optimise on (be it value for money, monetary amounts received in exchange for services/products or efforts or return on investments). The very subjectivity of any assessment of value reinforces my view that as researchers we need to investigate the perceptions of the strategic actors involved in TM within organisations. I have therefore adopted a strategy-as-practice research position in order to capture the potentially complex - or perhaps simplistic - views and meanings that strategic actors assign to TM. The term 'value' is also defined in other areas of the literature. In the HRM context, Dries (2013b) suggests that "value refers to the potential of the human capital at hand to contribute to its organisation's core competencies and enhances its competitive advantage" (p. 267). One way to think about the value of a TM architecture is thus to consider the extent to which it enables

an organisation to organise and exploit the potential of its valuable, rare and inimitable talent resources.

In the HRM literature, the term 'value' is also defined in relation to 'human capital' and to the assumption that employees have the capacity to add value to their organisations if they possess value-creating skills and knowledge and if these are institutionalised in ways which enable the implementation of value-creating strategies (Huselid, 1995, Becker and Gerhart, 1996b, Lepak and Snell, 2002, Dries, 2013a).

Lepak and Snell (1999) combine arguments from transaction cost economics, human capital theory and the RBV of the firm to argue that the value of human capital is very much dependant on its potential to contribute to a firm's competitive advantage or core competencies. Therefore, they define 'value' in relation to the strategic benefits customers would get as a result of employees adding value to their organisations (Snell et al., 1996). Similarly, Barney and Clark (2007) suggest that value resides in talent resources which have the potential to create and capture value.

However, since judgments about value are subjective and dependent on perceptions, this begs two important questions:

1. how is value created? and,
2. how is value captured?

To address these questions, there is a need to understand the content and process of value creation and value capture and their implications for TM. The TM literature implicitly suggests that not all talent are sources of value creation, but that value is perhaps created principally by

a small pool of élite employees. Accordingly, organisations should aim to organise their internal HR and talent systems (i.e. the TM processes, policies and practices) to exploit the potential of its most valuable talent resources if they are to sustain competitive advantage (Sparrow and Makram, 2015).

Drawing upon these debates, to address the question of ‘value’ and ‘talent management’ we need to understand three things:

1. what are the sources of ‘value creation’ (i.e. who creates value)? I would argue here that this is an organisation’s ‘valuable talent’, and by valuable talent I mean those who have the potential to grow and to contribute to value creation and the achievement of the organisation’s goals.
2. what, or who, are the ‘targets of value creation’ (who does TM create value for)? Again, I would argue here that it is the different groups of stakeholders, organisations, owners and perhaps the valuable talent themselves.
3. what is the ‘process of value creation’ in TM? I argue that to answer this question, we must examine the orchestration of the different processes, practices and policies deployed within a TM architecture to enable the creation and capture of value.

To define the ‘value’ of any particular TM architecture, one must make three assumptions:

1. Since ‘value’ is subjective and predominately dependent on the perception of target users, I argue that the ‘perceived use value’ of a TM architecture is directly related to how strategic actors (i.e. HR/talent groups, leaders and decision makers) perceive this value. This will, of course, vary from one organisation to another and from one individual to another. Therefore, it is essential for this research that I examine the

different perceptions strategic actors might have of the value of TM architectures and explore whether they actually think about the value which might be added when they are engaged in the process of designing and implementing TM in their organisations.

2. In order to contribute to value creation and value capture, TM architectures (i.e. TM processes, practices and policies) should enable firms to exploit the potential of their valuable, rare and inimitable talent resources. The components of TM architectures should be orchestrated, integrated and complement each other to enable the creation and capture of value, or more specifically, to enable 'valuable talent' to create value and enable the organisation to capture such value. Consequently, it is important to invest in the bundle of practices which constitute TM architectures rather than investing in individual practices: the whole is bigger than the sum of its components.
3. The 'exchange value' of a TM architecture is only recognised when the outcome of implementing its practices exceeds the amount invested to develop and implement those practices (i.e. when the contribution of valuable talent exceeds the amount invested to identify, develop and retain it).

To address the research problem of how TM architectures may add value to organisations, I argue that it is useful to think about the value of TM in relation to four different components of value, or what I call four different processes. These are value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection. These processes are explicitly and implicitly discussed in the literature. Therefore, in the remaining sections of this chapter, I present the arguments within the literature which have informed this empirical research.

### 3.4.1 How May Talent Management Architectures Enable the Creation of Value? The Process of Value Creation

Creating value and the quest to achieve sustained competitive advantage are two critical concerns of researchers in strategic management and organisation studies (Collis and Montgomery, 1995, Teece, 2007). Value is created when organisations exploit their internal resources and capabilities to implement strategies which enable them to respond to market opportunities (Penrose, 1959, Andrews, 1971). On the other hand, the literature on dynamic capabilities (Teece, 1982, Wernerfelt, 1984) suggests that value creation resides in the organisation's ability to "integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competences" (Teece et al., 1997, p. 516) and in its capacity to "purposefully create, extend and modify its resource base" (Helfat, 2007, p. 4). Moreover, Sirmon et al. (2007) suggest that a firm's resource portfolio establishes an upper limit to the creation of value. Organisations should, therefore, structure their resource portfolio by acquiring a repertoire of resources (i.e. unique and valuable resources), accumulating resources (i.e. internally develop resources) and finally divesting resources (i.e. actively evaluate and divest less valuable resources) to be able to create value.

To conceptualise the process of value creation, one needs to define the sources of value creation (i.e. who creates value). Lepak et al. (2007) suggest three sources of value creation: the individual (by developing unique tasks or services which are perceived to be valuable by target users), the organisation (by inventing new ways of doing things to benefit target users) and society (by developing new programmes and incentives intended to benefit its members).

Relating this to TM, two sources of value creation can be identified:

- individual talent, who create value when they develop their role and deliver novel and

appropriate outcomes which appeal in the eyes of their employer (Lepak et al., 2007), and

- the organisation, which creates value by inventing and devising the appropriate TM architecture (i.e. practices, systems and processes) which enable it to exploit the potential of their talent resource to work towards value creation (Wright and McMahan, 1992).

However, there seems to be a general disagreement in the strategic management literature about what value creation is, the processes by which value is created and the mechanisms which allow the creators of value to capture and enjoy a return on the value they create (Lepak et al., 2007). As mentioned earlier, this lack of consensus is multidimensional in nature (March, 1958, Porter, 1985, Post et al., 2004, Sirmon et al., 2007, Seung-Hyun et al., 2007, Kang et al., 2007). This is due to different views about the following:

- the targets (i.e. customers, stakeholders, individual employees, business owners, society),
- the sources of value,
- the ability to differentiate between the process and content of value creation, and
- confusion about the difference between value creation and value capture.

Accordingly, in order to understand what value creation is, we must first explore briefly how the term has been debated in the literature. Building on Bowman and Ambrosini's (2000) definitions of 'use value' and 'exchange value', other scholars have suggested that value creation is dependent on the value which is perceived by target users and their willingness to



pay in exchange for a service or product minus the opportunity costs of producing that product or delivering that service (Peteraf and Barney, 2003, Lepak et al., 2007, Helfat, 2007). Although these debates focus on the economic relationship between consumers and suppliers, they have been criticised for failing to identify the real determinants of value creation. One of the earliest discussions of the determinants of value creation was Amit and Zott (2001). They identified innovation, technology, strategic networks, value chains and intra-firm resources as key determinants of value creation. Lepak et al. (2007) similarly emphasised innovation as a determinant of value creation, but also included other determinants such as the creation of knowledge, entrepreneurship, learning, social networks and strategic human resources.

When we turn to the HRM literature, many scholars argue that employees are an important determinant of value creation due to their uniqueness, their ability to increase productivity by learning, the way they work together to help create the distinctive personality of the organisation and their ability to execute and deliver on organisation strategies, as well as the HR systems and architectures implemented to link human resources with value creation in the organisation (Pfeffer, 1994, Lepak and Snell, 2002, Peteraf, 2006, Pitelis, 2007, Garavan et al., 2012). To understand how TM architectures may enable the creation of value, it is therefore important to think about the sources of value creation in TM (who creates value) and the process of value creation (the mechanisms within a TM architecture which enable the creation of value).

There are many arguments in the literature which suggest that individuals, i.e. valuable talent, are the primary source of value creation and high returns, and not purchasable or physical resources (Barney, 1986b, Barney, 1991, Peteraf, 1993, Pitelis, 2009, Lepak et al., 2007, Felin

and Hesterly, 2007). Valuable talent are those who “possess appropriable value creating advantages, capabilities and action potential [and] can motivate the emergence of organizations and their strategies and actions intended to capture socially co-created value” (Pitelis, 2009, p. 1115).

There are other scholars who believe that value creation is a prediction of the characteristics, knowledge, mental agility, flexibility, motivations and ability of valuable talent to interact with others and with their environments (Locke and Fitzpatrick, 1995, Amabile, 1996, Felin and Hesterly, 2007). Thus, value creation is a result of the potential, knowledge, expertise and capabilities which valuable talent possess and utilise to perform and execute tasks/strategies which contribute to value creation.

Lepak et al. (2007) suggest that valuable talent create value “by acting creatively to make their job/service more novel and appropriate in the eyes of their employer or some other end user in a particular context” (p.194). Their argument is based on the assumption that value is created as an outcome of performing novel tasks or services and producing products that are perceived to be valuable by the target users (i.e. employers, customers, shareholders). It is, however, important to note that acquiring value-creating resources such as valuable talent is not in itself enough (Barney and Arian, 2001, Skilton, 2014). Instead, organisations need to intervene and engage in activities which enable the active development and management of their valuable resources such as talent so that they are continuously engaged in the process of value creation (Lado and Wilson, 1994, Wright et al., 1994, Pfeffer, 1995, Bowman and Ambrosini, 2000).

So how is value created (i.e. what is the process of value creation)? Porter (1985) suggests that value is usually created when organisations develop or invent new ways of doing things.

Similarly, Priem (2007) argues that value is created when organisations innovate and differentiate their product or service offerings in ways that are valued by customers. Lepak (2007) also suggests that “the value creation process includes any activity that provides a greater level of novel and appropriate benefits than target users or customers currently possess, and that they are willing to pay for” (p.184).

On the other hand, in the dynamic capabilities literature, value creation is seen in relation to the organisation’s capacity to renew competencies, create advantages and create, extend and modify its resource base to achieve congruence with the changing environments it operates in (Teece et al., 1997, Helfat, 2007, Ambrosini et al., 2009). For example, Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997) suggest that organisations create value when they invest in developing distinctive managerial processes (i.e. efficiently and effectively integrate patterns of current practices and learning), when they effectively position and assemble their strategic assets (i.e. endowments of technology, intellectual property and their customer base) and when they create evolutionary paths which allow them to “integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments” (p. 516). Similarly, Pisano (1994), Grant (1996a), Eisenhardt (2000) and Martin et al. (2011) argue that value is created when organisations alter their resource base, or acquire, integrate, recombine and reconfigure resources to generate new value-creating strategies. Likewise, Penrose (1959), Andrews (1971) and Sirmon and Hitt (2003) suggest that value is created when organisations carefully and deliberately exploit the capabilities of their internal resources to implement strategies which enable them to respond to market opportunities. Central to dynamic capabilities is the management of a firm’s resources, which is the comprehensive process through which a firm engages in activities that enable it to structure its resource portfolio (i.e. acquiring,

accumulating and divesting resources), bundling these resources to build internal capabilities (i.e., stabilising, enriching and pioneering) and leveraging those capabilities with the purpose of creating and maintaining value (i.e., mobilising, coordinating and deploying) (Sirmon et al., 2007).

How does the SHRM literature address these questions? The process of value creation is described in relation to how the HR systems (sets of processes, practices and policies) implemented by the organisation build employees' skills and motivates them to work towards achieving organisational goals and contribute to value creation (Wright and McMahan, 1992). It is argued that HR systems contribute to value creation when they elicit the desired behaviours which are critical to executing the strategies of value creation, and when they impact the skills and knowledge of valuable talent and their willingness to expend effort and express their talent in the workplace (Schuler and Jackson, 1987, Huselid, 1995, Macduffie, 1995, Boxall, 2012). Value creation is also described in terms of how HR systems foster and facilitate the generation, accumulation and internalisation of knowledge and spark the involvement and commitment of valuable talent (Lado and Wilson, 1994). The fundamental focus of these various explanations of value creation, both in the general management literature and the HRM literature, is the organisation's 'valuable talent' and their contribution to value creation. To explore how TM architectures may create value, I, therefore, present the first proposition of this research and suggest that:

RP1: value is created when a firm's TM architecture enables it to attract, acquire, and accumulate valuable and unique talent resources.

This in my view is a critical starting point for the capture, leverage and protection of value.

### 3.4.2 How May Talent Management Architectures Enable the Capture of Value? The Process of Value Capture

In addition to value creation, much of the literature, for example, the RBV literature (Barney, 1991, Peteraf, 1993, Collis and Montgomery, 1995), focuses mostly on the concept of 'value capture' rather than 'value creation'. The process of 'value capture' is described in relation to the economic value which firms capture by acquiring and maintaining their valuable resource portfolio. It is thus important for my study to understand the difference between these two processes in order to develop plausible arguments about how TM architectures may add value to organisations. It is important to recognise that the processes of value creation and value capture are two distinct albeit related activities.

In the strategic management literature, scholars have distinguished between these processes by recognising that in some cases, firms which create value may be unable to capture this value if they need to share it with others such as customers, employees or stakeholders (Makadok, 2001). This is referred to as 'value slippage' (Lepak et al., 2007). Various scholars have attempted to define value capture. For example, Bowman and Ambrosini (2000) describe value capture by distinguishing in particular between 'use value' and 'exchange value'. They see value capture as the difference between the exchange value (i.e. the revenue) which the firm receives in exchange for its products and services and the use value (i.e. the costs) it pays to suppliers or employees for the resources or efforts they provide to produce a product or provide a service. From the RBV of the firm, the process of value capture is mostly described in relation to the economic value of a firm's resources once these resources have been used to implement value-creating strategies – it is the value that the firm captures by virtue of acquiring value-creating resources that is important (Barney, 1986a).

It is also argued that value capture (the realisation of the exchange value) is determined by the bargaining relationship between parties – it is “a function of a bargaining process” (Bowman and Swart, 2007, p. 492) between the creators of value (i.e. customers, suppliers or employees) and the capturers of the value (i.e. firms) where the economic basis of this bargaining relationship is a function of perceived dependence (Pfeffer, 1995, Coff, 1999, Bowman and Ambrosini, 2000). From this point of view, it is reasonable to say that the value created by a firm’s resources becomes critical *only if the firm manages to capture that value*.

With respect to human capital as a source of value creation, it is argued that the bargaining power of employees is very much dependant on how they perceive themselves. For example, if they perceive their livelihood to be dependent on their organisation, it is unlikely that they will exert strong bargaining power, but if they perceive that their role in the value-creation process is crucial, that the talent they possess is critical to their organisation and that they can take it elsewhere, then they will most likely exert strong bargaining power (Bowman and Swart, 2007).

Given that value capture is dependent on the relative bargaining power of the value creator and the value capturer, organisations need what Rumelt (1984) refers to as 'isolating mechanisms' to enable organisations to weaken the bargaining power of their value-creating resources (i.e. talent resources) in order to capture value once it is created. Isolating mechanisms are meant to obstruct the flow of knowledge about the firm’s value-creating resources, capabilities and strategies, thus making imitation more difficult and preventing competitors from accessing and utilising them (Lippman and Rumelt, 1982, Mahoney and Pandian, 1992). To protect a firm’s human capital (strategic assets), it is important first to note

that they have advantageous attributes which distinguish them from other strategic assets owned by the organisation. These could be their in-depth knowledge, skills and experience, and how they utilise these advantageous attributes to create value. In the knowledge management literature, it is argued that the knowledge created in the organisation is a source of sustained competitive advantage and value creation, and that talent are the primary locus of knowledge, and so it is important for organisations to find ways to capture and protect the knowledge which is created by its talent resources (Nonaka 1991, Simon, 1991, Grant, 1993, Ambrosini and Bowman, 2001).

In relation to protecting value-creating human capital resources, Bowman and Swart (2007) introduce the concept of 'embedded capital'. They suggest that "embedded capital exists where there is ambiguity surrounding the rent creating contributions of human capital due to synergistic interactions between separable and embodied capital that are difficult to disentangle. Thus, embedded capital co-produces both rents and causal ambiguity" (p.494). Put differently, the idea of embedded capital is to intertwine and interconnect the embodied capital owned by human capital resources (i.e. knowledge, expertise and skills) with other, separable forms of capital (resources, systems and complex social relationships), so that it becomes difficult to isolate its contribution to value creation. For example, in their research, Hitt et al. (2001) found that law firms were able to capture the value created by their highly intelligent human capital when they developed processes and systems which enabled them to extract the tacit knowledge and industry- and firm-specific knowledge from their human capital and pass it on in the form of learning to others in the organisation, thus retaining the knowledge within the firm.

In today's economy, knowledge has become an essential factor for the creation of value and the achievement of competitive advantage in organisations. As a consequence, the protection and management of the knowledge created within an organisation is now an integral part of the organisations' competitive strategies (Hanel, 2006). Yet, it is important to realise that it is not knowledge per se which contributes to achieving competitive advantage, but rather the extent to which organisations are able to effectively manage knowledge stocks and flows among employees to create value (Lepak and Snell, 2008).

Many scholars argue that tacit knowledge is central to the development of sustained competitive advantage (Nonaka 1991, Grant, 1993, Spender, 1996), and it is thus considered to be one of the most critical resources of the firm in relation to value creation. In the literature, 'tacit knowledge' refers to individuals' skills, know-how, and unarticulated, implicit knowledge (Nelson, 1982, Kogut and Zander, 1992, Spender, 1996); on the other hand, 'objective knowledge' is knowledge which can be communicated from the possessor to another person (Winter, 1987). However, the two types of knowledge are not separate (Polanyi, 1983). In their knowledge base work, Simon (1991) and Grant (1996a) argue that individuals are the primary locus of knowledge and thus should be the starting point for understanding value creation and organisational outcomes. Similarly, Ambrosini and Bowman (2001) argue that knowledge is dependent on the owner and is socially constructed; it is "constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). It is therefore important for organisations to find ways of effectively capturing the knowledge constructed by their human capital and transferring it across the organisation so that it can be applied more widely (Sparrow and Makram, 2015). Kang et al. (2007) suggest that success in creating value requires organisations to exploit



employee knowledge, which requires the design of an HR architecture that captures the knowledge of different employee groups.

To think about how TM architectures may enable the capture of value, I, therefore, present the second proposition of this research and suggest that:

RP2: value is captured when a firm's TM architecture enables it to weaken the bargaining powers of its talent resources and capture their knowledge and expertise and transfer them to where they can be widely applied in the organisation.

### **3.4.3 How May Talent Management Architectures Enable the Leverage of Value? The Process of Value Leverage**

Thinking about the role of TM architectures in creating and capturing value raises the question of whether there may be other ways in which TM architectures may add value to organisations. A review of the literature brings to the surface two more value processes to which TM architectures may contribute, namely value leverage and value protection.

To understand how TM architectures may enable organisations to leverage the value created by talent resources, I turn to the dynamic capabilities literature to develop my argument and develop the third proposition of this research. The concept of 'dynamic capabilities' (Teece et al., 1997, Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000) has emerged from the RBV (Barney, 1991, Peteraf, 1993, Penrose, 1996), which in itself has been an influential theoretical development for understanding how competitive advantage is achieved and sustained over time. Teece and Pisano (1994) use the concept of dynamic capabilities to refer to the sources of competitive advantage. They emphasise two key aspects:

1. the shifting (i.e. dynamic) nature of the environment, and
2. the key role of 'adapting, integrating and reconfiguring' organisational skills, resources and functional competencies (i.e. capabilities).

The dynamic capability literature suggests that an organisation can leverage the value of its resources (be they tangible, intangible or human resources) by engaging in activities which create, modify and extend its resource base (i.e. acquisition, innovation, entrepreneurial, knowledge management) (Helfat, 2007). Dynamic capabilities have been defined as “the capacity of an organization to purposefully create, extend or modify its resource base” (Helfat, 2007, p. 1). They are internally built by firms rather than bought. They are path-dependent processes or routines which are embedded and employed in order to reconfigure the firm’s resource base (Makadok, 2001, Winter, 2003, Sirmon and Hitt, 2003).

Central to dynamic capabilities is the reconfiguration of the firm’s resource base. Accordingly, it is argued that dynamic capabilities comprise four processes: first the reconfiguration (i.e. transformation and recombination) of the firm’s assets and resources; second, leveraging (i.e. replicating, extending and deploying) processes, systems or resources which are operating in one area of a firm to another area; third, learning, which is the ability to effectively and efficiently perform tasks and learn from mistakes; and finally the integration and coordination of assets and resources to create a new resource base (Bowman and Ambrosini, 2003, Ambrosini et al., 2009).

For this research, I am interested in understanding how the process of ‘leveraging’ is understood in the literature and how it may be imported into the TM debate to explain how TM architectures may enable the leveraging of a firm's value creation resources (i.e. talent

resources). Lichtenstein and Brush (2001) argue that owning resources and bundling them to develop capabilities is not sufficient for value creation; instead, firms need to leverage and extend their capabilities to ensure a continuous process of value creation. Similarly, Miller et al. (2002) argue that a firm's resources and capabilities are of no value unless they can be extended to create more value and superior returns.

The process of leveraging is therefore critical for the maintenance of value creation. As outlined earlier, the process of leverage is seen in relation to a firm's ability to replicate a process or system which is working well in one part of the organisation in another part, or the ability to extend a resource by deploying it in new domains (Ambrosini et al., 2009). Similarly, Sirmon et al. (2007) refer to leveraging as "the application of a firm's capabilities to create value for customers and wealth for owners" (p. 277), which involves the processes of mobilising, configuring and deploying the firm's capabilities and resources. Thus the leveraging of resources in itself is critical, in that even when the firm owns and effectively bundles them to develop value-creation capabilities, the firm is unable to recognise the value created unless it effectively leverages and uses its resources and capabilities in the marketplace (Lichtenstein and Brush, 2001). Part of leveraging is a firm's ability to mobilise its idiosyncratic capabilities – the intent of such mobilisation is to identify the capabilities needed by the firm and design the capability configurations required to exploit such capabilities in a way which that will enable the continued creation of value. (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994) argue that mobilising a firm's capabilities requires continuous adjustment to ensure that the appropriate capabilities are available for sustainable value creation.

On its own, the mobilisation of capabilities is insufficient for the leveraging of value (Sirmon et

al., 2007); instead, firms need also to consider the coordination of capabilities, which Sirmon et al. (2007) describe as the effective and efficient integration of mobilised capabilities to create the capability configurations which result in the implementation of leveraging strategies. The goal of coordinating capabilities is to integrate them in ways that make it difficult for competitors to imitate (Chatzkel, 2002). The final process is the deployment of the integrated capabilities to realise the value which has been created by the firm's value-creating resources. In conclusion, the coordination and deployment of the firm's capabilities are vital to the implementation of leveraging strategies (Sirmon et al., 2007).

In addition to the dynamic capabilities and strategic management literature, there have been a number of discussions in the TM literature which implicitly describe the process of value leverage. The impact of TM architectures on value leverage is implicitly referred to by several scholars. For example, Sparrow et al. (2010) argue that value leverage requires firms to invest in appropriate TM practices which enable them to:

- a) build on their current talent capabilities,
- b) manage the knowledge of their talent resources in ways that lead to the achievement of strategic outcomes;
- c) respond to talent shortages and recognise organisational capabilities which are central to the business model.

In this context, Andreas, Annie and Michael (2007) suggest that the process of value leverage involves those activities which leverage knowledge assets in the organisation (i.e. talent resources) and link them to associated work functions across the organisation where they are needed to enable the sustainable creation of value. They also suggest that leveraging value

includes those activities that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of existing value-creating resources such as structuring talent resources, managing talent knowledge and transferring it across the organisation to generate new ideas, and creating a collaborative and creative culture to effectively manage talent. Sirmon et al. (2007), argue that organisations can leverage the value of their talent resources by mobilising, coordinating and deploying their capabilities. This involves developing talent capabilities and configuring them to exploit market opportunities, diffusing talent knowledge and transferring it through the organisation, and deploying talent within the organisation in a way which enhances their maintainability.

To think about how TM architectures may enable the leverage of value, I, therefore, present the third proposition of this research and suggest that:

RP3: value is leveraged when a firm's TM architecture enables it to extend, mobilise (replicate), integrate and deploy the capabilities of its value-creating talent resources.

#### **3.4.4 How May Talent Management Architectures Enable the Protection of Value? The Process of Value Protection**

Finally, I present the last value process in this research, that of the retention and protection of created rents. To understand how TM architectures may enable organisations to protect the value created by their talent resources, I turn to Rumelt's (1984) argument about 'isolating mechanisms' raised earlier in the chapter. Although in the strategic management literature, isolating mechanisms are mostly associated with value capture, I believe they are also a factor which helps to understand how created value might be protected.

Rumelt suggests that organisations can only preserve value if they succeed in protecting their value-creating resources from being captured or duplicated by competitors and if they deploy

isolating mechanisms that prevent rivals from having access to value-creating resources, thereby protecting these resources from being captured or duplicated by others outside the organisation. Isolating mechanisms are “legal barrier[s] that may prevent replication of the value-creating new task, product, or service by a competitor” (Lepak et al., 2007, p. 188). They occur in situations where the relationship between the firm’s resources and the competitive advantage is not understood (i.e. where there is causal ambiguity), when sources of competitive advantage are ‘socially complex’ (i.e. when they are embedded within the firm’s relationships and social systems), and when decisions are ‘path-dependent’ (i.e. on the firm’s unique history) (Rumelt, 1984). Moreover, they play a significant strategic role in allowing firms to sustain long-term competitive advantage and continuously generate resources rent (Mazur, 2013).

Barney and Clark (2007) suggest that organisations can protect their valuable human resources from being imitated by other competitors if they succeed in developing a firm-specific skill base. This is accomplished by training and developing employees on processes and procedures which are specific to the organisation (Hatch and Dyer, 2004) or similarly, by developing firm-specific knowledge and disseminating it throughout the organisation (Senge, 2006). They also suggest that the development of complex social systems which are not transferable across organisations and embedding talent resources within these systems can protect the value they create. SHRM scholars (Wright and Snell, 1991, Lado and Wilson, 1994, Becker and Gerhart, 1996b) also advocate the development of an integrated, synergistic HR system to manage valuable human resources rather than one which is a collection of independent practices. The interrelatedness and integration of the system's components makes it difficult if not impossible for competitors to identify which elements are more valuable and hence to imitate them.

According to Lepak, Smith and Taylor (2007), isolating mechanisms operate across both levels of analysis, i.e. the individual and the organisational level. They argue that at the individual level, attributes such as the nature of the individual's relationships with others in the organisation, their social positioning, their expertise and knowledge may serve as a basis for the development of isolating mechanisms. At the organisational level, on the other hand, isolating mechanisms may derive from the existence of strategic resources which are rare, inimitable, non-substitutable and valuable (Barney, 1991, Lepak et al., 2007) and the existence of processes and systems which enable the effective management of resources (Sirmon et al., 2007). In SHRM, scholars (Wright and Snell, 1991, Lado and Wilson, 1994, Becker and Gerhart, 1996b) suggest that integrated HR systems are considered to be isolating mechanisms implemented by organisations to manage their talent resources. These systems are also considered to be 'invisible assets' (Itami, 1987), and play an important role in generating value for the organisation and preventing its value-creating resources (human capital) (Jackson et al., 2014) from being lost to competitors.

HR systems play an important role in the management of human capital resources, and there appears to be a significant body of empirical research (built on rigorous methodology) which suggests that these systems affect both individual and organisational performance (Combs et al., 2006), and that the main way firms can use such systems to gain competitive advantage and create value is to improve retention and reduce turnover (Delery and Shaw, 2001) to protect valuable talent resources. Others such as Huselid and Becker (1997), Gardner et al. (2011) and Jensen et al. (2013) suggest that there is a positive association between high-performing work systems and employee retention. Pioneers in the strategic HRM literature argue that HRM systems co-evolve along with business strategies to retain and protect employees by building

long-term relationships which improve employees' commitment, involvement and performance (Arthur, 1992, Camps and Luna-Arocas, 2009, Jackson et al., 2014) and increase their willingness to stay with the organisation and contribute to its success (Evans and Davis, 2005).

To explore how TM architectures may enable the protection of value, I present the fourth and final proposition of this research and suggest that:

RP4: value is protected when a firm's TM architecture enables it to develop isolating mechanisms to protect its talent resources from being lost to competitors.

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

To understand how TM architectures may add value to organisations, we need to first address the question of value and develop a better and broader way of thinking about TM architectures in terms of the practices which enable the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value. Furthermore, to recognise the strategic value of assets, we need to identify the sources of value creation in TM (i.e. who creates value): is it the organisation (i.e. through its talent systems, practices and processes), or is it the talent resources (i.e. valuable talent)? In this research, I choose to think of the sources of value creation in TM as the valuable talent resources which the organisation has, but I recognise that having such resources in itself does not guarantee value creation. Instead, organisations need to intervene and manage these resources in ways which enable the creation of value.

This is where I believe a TM architecture (systems, processes, practices) may play a critical role in enabling the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value. A review of the value



creation, dynamic capabilities and strategic management literature has helped to identify a number of ideas which in my view are useful for understanding the value of TM architectures. Drawing on these ideas, I formulate four value propositions as a basis for examining the role of TM architectures in terms of four value processes. Based on the first proposition (RP1), 'value is created when a firm's TM architecture enables it to attract, acquire, and accumulate valuable and unique talent resources', I approach the question of 'how TM architectures may enable the creation of value' by recognising the importance of attracting and acquiring valuable talent (i.e. sources of value creation). I believe that this is a logical starting point for exploring the creation of value: if talent resources are recognised as a source of value creation, then it makes sense for TM architectures to enable the attraction and acquisition of talent resources. However, I also recognise that attracting and acquiring talent resources in itself is not enough, and therefore TM architectures should also enable the effective management of talent resources so that they are able to continuously contribute to value creation.

This leads to the second proposition (RP2): 'value is captured when a firm's TM architecture enables it to weaken the bargaining powers of its talent resources and capture their knowledge and expertise and transfer them to where they can be widely applied in the organisation', in which it is recognised that even if talent resources contribute to value creation, an organisation might not be able to capture and enjoy this value unless its TM architecture enables it to capture the value created by its talent resources. I also recognise that what makes talent valuable and a source of value creation is the knowledge and expertise they bring into the organisation, and so to capture the value of talent resources, I argue that TM architectures should enable the capture of the knowledge and expertise of talent and the application of such knowledge and expertise where it is needed. Although the value literature is mostly concerned

with the processes of value creation and value capture, it is important to note that other processes play a part, notably value leverage and value protection.

In exploring the last two propositions, I examine these processes and address the question of 'how TM architectures may enable the leverage and protection of value'. In discussing the third proposition (RP3), 'value is leveraged when a firm's TM architecture enables it to extend, mobilise (replicate), integrate and deploy the capabilities of its value-creating talent resources', I recognise that the process of value creation is continuous, and therefore, for talent resources to continue contributing to value creation, a firm's TM architecture should enable the extension and development of the capabilities, knowledge and expertise of talent resources and the deployment of these capabilities where they are most needed. Finally, in my discussion of the last proposition (RP4), 'value is protected when a firm's TM architecture enables it to develop isolating mechanisms to protect its talent resources from being lost to competitors', I recognise the importance of preventing the sources of value creation (i.e. talent resources) from being lost to competitors, and therefore argue that a TM architecture should enable the retention and protection of talent. To explore these four propositions, I have purposely focused on strategic actors in organisations as I believe it is through their perspectives and their understanding of TM that I will be able to develop a rich database which will hopefully help in shaping the argument and the findings of this research.

In the next chapter, I present a detailed account of the methodology and research design for the data collection and the analytical journey of this research.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present the key decisions and choices I made about the research design and the methods I used for data collection and data analysis. Given the nature of the research problem, i.e. 'how may talent management architectures add value as perceived by strategic actors in multinational organisations', and to address the research questions, I used a multiple-case study design employing a qualitative research approach to enable the generation of rich and detailed accounts of TM. The research design and approach chosen enabled me to examine 'how TM architectures may add value' across different organisations and through the eyes of different strategic actors – actors who provided interesting and enlightening insights which helped to address the research problem. I begin the chapter (Section 4.2) by first presenting my philosophical stance (i.e. how I view the world and how this impacted my research), and then (in Section 4.3) present and discuss the choices I made regarding the strategies of inquiry and the research approach. Subsequently, in Section 4.4, I provide a detailed explanation of the research design (case study design) and how I went about identifying, selecting and gaining access to five multinational companies, and outline the context of these organisations. I then (in Section 4.5) illustrate the research methods (in-depth interviews) which I used to collect my data and the unit of analysis I used to develop my conclusions, and provide a detailed explanation of how I went about analysing the data (my analytical strategy). In the last part of the chapter (in Sections 4.6 and Section 4.7) I conclude by presenting a reflective account of my role as a researcher in this study and the ethical and confidential considerations I bore in mind.

## 4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL ORIENTATION

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) suggest that most of the debates about knowledge of claims involve questions of ontology (the study of the nature of reality and its existence) and epistemology (the study of the best way or ways of inquiring into the nature of reality). Ontological and epistemological assumptions tend to overlap – as Crotty (1998) points out, it is difficult to distinguish between ontology and epistemology as they are mutually dependent: “to talk about the construction of meaning [epistemology] is to talk of the construction of a meaningful reality [ontology]” (p. 10). The debates around ontology are usually described in relation to two distinct views, the first of which is realism, which “emphasises that the world is concrete and external, and that science can only progress through observations that have a direct correspondence to the phenomena being investigated” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012, p. 19). In other words, the assumption is that the real world has a hard and tangible structure which exists irrespective of and separately from the individual’s perception of it (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The second view is relativism, which assumes that there are many different truths and that reality is created by people (Latour and Woolgar, 1979), meaning that “there is no objective truth to be known” (Hugly and Sayward, 1987, p. 278). Instead, there are different interpretations of the world, and no definite facts, but different accommodations of facts which are dependent on the viewpoints of people. There is, therefore, no truth, and social reality is nothing more than a creation of people through the use of labels, language and discourse (Cunliffe, 2001).

I see reality as a product of individual consciousness (Burrell, 2001), and believe that there is no single reality to be discovered, but instead many realities to discover. In terms of ontology,

therefore, my beliefs lean towards relativism. What this means for this research is that in order to generate a deeper understanding of TM and the value it may add, I need to recognise the importance of taking into account the viewpoints, experiences and events surrounding TM, and for this reason I made a conscious choice to engage with strategic actors in organisations to gain access to the underlying views and assumptions they might have about TM and value. I thus recognise that both these strategic actors and myself (as a researcher) are critical to deconstructing and constructing knowledge, and so I need to question their experiences, thoughts and feelings and dig deeper into their perceptions and logics and become immersed in the context of the research myself.

Epistemology, or paradigms [as described by Kuhn (1977)], is “a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a world view that defines, for its holder, the nature of the "world," the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). Debates about epistemology are focused around two contrasting views, which are the ‘Positivist’ and the ‘Constructivist’ view. In the positivist paradigm (also referred to as naïve-realism), reality is external and objective, based on observed facts and is investigated independently of the investigator. Crotty (1998) suggests that in the positivist paradigm “scientific knowledge is utterly objective and that only scientific knowledge is valid, certain and accurate” (p. 29). This means that a positivist researcher usually relies on scientific methods such as experiments to manipulate observed objects with the aim of discovering relationships between variables (Mertens, 2014). Such researchers are concerned with uncovering the truth and empirically presenting it (Henning et al., 2004).

On the other hand, the constructivist paradigm recognises that knowledge is socially constructed by peoples' perceptions, and that it is impossible to separate between what exists in the social world and what exists in the researcher's mind (Creswell, 2014). Constructivism rests on the assumption that "realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). It rejects the notion that there is an objective reality out there and instead it takes the stance that multiple subjective realities exist. The researcher's objective is thus to understand these multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge (Mertens, 2014). It assumes that knowledge and meanings are an act of interpretation and there is no such thing as objective knowledge which is independent of thinking and human reasoning (Gephart, 1999), so there is a need to understand phenomena through the meanings which people assign to them (Deetz, 1996).

Therefore, in line with my ontological orientation, my epistemological stance leans more towards the constructivist paradigm. In this research I play the role of an active observer (Carr and Kemmis, 1986), in which I see myself engaging in interpreting the meanings and actions of strategic actors as they express them within their specific social context. I recognise that meaning is constructed through people and is therefore created, negotiated, sustained and modified (Schwandt, 2003) by the way strategic actors make sense of their world and by their views and experience of TM and its value. My role in this research is to consider the complexity of the views and interpretations that strategic actors bring to the discussion, and to seek explanations within their frame of reference as opposed to just being an observer of action.

In the first instance, my ontological and epistemological views might appear inconsistent with

the use of research propositions (I explained why propositions were used in Chapter 3 – Literature Review). However, reflecting on the nature of the research problem ‘how TM architectures may add value to organisations’ and the research questions (outlined in Chapter 1 – Introduction, and in more detail in Chapter 3 – Literature Review), it becomes clear why these philosophical positions (relativist ontology and the constructivist paradigm) fit the research well. To further clarify this, I recognise that data collection and much of the data analysis happen at the individual and the organisational levels, where reality is subjective and draws on different interpretations. I also recognise that strategic actors have their own informed and insightful views on how exactly TM architectures may or may not add value to their organisations. Finally, I recognise that even where TM practices might appear the same (on the surface level), these practices are embedded in a complex and internally-shaped set of organisational systems which are unique to each organisation.

It is important to note that in formulating the first research question ('Do strategic actors believe that the talent management architectures (practices, processes, policies) implemented within their organisations add value to the organisation, and if so, what value do they believe they add?'), I decided to adopt a subjective and exploratory approach, to allow actors to share their views without me imposing any ideas or frameworks on them. However, in relation to the second research question ('How may talent management architectures add value in relation to four value processes (creation, capture, leverage and protection)?'), I recognise that within the RBV and the value creation and dynamic capabilities literature (which has informed much of the thinking in this study) there are a number of known conditions and specifications of which are critical to understanding how TM architectures may add value to organisations, and thus should not be ignored. Therefore, I chose to adopt a deterministic theoretical framework (value

model) of value which was generated from within the literature to guide the investigation (i.e. data collection and data analysis) and to capture the specifications of value that might have an implication on TM. It is also important to note that I fully recognise that this theoretical model was subjectively constructed, and that the participants would perceive it subjectively. This is because I recognise the importance of subjective constructivism (in that I am interested in examining how strategic actors interpret the value model, how they relate it to TM and what it means to them). The reason why I choose to use a deterministic theoretical framework (value model) is that I recognise that it is legitimate not only to question how strategic actors think about value, but to also look deeply into the different value ideas and processes – as described in the strategic management and value literature - and to examine whether these can usefully be drawn on and applied in a discussion of TM.

### **4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH**

A research approach is a strategy of enquiry used to move the research from its underlying philosophical assumptions to the selection of research design and subsequently decisions on appropriate research methods and tools for collecting, analysing and interpreting data (Myers and Avison, 2002). A research project is usually approached either quantitatively or qualitatively. Quantitative strategies (associated with positivist philosophical assumptions) involve complex numerical investigations where the researcher formulates hypotheses and engages in collecting data that either support or refute these hypotheses (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative research usually “makes use of questionnaires, surveys and experiments to gather data that is revised and tabulated in numbers, which allows the data to be characterised by the use of statistical analysis” (Hittleman and Simon, 1997, p. 3). The objective is to deductively test



or verify theory rather than to develop it (Creswell, 2014).

On the other hand, qualitative research rests on an interpretive approach – its objective is to make sense of phenomena in relation to the meanings people assign to it (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Therefore, its objective is to examine a particular phenomenon within its natural settings and focus on the meanings participants hold in order to develop a complex picture of that phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In a qualitative approach, researchers are personally involved in the whole process of data gathering and analysis, and hence developing hypotheses and testing theory is not their main objective. Instead, they aim to build theory based on the multiple perspectives and the value systems of the participants and on how these influences their interpretation of reality. To do this, researchers may choose from different research designs, including grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), case studies (Stake, 1995, Yin, 2009) and phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), and they may use multiple sources of data such as interviews, observations, archival reports and other documentation, and may adopt an inductive approach to data analysis (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

In this research, I chose to adopt a qualitative approach, as this is in keeping with my philosophical stance and appropriate for the nature of the research problem. To address the research problem, I recognise the need for a flexible research approach which enables me to explore the phenomenon of TM within its natural settings and to engage with strategic actors in their own context. To conduct this research effectively, I needed an approach which does not assume or seek to test the causal models required for quantitative studies, but instead an approach which facilitates a rich, complex, in-depth and rigorous study. Accordingly, a qualitative approach has enabled me to (a) engage with strategic actors in their unique

contextualised settings, (b) probe in depth their opinions about TM and value, (c) capture the richness of the organisational context and the complex events which might have influenced the development of TM (i.e. practices, processes and system) in their organisations, and (d) make sense of the different meanings these strategic actors have constructed and attributed to TM and to the value it adds to their organisations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). This approach has also helped me to use a flexible design (which I elaborate on in the next section) which can be adapted to the different phases of the research process. The flexible approach also enabled me to interpret what was seen, heard and understood during the data collection and analysis phases and inductively organise the data into patterns and themes so that I could form a holistic view of the problem and report the multiple perspectives of strategic actors (Creswell et al., 2007). It is hoped that this has helped in building theory, contributing to knowledge and understanding and therefore to guiding future research.

#### **4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

A research design is the logic that links together the collected data, the conclusions to be drawn and the questions of the study (Yin, 2003). It is the blueprint for deciding what questions to study, what data to collect and how to analyse findings (Philliber et al., 1980). The research design is usually informed by the philosophical views of the researcher (i.e. positivist vs constructivist), the research approach (i.e. quantitative vs qualitative) and the type of questions being asked (i.e. why, how, what). There are a great number of research designs available for qualitative researchers to choose from. The best-known designs are grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), and the case study (Stake, 1995, Yin, 2009). Grounded theory, first developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is a qualitative research

design in which the researcher generates a general explanation or theory about a phenomenon from the views of a large number of participants (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Creswell et al., 2007). In this design, theory is grounded in the data collected from the field, and an inductive approach is therefore deployed which moves from a more specific to a more general stance. In other words, theories are developed on the basis of the data gathered, from the interactions and social processes of people (Creswell et al., 2007). By using a grounded theory design, the researcher usually attempts to address questions which investigate experience over time (Morse and Field, 1995).

In contrast to this, phenomenology-based research is based on studying and understanding peoples' experiences as they live through them and describing the essence of these experiences rather than explaining or analysing them (Moustakas, 1994). In phenomenology-based research, the researcher collects data from those people who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description of their experience (Creswell et al., 2007). The researcher attempts to address the research problem and questions by focusing mainly on understanding what people experience in relation to a specific phenomenon. Although both grounded theory and phenomenology can result in good research design, I decided that a case study design (Yin, 2009) was more suitable to achieve the objectives of this study.

#### **4.4.1 Case Study Design**

Case study research has been broadly defined as a research approach in which the researcher (a) gathers primary evidence directly from organisational actors over a period of time, (b) understands a complex social phenomenon in its natural settings so that it retains the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the real-life events surrounding it, (c) employs multiple

methods of data collection (i.e. quantitative and qualitative), and (d) produces publications which incorporate both analysis and rich descriptions of organisational contexts and practices (Ferreira and Merchant, 1992, Yin, 2003). Such research is often framed as descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, single, collective, comparative and intrinsic (Yin, 1994, Stake, 1995). The objectives served by a case study design include (a) offering detailed accounts of organisational practices, (b) generating theory inductively from fieldwork, (c) interpreting and understanding the complex organisational contexts surrounding a phenomenon, (d) penetrating the perceptions and understandings of organisational actors and groups, and (e) benefitting from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and data analysis (Silverman, 1985, Walker, 1985, Werner and Schoepfle, 1987, Yin, 2003). Case studies are preferably used when the research problem and questions are 'how' or 'why', and when the researcher has little control over the events of a phenomenon, and the aim is to study it within its real-life context (Yin, 2003). The 'how' and 'why' of this study are centred on examining how strategic actors think about the value of TM to their organisations and why they perceive it to add value. In addition, a case study design does not imply the use of a particular approach for data collection; instead, it can employ either qualitative or quantitative approaches or even a mix of both. Data can be collected from fieldwork, archival records, interviews, observations or any combinations of these (Yin, 1981).

For this study, I have consciously chosen to adopt an 'explanatory' case study design due to its intense focus on investigating a single phenomenon by using multiple sources of data which may shed light on and subsequently help explain it in more detail. Explanatory case studies play a critical role in "investigating and explaining complex phenomena that may not lend themselves easily to quantitative research methodologies" (Henry, 2010, p. 372). I also chose

to adopt a multiple-case design. Multiple-case studies include two or more observations of the same phenomenon; this enables both 'replication' to independently confirm emerging constructs and research propositions and 'extension' to reveal complementary aspects of the phenomenon (Bryman et al., 2004). It also enables the analysis and synthesis of research findings (similarities, differences and patterns) across multiple cases. Multiple-case design (a) provides more compelling and robust evidence to explain the phenomenon under study (Herriott and Firestone, 1983), (b) generates rich data which represents multiple perspectives from within different contexts, and (c) enables broader exploration of the research questions and propositions, which results in theoretical elaboration and yields more robust, generalisable and testable theory than single case studies (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

The rationales behind choosing a case study design, and more specifically an explanatory multiple-case study design, were as follows:

1. The nature of the research problem is exploratory and centres on a 'how' question (How may TM architectures add value to organisations as perceived by strategic actors in multinational organisations?). Therefore, it requires a research design that supports an in-depth investigation of TM and value and their operational links (Yin, 1994, Baxter and Jack, 2008).
2. The objective of the study is to investigate TM within a real-life context in order to understand how its value is perceived, i.e. understanding how TM is implemented in organisations and whether it adds value or not.
3. The study aims to understand the value of TM through the perceptions of strategic actors and the decisions they make about TM. Therefore it requires a design that

illuminates decisions to explain why they were taken, how they were implemented and with what result (Schramm, 1971).

4. The question of TM and value is a relatively underdeveloped question – this was identified as a gap in the literature (as I explained in Chapter 3 – Literature Review). For example, there are a number of implicit value claims which suggest that TM is a potential source of sustained competitive advantage (Wright et al., 2001a, Barney and Clark, 2007, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, Bowman and Hird, 2014), yet there seems to be a dearth of empirical evidence to support them. Therefore there was a need to adopt a research design that is especially appropriate for investigating new areas where there is insufficient theory that offers a feasible answer to the research problem/questions (Eisenhardt, 1989).
5. It is in my intention both to contribute to knowledge and understanding and to construct theory which helps to advance the TM field. I therefore find a case study design one which provides a rich empirical description of phenomena, and thus plays an important role in building theory and advancing knowledge (Stake, 1995).
6. Finally, I find that a multiple-case is one which (a) enables theoretical replication and comparison across cases (Yin, 1999), (b) examines the research propositions and the proposed value model beyond a single organisational context, (c) cross-validates findings in order to either corroborate or refute the research propositions, and (d) generalises findings for the purpose of theory development. This design, therefore, is perfectly suited for this study.

#### 4.4.2 Selecting the Case

I have chosen to conduct this research within multinational companies where it is expected that sophisticated HRM and TM strategies will be in place (Iles et al., 2010); such sophistication and maturity are required to provide rich and detailed accounts to inform the research problem. Yin (2009) suggests that, in using multiple-case studies, each case must be carefully selected to predict either similar or contradictory results. Therefore, a purposive sampling approach is used which purposefully selects information-rich cases which enable in-depth investigation (Creswell et al., 2007). This research employs two purposive sampling strategies. These are (a) criterion sampling, in which organisations and strategic actors are selected because they meet certain criteria, and (b) maximum variation sampling (at the individual level, i.e. of strategic actors) in which actors are selected because they cover a spectrum of positions and perspectives.

The process of selecting the organisations began by conducting an informal positioning interview or tele-conversation with the head of HR/TM. The purpose of such meetings/discussions was to assess the suitability of each case against predefined selection criteria. These were (a) size: large multinational companies (i.e. those with more than 15,000 employees), (b) presence: a global presence with strong representation in the Middle East, in particular in Dubai, UAE, and (c) strategy: companies which had designed and implemented a TM strategy to enable the identification, development and retention of talent. The reasons for using these criteria were, firstly, that I assumed from previous research (Iles et al., 2010, Mellahi and Collings, 2010, Huang and Tansley, 2012, Preece et al., 2013) that global MNCs with more than 15,000 employees would “generally adopt more sophisticated and socially responsive talent management and human resource practices” (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017, p. 3) than

smaller organisations or start-up firms, and so I would expect to find a TM strategy in these companies and a set of best practices. Secondly, it was also important for me to ensure that these MNCs had a strong global presence, and especially that they would be represented in the MEA region, as this is where I currently reside and where I can negotiate most access.

A review of the TM literature indicated that in previous TM case-study research (Iles et al., 2010, Hartmann et al., 2010, Preece et al., 2011) the sample size included from four to seven cases. In addition, Creswell (2014) suggests that in multiple-case studies the number of cases should usually be four to five. Of course, the number of cases examined varies in relation to the scope and scale of data collection within each case study, but because there was a need for a balance between replication and extension of findings, I decided that a reasonable number for this study would be *five* organisations. The reliance on this number is based on two factors:

- first of all, these are MNCs which are recognised for their reputation, international scope and long-term performance,
- second, they are also recognised for having mature, sophisticated HRM and TM practices which inform best practice.

Therefore, I expected these organisations to provide rich, thick descriptions and explanations which would sufficiently inform the research problem.

#### **4.4.3 Gaining Access to the Cases**

Negotiating access to these MNCs was dependent on the strong business relationship my organisation has with them, so I took advantage of the agreement between my organisation and these companies to exchange best practices. To establish lines of communication, I first approached senior managers in four organisations to explore whether they thought their



organisation would be interested in taking part in such research and whether they would be able to help. Once they had agreed to help, I then asked if they could introduce me to the head of HR/TM so that I could establish a relationship and arrangements for the research. Once the initial contact was established, I scheduled an exploratory meeting (tele-conversation) with the head of HR/TM first to assess the suitability of the case against the criteria described above and to establish the possibility of engagement and participation in the research.

Relying on the relationships my organisation had with these companies enabled me to gain access to four MNCs in the information technology industry. The final case was in the healthcare industry, and here I relied on my professional network to gain access to a global healthcare organisation. My professional contact was happy to help, and introduced me to the head of TM, who also was keen to help. I followed the same process as with the other four organisations (described earlier). Since my approach was opportunistic and I leveraged the relationships and networks I had to gain access to these five case studies rather than making a considered selection, it is important to note then that essentially this study is not designed to validate findings across industries. Rather, it is designed to develop a broader perspective on how TM architectures may or may not add value to organisations which in principle (might be expected to) have similar TM practices yet different sets of realities and views.

Once the suitability of the organisation was established, a formal research invitation letter was sent to the HR/TM director outlining the purpose, objectives and practical outcome of the research, as well as giving a brief explanation of how the organisation could contribute to the study and what to expect in return (see Appendix One).

After a formal agreement was received (either verbally or by email), I asked the head of HR/TM

to help me identify six to eight suitable strategic actors to take part in the study with the condition that they should meet the following criteria:

- a. they should have experience of the organisation and be familiar with the organisational context,
- b. they should be involved in either designing or implementing TM practices (to ensure that they were familiar with how TM was implemented in the organisation), and
- c. they should have the time and willingness to participate in the study.

I stressed that the actors I was seeking should be system designers (by which I mean HR and TM professionals) and system implementers (by which I mean members of the executive management team and line managers implementing/executing TM in the organisation). I chose these for specific reasons:

- *Executive Management team (decision makers)*: so that they could provide insights into the context of the organisation and describe how they perceived TM from a corporate perspective rather than from an HR-influenced perspective;
- *HR or TM Directors (system designers)*: so that they could provide a holistic view and give a detailed illustration of the organisation's TM practices and how they were designed and implemented in the organisation. As system designers, they were expected to help me to gain an understanding of whether TM was thought of in relation to value (i.e. in particular in relation to the value-driven model) or not.

- *Line Managers (system implementers)*: so that they could provide a realistic view of how a TM strategy was translated into action and implemented in the organisation and whether they saw value in implementing such practices.

It is important to note therefore that the initial selection of strategic actors and their categorisation as either system designers or system implementers was based on the views and organisational insights of the HR/TM Director. The methodology, of course, allowed me to check on how each interviewee would explain their role and categorise themselves.

That said, I expected the strategic actors to have their own informed and insightful views of how exactly TM architectures may or may not add value to their organisations. Therefore, I was interested in aggregating the individual insights which I gained from the interviews to form a wider picture, and then thinking about their understanding of the value of TM at the organisational level. At this point, I would like to note that I did not include in this study those who were labelled 'high potentials'. I have no doubt that their views would have been valuable and could have provided new insights into the value of TM, but they were not the main focus of this study. Each strategic actor was then sent an invitation letter introducing myself (the researcher) and the research objective and explaining how they might contribute to the study (see Appendixes Two A and Two B).

#### 4.4.4 Research Context

As I mentioned earlier (in Section 4.4.2) the examined organisations had a strong global presence, especially in the MEA region. And although this study is not designed to examine TM in a specific region, most of the access negotiated is in the MEA region (i.e. United Arab of Emirates, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, South Africa). Therefore, I open this section by providing an overview of the MEA context, and its possible implication on TM before I describe the five organisations which participated in this study.

Geographically situated in a globally strategic place, with abundance in energy reserve and its enthusiastic workforce, the MEA region has become home to many of the world's largest multinational companies, most of which enjoy successful operations and sustained growth and profitability (Kavoossi, 2000, Ali, 2011). The region's expanding wealth, prudent financial policies and presence of substantial currency reserve and its ever-emerging business opportunities attracted many MNCs, who have succeeded in establishing themselves as dominant players, in sectors such as hospitality and retail, oil and gas, fast food industry, information technology and much more (Mellahi et al., 2011). Earlier research by Fiegenbaum, Shaver, and Yeung (1997) found that MNCs with operations in the MEA region are much larger in size, have highly internationalised operations, drive higher proportions of their sales from foreign sources compared to other MNCs with no operations or presence in this region. The increased interest in the MEA region, brings to the surface a number of opportunities as well as challenges, and regardless of their motive for entering the region, MNCs are forced to make fundamental decisions about their appropriate mode of entry, types of operations, the

selection of local partners, and their size (Mellahi, 2007).

Economically, the region displays an uneven distribution of resources with some countries endowed with enormous oil resources and thus classified as high-income countries (i.e. Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain), while others lack oil resources but to an extent enjoy other natural resources and thus are either classified as medium or low income countries (i.e. Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco) (Freedom House, 2007). In 2009, The World Bank classified countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Syria, Iran and Yemen, as labour abundant, and thus, have been a source for skills and educated labour compared to other countries such as Oman, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia (Ali, 2011), who have been heavily reliant on importing talent workers (expatriates) to help in the development of their economy and public sectors (Al-Ali, 2008).

Augirre, Post, and Hewlett (2009) indicated that although currently, only 4 percent of the global talent pool comes out of the MEA region, it is likely to become a strong source of global talent. The World Economic Forum (WEF) projects (May 2017) found that the region is endowed with an increasingly young, well-educated population of talent that is expected to significantly enhance the region's future growing trajectory and contribute to economic growth and social dynamism. Today, the MEA has become a recruitment hotspot, attracting top and global talent, forcing organisations to rethink their approach to TM. Ali (2011) suggests that the effective management of talent (i.e. how to attract, develop and optimise human capital) is the most pressing challenge that MNCs face in the region. Like many other regions in the world, the Middle East has experienced structural changes in the nature of its workforce, which has forced

many organisations to confront issues such as diversity, turnover, shortage of talent and skilled labour.

With little known about the management practices MNCs adapt in the region, for example, do they apply home country practices? Or, do they adapt practices to fit the host countries context? (Mellahi et al., 2011), the implication on the practice of TM may be significant as these companies are forced to decide on whether they should introduce their global talent systems and HR practices in the region or whether they should adopt it to fit local needs. This is not the only challenge they face, other issues such as the need to aggressively drive a nationalisation agenda (pressured by the local governments) to increase national employment in private sectors (Harry, 2007) forces these MNCs to invest in the development and nurture of local talent and to balance their talent composition between those non-nationals (expatriates) who might be more skilled, more equipped to add value, and nationals, who might need to be developed to be able to add value. Another implication is the ability of these MNCs to attract and acquire nationals to work for them. The World Economic Forum (WEF) projects (May 2017) suggests three themes that characterise the MEA labour market, first the low levels of workforce participation by national women, second, high rates of unemployment and under-employment among young educated nationals, third, the severe competition with government entities that attracts and lures national talent with higher salaries and benefits compared to what private MNCs offers. Finally, talent mobility might also impose several challenges on MNCs who might not be able to attract and move their talent across the region, due to political, social, and cultural factors. Accordingly, these challenges might result in the need for MNCs to adapt new practices that enables them to address these challenges.

Mirroring these challenges are also opportunities for MNCs to rethink their TM practices in the region. Given the fact that the region is relying on trade with other regions, the nurturing and development of talent is expected to be a decisive factor in shaping the region's economic future and role in the global market (Ali, 2011). Some of the obvious regional trends in TM are related to being able to attract highly-skilled talent and provide a fair access to career growth opportunities (Ready et al., 2008). Other trends such as embracing diversity and avoiding discrimination (where nationalities and gender do not matter) are becoming a critical agenda item for many MNCs, that are expected to invest in the development of national talent, more specifically, the development of women leaders (Ali, 2011). With these trends in minds, MNCs need to carefully decide on how they think about their TM systems (i.e. which practices constitute such systems, and how they might go about implementing them in the region) to ensure both global consistency and local adaptability.

The five MNCs examined in this study, positioned themselves as global players in the information technology and health care industries. They have a strong presence in the MEA region, with well-established regional HQ offices (either out of UAE, Dubai or Turkey, Istanbul) overseeing their operations in the region. They are market leaders (with some of them labelled as employers of choice) and a magnet to regional talent, with many competing to join these organisations to establish a career that enables them to develop global skills and expertise. They are expected to have sophisticated HR and talent systems compared to other companies (i.e. public, small size organisations) and given the pressure that many governments impose on nationalisation and the development of national talent, these companies are known for their investments in attracting, retaining, and nurturing regional talent. The regional structure of

these companies mostly revolves around sales and services (with the exception to locations such as Israel where R&D and regional centres of expertise exist to support the development of new products and services in the region). Strongly connected to their head office, the regional offices have a direct reporting line into the HQ organisation which plays an instrumental role in developing, and overseeing the implementation of many strategies, and transfer of best practices to the region.

In the next section and I provide a high-level brief to introduce each case, for reasons of confidentiality, I refrain from using the original name of each company, and instead I refer to them as Org. X, Y, W, V and Z.



Table 1: Case Study Contexts – Organisation X

	Case Study	Interviews Conducted	Significance to Research
ORG X	An American multinational technology company based in the US with a worldwide global reach. Organisation X is one of the world’s largest software makers and is famous for its software products as well as its flagship hardware products. The company is active in areas such as internet search, video games, the digital services market and the mobile phone industry. It is a publicly	A total of 19 participants (12 HR leaders and seven Business leaders) from within the organisation. Participants were mostly from the sales and marketing group and were located in seven countries (Turkey, the UK, Egypt, South Africa, Israel, the UAE and Saudi Arabia). A total of 11 face-to-face interviews were conducted on organisation premises in Turkey and the UAE, while the remaining	This is a key case for this research. Given that this is where I gained the greatest access and conducted the largest number of interviews, the findings of this case provided rich accounts and significantly informed the data analysis journey and the development of the thematic framework (see next section). The number of interviews and the richness of the

	Case Study	Interviews Conducted	Significance to Research
	<p>listed organisation which was founded in the 1970s and has grown to have more than 100K employees worldwide.</p>	<p>eight interviews were conducted using Skype (videoconferencing). Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes (see Appendix Five A).</p>	<p>data gave this case a higher weighting than the other four cases.</p>

Table 2: Case Study Contexts – Organisation Y

	Case Study	Interviews Conducted	Significance to Research
ORG Y	An American multinational computer technology corporation. This organisation is known for its integrated offerings of cloud solutions, applications, database software and middleware. The organisation is present in more than 140 countries worldwide and has more than 130K employees, including developers, engineers and expert consultants. Organisation Y was founded in the 1970s and has always been known for	A total of 10 interviews were conducted (four HR leaders and six Business leaders) in four countries (the UAE, Italy, the Netherlands and Australia). A total of six face-to-face interviews were conducted on company premises in Dubai, UAE, while the remaining four interviews were conducted using Skype (videoconferencing). Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes (see Appendix Five B).	This case was used to refine the thematic framework.

	Case Study	Interviews Conducted	Significance to Research
	<p>being a leading organisation in database software and for its ability to build for the future with its innovation and ability to recognise customer's challenges. It has expanded aggressively in the last three decades, and today has more than 25K partners worldwide and a customer base of more than 1 m customers servicing many well-known brands.</p>		

Table 3: Case Study Contexts – Organisation W

	Case Study	Interviews Conducted	Significance to Research
ORG W	An American multinational technology conglomerate. This company is well known for being the largest producer of networking hardware and telecommunications equipment. The company has a worldwide global presence and is a publicly-listed organisation, founded in the 1980s. Its products and services range from networking devices to cloud and mobility solutions. Its customer base caters for the	A total of seven interviews were conducted (two HR leaders and five Business leaders). Six face-to-face interviews were conducted on the company premises in Dubai, UAE, while only one interview was conducted using Skype (videoconferencing). Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes (see Appendix Five C).	This case was used to refine the thematic framework.

	Case Study	Interviews Conducted	Significance to Research
	<p>needs of many global organisations which are known worldwide, and over the years it has managed to develop an extensive base of partners and a strong ecosystem which includes value-added resellers, providers, consultants and integrators. The company growths rely on acquisitions; it has now acquired more than 150 computer networking, LAN switching and (VoIP) companies. It has more than 80K employees worldwide.</p>		

Table 4: Case Study Contexts – Organisation V

	Case Study	Interviews Conducted	Significance to Research
ORG V	A British multinational specialising in telecommunications services. The company is known for its offerings of telecoms services to government and corporate customers worldwide. It is a listed holding company serving customers in more than 180 countries, with a wide range of product offerings which include mobile and fixed-line telephony services, broadband internet, fibre-optic communications, digital TV	A total of 10 interviews were conducted (three HR leaders and seven Business leaders) in four countries (the UAE, South Africa, Singapore and Australia). A total of four face-to-face interviews were conducted on company premises in Dubai, and the remaining six interviews were conducted using Skype (videoconferencing). Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes (see Appendix Five D).	This case was used to refine the thematic framework.

	Case Study	Interviews Conducted	Significance to Research
	<p>products and services as well as networked IT services. Organisation V serves leading multinational companies through its global services and supports the business and public sectors across the UK and other parts of Europe. It is one of the largest providers of consumer broadband and fixed-voice services in the UK. Founded in the late 1960s, the company is publicly listed with almost 105K employees in its operations worldwide.</p>		



Table 5: Case Study Contexts – Organisation Z

	Case Study	Interviews Conducted	Significance to Research
ORG Z	An American multinational manufacturing medical device and pharmaceutical and consumer packaged goods, with more than 200 subsidiary companies and operations in over 60 countries and products sold in more than 180 countries. The Organisation Z family of companies has operations in the consumer healthcare field as well as making medical devices and pharmaceuticals. It is known as one of the oldest pharmaceutical	A total of six interviews were conducted (two HR leaders and four Business leaders). All were face-to-face, conducted on the company's premises in Dubai, UAE. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes (see Appendix Five E).	This case was used to refine the thematic framework.

	Case Study	Interviews Conducted	Significance to Research
	<p>companies in the world, and was founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Through its partners and distributors, the company is committed to providing the best healthcare products to its customers. The company today employees more than 120K employees worldwide.</p>		

## 4.5 RESEARCH METHODS

### 4.5.1 Interviews

Interviews are an important source of data in case study research as they can provide in-depth information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints on a particular topic. In qualitative research, an interview is designed to be a structured or semi-structured conversation with a clear purpose in which the researcher employs careful questioning and listening techniques to obtain knowledge and information related to the research problem (Brinkmann, 2015). Yin (2009) suggests that during an interview, the researcher should focus on two jobs: (a) following their own line of inquiry to satisfy the needs of the case study, and (b) asking unbiased, non-threatening questions to encourage participants to share their opinions about a particular phenomenon. Kvale (1996) suggests that interviews can either have an exploratory purpose, where some pre-planned structure is followed and where the researcher positions a research problem and follows up the participant's answers to seek new information, or they can have a hypothesis-testing purpose, where a more structured sequence of carefully worded questions is followed to enable the researcher to compare interviews across groups.

In this study, I interviewed 52 strategic actors across the five case studies. I conducted around 60 hours of actual interviews (all in the English language). I chose to adopt a semi-structured in-depth interview approach in order to explore the research problem and generate rich descriptions and interpretations of participants' social world (Ritchie et al., 2014). This was because I recognise that in-depth interviews are a powerful way of tapping into the experience,

motives and opinions of participants and exploring the research phenomena from perspectives other than her own (Rubin, 2012).

In this study I conducted different types of interviews as follows:

- Positioning Interviews: These were informal interviews (exploratory meetings) conducted before the research began, and more precisely before negotiating access to the organisations. Most of these interviews were with HR/TM directors to assess the suitability of the organisation on the basis of pre-defined selection criteria. Each interview lasted around 20 to 30 minutes, and solicited information about the company's HR and TM practices. During these interviews, I did not use a pre-defined set of questions, so the interviews were informal discussions where questions were structured during the conversation.
- Pilot Interviews: Before conducting the actual research interviews, I conducted pilot interviews to check for flaws, limitations and weaknesses in the interview design, and to test the logistics of the interview and validate the quality of questions. I conducted these pilot interviews in my own organisation, and although it did not meet a few of the selection criteria (previously listed), I felt that it was a good opportunity to pilot and test the interview questions with two HR leaders and two business leaders because a TM strategy had been introduced and implemented in a limited part of the business and a small number of strategic actors had been involved in the design, development and implementation of this strategy. The experience of conducting the pilot interviews

enabled me to refine the interview questions (in terms of structure and language) to ensure clarity and a smooth flow (see Appendix Three).

- *In-depth (semi-structured) Interviews:* An open-ended protocol was used to interview strategic actors within the MNCs (i.e. executive management, HR/TM directors and line managers). During the interviews, the strategic actors were asked to share their perspectives on a number of themes, such as their understanding of what talent management is and the value they think it might add to their organisations. The value propositions (see Chapter 3 – Literature Review) were used as the basis for this (see Appendix Three).

It is important to note that the literature informed the direction of the interview questions, but did not constrain them. Since the intention was to remain open to the meanings of TM in relation to value as perceived by the strategic actors, the interview questions were deliberately designed to be open in order to elicit these perceptions. In designing the interview questions, I took into consideration how the questions would “contribute thematically to knowledge production and dynamically to promoting a good interview interaction” (Kvale, 1996, p. 129). To ensure questions were clear and easy to understand, where possible I avoided using academic language. However, for questions where academic language was used, i.e. questions related to TM and value, I factored in time to introduce the four value processes and explain what they each mean (see Appendix Four). The value model was introduced later in the interview, after the discussion of value and before the discussion of the four value processes. That said, it is worth noting that the interview questions were part of an iterative process which

involved constant evaluation, and I, therefore, remained open and adapted to the different organisations as applicable.

#### **4.5.2 Interview Protocol**

A set of common procedures were employed to ensure consistency in how the interviews were conducted and administered.

- Stage One: Prior to the interview, an invitation was sent to introduce myself (the researcher), explain the research purpose and potential outcomes, and outline the role of the participants and what was expected of them during the interview. The invitation made it clear to the strategic actors that their participation was voluntary, and they could refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any stage (see Appendixes Two A and Two B).
  
- Stage Two: On the day of the interview and before commencing, I spent a few minutes introducing myself as well as getting to know more about the strategic actors (i.e. allowing them to talk about their role, background and experience) in an attempt to build rapport and establish an atmosphere in which they felt comfortable about sharing their views. Once the introduction had been made, I moved the discussion to the research topic and asked general questions to assess whether participants were clear about the purpose of the research and their role in the study. This was an opportunity to set the stage, establish a clear purpose for the interview, introduce the topics and the main constructs to be discussed during the interview and to answer any questions they might have before commencing.

- Stage Three: To begin the interview, I asked specific questions to learn more about the strategic actors' role and responsibilities, their experience within their organisation, their background experience and also their level of involvement with TM (i.e. as designers or implementers).
  
- Stage Four: During the interview, a set of similar semi-structured questions (see Appendix Three) were asked to elicit participants' perspectives on different themes. I began by asking questions to understand how TM was defined and implemented in their organisations. This provided a good foundation for assessing how mature the practices of TM were in these organisations and how familiar the strategic actors were with these practices. Whilst I relied on a semi-structured interview approach, it is worth mentioning that I remained flexible, using probing questions to pursue the different dimensions introduced in participants' responses and to develop a deeper understanding of the different perspectives and meanings that emerged. In addition, depending on the interview flow, the sequence of questions was adjusted, allowing me the flexibility to position questions and steer the interview as appropriate.
  
- Stage Five: I then moved the interview towards a discussion of value; the objective was to understand how value is defined and created in the organisation and also to explore whether the strategic actors perceived TM to add value to their organisations or not. I first asked about the meaning of value, and whether it was defined in the organisation or not, and this naturally led to a discussion of value creation and the sources of value creation.

- Stage Six: Building on the meaning of value, I then introduced the four value processes and their descriptions. It is important to note that I purposely used common descriptions to describe each of the value processes which I had developed from the literature review (see Appendix Four), without imposing any ideas of how these processes might relate to TM. My objective was to help the interviewees to develop a common understanding of what these processes might stand for academically, and then give them the opportunity to reflect on them within the context of TM. I provided some time for them to read, reflect and ask questions before we moved on to the next stage.
- Stage Seven: I then specifically asked the participants to reflect on the value processes and think about how TM architectures may contribute to enabling each of these processes. My objective was to explore whether they saw these processes in the context of TM and were able to relate them to the different practices of TM, and if they were, how they would describe these processes in relation to TM architectures. Based on the responses, I also probed to gain a fuller understanding of the ideas they had shared and to validate some other ideas derived from the value propositions (see Chapter 3 – Literature Review) - such as the idea of weakening bargaining power - to explore how these might be perceived by actors and whether they were applicable or not.
- Stage Eight: I then concluded the interviews by asking strategic actors to share their views on how they found the value processes and whether they thought this was a



useful way to think about TM. I encouraged them to think about their responses and to share any other thoughts they might have, as well as to ask any questions. I then thanked them for their valuable contributions and explained to them how their responses and the data they had provided would be treated, and reminded them that if they wished to withdraw their responses they had two weeks from the interview date to inform me.

### **4.5.3 Unit of Analysis**

I recognise that identifying units of analysis is a fundamental problem in case-study research. Yin (2009) suggests that selecting the appropriate 'unit of analysis' is dependent on how accurately a research question is defined and what it is that the research question is trying to study: the phenomenon under study, the entity that is being analysed, or the who or what that is being studied (e.g. the location, size or scale of the research target). This could be an organisation, an individual, a process or a programme (Baxter and Jack, 2008), or a unit of abstraction which researchers examine for variability to synthesise and compare data (Guest et al., 2013). On the other hand, the 'unit of observation', which is often (but not always) the same thing as the unit of analysis, is the set of measurements used as the data is being collected, and this is usually what the researcher is capturing or describing. Therefore, a study may have a unit of observation at an individual level and a unit of analysis at an organisational level for comparing data sets across two or more organisations (Guest et al., 2013). That said, before I explain the choice I made regarding the unit of analysis, I would like to differentiate more specifically between the unit of analysis and the unit of observation in the context of this particular study. Given that I collected my data through in-depth interviews, the unit of

observation for my study is the individual. In fact, to be precise, it is intra-individual (i.e. something within each individual) and not inter-individual (i.e. something which can be used to differentiate between individuals). My starting point is the belief that each individual has useful and meaningful insights into the potential value that TM practices and architectures might create. However, although I believe that these insights are idiosyncratic – unique to each individual as a product of how they make sense of the world – I also believe and assume that these insights might usefully form patterns depending on their specific roles as actors – i.e. whether they are system designers or system implementers. For example:

- HR or TM directors (system designers) would be expected to have a holistic view of the overall TM architecture as well as more detailed insights into the functions served by particular TM practices, while,
- Executives and line managers (system implementers) would be expected to be able to provide a realistic view of how a TM strategy should be – and likely is - translated into action and implemented in the organisation.

Based on this, it is the unit of analysis on which I intend to base generalisations and comparisons in this study, and thus the level at which (or levels to which) I will apply the conclusions from my analysis. As made clear in Chapter 3 (Literature Review), it is not in the intention of this research to examine the individual TM practices implemented in organisations. Instead, the study intends to build on ideas from the HPWS and HR architectures literature and examine on a macro level the bundle of practices which constitute TM architectures and how these may add value and contribute to sustained competitive advantage. My research approach takes into

account the practices (defined as the social norms, analytical frameworks, symbolic and material tools through which strategy is done), the practitioners (in my case, the strategic actors involved and engaged in the construction of practice) and their praxis (i.e. the collective social activity through which strategy is accomplished). So according to the research propositions (which are concerned with examining how TM architectures may add value to organisations), I am primarily interested in applying the conclusions from the collected data to the value that is created by the TM architecture (the talent management system) as a whole.

Therefore, I argue that the unit of analysis in this study is ultimately the 'TM architecture', which is in my view a 'social artefact'. My objective is to understand how TM architectures are constructed in organisations and the TM practices which constitute these architectures - and to analyse this architecture (as a social artefact of the organisation). I then go on to ask questions about – and intend to make inferences about - how TM architectures (or parts of these architectures, such as particular practices) might add or do not add value. I do this in order to draw broad conclusions about TM architectures and how they may contribute to enabling the four value processes (value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection).

In this study, I draw inferences about TM architectures rather than models of value, because to model something requires very precise measurement and understanding about the connections and relationships involved. As Chapter 3 (Literature Review) made clear, academics do not yet know enough about the value of TM architectures to be so precise. In making my inferences and doing my analysis, the evidence which I base my inferences on – i.e. the unit of

observation – is the thought processes and reflections of a series of individual interviewees who may be seen as either designers of the TM architecture or implementers of it. I intend to use ‘TM architecture’ as my unit of analysis to draw broad conclusions encapsulating a collective set of perspectives rather than drawing particular conclusions based on comparing findings across organisations or strategic actors. In the next section, I provide more detail about the different strategies I used to analyse and draw conclusions from the data.

#### **4.5.4 Analytical Strategy**

The process of qualitative data analysis employs an extremely wide range of diverse, complex and nuanced approaches (Holloway and Todres, 2003). It is a challenging yet exciting process which begins right at the start of the research, and one which requires the researcher to be creative, intuitive and inspired while diligently engaging with the data to construct theories, meanings and knowledge (Ritchie et al., 2014). There are many different approaches to qualitative data analysis, for example content analysis, in which the researcher engages in a systematic and objective process of data reduction to develop abstractions (concepts) to describe a phenomenon, taking into consideration content and context and identifying themes and the frequency of their occurrence (Ritchie et al., 2014, Elo et al., 2014). Another approach is discourse analysis, in which the researcher takes into account (a) the broader social context in which a conversation took place (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) and (b) the way knowledge is produced and constructed through language within a particular discourse (Silverman, 2014). On the other hand, in grounded theory, the researcher is engaged in generating analytical categories and identifying the relationships between them to produce an overall explanation of a phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Creswell et al., 2007). Here the researcher focuses

on processes, actions or interactions and uses an open coding approach to engage with the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

One of the most commonly used approaches to qualitative data analysis is thematic analysis. In the thematic analysis, the researcher focuses on identifying and describing the implicit and explicit ideas which emerge from within the data in order to develop themes and subsequently develop codes to represent these themes (Guest, 2012). Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p. 6). Thematic analysis gives researchers the flexibility to decide whether they want to identify themes on an explicit level, where they can examine only the surface meanings of the data, or at a more interpretive level, where they can examine the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations which emerge from within the data (Boyatzis, 1998).

With regard to the research question 'How may TM architectures add value to organisations?', I decided that a thematic approach to data analysis is best suited for this research. This approach allowed me to capture ideas, concepts and patterns which emerge from within the data itself and subsequently to generate themes which are firmly grounded in the data. It also allowed me to search within and between data sets and cases and move easily through the whole data set to un-surface themes and patterns and identify links between phenomena in different cases (Ritchie et al., 2014). In the next section, I present the stages of the analytical journey.

#### 4.5.5 Analytical Journey

- Stage One – Transcribing the Interviews: The process of transcribing the interviews from audio recording to written text is in itself an initial data analysis procedure (Brinkmann, 2015). In this stage, I personally transcribed all the recorded interviews word by word (verbatim). This was a time-consuming process, as it took five to six hours to transcribe each hour of interview discussion. During this process, I became familiar with the data and reflected on the emotional aspects and the social context of each interview. This provided a starting point for capturing meanings, ideas and initial thoughts. To ensure that the transcripts were reliable and valid, I checked the written text by listening to each interview once again and going through the transcripts (line by line) to spot any discrepancies and editing and adding, and deleting inaccuracies. The review process took two to three hours per interview. In total, I had conducted around 60 hours of interviews and spent around 550 hours transcribing and reviewing them all. This process resulted in almost 1,400 pages of transcripts. The structure of the transcripts was based on the interview flow, capturing the interview questions, probing questions and the strategic actors' questions and responses. After each interview, I wrote up my field notes immediately, while the experience was still fresh in my mind, and used these notes to reflect on what I had captured as well as to note other thoughts while I was transcribing the interviews.
- Stage Two – Data Familiarisation: As a first step, I had to immerse myself in the data itself and become thoroughly familiar with what the participants were saying about the

research problem. At this stage, I spent time reading through the data, and used three modes of readings: literal reading (i.e. reading the text to understand its literal meaning), reflective reading (i.e. reading through the text and reflecting on possible meanings) and interpretive reading (i.e. reading through the text and constructing my own interpretation of what the data meant) (Miller and Crabtree, 1999). This was a useful process which enabled me to become familiar with the data. I used print-outs to read across the data sets, examining each passage carefully and highlighting interesting topics and ideas, as well as noting my own comments and initial thoughts against the data. I also started to note initial themes (sometimes also referred to as codes) as these emerged from the data.

- Stage Three – Constructing the Thematic Framework: As described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), codes are an abstract representation of a phenomenon. Codes are used to build knowledge about data; they are a way of finding themes in the text, and can range widely from being descriptive to more interpretive or analytical (Bernard, 2010, Richards, 2014). The coding process enabled me to break the data down into chunks and establish links between the chunks by using codes to describe the category under which they best fitted (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). There were two levels of coding employed in this research, namely first cycle coding and second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2009). Saldaña suggests that first cycle coding is the initial coding process through which data is “reorganized and reconfigured to eventually develop a smaller and more select list of broader categories, themes, and/ or concepts”, while the aim of second cycle coding is “to develop a sense

of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” (p. 149) among the codes identified during first cycle coding.

For first cycle coding, I used two types of code:

- a) provisional codes: these are predetermined codes derived from both the research propositions and the theoretical framework (i.e. the value model) – for example, ‘value of TM’, ‘value creation’, ‘value capture’, ‘value leverage’ and ‘value protection’; and
- b) emerging codes: these are other codes which emerge from the datasets themselves - for example, ‘definition of TM’, ‘approach to TM’, ‘value-creating resources’, ‘meaning of value’ (and many more).

I note here that the first data source - the case study of Organisation X - played a significant role in determining the ideas which were applied throughout the data analysis process, and generated the majority of the codes or themes which made up the thematic framework (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013) which was then used across the other organisations. This is due to the fact that the majority of the interviews (19) were conducted in Organisation X, which gave it a higher weighting than the other four organisations (where there were between six and ten interviews). That said, it is also important to note that whilst most codes were developed from the analysis of Organisation X, additional codes were also developed from other organisations.

For the second cycle coding, I browsed through the remaining data sets (four organisations) to capture any other possible codes or themes, tried to make sense of the codes/themes which had emerged so far, refined them and organised the hierarchical structure of the thematic



framework in a logical way which would reflect the structure of the interview transcripts (i.e. in terms of information about the participants and the cases and topics including talent management and value and talent management). I started developing the framework offline using paper and pencil, as this made it easier for me to edit and make changes as I progressed.

- Stage Four – Storing the Thematic Framework Using NVivo: After developing the initial framework offline, I then started using NVivo to store the codes and themes, which are referred to as nodes. In the software, nodes are points from which topics or themes branch out onto sub-topics and sub-themes (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). Using the software, a hierarchical arrangement of themes and sub-themes was constructed, and these were accompanied by a descriptive note to explain the meaning of each theme and sub-theme. Using NVivo helped me to pull together small sets of themes and constructs to identify patterns and relationships and to identify commonalities across the themes (Saldaña, 2009). It is worth mentioning that when I constructed the first version of the thematic framework offline, I had a total of 186 themes and sub-themes, which were generated mainly from Organisation X (19 interviews). At this stage, I did not attempt to identify overlaps or repetitions, as my objective was simply to capture themes as they emerged from the data.
- Stage Five – Reviewing the Thematic Framework: Before indexing and sorting data, I spent some time reflecting on and reviewing the thematic framework. The objective was to rethink the logic of its flow, refine its structure and address overlaps and repetitions of themes/sub-themes. This process resulted in increasing the number of parent nodes

from three to 10 and reducing the sub-nodes from 186 to 161; each parent node and sub-node were numbered. It should be pointed out that this was an iterative process, and I continued reviewing and organising themes throughout the data analysis process (later on the 161 nodes were reduced to 98). Examples of parent nodes and sub-nodes are provided in the table below.

Parent Node	Sub-Nodes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Talent Management – Definition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Traditional HR</li> <li>▪ Having the right people</li> <li>▪ Performance management</li> <li>▪ Succession planning</li> <li>▪ Talent development</li> <li>▪ Retention</li> <li>▪ Culture</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meaning of Value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Generating revenue and profit</li> <li>▪ Customer satisfaction</li> <li>▪ Offering new services and developing new products</li> <li>▪ Value to the community</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Value of Talent Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Impact on organisation</li> <li>▪ Attracting and having the right talent</li> <li>▪ Developing and retaining talent</li> <li>▪ Capitalising on talent potential</li> <li>▪ Enablement of a talent culture</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Value Model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Value creation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acquiring Talent</li> <li>- Translating Strategy</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Value Capture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capitalising on Potential</li> <li>- Knowledge Management</li> <li>- Knowledge Transfer</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Value Leverage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extending Talent Capabilities</li> <li>- Knowledge Transfer</li> <li>- Continuous learning</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Value Protection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Talent Retention</li> <li>- Talent Development</li> <li>- Reward and Recognition</li> <li>- Talent Engagement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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**Table 6: Parent Nodes and Sub-Nodes**

Stage Six – Indexing and Sorting Data Using NVivo: The indexing and sorting process involves reading through each phrase, sentence and passage in detail and deciding what is it about and where it fits in the thematic framework (Ritchie et al., 2014). It is worth mentioning that the first step of data sorting was done on a printout of the interview transcripts before Nvivo was used. The objective was to give me an opportunity to rethink the initial sorting and indexing of data to see if new ideas or thoughts had emerged. I

started this process with the data from Organisation X to gain first-hand experience of the thematic framework.

- Stage Seven– Reviewing Data Extracts and Indexing the Remaining Cases Using Nvivo:  
Before indexing and sorting the remaining four cases, I decided to revisit the data extracts under each node and sub-node to check their relevance and coherence. This process led me to merge, delete and reposition some of the nodes, reducing the original number of nodes from 161 to 98. Once this was completed, I started sorting and indexing the remaining cases. It is important to note that each case was sorted and indexed in a separate yet identical thematic framework. While engaged in this process I noticed that some of the themes identified in the case of Organisation X were not necessarily found in the other cases, and this was due to having had to restructure the interview and omit some of the questions asked in Organisation X due to the time constraints imposed on me by the interviewees in other cases. The questions which were omitted were mostly generic, and related to the actual practices implemented in these companies, and although they were omitted, I managed to probe sufficiently to get a good sense of the various TM practices implemented in these companies. Empty nodes were not removed, but left and highlighted to enable comparison across cases.
- Stage Eight – Data Summary and Displays: In this stage, I re-engaged with the raw data and examined it word by word to interpret and assess its meaning (Ritchie et al., 2014). To help me navigate through the data sets and interpret the data using my own words and understanding, a matrix was created using Excel spreadsheets, which was structured

to enable me to compare participants' responses (case by case) against each node and sub-node. Separate sheets were created for each parent node and its sub-nodes. During this process, I revisited the original data source and re-read participants' responses in the context of the interview to ensure that I did not lose sight of the original meaning of the text. After reviewing each response, I noted my own interpretation and comments, and highlighted interesting quotes from the text. It is important to note that I also took my own side notes and reflections whenever an interesting idea or view emerged. During this process, some of the original nodes were revisited and questioned. Some nodes were removed or merged, and nodes were added. In addition, some parts of the data were reorganised and re-sorted under different nodes as they did not seem relevant any more. Before moving on to the next stage, I developed the data displays for the remaining four cases.

- Stage Nine – Abstraction and Interpretation: At the start of this stage, I reviewed the data summaries developed as an outcome of the previous stage. My aim in this was to note the range of perceptions, thoughts and behaviours that had emerged and to list elements found in each of the responses (Ritchie et al., 2014). To complete this stage, I created tables in Word to list the elements found in each response. As part of this process, I read both the data summaries and the raw data as it had originally been sorted, firstly to validate the data summaries and secondly to capture any new elements. The elements found were listed against each response, taking into consideration each node and sub-node. They were then regrouped under key dimensions or categories. Before moving to the next stage, I completed these steps for all the remaining cases.

- Stage Ten – Categorisation and Classification of Data: In this stage, I questioned and reviewed each of the elements identified and the key dimensions. The aim was to construct a set of categories that would discriminate between different aspects of the data (Ritchie et al., 2014) and at the same time show links. This is where I resorted to using mind maps to visualise the data and provide a more detailed and in-depth picture of the data and its categorisations (Wheeldon, 2011). Because they showed the data categories in visual form, the mind maps helped me to arrange concepts and present ideas in a way which allowed me to identify relationships and links between the categories. The objective of using mind maps was to generate meanings from the data, and to test and confirm the findings and minimise bias (Miles et al., 2013). I used the mind maps to string together relevant parts of the data and logically build chains of evidence to illuminate and explain how TM may add value to organisations. I used them to help me decide how to structure and present the findings of this study, as well as to make decisions about which data sets to use and which might not be relevant to the research question. In this stage, I was going back and forth between the data (i.e. looking at the detail of the interviews) and a holistic picture, which essentially constituted an iterative approach to data analysis.

As I continued with the analysis, I used a consistent method and dealt with each case by following the steps explained above. Each case was first analysed separately, and then the findings were aggregated by examining the entire collection of word tablets for patterns, similarities and differences. This allowed me to draw inferences and cross-case conclusions and build plausible arguments and interpretations which were supported by the data.

#### 4.6 VALIDITY, RELIABILITY AND GENERALISABILITY

In qualitative research, researchers seek to understand particular phenomena in context-specific settings – a "real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 39). So, unlike quantitative research, where findings are produced by means of statistical tools and quantification (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), in qualitative research findings are produced from real-world settings where the phenomena under study unfold naturally (Patton, 2002). Thus, unlike a quantitative researcher who is seeking causal determination and to predict and generalise from findings, a qualitative researcher is seeking illumination and to understand and extrapolate to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997). The naturalistic paradigm (qualitative approach) rests on a number of assumptions which distinguish it from a more rationalistic paradigm (quantitative approach). For example, Guba (1981) suggests that the naturalistic paradigm rests on the assumption that there are multiple realities (so that inquiry diverges instead of converges), and that all the parts of these realities are interrelated, so that the study of any one part influences the other parts. He also suggests that in the naturalistic paradigm, while researchers make every effort to maintain an optimal distance between themselves and the phenomenon studied – they (the inquirers) and the respondents are influenced by each other, and this I recognise and reflect on in the next section. Finally, Guba suggests that in a naturalistic paradigm, generalisation is not possible – the aim here is to develop knowledge which at best results in formulating a set of working hypotheses which relate to a particular context.

Questions of validity and reliability are more common in quantitative research than in qualitative research (Leung, 2015). Since both these concepts are rooted in the positivist perspective (Maxwell, 1992, Creswell and Miller, 2000), there is a need to redefine how they might apply to and be used in the more naturalistic inquiry paradigm underpinning qualitative research. For this reason, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the quality of qualitative research should be judged by different criteria - first, its creditability (i.e. internal validity), by which they mean testing the data with the members from whom data was drawn (member checks). The second issue is the dependability (i.e. reliability) of the research, which is the trackability of variance, “variance that can be ascribed to sources: so much for error, so much for reality shifts, so much for increased instrumental proficiency (better insights) and so on” (p. 81). Third is the transferability (i.e. external validity) of the findings, which in itself depends on the degree of similarity between two contexts. Transferability in qualitative research is thus determined based on the generation of thick descriptions (similar in more than one context,) which leads to the development of working hypotheses which may be transferred from one context to another depending upon the degree of fit between the different contexts. The final issue is confirmability (i.e. construct validity), which in qualitative research is achieved by focusing on the data produced and its confirmability.

In this study, I have used a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2009), which helped ensure the validity and reliability of the research and thus increased the probability of producing a more compelling and more robust study (Herriott and Firestone, 1983). To establish validity, the multiple-case design meant that I examined the phenomena in multiple contexts, which involved engaging with and soliciting the perceptions of different strategic actors (i.e. HR



system designers and system implementers) to understand in greater depth how they think about the value of TM, and thus resulted in the generation of rich and thick descriptions of data. I subsequently immersed myself in the data sets by personally transcribing all 52 interviews, and becoming fully familiar with its ins and outs by using three modes of reading: literal, reflective and interpretive (Miller and Crabtree, 1999). This enabled me to validate and compare findings across multiple organisations and multiple strategic actors, and thus seek out similarities and differences across various accounts and ensure that the different perspectives of the actors were captured and represented. It also allowed me to seek alternative explanations and report and discuss the findings by highlighting both consistencies and contradictions in the views of the strategic actors.

To establish reliability, this research design incorporated replication logic. Firstly, I used purposive sampling strategies such as criterion sampling (where organisations were selected on the basis of certain common criteria to enable the generation of similar findings) and maximum sampling (where strategic actors were selected because they covered a wide spectrum of roles and expertise which it was assumed would generate interesting insights and perspectives). Secondly, I replicated the processes and strategies used for data collection and analysis (i.e. how data was collected during the interviewing stage and how it was handled during the analysis stage), which ensured consistency in application and subsequently increases the likelihood of generalisation from this study. Thirdly, I developed and used a thematic framework in which data chunks were broken down into categories and codes and strung together in order to make sense of the data and draw meanings and inferences from it. The thematic framework was replicated across the five cases and was therefore used to increase

the validity of this study. I also used logical models to display the data, identify relationships and build explanations which would allow readers to understand how the conclusions were reached. Finally, I provide detailed descriptions of the general methods, procedures and techniques used to collect and analyse the data, and explain in detail how I handled and navigated through each stage (see Sections 4.5.1 and 4.5.2 above) and how these methods were replicated across all five cases.

Based on the research design and the methodology, I claim that the findings of this study are generalisable to:

- a) MNCs which have broadly established sophisticated talent management systems,
- b) MNC subsidiaries at regional level operating in the Middle East region,
- c) Sales and services-based organisations,
- d) (To a certain degree), the information technology and healthcare sectors as a whole.

To be able to claim generalisability, I produced thick descriptions of the data and highlighted similarities in the results from different organisations, and how the findings apply from one to others (see Chapter 5 - Empirical Findings). I have also pointed out findings which were unique to a specific context. And while there are clearly some limitations to the study (for example, the fact that it investigates only five multinational companies), all the cases can be seen as sales organisations which provide services and goods, and the study broadly focuses on the logics of strategic actors operating mostly at a regional level rather than in a corporate centre of expertise level. I also feel that the level at which the interviews were conducted (i.e. with members of the management and leadership teams) means that the findings can be generalised

and assumed to apply in other companies operating in a similar context and economic situation.

In terms of broader generalisability, I acknowledge that the picture might look different in sectors which were not sampled in this study, such as the automotive industry, the public sector and so forth). Yet the reason for this is human asset specificity, or the extent to which the skills and knowledge of talent need to be shaped to the particular operations and business model of the firm in question, or the degree to which the skills, knowledge and experience of personnel are specific to a particular firm's business processes (Flamholtz, 1972, Leiblein, 2003), and this might, of course, differ across sectors. A further reason is that human capital intensity might also be expected to differ across sectors (Coff, 1997, Sparrow, 1998). It may be more central to some industries than to others, either because it accounts for a higher proportion of total costs or because employees have greater latitude to add value to core business processes.

#### **4.7 THE RESEARCHER'S REFLEXIVE ACCOUNT**

In qualitative research, the researcher is a research instrument and is expected to take an active role in the data collection (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) and an equal role in the construction of meanings. It is therefore important to acknowledge that in qualitative research, the researcher will influence the collection, selection and interpretation of data (mediated through a human instrument). Thus it is important to reflect on the role of the researcher during the research process and "report on personal beliefs, values, and biases that may shape" (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 127) the research findings.

Reflexivity is the process in which the researcher engages in a conscious self-awareness analysis

of their own role in the research – here the researcher does not merely report facts or truths, but actively constructs interpretations of his/her experience and then questions how those interpretations came about (Hertz, 1997). Ideally, the process of reflection and reflexivity starts at a very early stage - as the research is being conceived, the idea is being formulated, and the researcher is engaged in the process of establishing a relationship with the topic - and it ends only when the research process is over (Finlay, 2002). In this section, I present my reflections on the research journey I have made, and how I managed to confront some of the subjective views I imposed on the research from my own experience and professional positioning.

Reflecting on my background as a researcher, I have both professional and academic experience in the field of TM. Professionally, in my current role (with a leading global airline based in the Middle East region) I head the TM function. I am therefore fully responsible for the design, development and implementation of TM architectures (i.e. systems, processes, policies). This experience has helped me gain a practical understanding of how organisational contexts (i.e. the culture, social settings, and systems) impact the development of TM (i.e. systems, processes, policies), as well as to recognise the challenges and opportunities that influence the implementation of TM in the business. Academically, having been immersed in the TM literature in its entirety, I have developed a sound understanding and familiarity with the development and limitations of the field. This inevitably made me more informed whenever I engaged in any discussions concerning TM. I became knowledgeable enough to provide my own analysis of the current state of the field and my own insights into some of the challenges it faces.

I, therefore, acknowledge that my current role and experience in the field expose me to the risk of being influenced by my own suppositions, assumptions and understandings of how TM may add value to organisations. Therefore, it has been challenging for me not to bring my own experience and knowledge to the interpretation and analysis of the data. To mitigate this risk, I have ensured that I did not impose my views of TM on either the collection or the analysis of the data. This meant that during the interviewing process, I played a neutral role, and made a concerted effort throughout to ensure that my own views were minimised and not imposed on participants' responses. I maintained a balanced rapport between being friendly on the one hand, yet impersonal but curious on the other. I allowed responses to flow freely, without interrupting unless there was a need to probe interesting or unclear points. While I was noting any observations (during the interview itself), I ensured that these observations were not an attempt to evaluate the responses or prejudge the strength of the data or its value to the research.

After each interview, I put aside some time to note down my own reflections and feelings about how the interview was conducted and any findings that were based on my own observations. I reflected on these notes as I was transcribing the interviews and listening again to the conversations I had had. In analysing the data, I made sure that I became familiar with the data sets, and so it was important for me to accurately (verbatim) transcribe the interviews without changing, manipulating or commenting on any of the responses during this process. I then engaged in a rigorous iterative analysis process (as described earlier) to ensure the data was properly sorted, coded and interpreted. While there is no doubt that my experience and understandings of TM influenced how I made sense of the findings, I made sure (as

demonstrated in the next two chapters) that I reported on the findings as they were presented and described by the participants, and highlighted any areas where my personal views might have impacted the findings in any way. Overall, I made consistent efforts to maintain a high level of objectivity during both the interview and the analytical processes, as illustrated in the rigorous analysis journey I undertook. I remained open, alert and curious throughout the process to capture new insights and opposing views.

#### **4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In this research, I have followed and complied with the Lancaster University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) codes of practice and with the ESRC Research Ethics Framework. First, I completed the 'Self-Assessments (Part A and B)' form and submitted it to the Chair of the UREC for sign-off and approval before I began the research. Prior to the interviews, I gave the participants a research brief which introduced my background, explained the purpose and objectives of the research and outlined their role in the study and how they were expected to contribute to it. All participants were asked to sign a consent form which detailed the interview protocol and provided a guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality; I also asked permission to use audiotaping, assured participants that they had a right to withdraw and alerted them to relevant risks (Sarantakos, 2013) (see Appendixes Two A and Two B).

To gain access to the five cases (in the selected organisations), I sent an invitation letter to the director of HR/TM, providing full details of the research objectives, expectations and anticipated outcomes, and requesting the organisation's agreement to participate in the study and permission to have access to strategic actors (see Appendix One). I also gave an assurance

that participating in the study was voluntary, so coercion was not used in any way to get strategic actors to take part in the study (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Instead, the strategic actors were approached only after approval from their respective organisations had been obtained, and after they had agreed to participate in the study. In addition, any sensitive information shared during the interviews was treated as confidential and was only used or disclosed in the research report after being reviewed by the strategic actors and approved for use. This allowed them to retain ownership and exert the right to decide on how the information they had provided should be used.

Transparency and clarity are key aspects of this research, and so every effort was made to avoid creating any conflict of interest for the participants. Before starting the interviews, I made sure that the strategic actors were comfortable about sharing their views without subjecting themselves to any form of conflict, and I confirm that there were no conflicts of interest in this study. The research findings are reported without falsification, misrepresentation, fabrication, and with no attempt to present outcomes in a favourable way or suppress evidence. All efforts were made to provide accurate accounts and objective interpretations of the data throughout the process of data analysis (see Section 4.5.4 – Analytical Strategy). The audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews were password protected and stored on an external hard-drive which was accessible only to myself, with a password-protected cloud back-up.

Before I conclude this section, I would like to acknowledge that my current role (as an employee of a leading airline and as a TM professional) facilitated access to the cases. The strong relationship my organisation has with these companies allowed me to gain access to strategic

actors and information easily. Whilst I was opportunistic in using my current role and organisation, I made sure that it was clear to all participants that this research did not represent my organisation in any shape or form, that whatever they chose to share would be fully confidential and used only within the context of academic research, and that no reference would be made to their professional or personal identity.

#### **4.9 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have described the many decisions I made to enable me to conduct this research study. Given the varied but also limited theoretical development of the TM field and the need to use a flexible research design to enable me to gain a deeper understanding of the social contexts influencing the practice of TM in organisations, I adopted a qualitative research approach which aligned with my philosophical views as a constructivist who believes that reality is constructed through the many viewpoints, experiences and deeper thoughts surrounding a particular phenomenon. In this study, I used a case-study design (more specifically, an explanatory multiple-case-study design) to enable me to address the research question 'how may talent management add value to organisations?' across different social contexts and organisational borders. I closely and carefully immersed myself in the research process and engaged with strategic actors from five different multinational organisations through in-depth interviews in an attempt to solicit their varied views about TM and tap into their thinking to understand how they perceive TM in relation to value and to four value processes. I analysed each case separately, using the same analytical strategy each time to ensure consistency in handling the data sets collected over the course of the study. In the following chapter, I discuss



the research findings in more detail.

## CHAPTER FIVE – EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I intend to unpack the different views and realities of interviewees about TM, and report on the evidence and themes which emerge overall from this study as I present in-depth accounts and key empirical findings from the 52 semi-structured interviews conducted across five MNCs. As I explained in Chapter 3 (Literature Review), the research problem is to examine and understand 'how TM architectures may add value to organisations as perceived by strategic actors in multinational organisations'. To address this research problem, the study seeks answers to two research questions. The first is 'do strategic actors believe that the TM architectures implemented within their organisations add value to the organisation, and if so, what value do they believe they add?' and the second examines 'how may TM architectures add value in relation to four value processes (creation, capture, leverage and protection)?'.

In this chapter, I present the empirical data that has helped in exploring these questions. To begin with, (in Section 5.2) I present the findings which result from the use of a dichotomy of strategic actors (i.e. system designers and system implementers), with the objective of showing how these strategic actors describe their roles and involvement in influencing the design and implementation of TM in their organisations. The next section (5.3) presents the findings related to the first research question, and I provide empirical evidence on how the constructs of 'talent management' and 'value' were understood and described and how actors thought about the value that TM may add to their organisations. Section 5.4 then presents how the

value model and its four value processes (value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection) were understood by the actors when it was first introduced. I then move on to present the empirical evidence related to the second research question and show how interviewees related the idea of TM architectures to the four value processes and how they perceived TM architectures to enable each of these four processes. Finally, in Section 5.5, I conclude the chapter by presenting the key findings on how interviewees perceived the usefulness of value models in order to understand the value of TM architectures.

## 5.2 THE DICHOTOMY OF STRATEGIC ACTORS

In Chapter 2 (Literature Review), I noted that many aspects of TM – for example, the choice of the actual practices adopted, the way judgments might be made as to whether someone is a high potential or not, and indeed even the definition of what is meant by high potential – are very subjective. This subjectivity means that the answers one finds and the conduct of actual practice inside the organisation depend on who is making the judgement. The way in which I tried to resolve this problem, in addition of course to using a qualitative methodology and allowing interviewees to make sense of the notions of TM themselves, was to broaden the investigation to include not just those people from within the HR community who may be assumed to have designed the practices, but also those in the broader organisation who are involved in applying the practices. It is understandable that these two groups might make different judgments and use different criteria even if in principle they are supposed to be operating in the same way. Therefore, my objective was to surface any differences in perceptions which might have been influenced by the different positions/roles that actors may

hold. The study, therefore, used a dichotomy of system designers and system implementers. The first findings to be introduced relate to the roles of strategic actors in shaping and influencing the TM strategy.

Although the dichotomy between system designers and system implementers was used mainly to reflect a classic strategic and 'metagalactic' perspective (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009), my observations (based on the findings) indicated that in reality the distinction was not as clear-cut as I originally assumed when I first made the decision to interview sets of strategic actors representing both system designers and system implementers. The lack of a clear-cut distinction was reflected in the ways the strategic actors struggled to justify and explain their role in influencing and shaping the design and execution of TM strategies. For example, when they were asked if (through their role) they contribute to the design and execution of the TM strategy, most of them stated that they played an active role in designing and executing the TM strategy in their organisations. For example, the HR Lead for South Africa in Organisation X described her role as mostly involved in designing the TM strategy and driving the implementation locally through business leads:

*"I think it is a bit of both, it is probably 60% on design locally, and what we need to do from a MEA perspective as well as a South Africa perspective and then I enable implementation through our line and business leaders, if you know what I mean. So yes, I am heavily involved in both."*

Similarly, the Business Intelligence Lead for Israel in Organisation X believed that the nature of his role allowed him to be involved in the design and implementation of the TM strategy:

*“I think I would say both - I mean equally, if it is an equal portion, I am definitely designing and implementing.”*

While this was the case for most interviewees, a small number were clear that their role was limited to the execution of the TM strategy (which is usually designed centrally, at head office level). By this, they meant that their role was to ensure that the strategy designed at head office level is executed and delivered in the business as is, rather than modifying the design of the strategy.

For example, the Regional Sales Manager, MEA, in Organisation Z explained his role as more of an executor but also recognised that there might be opportunities to execute the global strategy in different ways depending on local needs:

*“Actually, my role is more into execution and applying what comes from the centre, I mean our head office. However, at the country level, I am part of the management team, and we customise some of the areas, and we try to adopt some of those in a different way. So, in general, it is more applying and executing what’s well prepared inside the company but also landing it differently depending on what we need locally.”*

Similarly, the Regional Commercial Head, MEA Region, in Organisation X said:

*“I would say most of the talent management strategy is designed by Corp, you know - the central owner in the head office, in terms of the main activities and main actions around talent management. But I would define myself as more of an implementer, but then at the MEA-specific level we also try to implement sort of certain programmes and maybe certain focuses to align to our needs, but yes, mostly the design is done centrally, and we execute what is given to us.”*

With the majority of interviewees who perceived their role as strategy and system designers (whether they were HR/Talent professionals or business leaders), I was interested to learn more, so I probed further and asked them to provide examples of how they contributed to the design of the TM strategy. This is when it became evident that they were not differentiating between strategy design and strategy execution as such, but instead used 'design' and 'execution' interchangeably to describe their roles, which appeared to be more of 'obedient executers' rather than 'active designers'. For example, they perceived their role as designers only because they were involved in making decisions about the type of talent needed or the type of development required to develop talent locally, as illustrated in the quotes below from the Head of Marketing, MEA Region, in Organisation X and the HR Lead, South Africa, in Organisation X:

*“Well you see, I am involved in the design of the talent management strategy, because I get to say what types of talent I need to hire in my business and I then go about hiring them, if you know what I mean. So, this is how I see myself influencing the design of the TM strategy.”*

*“I first look at the development needs of my talent in South Africa, and I then identify the suitable training and development interventions that we can introduce locally in our sub. So, we decide locally on how we want to develop our people – so the talent development strategy.”*

From the interviews, it appears that these types of decisions or activities do not necessarily involve any design, but rather more execution according to the strategy implemented (Favaro, 2015) globally. There is a level of governance which is imposed on local subsidiaries, and the role of strategic actors is thus to ensure the effective execution of the TM strategy, which

provides little involvement in strategy design. That said, this did not come as a surprise, as previous research indicated that it is common that strategic actors in MNC subsidiaries often struggle to justify their role as active strategic actors rather than passive implementers of corporate strategies (Dick and Collings, 2014). Yet the limited engagement with strategy design did not stop strategic actors from providing their own perspectives and cognitive logics on how they believe TM adds value to their organisations, as I will show in the following sections.

### 5.3 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS – RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

*“Do strategic actors believe that the talent management architectures (practices, processes, policies) implemented within their organisations add value to the organisation, and if so, what value do they believe they add?”*

#### 5.3.1 Talent Management – How is it Defined?

To understand how TM adds value to organisations, it was important first to understand how organisations and their strategic actors define and approach TM. When I asked them to describe how TM is defined in their organisations (if at all) they appeared surprised by the question, and struggled to articulate a formal definition of TM. This was perhaps due to the lack of a common organisational view or definition of what TM is.

For example, the HR Director for Asia Pacific in Organisation Y suggested that it would be difficult to pinpoint a precise definition in her organisation, while the Regional HR Manager in Organisation X was surprised that the question was even asked and indicated that she had never thought about the definition of TM before.

*“I do not think you will ever get an answer to this question. There is no such thing as a talent management definition in our organisation; we do not necessarily define it.”*

*“Wow, that is a big question, I am surprised you even asked. To be honest, I never thought about it, and I would be very curious to see what sort of responses you get from others in the organisation.”*

This observed reality indicated that organisations implemented TM without properly defining it (which is not unusual in any management practice), and there seemed to be a lack of “clarity regarding the definition, scope and overall goals of talent management” (Lewis and Heckman, 2006, p. 139). When I probed to understand why no or only limited attempts had been made by organisations to define TM, the responses showed that the absence of more strategic thinking around the definition of TM and the design of talent architectures is due to the fact that organisations operate from the assumption that TM is just another HR process.

For example, the Sales Director of Organisation X described TM as just another term to refer to HR and what HR professionals are already doing:

*“It’s HR; talent management is what HR has been doing for so many years. It is just a new term, you know - HR evolved from personnel management to HR and now talent management.”*

Therefore, in practice, it seemed that organisations approached TM pragmatically without giving much thought to its definition and the value it added. Fundamentally, strategic actors did not seem to be bothered or concerned by the absence of a TM definition. That said, the question of ‘what TM is’ provoked them to think about what TM might mean to them, and the lack of a formal organisational definition encouraged them to reflect on the construct of TM and describe it on the basis of their own cognitive logics and perceptions, rather than being



guided by a common organisational view. Despite the fact that TM meant different things to different organisations (even to different parts of the same organisation), the findings showed that interviewees broadly viewed TM as a bundle, or set, of management ideologies, manifested in a broad range of HR practices, which included activities such as attracting and hiring talent, performance management, succession planning, talent development and talent retention.

For example, the Regional Commercial Head, MEA Region in Organisation X described TM in relation to the attraction, development, performance management and succession management of talent.

*“the way I would define talent management, I think one aspect of it is really sort of attracting and finding the right talent to bring into the organisation, I would say that is one part of it, and then again identifying talent in the organisation and helping them grow, learn and give them the opportunity to grow into more senior roles and grow as a talent would be the second part of it. And then this is more for high potential talent, potential talent, and then I would say another part is the regular process of performance management as well is part of the succession planning.”*

However, despite this broad spectrum of practices, I was unable to detect any explicit evidence to suggest that these were bundled together to form a suite of interrelated and interdependent practices, or if they were deliberately designed with the idea that the inclusion of one practice necessitates the inclusion of another (Zacharatos et al., 2005). While the strategic actors recognised the importance of each practice, they viewed and described them as individual practices rather than as a set of aggregated practices designed to complement each other. When I probed them around the ideas of relatedness and talent systems, they did not seem to

be thinking along these lines. This indicated that when organisations engage in the design and development of their TM practices, they do not consciously think about the notions of architecture or HPWS (Becker, 1998, Lepak and Snell, 1999). That said, what I did detect from the findings was that the outcome of effectively implementing one practice impacted the implementation of another practice (i.e. the outcome of performance management impacts the identification of high potential individuals, which subsequently impacts succession planning). So, whilst organisations might not deliberately think about designing an interrelated and integrated suite of practices, there are implicit expectations that the outcome of one practice enables another. I elaborate on this point below.

So, what is the list of practices which constitutes a TM architecture? The one key practice that consistently emerged in all 52 interviews was performance management. In this study, interviewees seemed to believe that there is a strong relationship between performance management and TM, and that they go hand in hand and cannot not be separated as such. It is through the performance management process that employees are discussed and reviewed, and that high potentials are identified. In this, there is a disjunction between academic critiques of the talent management - performance link (Sparrow et al., 2014a, Collings, 2014a, Collings, 2014b) and the working assumptions made by the strategic actors.

For example, the HR Director, ME&A in Organisation X described performance management as a process used to differentiate between employees, not only to identify those who are performing from those who are not, but also to identify high potentials:

*“You know, performance management plays an important role here, not only because it helps us manage our people and ensure they deliver but also because it helps us differentiate between them and identify those who have potential from those who do not ... If you get performance management right, talent management becomes an easy process of identification and development.”*

The findings (across all five cases) did not surface any other views of performance management and TM. Thus, the strong association between them indicated that interviewees believed that performance is a key indicator of potential - yet without evidence of performance they are unable to recognise high potential talent. These findings perhaps contradict what Collings and McMackin (2017) surprisingly found in their study, that there was only a poor linkage between the process of performance management and TM. In my study, I observed that organisations and their actors operate on the assumption that there is a strong linkage between the two, but perhaps what was missing was clarity around how effective performance management is in measuring performance (i.e. differentiating between high performers and poor performers), and therefore how effective the talent identification process is in identifying high potential individuals (i.e. differentiating between those with high potential and all the others). That said, I would like to note that assessing the effectiveness of the TM practices implemented by organisations is not within the scope of this study. My interest was mainly to understand what practices are implemented rather than how effective these practices are.

Although the findings showed that performance is an indicator of potential, there is a need to understand what makes an individual a ‘high potential’, what ‘potential’ actually means. So, based on the responses and the great variations in the descriptions of the constructs ‘potential’ or ‘high potential’, it became clear that terms such as ‘high potential’ and ‘top talent’ were

tentatively used to describe an élite group of individuals who stand out from the crowd in the organisations. At the same time, as in the case of the construct 'talent management', the findings indicated that there was no formal definition to describe what organisations meant by 'potential' or 'high potential' individuals. Instead, the term 'potential' was mostly related to individuals' abilities, for example, their ability to grow and take on more complex responsibilities, and what this meant in an organisational context was conceivably associated with the idea of climbing the ladder and moving up to the next level. As I explained earlier, the ability to outperform others, or being a high performer, was a critical criterion for identifying individuals with high potential. Having said that, I observed that the scope of performance management varied from one organisation to another, and although these organisations are mostly sales and service organisations, the criteria used to measure employees' performance were different. For example, in Organisation X employees' performance was measured against the impact they make on business results, as well as on customers and others in the organisation (i.e. peers, direct reports and so on), while in Organisation Y, employees' performance was measured purely against sales targets and delivering on results.

In addition to high performance, some of the criteria used to describe high potential employees were related to their ability to resolve challenging problems, to come up with creative solutions, to work on difficult projects and having what it takes to progress at least two levels above their current role. It is important to highlight here that these judgments were based on the assumption that current performance predicts future performance. This indicates that the identification of potential was rather subjective, and dependent on strategic actors' perceptions of performance and thus how they identified potential.

For example, the Head of HR, ME&A Region in Organisation Z described 'high potential' individuals as those who he assumed could progress at least two further levels in their current career. Similarly, the General Manager, SMG, in Organisation X described 'potential' in terms of the ability to outgrow a current role and progress more quickly than others.

*"Okay, those people who are being discussed to be successful for critical or leadership roles, so people that can grow that we believe that at a certain point in their career where they have the potential to grow two levels within a timeframe of 5 years..."*

*"Let's put it this way - if they have potential to grow quicker than others, usually we put them as a high potential as an accelerated pass to succeed some roles."*

So, in the absence of a clear and conscious definition of 'potential' or 'high potential', and from other evidence in the findings, I can conclude that in practice the term 'high potential' is used to refer mostly to a select group of individuals who are assumed to possess the abilities to grow and take on more complex responsibilities, assignments and roles than others in the organisation. In my view as a researcher and a TM professional, the absence of a definition is problematic and might have implications for the practice of 'talent management'. To begin with, the meanings associated with 'potential' are usually taken for granted and mostly dependent on how the interviewees define the term, which means it depends heavily on the ability of strategic actors to differentiate between 'performance' and 'potential' (which might be questionable). It also indicates that organisations do not realise the significant impact this might have on the practices of TM, which in this instance is the identification of high potential.

While discussing 'high potentials', interviewees identified succession planning as another key practice in TM. In their view, high potential employees were purposefully identified so that they could take on more critical and senior roles in the organisation. This is to ensure that

organisations have a pipeline of successors groomed to become their future leaders. The process of succession planning was described across all five companies in relation to leadership potential and the development of a pipeline of leaders, and was thus perceived as a critical component of the TM architecture.

For example, the Commercial and Operations Manager in Organisation W believed that succession planning is a key strength of TM, as it is through the process of talent identification that potential successors are identified and subsequently mapped against critical roles in the organisation:

*“Succession planning is a very key strength of talent management; it is about ensuring we have successors for all our critical roles and who are your successors? it’s your high potentials mostly.”*

While discussing succession planning, strategic actors placed great emphasis on talent development, which is used mainly to enhance the capabilities of high potentials as well as being a mechanism designed to retain all employees. In these organisations, developing the careers of ‘high potentials’ was perceived as instrumental in the development of future leaders. What emerged in the findings was the use of a wide range of development offerings, such as formal learning, social learning (i.e. the use of mentors and coaches), networking events, stretch assignments and talent mobility. What I observed was that these organisations tend to invest in developing special programmes to support the development of their high potentials, and that these programmes usually combine formal, informal and social learning interventions to support this development, and most importantly to prepare the high potentials for taking on future roles.

Although talent development was viewed as a mechanism for retention, a small number of organisations (two of the five) seemed to rely on financial rewards to retain their 'high potentials'. For example, the Talent Acquisition Manager in Organisation Z referred to the exclusive financial rewards they offered to those designated as 'star talent'. This was the first time the term 'star talent' had been used, and when the strategic actors were probed to understand more about what it stood for, it was clear that it was not a commonly used term in the organisation, but more of a personal way of referring to high potentials.

*“then you have LTI, which is long-term incentives, that is paid based on the nomination for the super talent, and those are the people we want to invest in, they are the ones you want to grow and stay and become global leaders, so LTIs are an amazing benefit to do that, so you have bonus LTI, you have on core award which is our reward system and we do that a lot, it is specifically for the talent, it is for a specific action or task that they have done that was out of their scope of work, for example. Then you have merit increases that are different based on, not performance, but based on the size of business, the roles, the performance, everything basically.”*

While there are several arguments in the literature to suggest that organisations should invest in tailored retention programmes, strategies and practices targeted at a particular group of employees (i.e. high potentials) to meet their expectations and needs (Hiltrop, 1999, Cappelli, 2000), this did not seem to be the case in reality. The only deliberate approaches to talent retention found in the research were development programmes and the opportunities offered to invest in the careers of high potentials, but other than these it did not seem that these organisations invested in separate practices or strategies to retain high potentials.

When it comes to how organisations approach TM (i.e. adopting an inclusive or exclusive approach), it was observed that in principle, the interviewees believed that TM should be

inclusive of all employees. But while this seemed to be more of an expressed belief, in practice, when investments were required, TM was oriented towards differentiating between employees and differentiating those who have potential from those who do not. This reveals a disconnect between the belief system of the strategic actors (everyone should be considered as a talent) and the predisposition to differentiate between employees in practice. This differentiation highlighted an important fact: whether consciously or unconsciously, organisations tend to invest differently in their employees, so those labelled or identified as ‘high potential’ tend to get more attention and benefit from greater investment than others. Therefore, I can argue that what differentiates TM from traditional HR is that it is more oriented towards a select group of high performers and high potentials – it is an élite system which is focused on a small group of individuals rather than the entire workforce.

For example, the Regional Consulting Director, Sub-Saharan Africa in Organisation V believed that their TM systems were designed with inclusiveness in mind, but when implemented, these systems tended to differentiate between employees and target high potential individuals:

*“I think on paper and the way our systems are designed it is an inclusive approach, we recognise that everybody has talent and has value to offer, but when it comes to practice and driving talent to excel it is more exclusive.”*

Although it has attracted adverse criticism in the literature (Pfeffer, 2001, Downs and Swailes, 2013, Thunnissen et al., 2013), the exclusive approach remains the most common approach both in practice and in academia (Lepak and Snell, 1999, Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005, Becker and Huselid, 2006, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, Iles et al., 2010).



Understanding how organisations think about TM was an important step towards understanding how its value is perceived. This discussion about the meaning of TM offered interesting insights and prompted strategic actors to think about the value which TM adds to their organisations. I elaborate this further in the next section.

### **5.3.2 Value – What Does It Mean? The Sources and Targets of Value**

Moving on from understanding how organisations define TM, the discussion was directed towards the concept of 'value'. The objective was to explore how organisations think about value (how they define and create it) before relating the concept of value to the discussion of TM and examining how strategic actors think about it in relation to TM. Whilst a discussion of value elicited different perceptions and insights, it was interesting to notice that in these organisations, the language of value was not common, and perhaps not widely used by the strategic actors. I cannot deny that this was no surprise given the lack of consensus around the meaning of 'value' (as a subjective concept) in the academic literature, and the findings showed that in practice, too, the concept of 'value' is not clearly understood. This perhaps brings to the surface a plurality of perspectives about the targets of value (who value is created for) and the sources of value (who creates value). Despite this plurality of perspectives, however, there was a common and simplistic view across all five organisations that 'value' is related to achieving sales targets and generating revenue and profit. So the way in which strategic actors related to the term 'value' was maybe immediate and certainly context-driven (as sales organisations, these firms are driven mostly by sales targets and the ability to produce products and services which meet customers' needs and subsequently generate revenue and profit).

For example, the Cluster Leader in Organisation Y describes value in relation to sales and achieving targets:

*“Value ... it’s achieving the targets, yes, we look at the customer satisfaction, but if you look at what the highest focus is, it is sales, how much are we selling, how much are we achieving, how much are we growing. It is numbers; it is a number-driven organisation by default - the whole market, by the way, it is not only us ...”*

### **5.3.2.1 Targets of Value**

To describe what ‘value’ is, strategic actors also reflected on the targets of value creation. In many parts of the literature, it is emphasised that the targets of value creation are (for example) business owners and shareholders (Porter, 1985, Sirmon et al., 2007), customers (Kang et al., 2007, Priem, 2007), stakeholders (Post et al., 2004) and societies and nations (Porter, 1998, Seung-Hyun et al., 2007). From the findings, I observed that across all five organisations value was perceived to be created for customers and shareholders, and therefore as explained above, was associated with revenue generation and making profit (i.e. achieving sales targets, increasing market share and making money) and delivering on customers’ expectations (i.e. providing services and products which meet customers' needs).

For example, the Director of Marketing in Organisation Z described value in relation to sales and profit, while the Head of Strategic Advice in Organisation V described it in relation to understanding the customer’s needs, as far as possible anticipating these, and being able to develop the products and provide the services required to achieve customer satisfaction:

*“sales and profit ultimately, ultimately that is what it gets down to.”*

*“so, our value model is two things, one is to be able to provide a unique service delivery experience to the customer, and the second value that we bring is hopefully to be able to do it more efficiently and cheaper than our competitors.”*

The findings from Organisation X (which are very specific to this organisation) showed that in addition to creating value for customers and shareholders, they were also focused on creating value to the local communities they serve, and for the cities and governments that support their global operations. This is due to the fact that in Organisation X there was observed to be a sense of social responsibility and an intent to make a difference to the lives of the people they touch. This was reflected in their mission statement and engrained in their corporate culture.

For example, the General Manager of Organisation X stated that in his organisation, value is created when they can change and improve the lives of people through technology, so in this particular organisation, the company was committed to making a difference through the technology and products they offer. By default, this brought to the forefront of their agenda the ability to influence people's lives and support the communities they operate in. Therefore, to them, it made sense to relate the term 'value' to their ability to add value from that perspective:

*“what do we do as a community that we live in; how do we change the lives of people or how do we improve the lives of the people in this country? How do we help the government to create new jobs, what's our plans regarding cybersecurity, for example - all these things.”*

### 5.3.2.2 Sources of Value

In their attempts to describe value, interviewees also reflected on the sources of value (i.e. value-creating resources), and whilst various perspectives were detected, there seemed to be a common view among all five organisations that talent are a critical source of value creation. In these organisations, people were perceived to contribute to value creation, but not just any type of people – instead, it is people who are identified as valuable to the organisation because the knowledge and expertise they possess gives them the ability to deliver results, resolve complex problems, create and innovate, and thus to create value for the organisation. In organisations where value is created for customers and shareholders, value-creating talent were described in relation to their ability to understand customers’ needs and translate these needs into products and services which contribute to increased sales and result in generating revenue.

For example, the Head of HR, MEA in Organisation Z describes people as the most important asset of the organisation, as does the VP Advice, MEA in Organisation V:

*“This sounds so mellow, but I mean people are the most important asset. We can have brilliant products, we can have a brilliant strategy, but if it is not implemented by the right people or produced by the right people, or sold by the right people, or developed by the right people, we are worth nothing. So of course, it should be the core of our business, people are our important asset, it is what it is. because with the right people you can even sell bad products ...”*

*“The people ... and I wouldn’t underestimate the people because I think there are a number of our competitors who have similar assets basis that we might be stronger in one*

*area and they might be slightly stronger in another area, and for us to differentiate again we must be better at thinking and we must be better at executing.”*

The emphasis on people as value-creating resources resembles what has been argued in the RBV literature (Barney, 1991, Barney and Clark, 2007), where resources which are valuable, rare, inimitable and imperfectly substitutable are seen as sources of sustained competitive advantage and value creation. In these organisations, having the right people is critical to business success, but as I explained earlier, the criteria for identifying the ‘right people’ (i.e. valuable talent, high potentials) are not clear-cut, but differ from one organisation to another and even from one strategic actor to another, again drawing attention to the subjectivity surrounding what is meant by concepts such as the ‘right people’.

In addition to human capital resources, there are other resources such as physical capital resources and organisational capital resources (Williamson, 1977, Tomer, 1987). For example, in these organisations, it was observed that external partners, technology and R&D facilities, intellectual property, knowledge and expertise which are developed internally, as well as corporate culture and internal structures, were also considered to be value-creating resources.

For example, the Business Intelligence Lead, Israel in Organisation X explained the importance of the ecosystem his organisation had created around itself as an extra resource for creating value through partners. He also mentioned the non-people-based resources his organisation leveraged to create value. This indicated that in these organisations, whilst people are the most valuable resource, there are other resources which they consider critical to the creation of value:

*"So, it is about the ecosystem, so I guess for every dollar that we create directly we want to have like 10 dollars of value that is created indirectly because that is how you create an ecosystem ... so think about the value that we can extract from partners around us in the ecosystem to create the value and of course, there are non-people resources, for example, servers and infrastructure and so on, that is helping us to deliver that value."*

Thus, while people may be recognised as the most critical value-creating resource an organisation might have, this brings to the surface the importance of TM to value creation. This is perhaps better explained by the Business Lead in Organisation X, who suggested that TM is critical to value creation because it is mostly concerned with the management of valuable people:

*"so, for me, I mean again the most critical resources that we have is people, and therefore talent management is critical because that is the key resources that we have that creates value for the company, like business value. So, to me, it is a no-brainer, right, why I see talent management critical for value creation."*

This on its own is a very interesting finding, in which we start to see a shift in strategic actors' mindsets from perceiving TM mainly as just another HR process (as I pointed out earlier in the findings) to an enabler of value creation. In the next section, I elaborate on how the value of TM was perceived by strategic actors, and the impact of the value discussion on their thinking and perspectives.

### **5.3.3 The Value of Talent Management**

There is no doubt that the trigger word 'value' provoked the interviewees to think differently about TM. When the discussion was brought back to TM to investigate whether or not they believed that the TM added value to their organisation, I immediately observed that mindsets

shifted from perceiving TM as just another HR process/practice to seeing an enabler to value creation. Subsequently, as I asked more probing questions and encouraged them to elaborate on their ideas, it was obvious that the ideas of 'value' which I had introduced were guiding their thinking – they had now started to think more strategically about TM, and I could see how their views about TM and their description of its meaning had evolved.

For example, this shift can be seen in the quotes below: both are from the same person, the HR Lead for M&A in Organisation X. In the first quote, she describes how she viewed TM prior to any value discussion, while the second quote is from the phase after the discussion of value. As can be seen below, before ideas of 'value' were introduced to the discussion, she described TM in relation to the broad areas of HR, which include the recruitment, retention and development of employees with no reference to it being strategic or even a mechanism for adding value. Once she had been introduced to the concepts and ideas of 'value', however, she reflected these back and acknowledged that TM goes beyond the broader spectrum of HR processes/practices.

*“So, when we think about talent management, it is about building an exceptional workplace, where we will land the right people in the right time with the right capabilities. So, it is the very broad areas of HR, you know, but might also cover into things like culture; it will touch into development and things like that as well.”*

*“Look, for me talent management, it is more than adding value, like in order to make this company a better place to work for, you need to have the right talent, not any talent, the right talent, you see, because everything starts there. If you do not have the right talent in place, you cannot sell, you cannot deliver the numbers, you cannot win, even you cannot do any research. So absolutely, talent management is more than just recruiting,*

*developing and retaining employees; it is in my view strategic and critical if we wish to create value in this company ...”*

Following on from this, when I asked the interviewees to describe how they perceived TM as adding value to their organisations and asked them to describe this value, they came up with four areas: (a) translating corporate and business strategy into talent capabilities, (b) capitalising on and making use of talent potential, (c) extending talent capabilities by helping them to acquire and institutionalise new knowledge and skills, and (d) creating a culture which enables the engagement and retention of talent, so that they can continuously add value to the organisation. I elaborate on each of these points below.

First of all, the interviewees believed that TM should enable them to translate the corporate and business strategy into talent capabilities, or in other words, to understand what types of talent and capabilities they might need to enable them to create business value. The issue here is having the right people, but only after developing a good understanding of what 'the right people' stands for – in other words, identifying what type of talent and capabilities are needed by the organisation and then making sure that such talent are attracted and acquired. The value of TM was perceived in relation to enabling the organisation to think about the types of talent it might need in the future (thus adopting a future-oriented perspective) and subsequently helping to attract and acquire such talent. This suggests that for TM to add value it should enable organisations to become more objective in how they think about the types of talent they need, rather than relying on subjectivity - which is mostly based on using loose, undefined terms such as 'high potential' or 'gut feeling'.



For example, the Senior HR Director in Organisation X strongly believed that TM adds value when it enables the organisation to think about the future and thus focus its efforts on attracting and acquiring the types of talent needed to support this future:

*"it is not about bringing in talent; it is more to do with understanding what type of talent we need, what does our future look like, what sort of people we need, and make sure we have them, it is more strategic, you see ..."*

The second way in which TM could add value to organisations was by enabling them to capitalise on the potential of their talent. This was another interesting insight, and so there was a need to probe further and encourage the strategic actors to elaborate further. This surfaced an important observation - that organisations invest a lot of effort and time in identifying their 'top talent' or 'high potentials', yet they do not necessarily know how to leverage this potential and capitalise on it so that they can get a return on their investment. Therefore, one way for TM to add value is to help organisations to get the best out of their talent, capitalise on their potential and utilise it in a way that would add value to the organisation.

For example, the Marketing Director of Organisation Z suggested that the people asset is probably the most expensive asset an organisation has and thus it is critical for organisations to extract and capitalise on the potential of their talent. Similarly, the Business Intelligence Lead, Israel in Organisation X describes the value of TM as its ability to find the best ways to translate talent potential into outcomes that add value to the organisation.

*"I mean people resources are probably one of our greatest assets, certainly are one of our most expensive assets, and if we are not getting the best out of them, extracting their potential, and if you are not surrounding yourself with great people who are motivated and know what they are doing, then you may as well go home."*

*“the idea is if I can take those high potential, it is like you know in electricity there is potential and current, right, so if I can get this potential with current that can actually light my bulb so for me that is the value I am after. So, from a talent management perspective is finding ways to translate potential to current, see what I am saying?”*

This then moved the discussion on to how the practices of TM may enable organisations to effectively manage their high potentials. This is where the third and fourth values of TM were seen to reside.

The third value of talent management was described as the extension of talent capabilities by helping them to acquire and institutionalise new knowledge and skills. Here, the strategic actors believed that for TM to add real value it should enable the development of a learning environment where high potentials not only become better at what they already know or do, but also extend their capabilities by learning the new skills required for the future. This essentially requires talent to engage in a process of both learning and unlearning - a continuous learning process to ensure that the organisation is developing internally the talent capabilities required to meet its future needs. But in the view of the strategic actors, this is not only about high potentials learning new skills, but also about enabling organisations to institutionalise the learning which is already happening and converting it into effective processes through which the organisation can engage in a process of continuous improvement and value creation. This is where the idea of talent development was extended to encompass the creation of a learning organisation and the creation of systems and processes that enable high potentials to learn and share their learning so that the organisation can benefit.

For example, the Senior HR Director, MEA in Organisation X explains this:

*“talent management should support the concept of the learning organisation. You know, the learning, and organisational learning isn’t anything other than individuals learning and then the organisation figuring out how to institutionalise the learning that is brought in by those people and turn it into a better process and a more effective process, you know - an incremental benefit back to the organisation and that is how I see talent management supporting talent development.”*

The final way in which TM adds value emphasises the importance of developing the right culture in the organisation. The strategic actors saw a strong correlation between TM and culture. It is important to note that the aim of this study was not to examine corporate cultures and how they might impact TM in organisations, but since the concept of ‘culture’ was raised by the majority of interviewees, it was important to understand why they perceived the value of TM in relation to culture. It was apparent that the interviewees felt that TM should enable a culture in which talent are nurtured and developed, and one which enables organisations to embed the management of talent as part of its culture.

For example, the HR Manager, Commercial in Organisation X suggested that the more TM becomes part of the culture and the DNA of the organisation, the more it is expected to add value to the organisation. Similar points were made by the Director of Commercial Sales in Organisation Y, who emphasised the importance of TM in helping his organisation to develop the right culture for the management of talent:

*“The more we make this part of our culture and thinking to put this as a priority every day in what we do, the better we get in achieving the value out of talent management.”*

*“talent management should help us develop our culture, you know if you don’t have the right culture to support the management of talent, then you are setting yourself up for failure.”*

The study showed that the discussion of value triggered interesting insights amongst the interviewees about how TM might be thought of differently. Therefore, it became clear from the findings that thinking about the value of TM enabled them to better articulate the meaning of TM (i.e. its boundaries and scope). In the next section, I elaborate further on how the value of TM was perceived in relation to four value processes: value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection.

#### **5.4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS – RESEARCH QUESTION TWO AND THE FOUR VALUE PROPOSITIONS**

*How may Talent Management architectures add value in relation to four value processes (creation, capture, leverage and protection)?*

##### **5.4.1 Understanding the Value Model and its Four Value Processes**

Before I present the findings to explain how strategic actors thought about the value of TM architectures in relation to the four value processes, I would first like to present how they had perceived and understood the value model before they were asked to relate it to TM. The value model provided descriptions of each of these four processes (see Appendix Four). I purposely used common descriptions (derived from the literature) to avoid imposing my own understanding and thoughts about how these processes may relate to TM, and instead allowed the interviewees the opportunity to make sense of these four processes and come up with their own views on how they may relate to TM. While I fully realise that there was a danger of leading them to think about these processes in a particular way, I ensured that they were allowed to express themselves freely, and probe questions were used to encourage them to surface their own understandings and views of each of these value processes. This was an important step to

prepare them for the next stage of the interview. In this section, I present a brief overview of their initial thoughts about the value processes, without necessarily going into much detail about how they might relate to TM (which I do in the next section). Later in the chapter, I will conclude by explaining how they perceived the usefulness of the value model after they had been asked to reflect on its processes in relation to TM.

#### **5.4.1.1 Value Creation**

Based on the literature review, I described value creation as the *'activities that enable the organisation to effectively manage its value-creating resources in order to increase the worth of its goods, services or even its business'*. The findings showed that the process of value creation was probably something very straightforward, which the interviewees related to. Given the earlier discussion about value, and the strategic actors being probed to think about business value and how it is created in their organisation, the process of value creation was perceived as a process in which the organisation provides services and products which meet the expectations of its target users and subsequently generates revenue and profit in exchange for these services and goods.

#### **5.4.1.2 Value Capture**

I described value capture as the *'activities that enable the organisation to recover some or all of the value that is created by its value-creating resources'*.

Across all five of the organisations examined, the process of value capture was not fully understood and perhaps was confused with the process of value creation, although there was

a very small number of interviewees who could consciously articulate the difference between the two processes. This was attributed to strategic actors believing that if their organisations can create value, then by default they have captured it. I argue that this view is significantly influenced by the fact that these were sales organisations, and so value is perceived in relation to achieving sales targets, generating revenue and making a profit, extending market presence and providing products and services which satisfy customers' needs and thus result in increased sales. From this point of view, once value is created, it is very much captured by the organisation. This does not come as a surprise, as even in the literature the two processes are not clearly distinguished, even though there have been a number of attempts to explain and argue the difference (Bowman and Ambrosini, 2000, Lepak et al., 2007).

#### **5.4.1.3 Value Leverage**

In the value model, I describe value leverage as *'the activities that enable the organisation to improve and extend the capabilities of its value-creating resources.'*

The process of value leverage was something new to most strategic actors and it, therefore, took them quite some time to relate to the concept. They initially interpreted the process of value leverage as similar to the process of value creation. This was attributed to the fact that in these organisations value creation is a continuous process, as these organisations are continuously searching for new ideas to develop new products and services for their target users. Therefore, they are continuously leveraging their value creation capabilities to continue creating value.

#### **5.4.1.4 Value Protection**

In the value model, I describe value protection as the 'activities that enable the organisation to protect its value-creating resources from being captured or duplicated by competitors'.

Realising that organisations create value through their value-creating resources, be they human, physical or organisational capital, it was easy to understand and relate to the processes of value protection. In their minds, the strategic actors believed that to protect the value-creating resources; their organisations should develop and implement strategies and processes to prevent them from being replicated by and lost to competitors.

In summary, the value model provided a good foundation and a starting point for the interviewees to think about the value of TM architectures. Although they struggled slightly to differentiate between some of these processes, when they saw them in the context of TM they were able to challenge their own logics and understanding to see the connection between the processes of value and the concept of TM. In the next section, I provide more detailed accounts in relation to each of these value processes and explain how the strategic actors related them back to TM.

### **5.4.2 Talent Management Architectures and The Four Value Processes**

#### **5.4.2.1 Value Creation – How TM architectures may enable the creation of value**

The findings showed that the interviewees believed that people are a critical source of value creation, as is the role of TM in that it enables the creation of value. Across all the organisations, strategic actors believed that to create value, the starting point is to acquire and identify talent.

They believed that TM architectures may contribute to value creation if they enable organisations to understand what their talent needs are (i.e. what types of talent and capabilities they might need for the future) and go about acquiring those talent (externally) and identifying them (internally). Since value is created through people, they emphasised the role of TM in ensuring that the organisation is full of talent who are critical to value creation (i.e. people who possess the skills, knowledge and expertise required by the organisation to create value). This highlights the importance of being able to differentiate between employees and to identify those who can execute and implement an organisation's value-creating strategies.

The quotes below illustrate how strategic actors describe in their own words the role of TM architectures in value creation. The first is from the Head of Talent Management, ME&A in Organisation Y, and the second from the Regional Consulting Director, Sub-Saharan Africa in Organisation V.

*“So, in terms of value creation, I think that talent management is the process that should identify who are the persons, the individuals that have the highest capabilities and potential to lead this value-creation process, because those are in the people who have developed it or have their own characteristics that fit partially with our strategy and the value that we want to create for the organisation and for our customer organisation.”*

*“when it comes to talent management, for me it is about understanding what talent means in each of those segments. So, what is, what are the key attributes of your talent that will make people successful in value creation?”*

As illustrated here, the interviewees said that people create value, and so TM contributes to value creation when it enables organisations to understand what type of talent it needs to



successfully create value. This emphasises the importance of defining what constitutes talent (i.e. attributes, capabilities, abilities) before attempting to acquire such talent.

In the literature, many scholars have argued that human capital is a primary source of value creation due to employees' uniqueness, their ability to enhance productivity and execute and deliver on value-creating strategies (Pfeffer, 1994, Lepak and Snell, 2002, Peteraf, 2006, Pitelis, 2007, Kang et al., 2007, Felin and Hesterly, 2007). Furthermore, there are a number of arguments which suggest that value is created when organisations structure and alter their resources base by acquiring, accumulating, integrating and reconfiguring their resources to generate new value (Pisano, 1994, Grant, 1996a, Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000, Sirmon et al., 2007). From the findings, then, it can be seen that the views of strategic actors align with what has been debated and presented in the literature.

Other tentative themes (and by tentative, I mean themes which that emerged in one or more organisations) were related to the management and development of talent (i.e. upskilling them to create value). When strategic actors were probed and asked to elaborate on these insights, however, they did not provide enough evidence to explain why they thought these TM practices contributed to value creation. This can be attributed to them trying to view TM broadly, and not breaking it down into specific practices, or in other words looking at TM as a whole as an enabler of value creation. Given that these tentative themes were not prominent in the data, I was unable to develop any explanations or conclusions about how these might contribute to value creation.

#### 5.4.2.2 Value Capture – How TM architectures may enable the capture of value

Although they initially struggled to differentiate between value capture and value creation, when interviewees began to think about each process in relation to TM, they did manage to distinguish between them. This was attributed to the fact that they viewed talent as a critical source of value creation (due to the skills, knowledge and expertise of employees which contribute to the creation of value). Accordingly, they suggested that the role of TM architectures is to enable their organisations to capture the value of their valuable talent resources and capitalise on their potential. Although it might happen in different ways, this was mostly related to the extraction of talents' knowledge and expertise and transferring it elsewhere in the organisation. For example, this process could be enabled if organisations are able to develop mechanisms for extracting the knowledge and expertise of talent, which might take the form of assigning talent to critical projects, assignments or challenging problems so that they can utilise their knowledge and expertise to create value for the organisation while at the same time transferring their knowledge to other team members. It is about making sure that the right talent are in the right job at the right time and are sharing and utilising their knowledge and expertise to create value. Reflecting on earlier findings, the strategic actors indicated that although a lot of time and effort goes into the acquisition and identification of talent (high potentials), their organisations do not necessarily capitalise on the potential of such talent. Accordingly, if TM architectures are to add value to organisations, it is necessary to capitalise on the potential, knowledge and expertise of talent.

This was explained succinctly by the Head of Advice, AME in Organisation V and the Business Intelligence Lead, Israel, in Organisation X:

*“So, for value capture specifically what we look at doing is taking a lot of that knowledge and expertise out of people’s heads and transfer it where it is needed ...”*

*“I think what comes to mind on this one, is a system where we can move knowledge laterally, so, for example, I don’t want critical knowledge in a specific area that creates value for me to sit in the head of one person no matter how much of top talent he is, I want to create some redundancy in my system. So, I need to have processes in place that can also move knowledge and create opportunities for people to move ...”*

One argument frequently encountered in the literature is that value capture is “a function of a bargaining process” (Bowman and Swart, 2007, p. 492) between value creators and value capturers. During the discussion, I introduced interviewees to the concept of ‘bargaining power’ to get a sense of whether they agreed with the ideas behind it, but despite its popularity in academic circles, in practice, strategic actors rejected the idea of weakening the bargaining power of talent in its entirety. When probed in an attempt to understand why, they indicated that organisations attract and hire talent for their knowledge and expertise, and instead of investing time and effort to make them dependent on the organisation with the aim of weakening their bargaining powers, the organisation should implement strategies which enable it to capitalise on the potential of such talent.

This is illustrated in the quote below from the Head of HR Commercial, MEA in Organisation X:

*“because you wouldn’t necessarily want to weaken their bargaining power, why would you want to do that as an organisation?... I actually like the idea of an employee being so skilled that anybody would want to grab them at any time, and I would actually invest in*

*them, even more, to become even more skilled. But yeah, they become even more valuable to the market, but still having that genuine connection with the company. We should think of ways to get the best out of people and benefit from the knowledge they have and not weaken their bargaining powers.”*

Capitalising on talent potential was mostly described in relation to developing internal systems to capture the knowledge and expertise of talent and transfer it to other parts of the organisation. This in their view would enable their organisations to leverage the potential of talent. The findings from this study align mostly with the proponents of knowledge management who suggest that individuals are the primary locus of knowledge (Simon, 1991, Grant, 1996b), and thus that managing the knowledge of talent is critical to sustained competitive advantage and value creation (Nonaka 1991, Grant, 1993, Spender, 1996).

#### **5.4.2.3 Value Leverage – How TM architectures may enable the leverage of value**

As indicated earlier, the concept of ‘value leverage’ appeared to be a new concept to the interviewees. From the findings, I felt that at first, because they realised that value creation is a continuous process, they were not immediately able to relate to value leverage. In their view, their organisations were already leveraging value by ensuring the continuous creation of value and so they were not sure how value leverage was different from value creation. However, although this was the initial reaction to value leverage, i.e. when they were asked to reflect on how TM may enable value leverage, they talked about the enablement of a continuous learning process in which talent can learn anywhere and at any time, i.e. the idea that it is critical to keep talent in learning mode so they can learn new skills and therefore acquire new knowledge

and extend their capabilities. These ideas align with the principles of creating learning organisations (Senge and Stubrich, 1993).

This was explained articulately in the quote below from the Delivery Manager (Lead), Emerging Markets in Organisation Z:

*“It is all about learning, so again, learning for me is more about a continuous process, you know, you need to keep them learning. The world is changing and what they know today might be irrelevant tomorrow, so how can we enable learning in our organisation?”*

Similar debates in the dynamic capabilities literature (Teece and Pisano, 1994, Helfat, 2007) describe value leverage as a process which involves the reconfiguration and modification of the organisation's resource base, and this is mostly achieved by extending the capabilities of resources and deploying them across the organisation.

The only other tentative view detected in the findings was related to succession planning and enabling the organisation to have a pipeline of successors for future critical roles. The relationship between value leverage and succession planning was explained in relation to ensuring that the organisation has a pipeline of valuable talent resources which can continue creating value and thus leverage the organisation's value creation capabilities. Once again, this was a very weak theme (mentioned by two actors) in the findings, and I was unable to develop any conclusions from it.

#### **5.4.2.4 Value Protection - How TM architectures may enable the protection of value**

The process of value protection was perhaps the easiest for the interviewees to relate to. Their immediate reaction to value protection was that it was mostly about retention. Given the

shortage of highly skilled employees (i.e. those who possess the requisite knowledge, skills and expertise) and the increased competition to attract and acquire talent, the interviewees, recognised that the retention of top talent is a primary concern for their organisations and that it is critical for organisations to invest extensively in retaining their most valuable talent and preventing them from being lost to competitors. While isolating mechanisms (Rumelt, 1984) is not a concept which is generally familiar in practice, the strategic actors saw retention as a protective mechanism for preventing talent from being lost. Furthermore, whilst earlier in the interviews (before the concept of value was discussed), the interviewees, referred mainly to talent development and career management as retention mechanisms, when they started thinking about the value of TM architectures they went beyond such ideas and strongly emphasised the need to understand what motivates talent, what engages them and makes them want to stay, and the necessity of making every effort to create an environment (i.e. culture) which enables the retention of talent. This should include developing targeted retention programmes (Cappelli, 2000) which go beyond the traditional retention mechanisms and include specific strategies which appeal to top talent and increase their desire not only to stay with the organisation but also to contribute to the organisation and add value.

This was best explained by the Business Intelligence Lead, Israel in Organisation X:

*“I think when I talk about retaining talent, that is definitely one - I mean every strong employee that I’ve just lost probably also means that I have failed to protect some value because they also move with IP in their head, knowledge and some competitive knowledge that you know that our competitors may use against us, so that is definitely value protection activity. So, you know, how we can protect those talent and retain them? What*

*do we need to do that we are not doing today to retain them? We need a different targeted way.”*

Overall, the value model introduced in this research is thought to reflect on how in practice TM architectures are perceived to add value to organisations. Introducing the four value processes provoked a different dialogue and different ways of thinking about TM, which was evidenced in the responses given and in how strategic actors reacted to the concepts of ‘value’. Whilst it might not be common in practice, it generated interesting findings and insights, and moved strategic actors from the traditional way of thinking about TM to a more strategic perspective. In the next section, I provide more detail on how strategic actors perceived the model to be useful to the discourse of TM.

## 5.5 HOW THE USEFULNESS OF THE VALUE MODEL IS PERCEIVED IN PRACTICE

Before concluding the discussion of the interviews, it is important to pause and reflect on the model. I was particularly keen to understand whether this was a common or customary way of thinking about TM (i.e. in relation to value), and whether strategic actors perceived the model useful to TM or not. On this question, there was some evidence of contradictory views, specifically among the HR/Talent system designers, who believed that value drives most of the thinking behind their TM architectures, and that therefore this is perhaps not a new way of thinking. This point was articulated by the Head of Talent Management, MEA in Organisation Y:

*“I think that the core concept of talent management is based on value, because all the talent management processes and each activity in talent management is related to help the organisation have the right people in the right place and develop them to ensure that*

*value is created as well as a sustainable business results. So, everything is rotating around value, so yes, this is very common.”*

Nevertheless, the great majority stated that they had never thought about the relationship between ‘TM architectures’ and ‘value’, or more specifically about how TM architectures might contribute to value creation in their organisations. This was attributed to the fact that the language of ‘value’ was not in common use in these organisations, let alone the idea that concepts of ‘value’ should be related to TM. I realise that there might be different ways of thinking about TM and value, as well as other value processes which can be examined in relation to TM, but I would like to argue that the findings indicate that the concepts of ‘value’ and the value model provoked and generated a different dialogue among the strategic actors, and this was shown in the way their thinking evolved following the discussion of value and how they managed to articulate the meaning of TM in relation to the value it may add.

The findings showed that the strategic actors perceived the value model to be useful in a number of ways. For example, they thought it provided a structure and framework for evaluating the different parts of the TM strategy and ensuring its alignment with the organisation's goals and direction. They also saw it as a good mirror to reflect on how strategic the organisation's approach to TM is. They perceived the ideas of ‘value’ presented in the value model as tools which could help HR and talent practitioners to develop a more strategic lens when they are designing the organisation's TM architectures and when they are facilitating the discussion of TM in the organisation. It is important to think about talent resources and the value they add to organisations, and so having a framework which includes the different value processes that the organisation might engage in (consciously or unconsciously) was perceived



as a useful way of enabling the organisation to focus its efforts not only on the attraction and retention of talent, but also to take it to the next level and focus on exploiting the potential of talent and leveraging their capabilities.

This was best summarised in the quote below, which is from the Vice President, Sales, Marketing and Services Group, MEA in Organisation X:

*“Absolutely, I think the ideas behind your value model are critical to TM. I am not sure if our talent COE think about talent management in such a way, but I think if they are introduced to this model, they will be able to come up with processes that align to our strategy and add more value to our organisation ...”*

## 5.6 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study surfaced interesting insights about how TM is perceived by strategic actors in MNCs. First, they helped us realise that although academics are interested in conceptualising the term ‘talent management’, in practice, organisations and their actors are less concerned about having precise definitions to describe what they mean by TM. This is attributed to the commonly held belief of strategic actors that TM is just another HR process. Although this was the initial perception of what TM is, the findings show that once concepts of ‘value’ had been introduced into the discussion of TM, the perspectives and logics of the strategic actors were challenged, and they began to view TM as an enabler of value creation rather than just an HR process. Thinking in terms of ‘value’ revealed four strategic opportunities for TM to add value to organisations. These were, first, articulating and interpreting corporate and business strategies to identify and maximise the types of talent and capabilities needed by the organisation; second, capitalising on the potential of valuable talent and aligning this

potential to the generation of value; third, extending the capabilities of valuable talent to acquire and institutionalise new knowledge and skills; finally, creating a culture which enables the engagement and retention of talent so that they can continuously add value to the organisation.

The findings also showed that TM was perceived to include a set of practices such as the identification of talent, performance management, succession planning and talent retention. Whilst I was unable to detect any evidence which suggests that these practices could be deliberately bundled to form a TM system, it was clear that there were implicit assumptions that the outcome of implementing one practice impacts another. This was noted when strategic actors related the identification of high potential to performance management and how it is used in their organisations to predict future performance and indicate potential. It was also observed in relation to succession planning and how actors expected high potential talent to take on more critical and complex roles in the future. This in my view is problematic given the subjectivity which is observed around the way performance is measured and how potential is identified (i.e. the lack of clear criteria), which might lead to focusing TM efforts on people who are not really high performers or high potentials.

Nevertheless, the key principles underlying these practices were seen as the idea of differentiating and segmenting employees into pools of talent. It was clearly observed that whilst organisations advocate an inclusive approach to TM, when it comes to actual practice or application, their efforts are targeted at differentiating between employees and focusing largely

on those labelled high potentials. This, therefore, helps in understanding how TM may differ from traditional HR.

The value model was introduced to find out how strategic actors view TM architectures as enabling four value processes (value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection). The findings showed that the process of value creation was described in relation to enabling the organisation to understand what types of talent it needs by referring to corporate strategies and attracting, acquiring and accumulating these talents. On the other hand, to capture the value of talent, the strategic actors described value creation in relation to exploiting, decoding and transferring talents' knowledge, i.e. capitalising on their potential. The value leverage process was described in relation to enabling a process of continuous learning, and thus creating a learning organisation to extend the capabilities of talent. Finally, value protection was described in relation to developing targeted retention programmes which are focused on the needs and motives of a targeted group. Overall, the model was perceived as a useful way of thinking about TM, and whilst there might be other ways of introducing the discussion of value to TM, I argue that the four value processes resulted in surfacing interesting insights about how TM architectures may add value to organisations. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings in more detail.

## CHAPTER SIX – DISCUSSION

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses in more detail the findings of this study. The evidence discussed in this chapter addresses the two main research questions:

- in relation to the first question, I examine the basis on which strategic actors believe that the TM architectures (practices, processes, policies) implemented within their organisations may or may not, add value to their organisations, and if they do feel that TM architectures add value, then what sort of value they believe they add;
- in relation to the second question, I examine the value that TM architectures may add in relation to four value processes, i.e. value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection.

I have structured this chapter on the basis of these research questions to provide the reader with a logical presentation and discussion of the findings, and then discuss the different concepts I have introduced in the study. I open the chapter (in Section 6.2) by discussing the findings from the first research question. In this section, I reflect on the findings of how strategic actors think about TM (i.e. what talent management means to them and how it is defined in their organisations, if at all), and present the different TM practices implemented within the organisations which constitute their TM architectures. I conclude Section 6.2 with a discussion of the value of TM and how it is perceived and described by strategic actors.

I then move on (in Section 6.3) to address the second research question and elaborate further on the value of TM. I discuss how strategic actors perceive this value in relation to each of the four value processes introduced in Chapter 3 (Literature Review) – i.e. value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection. In Section 6.3 I also discuss the initial value propositions which I developed (derived from the literature) to guide this study. I treated these four research propositions as predictions of the most likely responses and explanations which can be inferred or reasoned from our current understanding of the literature. Now that the findings of the study have been presented, it is possible to revisit the original propositions. My goal here is to show how these propositions should be modified in the light of the empirical evidence presented in Chapter 5 (Empirical Findings) and discussed in this chapter. I then conclude the discussion of the value model (in Section 6.4). My goal is to present my own reflections on how strategic actors understood the model when first presented with it, and its usefulness in understanding how TM architectures may add value to organisations.

The second half of this chapter then examines and discusses two of the key research positions which have guided this research. In the literature review (Chapter 3), I adopted a strategy-as-practice research position which emphasises the importance of strategy practitioners (or in other words strategic actors) in making and conducting strategy (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). These are the actors involved in the construction and implementation of the TM practices in organisations, and these were divided into two groups for the research interviews, namely system designers and system implementers. In Chapter 3 (Literature Review), I argued that examining TM through the meanings that such strategic actors see as influencing the development of TM in their organisations, and the contextual rationales they draw upon in

attributing such meanings, is critical to addressing my research problem and developing a sound understanding of how TM architectures may add value to organisations. Therefore, in Section 6.5 I discuss this dichotomy of strategic actors (separated into system designers and system implementers). My goal is to explain how these actors perceived their role in influencing the design and implementation of TM in their organisations, and to discuss whether the use of a dichotomy of actors surfaced different contributions and views from the two groups.

I then discuss (in Section 6.6) the notion of TM 'architecture', a notion I borrowed from the human capital literature and applied to TM (Huselid, 1995, Lepak and Snell, 1999, Lepak and Snell, 2002, Becker and Huselid, 2006). My goal is to explain how organisations and their strategic actors think about their TM architectures and the ways in which its practices are interrelated, and whether these practices were consciously designed to complement each other as part of a TM architecture. I also explain how the practices of a TM architecture are positioned differently from traditional HR practices.

This brings me to the penultimate section in the chapter (Section 6.7), where I conclude by discussing how TM may be considered to be different from traditional HR management, and the need to make this distinction if academics wish to establish TM as a separate field of practice.

## **6.2 HOW DO STRATEGIC ACTORS THINK ABOUT THE VALUE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT?**

It should be remembered that in the literature review I noted that since becoming a mainstream topic in the mid-1990s, TM has quickly gained the interest of both scholars and human

resources professionals (Sparrow et al., 2014b, Cascio and Boudreau, 2016, Collings et al., 2017, McDonnell et al., 2017). I argued that since then, a dominant theme in academic research publications on this topic has focused mainly on the conceptualisation of the term 'talent management', and that there has been considerable variation in the way TM is defined (Lewis and Heckman, 2006, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, Tarique and Schuler, 2010, Scullion and Collings, 2011, McDonnell, 2011, Vaiman et al., 2012, Cappelli and Keller, 2014). In Chapter 2 (Literature Review), I presented the debates surrounding this issue and the definitions suggested for the terms 'talent' and 'talent management'. However, despite this academic focus and interest in defining 'talent management', the findings of this study indicate that in practice organisations do not invest much time or effort in defining what TM means to them. Accordingly, in seeking to understand how TM architectures may add value to multinational companies, the research must acknowledge the observed reality that strategic actors struggle to interpret and articulate what TM means in their organisations.

The findings showed that:

1. through the actions of the strategic actors, organisations implement TM without defining its scope and boundaries, and
2. how they did not seem disturbed or overly concerned by the absence of a formal definition of TM.

The absence of strategic thinking around TM was attributed to the temptation for these organisations and their strategic actors to approach TM pragmatically, guided by the assumption that it is just another HR practice (Olsen, 2000, Byham, 2001, Chohanec and

Newstrom, 2011). It is no surprise that strategic actors perceive TM as another term to describe the HR function – over the years HR has been given a number of labels and identities (e.g. personnel management, human resources management, human capital management) that have contributed to this common assumption.

The findings indicated that TM was perceived to include fundamentally the same activities as HR: for example, the recruitment, selection, development and retention of people. This, therefore, poses a risk of TM being seen just as an umbrella term for an undefined bundle of practices (Alziari, 2017) which, at their core, are no different from traditional HR practices. These findings (though note some of my later discussion) align with the views of a small yet growing number of researchers who are challenging the distinctiveness of TM as a field in its own right, and who argue that since both TM and HR involve similar functional areas then the distinction does not mean anything new for HR academics or professionals (Iles et al., 2010, Preece et al., 2011, Jones et al., 2012). This struggle to contextualise and describe the meaning of TM is also reflected in the lack of clarity in organisations and their practitioners about what the objective and intended outcome of their TM systems is or should be (Makram et al., 2017). Given this lack of clarity, the challenge is to identify:

- what really constitutes a TM system;
- whether it is just another amongst many HR practices; or
- whether there are bundles of practices which organisations invest in and which differentiate their TM from their traditional HR practices.



### 6.2.1 The Practices of Talent Management

As I explained in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), the literature review identified a number of gaps in the current TM which require academic attention. One of these gaps is that there is not enough empirical research examining *actual* talent systems and bundles of practices, and as a result, there is a serious gap in academic knowledge regarding how organisations manage their talented employees and how they implement their TM practices (McDonnell et al., 2017). Accordingly, there is no agreement in the literature about the exact bundles of practices which constitute a TM system (Sparrow et al., 2014b). The findings of this study show that organisations engage in a number of core or common practices as part of their TM systems, such as the identification of talent, performance management, succession planning, talent development and talent retention. I discuss these core practices to illustrate how (in the minds of strategic actors) they may be used in combination to have an impact on the TM systems.

While there was not enough evidence to suggest that these practices were deliberately selected and bundled to form an organisation's talent system or talent architecture, it was very clear that *the outcome of implementing one practice informs another*. In Chapter 2 (Literature Review), when I introduced the notion of TM 'architecture', I noted that it is the interrelatedness and systematic nature of the system (the practices and process that form an architecture) which make the architecture inimitable. This interrelatedness provides a strategic lever for organisations by acting as the basis for acquiring, motivating and developing its intellectual assets (talented employees). So although a TM architecture might not exist by design, *it might exist by default* through the mutually influencing nature of key TM practices.

I now discuss the mutually informing relationship which seems to exist between three core practices:

- Performance management
- Succession planning, and
- Talent Development.

I begin with performance management. This was identified as one of the critical processes in a TM system by the vast majority of organisations. In these organisations, past and current performance was relied upon to predict the future performance of employees in more complex roles. Thus, performance was perceived as an indicator of potential (even though in theory the two are supposed to be separate judgements). So, although performance management is designed mainly to differentiate between poor and high performers, there was also a common expectation that the outcome of the performance management process is critical to support strategic actors in making decisions about who should be flagged up as a high potential and who should not. In these organisations, strategic actors believed that there was a need for hard evidence (and in their minds, this was performance outcomes) to support any discussion of employees' potential and future progression. Performance management was thus used as another (and very dominant) data point to support any talent identification processes. While in practice this might seem to be a fair expectation, there is, of course, no evidence in the literature to suggest that past performance *is* an indicator of potential – in fact the opposite is suggested, i.e. there is agreement in the literature that past or current performance does *not* always guarantee effective performance in future complex and broader roles (Silzer and Church, 2010), and hence might not be an accurate indicator of potential. Therefore, it is

important for organisations to realise that, with their current performance assessment practices being limited to judging talent on the basis of past behaviour and performance rather than focusing on their potential to be groomed and nurtured for the future, there is a risk of investing in and focusing their TM efforts on employees who might not have the potential to take on more complex responsibilities.

So how does the outcome of implementing one practice impact another? First, I argue that this dependency on performance management clearly might have a negative impact on the effectiveness of how TM is implemented in organisations. The reason is that there are many factors which impact employees' performance – for example, the work environment, their levels of motivation and engagement, their relationship with their line managers, them being in the right job, and many more. Therefore, I would argue that relying on performance management to predict future performance and potential might result in the risk of missing out those employees who have the potential to grow, but whose performance is impacted by factors outside their control, and instead focusing on other employees who might or might not have the potential, but who due to other factors (e.g. having a good relationship with their line manager) have been identified as high performers. This subsequently compromises the effectiveness of TM practices if those identified as high performers fail when they take on more complex responsibilities, thus leading the organisation to assume that their TM practices (i.e. their investment in the development and retention of high potentials) are not enabling them to effectively manage their high potential talent, when in reality it is their over-reliance on performance management which has resulted in such outcomes.

Therefore, there is an opportunity for further academic research to examine the relationship between performance management and TM, and to explore how the outcomes of performance management can be used by organisations to inform their TM investments. It should be remembered that in Chapter 2 (Literature Review) I made the point that the debates around HPWS argue that it is the *combination of practices* into a bundle, rather than individual practices, which shape the pattern of interactions between and among managers and talent, suggesting that what is required is investment in an aggregated set of HR practices rather than in individual (isolated) HR practices (Becker and Huselid, 1998). This debate also led to the conclusion that the inclusion of one practice necessitates the inclusion of other practices (Zacharatos et al., 2005), and that it is not the practices themselves which produce competitive advantage, but rather the human capital developed by these systems. The effectiveness of an architecture should be judged by the collective set of “systems, practices, competencies, and employee performance behaviours that reflect the development and management of the firm’s strategic human capital” (Becker and Huselid, 2006, p. 899). Therefore, the question that we must answer revolves around whether the dominance given to performance management within a TM architecture leads to good or bad outcomes. We assume it must produce poorer outcomes because it ignores those high potential but are currently poor performers. But does the addition of potential (however defined) as a criterion to existing high performance really predict future performance? Perhaps not, at least in the mind of strategic actors.

Second, I argue that the design of performance management and its practices might impact the design of TM practices. For example, the fact that many MNCs are abandoning the traditional annual appraisal cycle in favour of instant performance feedback (Cappelli and Tavis, 2016)

might impact the practices of TM more fundamentally than system designers currently assume, leading them to make new choices and different decisions regarding the design and implementation of their talent systems. Therefore, there is a need for academics to pose another big question: how might changes in the practices of performance management (such as a shift to continuous feedback) impact the practices of TM?

With organisations perceiving performance to be a predictor of potential, it is important to understand how they define 'potential' and how they differentiate 'high potential individuals' from others. As with the term 'talent management', it became clear during the discussions I had with interviewees (across all five organisations) that the term 'potential' was loosely defined and there was a clear absence of a formal definition and of indicators which organisations used to differentiate their high potential employees from other employees. This definitional problem was evidenced in the many different views they voiced of what potential is: for some, potential was the ability to grow, while for others it was having the right skills, capabilities and motivations. Regardless of how 'potential' is defined, the one common observation was that in these organisations, 'high potentials' are perceived to be a select group of high performers who can grow sufficiently to perform in a leadership role, two levels higher than their current role, and therefore may take on more complex assignments and responsibilities. The problem with this view is that it does not provide a specific explanation of the dimensions of potential (e.g. skills, cognitive abilities, behaviours, expertise) which these organisations look for to decide whether someone is a high potential or not and thus whether they can perform in higher roles or not. Based on the findings, I argue that the identification of high potentials is a subjective process that is very dependent on how strategic actors perceive

potential, instead of being governed by a shared, objective view of potential.

This problem is noted by Fernández-Aráoz, Graysberg and Nohria (2011): "We are surprised to discover how many companies launch high-potential programs without first clearly establishing what they mean by "potential" (p. 78). Similarly, Sparrow, Hird and Balain (2011) observed from their study of talent management practice that "...the very senior non-HR managers admitted they were puzzled by what their particular organisation meant by "Potential". It was quite common for respondents in our interview process to say something on the lines of "I understand what we mean by Performance, but Potential and its meaning is another issue" (p. 30). In part, this was because "...gaining agreement on what is meant by "Potential" has been fraught with difficulty with no commonly agreed definition emerging" (p. 30). Sparrow, Scullion and Tarique (2014c) went on to argue that this problem of using models of "potential" which are often poorly defined, or implicit but variably applied, was that "...occupational psychologists, search consultants and human resource development consultants all play a major role...each provider brings their own models of potential, leadership and human capability, and thinks about questions of potential, talent deployment, career advancement and career derailment with different models. So, the assessment and development models – the competency systems used to capture the nature of human capital – can be a product of historical and professional practice" (p. 18). Such subjectivity in my view does not then come as a surprise.

In Chapter 2 (Literature Review), I explained how the literature includes a wide spectrum of views and definitions of potential, which does not help or guide practice and therefore

increases the subjectivity surrounding what potential really is. Scholars have been increasingly interested in defining what potential is (Silzer and Church, 2010, Ready et al., 2010, Tansley, 2011, Sparrow et al., 2011), taking into account different factors such as cognitive abilities, social and political abilities, growth and learning agility, motivation, ambition and drive. Organisations have spent a lot of time and resources on identifying talent, and most of this involves determining what types of talent already exist in the organisation and which of them have the potential to grow and contribute to value creation. For example, Silzer and Church (2009) define potential as cognitive and personality abilities, learning and motivation abilities, and leadership and technical skills. Others define potential in relation to analytical abilities, knowledge and insights, social abilities, political abilities, creative abilities and learning abilities (Silzer and Church, 2010, Tansley, 2011, Meyers et al., 2013). There are also debates on whether potential is innate, which means born and not made (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013), or an outcome of deliberate practice and development (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006). The question of 'what is potential' or 'what is a 'high potential'' is hotly debated in the TM profession and thus as a consequence, there are many models of potential, which makes it rather difficult for organisations to select a model to guide them in identifying high potentials (Church, 2014). Such a wide spectrum of perspectives in both the academic research and in practice is in my view another challenge to the development of the field of TM.

If the definition of 'potential' is not clear and organisations are not investing in an objective talent identification process, then once again they are opening themselves to the risk of investing their TM efforts in those individuals who might not possess the potential to grow. Given the subjectivity around performance, the perception that it is an indicator of potential

and the lack of clarity around what potential means, it is imperative for organisations to think carefully about the tools they use to assess and identify their high potentials. While much has been written in the area of executives and talent assessment, there are comparatively few empirical studies which focus on the assessment of high potentials, and thus little guidance is available for practitioners (Church and Rotolo, 2013, Church et al., 2015). This gap in the literature makes it more difficult for organisations to appropriately and objectively differentiate between their employees and identify high potentials.

Therefore, there remains a need for academics to invest more effort in understanding how organisations can best identify their talent, providing not only a definition of potential but also a detailed approach to talent identification which is perhaps not dependent on performance. This lack of knowledge and understanding is a hindrance to the development of the TM field. Many questions remain unanswered and call for research to guide practice. Although it is not the intention of this study to address this gap, one outcome will hopefully be to reinforce the point that our future research as TM academics will need to pay attention to and help address some of these gaps.

Another key practice for the organisations studied, and their TM was succession planning. In the organisations studied, succession planning was observed to be a process which was critical to the management of high potential talent as well as to preparing for the future by building a pipeline of future leaders. In its simplistic form, succession planning was perceived as the process whereby organisations identify future leaders who have the potential to be developed and assume responsibility for critical positions. This is where I observed a direct link between



talent identification and succession planning - where it is expected that those who are identified as high potentials are natural successors to critical leadership positions. Although succession planning was mostly focused on leadership potential, it was interesting but not surprising to find that the organisations studied were not necessarily precise about what they mean by 'leadership potential'.

While it was not within the scope of this research to examine how effective succession planning is in these organisations, the findings indicated that there were genuine concerns about the investments that go into identifying high (leadership) potentials for critical positions and the reality of filling these positions from a pre-defined list of successors and high (leadership) potentials. More specifically, the concerns expressed by the interviewees were about how their organisations struggle to find suitable internal successors to fill these critical roles, despite investing in identifying and establishing a list of possible successors who were assumed to have the leadership potential required to enable them to take on more complex roles. It is important to note that although understanding specifically what 'leadership potential' is has been of interest to practitioners for years, it has not received the level of attention it requires in the academic literature (Church and Silzer, 2013). This makes it even more difficult for organisations to think about future leaders and how they can build a pipeline of high (leadership) potentials to take on critical positions in the future. At the same time, my research reinforces the view that all of these concepts are 'subjective', which affects the processes based on them. The TM literature, therefore, needs to pay more attention to this complexity rather than assuming that TM architectures employ objective criteria and that employees are therefore assessed in a reliable way.

Given this lack of clarity, the findings showed that although organisations dedicate a lot of effort and resources to differentiating between their employees and identifying a pipeline of leaders, they do not use any sophisticated assessment tools to guide this critical process. This goes back to their heavy reliance on performance as an indicator of potential and subsequently a good way of identifying possible successors to leadership positions. Once again, I would argue that the heavy reliance on performance exposes organisations to the risk of making decisions based on past performance rather than on potential, let alone leadership potential. Perhaps this reliance is because what employees deliver can be seen as hard, solid evidence, as compared to potential, which is very much an unknown and requires the ability to predict how a particular employee might perform in a few years' time.

In thinking about 'potential', there is a need to recognise that it is a multidimensional construct which therefore requires a multi-trait and a multi-method approach to measure and identify it (Silzer and Church, 2009, Church and Rotolo, 2013). Accordingly, for the implementation of succession planning and the identification of potential to be successful, I argue that organisations need to determine the dimensions of potential and the indicators that they see as critical to leadership positions. These dimensions might include sets of cognitive, personality, learning, motivation, initiative and drive abilities and characteristics. Regardless of the combination of these dimensions, there is also a need to identify a set of reliable multi-dimensional assessment tools to enable the objective identification and prediction of leadership potential. This is an important step for any future development and succession planning efforts made by organisations. Having said that, I would also argue that TM practitioners might face a dilemma, in that they need to develop better-defined models of

potential, but at the same time, they may struggle to get line managers and non-technical people to use such models. Therefore, there is an opportunity for more academic research to examine how best line managers may use such models to guide and inform their decisions.

The final TM practice which emerged in the findings was related to how these organisations invested in the development of their high potential talent. While development was perceived to be available for all employees regardless of whether they were high potentials or not, it was clear that in these organisations more deliberate investments were targeted at a select group of high potentials. These investments ranged from dedicated high potential programmes, executive development programmes, career advancement opportunities and access to professional networks. In these organisations, the development of high potentials (as well as others) was perceived to be a means of attracting and retaining staff. The interviewees believed that talent are most likely attracted to organisations known for offering careers rather than just jobs, and are more likely to stay with organisations which show them that they really care about their career aspirations and progression. The development opportunities offered by these organisations outweighed the need or desire to overly compensate high potentials, as it was believed that the true compensation lay in the investment made by the organisation in developing and growing such talent. Thus, although the most popular retention mechanism is 'compensation' (Cappelli, 2000), in the organisations studied, compensation was the least-discussed tool used for retaining high potentials.

## 6.2.2 What is the Value of Talent Management?

To understand whether strategic actors perceive TM to add value to their organisations or not and to understand *how* they describe such value, it was important to first initiate a discussion about the concept of 'value'. The objective of this discussion was to encourage interviewees to reflect on the meaning of 'value' (i.e. what is value) and how value is created in their organisations, and to ensure that there were similar understandings of what the discussion was to be about across the interviewees before then interpreting what their understanding meant for the study of TM.

This provided a good segue (i.e. an uninterrupted transition from one role, state or condition to another) for the following discussion of the value of TM, and provoked what I felt were interesting insights from the practitioners and a clearer perspective which could also help to develop our academic understanding of what TM is. As I argued in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), the conceptualisation of the term 'talent management' has been a subject of interest to academics for many years (Ashton and Morton, 2005, Lewis and Heckman, 2006, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, Tarique and Schuler, 2010, Nijs et al., 2014, Collings et al., 2011, McDonnell et al., 2017). Yet despite this, the debate has not really explored TM from a value perspective before. This is where I see this research as contributing to our understanding and the development of the field, by providing key insights into how thinking about the concepts of 'value' may contribute to a better understanding of the meaning of 'talent management', hopefully in a way which helps to resolve the current definitional problem in TM.

Reflecting on the findings from this study, one of the key observations was how rarely the language of value was used in organisations. While the organisations and their actors believe that they exist to create value, they perhaps are less fussy about using the term value in their day-to-day life, and because it was not a familiar term to many, I had to intervene to guide the interviewees towards thinking about business value and how their organisations create value.

So, what is value? In Chapter 3 (Literature Review), I highlighted the fact that in the literature on value and value creation (Bowman and Ambrosini, 2000, Lepak et al., 2007) there seems to be an awareness that the meaning of value is subjective and that it is predominately dependant on the perceived worth of a product or a service in the eyes of the beholders and their willingness to exchange monetary amounts for such products or services, so accordingly value means different things to different groups (Bowman and Ambrosini, 2010). The findings of this study showed that when asked to describe value, the strategic actors reflected on two key concepts, which were:

1. the targets of value (i.e. who is value created for), and
2. the sources of value (i.e. who creates value) (Lepak et al., 2007).

In attempting to specify the targets of value, it is important to note that since these organisations were mostly sales and services organisations, the targets of value by default were the consumers and users of their goods and services. Not surprisingly, therefore, value was mostly described by the actors as the ability to generate revenue and profit in exchange for the goods and services that these organisations create and make available in the market. On the other hand, the sources of value creation were recognised as the bundle of resources these

organisations have, for example, their R&D capabilities, knowledge of markets and consumer behaviour, innovation, manufacturing facilities, technology and human capital. In these organisations, human capital was perceived to be the most valuable resource they had. It is through their human capital that these organisations can create and develop new products that meet customers' expectations, it is through them that they can innovate and come up with new ideas, and it is through them that they can sell and exchange their products and services in the market. This confirms my earlier assumptions in Chapter 3 (Literature Review), where I suggested that the sources of value creation in TM are the organisation's 'valuable talent'.

In line with what has been argued in the literature by researchers such as Barney (1991), in practice, organisations believe that their resources are valuable when they enable them to create business value and move ahead of the competition. This takes me back to my earlier assumption in Chapter 3 (Literature Review), where I suggested that the meaning of 'value' is very much associated with the ability of an organisation to orchestrate and leverage its valuable resources in ways which enable them to develop products and services which meet customers' needs and subsequently generate revenue and profit. This orchestration of valuable resources is only possible if organisations orchestrate the different talent practices (which constitute their TM 'architecture') in ways which enable them to create and capture business value.

Recognising that human capital is a valuable resource which is critical to value creation provided a natural segue to think about the value of TM and thus address the first research question: 'do TM architectures add value to organisations, and if so, in what way?' Before discussing the responses to this question, I would like to make a key observation – when first asked to define

what TM is, the strategic actors seemed somewhat unclear about what TM means in their organisations, and found it difficult to articulate their own understanding of TM. However, when the concepts of 'value' and 'value creation' were brought into the discussion and the strategic actors had been given the opportunity to think and reflect on value and how it is created in their organisations, their views clearly shifted from seeing TM as just another HR process to seeing it more as a strategic enabler of value creation. This suggests that they were open to the ideas of 'value' and to how these may relate to TM, and I would, therefore, argue that introducing new concepts (such as value) to the TM discourse contributes to a better understanding of the meaning of TM.

This suggests that the actors were clearly open to the externally-invoked concepts which I introduced and were able to apply it to TM. The distinctions I provided for them is underpinned by two key ideas:

1. in these organisations, human capital was perceived as a valuable resource which is critical to value creation and the achievement of competitive advantage, and
2. the value of TM derives from its focus on managing the firm's valuable resources – i.e. its human capital.

Hence, from the data I was able to identify four key factors mentioned by strategic actors in all five organisations to describe the value of TM:

- a) TM adds value when it enables organisations to translate their corporate and business strategies into the types of talent and capabilities they need to enable them to create value and achieve sustained competitive advantage,

- b) TM adds value when it enables organisations to capitalise on and leverage the potential of their talent, so they contribute to value creation,
- c) TM adds value when it enables organisations to extend their talent capabilities by acquiring and institutionalising new knowledge, and finally
- d) TM enables organisations to develop the right culture to nurture, develop and grow their talent.

This shift in views brought to the surface the multidimensional strategic nature of the value that TM architectures may add to organisations. I will now elaborate on the four points about value made by the strategic actors.

- a) The first way in which TM delivers value is by: *‘enabling organisations to translate the corporate and business strategies into the types of talent and capabilities needed to enable the creation of value and the sustainability of competitive advantage’*. This indicates that the scope of TM extends beyond the attraction and identification of talent to a more deliberate and proactive approach to identifying the types of talent needed to implement the organisation's strategy and ensure value creation. The underlying view is that TM should be able to translate a corporate strategy into a talent strategy which subsequently informs how organisations might go about attracting, acquiring and identifying the types of talent they need the most. And while some might see this as common sense, there is not enough evidence (at least not from the findings in this study) to suggest that when thinking about their TM strategy organisations are taking into consideration their business strategy and translating it into a talent strategy.



- b) The second way in which TM delivers value is by *'enabling organisations to capitalise on and leverage the potential of their talent so that they contribute to value creation'*. This recognises that identifying and acquiring the right talent is perhaps not enough. Organisations spend a lot of time and effort on attracting and acquiring talent, but there is also a need to enable these organisations to capitalise on the potential (skills, knowledge, expertise) of talent and utilise these in ways which enable the company to create value. The findings indicated that strategic actors were mostly concerned about the investment that goes into identifying high potential talent, with little attention given to exploiting and capitalising on this potential. In the interviewees' views, their organisations need to think more smartly on how they should manage high potential talent to get the best out of them and utilise their potential where and when needed.
- c) The third way in which TM delivers value is by *'enabling organisations to extend their talent capabilities by acquiring and institutionalising new knowledge'*. This suggests that TM is no longer concerned with traditional forms of training and development which might focus mainly on developing talent for a specific task at a given point of time, but instead is concerned with enabling the continuous learning and unlearning of talent at all times and ensuring that their capabilities are deliberately extended and aligned to the strategic direction of the organisation. The findings indicated that strategic actors believed that the world is changing fast, and that new skills and capabilities are required to enable organisations to compete and succeed in a very dynamic environment. There is, therefore, a need to treat learning as a continuous process, where talent are always in learning mode so that their skills and capabilities remain relevant.

- d) Finally, the last way in which TM delivers value is by *'enabling organisations to develop the right culture to nurture, develop and grow their talent'*. This suggests that TM is a custodian of the corporate culture and an enabler of an environment where talent is nurtured. The strategic actors indicated that there is a correlation between the corporate culture and TM, so the management and development of talent should be embedded in the DNA of the organisation.

Based on how interviewees described the value delivered by TM, it is clear that when concepts of 'value' were brought into the discussion of TM, they served as a trigger which enabled them to adopt a more critical form of thinking and to articulate their interpretation of value in the context of both business outcomes and TM. It is important to note that the earlier discussion had not generated such insights or dialogue about TM, and it was only the discussion of value which provided evidence that practitioners could engage in more critical and strategic thinking about TM. It may seem rather pointless to try to join up one diffused bundle of ideas (i.e. about the basic processes which constitute TM) with another (i.e. about the nature of value) in order to understand how TM architectures may add value to organisations. However, this showed that the discussion of value was able to trigger interesting insights from the strategic actors and to provoke new ways of thinking about TM. It also provided new perspectives on the definitional problem the field is currently facing. I therefore believe that the field of TM has now reached an intersection point where its development is very much dependent on academics being able to escape the confines of the traditional HR literature and extend their thinking to borrow ideas and theories from other well-developed domains such as strategic management, knowledge management and dynamic capabilities to help develop the field further.

### 6.3 HOW MAY TALENT MANAGEMENT ADD VALUE TO THE FOUR VALUE PROCESSES? MODELS OF VALUE

Whilst there is no doubt that the four processes used to describe the value of TM provide a good foundation for understanding how TM architectures may add value to organisations, it is the subsequent discussion of value models which led to new avenues of discovery and enriched insights.

In this section, I provide a detailed discussion of how TM architectures were perceived to add value against the proposed value model and its four value processes (value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection). I then draw on the discussion of the findings to show, one by one, why and how the initial value propositions evolved from the way they were initially presented. I first present the original propositions (as in Chapter 3 – Literature Review), and then explain how the findings contributed to a revision of these. I then conclude each section with revised versions of the propositions in the light of the findings. Before I do this, it is important to note that although the strategic actors themselves might not have put forward arguments about, or made distinctions between, the four value processes (without being directed to think about value in such a way), their involvement with TM (i.e. their own talent-as-practice) nonetheless seemed to equip them to think more strategically about the value of TM.

### 6.3.1 How May Talent Management Architectures Enable the Creation of Value?

Original RP1: *“value is created when a firm’s TM architectures enable it to attract, acquire, and accumulate valuable and unique talent resources.”*

In the first proposition, I suggested that TM architectures may contribute to value creation if they enable organisations to attract and acquire the talent (human capital) resources they need in order to create value. In Chapter 3 (Literature Review), I presented several scholarly debates (from the non-HR literature) on how value is created in organisations (Teece et al., 1997, Helfat, 2007, Sirmon et al., 2007, Ambrosini et al., 2009) as well as on how the process of value creation was described in the strategic HRM literature (Schuler and Jackson, 1987, Lado and Wilson, 1994, Macduffie, 1995, Huselid, 1995, Boxall, 2012). These academic debates contributed to the development of this proposition.

The findings showed that organisations and their actors perceived human capital as a key contributor to value creation. Similarly, in the literature, there is an increasing number of scholars who suggest that human capital is the primary source of value creation and high returns (Barney, 1991, Peteraf, 1993, Teece et al., 1997, Felin and Hesterly, 2007). Strategic actors, therefore, believed that a pre-requisite for any successful TM architecture is that it should enable the organisation to attract, acquire and identify valuable talent. By valuable talent, they mean ‘high potentials’ - those who have the potential and capability to implement value creating strategies. Critical to this is the ability to define what a ‘valuable talent’ is, to begin with. As I pointed out in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), from the literature review, we learn that talent are perceived as valuable when they possess the capabilities, potential and motivation to contribute to value creation (Pitelis, 2009). Yet whilst this makes sense, as made

clear earlier in this chapter, defining who is a valuable talent (i.e. who is a high potential) is in practice not as easy as it may seem. In fact, the findings show that organisations and strategic actors go about identifying their most valuable talent and high potentials without necessarily having any clear criteria or definition to guide them.

Nonetheless, there were four key processes (discussed in the previous section) which were commonly perceived by all interviewees to contribute to the value of TM, – one of which has to do with the identification and acquisition of talent. That said, what raised the need to revise the original proposition (RP1) was the realisation of strategic actors that the value of TM architectures extends beyond just the identification and acquisition of talent to reflect a more strategic need, which is to help organisations recognise the types of talent they need to effectively and successfully implement their corporate and business strategies. This means that it is first necessary to translate these strategies into the types of talent who are critical for the creation of value, and then go about identifying and acquiring these talent. This shift in perspective brings to the surface the importance of thinking objectively about talent and clearly understanding which talent are needed and which are not. And whilst the essence of the original proposition (PR1) remains the same (i.e. the identification and acquisition of talent), the revised proposition brings to the fore the importance of understanding the ‘need for talent’ before engaging in any process of identification and acquisition. Taking into account the findings, I, therefore, revise the original RP1 as follows:

Revised RP1: *“value is created when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to translate its corporate and business strategies into types of talent and capabilities critical*

*to value creation, which subsequently enables the organisation to attract, acquire, and accumulate such talent.”*

### **6.3.2 How May Talent Management Architectures Enable the Capture of Value?**

Original RP2: *“value is captured when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to weaken the bargaining powers of its talent resources and capture their knowledge and expertise and transfer them to where they can be widely applied in the organisation.”*

In Chapter 3 (Literature Review), I referred to how the process of value capture was described in relation to ‘weakening the bargaining powers’ of value-creating resources (Pfeffer, 1995, Coff, 1999, Bowman and Ambrosini, 2000, Bowman and Swart, 2007). Based on this, in the second proposition, I suggested that one way to capture the value created by valuable talent is to weaken their bargaining powers and increase their dependency on their organisations, which could be achieved by capturing and transferring their knowledge and expertise to where it is most needed in the organisation. Before I discuss how the interviewees related to the concept of ‘bargaining powers’ and how they perceived TM architectures to enable the capture of value, I would like to mention an important observation: when the strategic actors were first introduced to the value model, they were unable to differentiate between value creation and value capture. However, when the concept of ‘value capture’ was introduced to the TM discussion this did not seem to be the case anymore. Instead, it seemed that the discussion of TM enabled the strategic actors to see that the two processes are different yet in many ways complement each other.

The following discussion illustrates how value capture was perceived and described differently when put in the TM context. In Chapter 3 (Literature Review), I noted that in the value literature, it is argued that the process of value capture is different from the process of value creation (Coff, 1999, Makadok and Coff, 2002). This is because of how on some occasions the creators of value fail to enjoy the value they have created – a process referred to as ‘value slippage’ (Lepak et al., 2007). Therefore, value capture is described as a bargaining process between the creators of value and the capturers of this value (Pfeffer, 1995, Bowman and Ambrosini, 2000). In such cases, from a talent or human capital perspective, Bowman and Swart (2007) argue that the bargaining powers of talent are dependent on how they perceive their role in the process of value creation. Thus, they will most likely exert strong bargaining powers if they believe that they possess advantageous attributes which are critical to value creation and that they have are free and can choose to either share their capabilities and knowledge with their organisations or not. On the other hand, it is unlikely that they would have any bargaining power if they believe that their ability to contribute to value creation is dependent on their organisations. Although this argument is popular in the academic field (Bowman and Ambrosini, 2010), in practice, the idea of ‘bargaining power’ (i.e. disempowering talent) was totally rejected by actors. The reason is that the strategic actors believed that when their organisations have put in so much effort to attract the best in the market, it does not make sense to then to disempower them in any way. Instead, the findings indicated that strategic actors perceived the process of value capture in relation to capitalising on the potential of talented human capital. Although this might happen in different ways, they commonly believed that it is mostly a process of extracting talents' knowledge and expertise and transferring these to other parts of

the organisation. This could take the form of being able to develop mechanisms which encourage the free exchange of knowledge and expertise between the organisation and its talent, and exploiting, decoding and translating the knowledge captured so that it can be applied more widely across the organisation (Sparrow and Makram, 2015).

This decoding of the knowledge of talent is critical to the process of value capture – given that talent is the primary locus of knowledge (Simon, 1991, Ambrosini and Bowman, 2001). Therefore, organisations need to effectively manage the flow of know-how and become good at generating, appropriating and exploiting the knowledge (Leadbeater and May, 2000, Fillion et al., 2015). Indeed, knowledge is critical to sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991), but managing knowledge is not a straightforward, easy task. Instead, it requires the development of specific organisational capabilities and systems (Peppard and Ward, 2004).

Before I conclude this section, and in response to the understandable position taken by the strategic actors in relation to the debates around weakening bargaining powers, I would like to discuss two opposing arguments. Firstly, it could be argued that the idea of weakening the bargaining powers of employees is not applicable to TM and it is thus in the interests of any organisation to recognise the power their talent have brought through their knowledge and expertise, and to invest in harnessing and enabling such powers. On the other hand, it may also be argued that capturing and transferring the knowledge and expertise of valuable talent might result in disempowering them, because doing this means that their unique expertise and knowledge are no longer retained by them but instead shared with others. Whatever the case, I recognise that there is a need for research to perhaps empirically examine the concepts of ‘knowledge management’ and its relationship to TM. That said, I argue that a TM architecture



may play a significant role in developing a system which enables the organisation to capture the accumulated knowledge and expertise of its talent and transfer it to other parts of the organisation.

These findings, therefore, meant that there was a need to revise the original proposition (RP2) to emphasise the importance of knowledge management and its relationship to TM and to remove the idea of 'bargaining power', as it had been rejected by practitioners. Accordingly, the original RP2 was revised as follows:

Revised RP2: *“value is captured when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to exploit, decode and transfer the knowledge and expertise of its most valuable talent so that they can be widely applied in the organisation.”*

### **6.3.3 How May Talent Management Architectures Enable the Leverage of Value?**

Original RP3: *“value is leveraged when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to extend, mobilise (replicate), integrate and deploy the capabilities of its value-creating talent resources.”*

Although it has not been explicitly debated in the literature, in Chapter 3 (Literature Review), I had to turn to the dynamic capabilities literature (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000, Martin et al., 2011, Teece, 2007) to understand the concept of ‘value leverage’ and how it might be extended to the discussion of TM. In this literature, the process of value leverage is mostly described in relation to extending, replicating and deploying a firm's resource base – it is about internally building and modifying the firm’s resources to ensure a continuous process of value creation. Accordingly, a firm’s resources are of no value unless they can be extended to create more value and superior returns to the organisation (Miller et al., 2002). This was the basis on which

the third proposition was developed, in which I suggest that TM architectures may contribute to value leverage if they enable organisations to extend and deploy the capabilities of their most valuable talent resources.

I noted earlier that the dialogue with the strategic actors about the notion of value, and the introduction of unfamiliar concepts about 'value' from the strategic management literature, seemed in many (but by no means all) cases to trigger shifts and refinements in the thinking of the actors. It is valuable for us as TM researchers to reflect on the thinking of the strategic actors and the ways in which their answers seemed to signal links they seemed prepared to accept or embellish, once prompted. So, for example, when first introduced to the value model, the interviewees were not sure how to think about the notion of value leverage. They interpreted it in relation to the process of value creation, with the assumption that value creation is a continuous process and therefore it should be expected that their organisations would continue to produce new ideas, products and services to ensure the continuity of value creation. Thus, they perceived value creation and value leverage to be the same process.

Yet when they put this notion from the strategic management literature into the context of TM, they started to question their own logics and understanding, and to realise that TM architectures may enable value creation through the attraction and acquisition of talent. However, to ensure that such talent are continuously adding value to the organisation, TM should enable continuous learning and the extension of talent capabilities so that talented individuals remain relevant to the ongoing process of value creation. Such a shift in understanding was triggered by the idea of continuity and the ability to sustain and maintain

the process of value creation.

The process of value leverage was then associated by interviewees with the concept of the development of a learning organisation – the ability to create an environment where talent engage in a continuous process of learning and unlearning to ensure that their skills, knowledge and expertise remain relevant. Our environment is becoming more and more complex, interdependent, unstable and unforeseeable, and so organisations are continuously seeking to improve their product and service offerings through innovation and breakthrough ideas. However, although the strategic actors acknowledged that there was a link between value leverage and learning, it was clear that little attention was given to leverage, and I would, therefore, argue that organisations might require greater capabilities in this area, and a different set of skills and knowledge amongst their strategic actors which can only be enabled through the creation of a culture which encourages continuous learning and change (Senge and Stubrich, 1993, Fillion et al., 2015). A learning organisation is an 'ideal state' (but of course potentially also another prescription), and one towards which some actors believed there is a need to evolve in order to respond to the ever-changing nature of the environments their organisations operate in. I would then argue that one of the ways to make this possible is investing in their value-creating resources, including human capital and the extension of their capabilities and their ability to learn.

These findings meant that the original RP3 should evolve beyond just the extension and mobilisation of talent capabilities to include the idea of learning organisations and bring to the fore the importance of engaging talent in a continuous process of learning to extend their

capabilities and ensure that they remain relevant. I, therefore, revised RP3 to reflect the ideas and concepts of the 'learning organisation', and suggest that it should be phrased as follows:

Revised RP3: *“value is leveraged when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to create a learning organisation where talent resources are engaged in a continuous process of learning and unlearning to extend their capabilities, nurture expansive patterns of thinking and encourage collective learning”.*

#### **6.3.4 How May Talent Management Architectures Enable the Protection of Value?**

Original RP4: *“value is protected when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to develop isolating mechanisms to protect its talent resources from being lost to competitors.”*

To understand how created value may be protected, in Chapter 3 (Literature Review) I turned to the strategic management literature and borrowed the notion of 'isolating mechanisms' (Rumelt, 1984), which are the mechanisms created by organisations as barriers to prevent competitors from imitating value-creating strategies, resources and capabilities. The notion of 'isolating mechanisms' was mostly described in relation to the process of value capture, but given its relevance to the ideas of protection and prevention, I used it to develop the fourth and final proposition of this study. In this proposition, I suggest that in the context of TM and HRM, isolating mechanisms are perceived in relation to an organisation's HR and talent systems, and are developed to prevent the organisation's talent resources from being lost by being acquired by competitors. They include processes which are mainly focused on increasing the retention of talent and increasing their commitment and willingness to stay with their organisations (Arthur, 1994, Huselid and Becker, 1997, Gardner et al., 2011, Jackson et al., 2014).

Similarly, in the findings, the process of value protection was described in relation to an organisation's ability to protect and retain its valuable talent. This extends beyond the traditional strategies of talent retention (i.e. compensation, career development) which in the view of the strategic actors are no longer suited to a world where talent is constantly jumping ship and easily being poached by other companies. While in these organisations the departure of talent is expected and sometimes welcomed, it is the departure of valuable talent that is considered to damage the organisation, especially in an age where there is a potential "war for talent" (Chambers et al., 1998, Axelrod et al., 2001, Beechler and Woodward, 2009).

The interviewees, therefore, felt that their organisations should do more than just offering competitive packages and investing in the development of their employees in the hope that they would choose to not leave the organisation. Although the traditional retention methods remain in common use by these organisations, the strategic actors felt that it was important for their companies to accept the reality that it is no longer possible to protect talent from attractive opportunities and aggressive poaching attempts by other companies. Therefore, instead of spending time investing in retention tools to minimise the turnover of talent, perhaps the time has come for organisations to abandon the traditional retention approach in favour of a more targeted market-driven approach to talent retention (Cappelli, 2000). In a market-driven approach, Cappelli suggests that organisations should design retention programmes which are targeted towards specific groups of talent, which warrants different retention efforts for different groups. A targeted approach enables the organisation to focus its retention efforts on target groups on the basis of what they require and types of talent the organisation desires.

The key principle here is for the organisation to decide who are the 'valuable talent' it wishes to retain, and then based on this to direct its retention efforts (i.e. compensation, job design and customisation, career development, social factors and so forth) according to the specific needs of this targeted group. This approach aligns with the principles of TM, which is orientated towards segmenting and differentiating between talent (Lepak and Snell, 1999, Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005, Becker and Huselid, 2006, Ready et al., 2010, Sparrow et al., 2011, Stahl et al., 2012).

While the ideas and principles of 'isolating mechanisms' can be traced back to the idea of protecting talent, which in practice is usually interpreted as focusing on retention, the findings show that the term 'isolating mechanism' is not commonly used by practitioners, and it, therefore, needed to be specifically explained in relation to how organisations think about protecting their most valuable talent. Accordingly, I revised the final value proposition as follows:

Revised RP4: *“value is protected when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to develop a targeted market-driven approach to retaining its most valuable talent resources and prevent them from being lost or poached by competitors.”*

#### **6.4 REFLECTIONS ON THE VALUE MODEL AND ITS FOUR VALUE PROCESSES**

In this section, I draw on the discussion about the value of Talent Management to a close by reviewing the four value processes and:

1. reflecting on how the overall model was perceived and understood when it was initially introduced to strategic actors and they had not been asked to relate it to TM, and then

2. providing detailed accounts of how the usefulness of the model was perceived and described by them.

I chose to make this section separate from the previous section to show how the original value model was perceived and understood (before it was related to TM). As explained earlier, the objective of this research is to examine 'how TM architectures may add value to organisations'. To address this research problem, I proposed and used a value model (see Appendix Four) which comprised of four value processes (value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection) to guide the research process. The strategic actors were introduced to this value model during the interview and were given the opportunity to reflect on the processes it involves for the purpose of relating it back to the discussion of TM and reflecting on how TM architectures may contribute to enabling these four value processes.

My intention in the next section is therefore to examine the different ways in which these processes are debated and described in the literature and how they were perceived and understood by the strategic actors. While I do realise that there might be a risk of imposing theoretical models on the evolving logics and understandings of the strategic actors, for the purpose of this study I nevertheless used a 'value model' to introduce the interviewees to the concepts of 'value creation', 'value capture', 'value leverage' and 'value protection', and then to solicit their views on how they perceived TM to enable and contribute to each of these processes.

In the next section, I discuss the usefulness of introducing value models to the TM discourse as perceived by the interviewees. It should be born in mind that I developed the description of

each process in the model from the literature on value, value creation and dynamic capabilities. I purposely used a general description to avoid imposing any ideas on how these processes might relate back to TM. My objective here was simply to help the interviewees to understand these processes before moving on to discuss each process in the context of TM.

#### **6.4.1 Understanding the Value Model**

##### **6.4.1.1 Value Creation**

Value creation is described as 'activities which enable the organisation to effectively manage its value-creating resources in order to increase the worth of its goods, services or even its business'.

The first process is value creation. As I said in Chapter 3 (Literature Review), despite 'value creation' being a central concept in both the management and the organisational literature, it is difficult to find much consensus amongst scholars about its meaning, its processes, or the mechanisms that allow any value created to be captured (Lepak et al., 2007). There are three reasons for this:

1. differing views about the targets and sources of value creation,
2. failure to distinguish clearly between the content of value (i.e. what value is, who values what, and where value resides) and the process of value creation (i.e. how value is generated), and
3. the conflation of the process of value creation and the process of value capture (Sparrow and Makram, 2015).



Despite this confusion in the literature about the meaning of value creation and its processes, in practice, the strategic actors did not struggle to understand value creation. The reasons for this are that the earlier discussion about the meaning of value (see Section 6.2.2) had prompted them to think about the sources and targets of value creation, and this led them to recognise how value is created by their organisations. Additionally, the fact that these organisations are sales and services organisations enabled the strategic actors to quickly relate the process of value creation to achieving sales targets and developing products and services which meet the needs of their customers. Therefore, value creation was perceived as the process through which the organisation develops goods and services for its target users in exchange for a sum of money, and thus contributes to the generation of revenue and profit. It is important to acknowledge that the context of these organisations might have influenced how the interviewees thought about value creation, and this may suggest that strategic actors in organisations with a different focus might come to different conclusions about the meaning of value, thus adding a further level of complexity.

#### **6.4.1.2 Value Capture**

Value capture is described as 'activities which enable the organisation to recover some or all of the value that is created by its value-creating resources'.

The second value process is value capture. In the strategic management literature, a distinction is made between value creation and value capture, and it is recognised that in some organisations, the creators of value may not fully capture and benefit from the value they create (Coff, 1999, Makadok and Coff, 2002). While this distinction between the two processes is from

the academic world, in practice, organisations and their strategic actors do not see a difference between them. Instead, for the most part, the interviewees believed that if their organisations succeed in achieving their sales targets, then by default they have succeeded in capturing the value they created. I again argue that this view can be attributed to the fact that these organisations are sales and services organisations, and so if value is created (i.e. if revenue and profit are generated) then by default it is captured.

Although this seemed very straightforward to relate to, it also aroused a sense of curiosity among the interviewees, who were questioning whether or not they understood what value capture is. This curiosity was a result of them questioning their own logics and understanding against how value capture is described in the literature (in the value model) and attempting to understand why these processes (value capture and value creation) were presented as two different processes rather than being the same. I would argue that perhaps if they had not been presented with the value model, they would not have been so curious, but I also need to acknowledge a key observation across all the organisations - that despite the fact that guidance was offered to help them understand the four value processes, the strategic actors relied more on questioning their own understanding and whether they related to how the processes were explained. It is also important to note that the confusion between the concepts of 'value capture' and 'value creation' did not continue for long; once the discussion was directed towards TM and the interviewees were asked to think about value capture and value creation in relation to TM architectures, I detected more clarity in their responses, indicating that they had started to understand how the two processes differed.

### 6.4.1.3 Value Leverage

Value leverage is described as 'activities which enable the organisation to improve and extend the capabilities of its value-creating resources'.

The third value process is value leverage. It is important to remember here that, unlike value creation and value capture, the process of value leverage is implicitly debated in the literature. For example, a number of researchers such as Sirmon, Hitt and Ireland (2007) refer to value leverage as a process of mobilising, co-ordinating and deploying a firm's capabilities and resources. In the dynamic capabilities literature, others (Teece et al., 1997, Winter, 2003, Helfat, 2007) view value leverage as the replication, extension and deployment of a firm's resources. This implies that the process of value leverage is mainly concerned with a firm's ability to effectively manage its resources in ways which involve the extension, deployment and integration of resources.

Although the topic has been investigated in the academic world, however, in practice the process of value leverage was not necessarily understood by the strategic actors, but instead was interpreted once again in relation to value creation. This confusion in my view is related to the observed reality that in these organisations, the strategic actors believe that the process of value creation is continuous – their organisations are always actively involved in finding new ways, new services and new products to continue creating value for themselves and their target users. Accordingly, it does not make sense from the perspective of practice to differentiate between the two processes. Having said that, I would argue that we need to be careful before coming to such conclusions, as in practice, strategic actors use their own logics and

interpretations of processes and conditions to reach certain conclusions, and so the context of the discussion will impact how they might perceive or understand specific processes. This was evidenced when the discussion moved on to discuss TM, by which time their understanding of value leverage had evolved to include a more descriptive interpretation of the process and an acknowledgement that TM architectures may enable the leverage of value.

#### **6.4.1.4 Value Protection**

Value protection is described as 'activities which enable the organisation to protect its value-creating resources from being captured or duplicated by competitors'.

Finally, the last value process, i.e. value protection, has been implicitly debated in the literature. In practice, it seemed to be one of the easiest processes for the strategic actors to relate to. In the literature, value protection is discussed in relation to what Rumelt (1984) refers to as 'isolating mechanisms', arguing that organisations can preserve and protect the value they create if they deploy isolating mechanisms which prevent competitors from imitating and acquiring their value-creating capabilities and resources. Although in practice the term 'isolating mechanism' is not popularly used, when it was related to the concept of protection, it was easily understood. The strategic actors believed that protecting their value creation capabilities and resources was critical for their organisations to continue creating value and outperforming rivals in the market.

In short, their initial reactions towards the value model were encouraging rather than discouraging. This is because it provided a good foundation to help them challenge their own ideologies, logics and understandings, and helped them to see a link between the ideas of

'value' and their implications for TM.

#### 6.4.1.5 The Usefulness of the Value Model

Introducing the value model to the strategic actors – both HR and talent system designers and business leaders - prompted interesting views and insights to inform our understanding and hopefully contribute to further development of the field of TM. Although I do realise that the value of TM is in the eye of the beholder and thus there is a danger of imposing theoretical models and frameworks which might influence the logics and understanding of the strategic actors, there is nevertheless a need to help organisations move towards implementing more useful and constructive TM architectures (Sparrow and Makram, 2015). There is, therefore, merit in using models like this to guide the investigation and further TM research in order both to make such models more helpful on a practical level and to move the academic debate forward. Introducing the value model to this research has helped to solicit the different views and understandings of TM and its value which might not have emerged or been provoked without the use of a theoretical framework to guide the discussion. Specifically, I have found the value model to be useful in a number of ways:

- It provided strategic actors with a structure and a framework for reflecting on the TM systems implemented by their own organisations and thus to share their own logics and views on how these systems should be designed to enable a more strategic approach to TM - i.e. one which adds value.
- The ideas and concepts of 'value' differentiate between the sources and targets of value, which helped the interviewees to realise the importance of human capital as a

value-enabling resource and subsequently to understand the value TM may add. Underpinning this is the idea of exclusiveness, according to which a select group (valuable talent resources) contributes to value creation.

- Although the four value processes were new to these strategic actors, this idea enabled them to realise that the value of TM extends beyond just attracting and identifying talent to include other strategic activities (i.e. the management of know-how, creating learning organisations, designing targeted talent retention practices).
- Borrowing ideas from other domains of research (i.e. strategic management, value, dynamic capabilities and HR, human capital and TM) and bringing these to the discourse of HR and TM helped to address the definitional problem of TM by providing a foundation for thinking about the scope and targeted outcomes of TM and thus differentiating it from traditional HR.
- The model helped to reformulate the initial propositions underpinning the value model, and thus provided an opportunity to socialise and develop ideas of 'value' beyond those currently debated in the value literature.

Based on the above and on my subsequent analysis of the data, I would like to propose a new definition of 'Talent Management' which reflects the concepts of 'value' and defines the boundaries and scope of TM. This new definition is as follows:

*'talent management is an exclusive strategic approach which enables organisations to create, capture, leverage and protect value through the effective management of a select group of elite talent'.*

The ideas underpinning this definition rest upon the assumption that TM is an exclusive strategic approach (in Chapter 2 – Literature Review, I presented the different debates on the inclusive and exclusive approaches to TM) implemented by organisations to differentiate between employees and subsequently to manage a select group of élite talent towards the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value. These ideas were developed based on further analysis of the data, which showed that there is enough evidence to support the conclusion that value is created, captured, leveraged and protected through the management of a small élite. For example, in the findings I found the following ideas to support my proposed definition:

1. First, despite being described as an inclusive approach to TM, the actual practices of TM are more geared towards differentiating between employees and focusing efforts on the management of a select group of élites (i.e. those displaying the potential to grow and take on more complex responsibilities). Although this was not explicitly articulated by the strategic actors, subsequent analysis of the data indicates that organisations and their strategic actors believe that a select group of individuals have the potential to add more value than others and therefore that it is important to invest in the effective management of those individuals.
2. Second, the ideas behind the exclusive approach to TM were also noted in the findings on how TM architectures may contribute to the four value processes. For example, value creation relates to enabling organisations to attract and acquire a select group of talent (i.e. those critical to value creation). Value capture relates to exploiting, decoding and transferring the knowledge and expertise of the organisation's most valuable

talent. In relation to value leverage, the findings suggest the creation of a more sharing learning environment, albeit with the learning being based on the contribution and insights made by elite talent. Finally, value protection relates to the retention of the organisation's most valuable talent.

Taking into consideration the findings from this study, I argue that there is enough evidence to support the exclusive approach to TM (even if this is not explicitly articulated by the strategic actors) and the idea that TM architectures may add value to organisations by enabling the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value.

## 6.5 THE DICHOTOMY OF STRATEGIC ACTORS

In Chapter 3 (Literature Review), I introduced the notion of strategy-as-practice (SAP) to explain my decision to use different types of strategic actors to interview for this study and how it may apply to the context of this research. In this section, I discuss this design choice and in the light of the findings, evaluate whether using a dichotomy of strategic actors was as useful as I expected or not. There seems to be little attention in mainstream strategy research to the role of actors in shaping and influencing strategy, and this has been attributed to the dominant influence of micro-economics on strategy research (Johnson et al., 2003, Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009).

In this research, I adopt a strategy-as-practice approach which brings actors – their actions, emotions, motivations and interactions - to centre-stage. The strategy-as-practice approach is mainly concerned with the doing of strategy, i.e. praxis (the situated social activities in which



strategy is accomplished), practitioners (the actors involved in the doing of strategy) and practices (the tools, processes, procedures with and through which strategy work is done) (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006, Whittington, 2006, Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).

At the heart of this strategy-as-practice approach is the idea of what practitioners actually do and how they shape strategy through their actions and cognitive logics (Golsorkhi, 2010), and although this study is not designed to directly assess and examine the managerial cognitions of strategic actors, the methodology used does tap into their logics and actions. This is because the strategy-as-practice approach makes it possible to recognise the kinds of reasoning and logic which strategic actors tend to use. Therefore, it has enabled me to examine the reasoning and logic they applied in this context, and what proportion of their thinking was based on strategic and business alignment rather than their own employed logics (Björkman et al., 2014). For example, when I attempted to understand how TM is defined in the organisations investigated, I found that the interviewees described TM in relation to their own interpretation of what TM is or should be, which indicated that in the absence of a formal definition of TM, they were relying more on their own employed cognitive logics to explain what TM means. On the other hand, when I attempted to examine how value is created in these organisations, and how TM architectures may contribute to the creation of value, I observed that although the language of value was not commonly used among organisations and their actors, they tended to reflect back on their business strategy to find a description of value and then relate this description back to how TM architectures may contribute to the creation of this value. This indicated that the strategic actors tended to switch from relying on their cognitive logics to interpreting things on the basis of business strategies as and when needed.

In this study, I have focused on two groups of strategic actors, namely HR/Talent managers (i.e. systems designers) and business and strategic leaders (i.e. system implementers). My objective was to understand the realities and views of these actors and identify differences between those views (which are primarily self-generated) and those deeper constructs which can move them beyond their primary practice. From the findings, I could argue that although the dichotomy between system designers and system implementers, first introduced in Chapter 3 (Literature Review) and then incorporated into my methodology, reflects a classical strategy and a managerialist perspective (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009), the distinction between them was not as clear-cut as I originally assumed. This is attributed to strategic actors struggling to describe their role as strategy designers rather than implementers and executors of strategy. For example, when I attempted to examine their role in influencing the design of the TM strategies, most actors - both system designers and system implementers - described themselves as active strategists (engaged in the design of the TM strategy), but when I probed further to understand in what way, I came to realise that they were instead implementers and executors of a strategy which is designed centrally by head office and cascaded down to the different regions for implementation and execution. Therefore, the only way they can influence the TM strategy is through its application rather than through its design. This does not come as a surprise, however - research aimed at understanding the role of strategic actors in shaping strategy has shown that senior managers in MNCs usually struggle to justify their role as strategic actors as opposed to being passive pawns in the implementation of their corporate strategies (Dick and Collings, 2014).

Furthermore, as I attempted to understand the different involvements and engagements of the strategic actors with the design and implementation of the TM strategy, it became clear to me that it was important to recognise the distinction between strategy implementation and strategy execution. Favaro (2015) suggests that implementing a strategy consists of all the decisions and activities required to turn the strategic choices (in this instance the choices made by the system designers) into reality. However, because it is important to recognise that everything that might have been assumed when formulating a TM system design is in a constant state of flux, and that all designs are likely to evolve, the formulation and the implementation of a strategy may run in parallel rather than be sequential. This means that the implementation of a TM strategy is generally assumed to involve a focus on closing the gap between design as it was planned and actual practice. Clearly, there may be better ways of implementing a strategy, and this raises the need to distinguish between implementation and execution, which refers to the decisions and activities which strategic actors undertake in order to turn the designed and subsequently implemented strategy into a success. While I realise that the semantics around this distinction matter a lot less to strategic actors, it was critical for me to make this distinction as a way of explaining their real involvement in the design and implementation of TM systems.

My initial assumptions about the role of strategic actors in shaping strategy were based on the 'participation in strategy' research (Sagie and Koslowsky, 2000), which suggests that strategy formulation is a task of top management. I was thus expecting strategic actors (both on the HR/talent or and the business side) to be 'active pawns' in the design, implementation and execution of the TM strategy. However, the findings showed that although the interviewees

initially saw themselves as 'active designers' and 'implementers' of strategy, they were instead 'active executors' of a strategy which is designed elsewhere (mostly at head office level). This does not surprise me much, given the fact that this study was conducted at the subsidiary level rather than the head office level. The strategic actors in this study had different levels of engagement and involvement with TM.

The HR and talent actors were mostly involved in delivering a global talent system into their local subsidiaries with of course a level of adaptation to fit the needs of the subsidiary. On the other hand, the non-HR and talent actors were more or less executing a strategy that was given to them through their HR and talent partners – and while they believed that in one way or another they were involved in strategy design, their input was mostly about the decisions they made when they were engaged in implementing the TM strategy and practices (i.e. the identification, development and management of talent). The fact that they saw their involvement in this way is linked to their fundamental assumptions about what strategy is and the nature of strategy work (Mantere and Vaara, 2008).

Therefore, there is a need for TM researchers to understand the social processes in operation when talent strategies are designed and the assumed roles of different members of the organisation in the formulation, implementation and execution of the TM strategies. That said, I would like to argue that the method of interpretation used in this research enabled me to solicit and surface the logics of the strategic actors in terms of three processes. The first of these is the process of self-actualisation, which is the constant search for meaning in organisational activities and the realisation that all organisation members can in principle participate in

strategising (Mantere and Vaara, 2008). For example, although it was clearly observed that interviewees do not directly get involved in the design of the TM strategy, the findings indicated that the reason why they perceive their role as active participants in strategy is that the essence of their strategy work is to make sense of the TM strategy and to align their goals, actions and decisions to enable the successful implementation of this strategy.

The second is the process of dialogisation, described as a constructive dialogue between different groups, and the idea that all those who have a vested interest are to participate in the strategy process (Mantere and Vaara, 2008). For example, the findings indicated that the institutionalisation of the TM strategy provoked a dialogue between the two groups of strategic actors (talent/HR professionals and business leaders) to exchange their different views so that decisions could be made on how best to implement and deliver the TM strategy. I observed that both the talent/HR actors and the business leaders worked together very closely to enable the successful implementation of the TM strategy. This might provide opportunities for different interpretations and views to guide the implementation and perhaps suggest further refinements if needed.

Third is the process of concretisation. Strategizing is a natural part of organisational decision making, and thus the strategic actors are expected to adhere to a common set of rules (Mantere and Vaara, 2008). For example, although in these organisations the TM strategy was centrally designed (at head office level), it was made available to different strategic actors in the organisation, and its further refinement and implementation was left to strategic actors at different levels. This enabled them to devise action plans and make the decisions required to

bring this strategy to life. Accordingly, the TM strategy was used more as a tool and a set of guidelines on how talent should be managed.

The question remains: did the use of a dichotomy of strategic actors work? Was it useful? Do we see similar or different ways of thinking about the TM architecture from the two types of interviewees or not?

I argue that the answer to this question is to some extent influenced by the topic being investigated. Talent Management has brought issues about the management of people to the forefront of the attention of senior leaders as never before (Collings, 2014a). With the increased interest of CEOs and senior leaders in TM, it was difficult to detect a wide spectrum of differences in how the two groups (i.e. system designers and system implementers) perceived and thought about the management of talent.

While there no doubt that there were different levels and different ways of thinking in the two groups, these differences were underpinned by the same assumption that TM is critical to competitive advantage (Collings and Mellahi, 2009) and that it is mainly concerned with the management of a select group of individuals who are of particular value to their organisations (Makram et al., 2017). Accordingly, I would argue that the usefulness of investigating two groups of strategic actors is that it enables TM researchers to gain insights into the logics and understandings common to both groups, but not into the ways in which their views differed.

## 6.6 THE NOTION OF 'ARCHITECTURE'

In Chapter 3 (Literature Review), I introduced the notion of 'Talent Management Architectures', and I have used it throughout the study to explain how TM may add value to organisations. In this section, I discuss how organisations and their actors think about their TM architectures and the practices which constitute these architectures.

For this research, I have borrowed the notion of architecture from the human capital literature (Becker and Gerhart, 1996b, Lepak and Snell, 1999, Wright et al., 2001b, Becker and Huselid, 2006, Kang et al., 2007) to refer to 'the combination of the talent systems, processes and practices implemented by an organisation to effectively manage its valuable talent'. By assuming the operationalisation of the of TM architectures, I have indirectly relied on human capital and HPWS thinking and made a series of assumptions about the notion of architectures and its applicability to the TM discourse:

- there exists a system of work practices which enables an organisation to manage a specific group of individuals who are a potential source of sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991);
- it is the systematic interrelatedness of the bundles of practices in a TM architecture which accounts for their inimitability and therefore provides a strategic lever for the organisation (Huselid and Becker, 1997);
- the design of a TM architecture is dependent on the strategic value and uniqueness of the organisation's human capital (Lepak and Snell, 2002), and their value, in turn, is inherently dependent on their potential to improve efficiency and effectiveness, exploit

opportunities and, neutralise potential (Barney, 1991); their uniqueness is dependent on them being rare and firm-specific (Lepak and Snell, 1999);

- not all employees possess knowledge and skills which are of equal strategic importance to their organisations; therefore there may be different HR and talent architectures within the same organisation to cater to different employee groups (Lepak and Snell, 1999);
- a TM architecture produces the behaviours necessary to implement value-creating strategies and achieve sustained competitive advantage (Huselid and Becker, 1997);
- TM architectures might appear the same in terms of the practices they involve, but in reality, the assumptions underpinning these architectures are often unique and dependent on the organisation's corporate strategy, its inherited philosophies and the decisions made by its strategic actors (Paauwe, 2004, Boxall, 2012, Sparrow et al., 2014b).

These assumptions served as a starting point for examining how organisations think about their TM architectures (if they do at all) and what practices constitute a TM architecture and how these practices might differ from other HR practices implemented by the organisation. I was also interested to examine how strategic actors envisage their organisation's TM architecture and how they interpret and enact it, as well as examining the usefulness of the notion of 'architecture' in practice.

The findings showed that these organisations have HR and talent systems made up of a number of practices designed and implemented to enable them to manage their workforce. What I have



not been able to ascertain, however, is how these practices are aligned with the strategic direction of these organisations. There were very broad claims that the 'people agenda' or 'HR strategy' is directed by and aligned to the corporate strategy, but the interviewees were unable to describe how this alignment was made and how corporate strategy was reflected in the design and implementation of the TM architectures. The claims, therefore, seemed more like assumptions based on the strategic actors' own perceptions rather than on facts. What was also interesting to observe was that in these organisations, there was no explicit evidence to suggest that the practices of the HR or talent system were consciously designed as a bundle of interrelated practices. However, the findings did provide implicit evidence suggesting that these practices, although not deliberately designed as a coherent, interrelated system, were expected to work in tandem, and that the outcome of one practice would impact the outcome of another, for example, that the practices of performance management would inform the practice of talent and potential identification, and that the identification of high potentials would inform succession planning. This indicates that although organisations might not consciously think about the sophistication and interrelatedness of their talent practices, there are implicit expectations that these practices do in one way or another complement each other and serve the purpose of effectively managing talent throughout their lifecycle.

So what bundles of practices constitute a TM architecture? Although it was evidenced in the literature that there is no agreement about the exact bundles of practices constituting a TM architecture, it is fair to assume that it constitutes a set of practices which include: the attraction and recruitment of talent, the creation of employee value propositions, the engagement and retention of talent, the systematic identification of internal talent, the

management of talent flows and succession systems, the development of talent, and the management of performance (Sparrow et al., 2014a).

The findings showed that organisations tend to implement a set of common practices to manage all their employee groups regardless of the value they add to the organisation. This is mostly done to ensure consistency and fairness in application. Having said that, examining how these practices are implemented enabled me to realise that the implicit assumptions underpinning these practices are that there should be a differentiation between employees and that different groups of employees should be managed differently. The idea is to identify those talent who outperform others and have the potential to add more value to the organisation, and subsequently to invest in their development and retention differently. In such cases, a talent system is a set of practices which are mainly related to the attraction and identification of high potential talent – those who have the potential to add greater value than others, the management of future leaders through succession planning, the performance management of talent by differentiating between poor and high performers, the development of talent and investment in their career progression, and finally the retention of talent. Whilst these practices were observed across all organisations; it is important to note that the differences lay in how they were enabled and implemented by these organisations. This, however, supports the idea that a ‘talent management architecture’ constitutes a set of practices which enables the organisation to focus its efforts on a select group of individuals. This is in line with most of the thinking underpinning the HPWSs and HR architectures literature (Lepak and Snell, 1999, Becker and Huselid, 2006).

Although the notion of ‘architecture’ is not commonly used in practice to describe an organisation's HR and talent systems, this did not prevent me from observing and noting evidence to support the ideas (listed above) behind a ‘talent management architecture’. Based on the findings, I would argue that the notion of ‘architecture’ is a useful way to think about TM and the bundles of practices involved – in its own way, it reflects a number of different philosophies debated in the TM literature. First, it claims that value is generated by a select group of individuals and that therefore there is a need to differentiate between employees and identify those who have the potential to add more value than others (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014). It also suggests that there is a need to differentiate in the way these people are managed by using a set of practices which are bundled and interrelated to attract, retain and develop valuable talent. Whilst this fits well with the exclusive approach to TM, I recognise how it might provoke proponents of the inclusive approach and how it may lead to issues of inequality. For example, it may result in those labelled as less able becoming even less able because less investment goes into their development, which subsequently limits the extent to which they are developed (Thunnissen et al., 2013, Pfeffer, 2001). It also suggests that TM architectures should be aligned with the strategic direction of the organisation if they are to contribute to value creation (Sparrow and Makram, 2015). I argue that thinking about the practices of TM in relation to the notion of ‘architectures’ enables organisations to realise the impact of these practices on its ability to create, capture, leverage and protect value. It also enables them to differentiate their TM practices from traditional HR practices and decide how they would go about investing in the management of those who contribute more to the generation of value than others.

I believe the findings of this study provide a good foundation for future research to explore the effectiveness of TM architectures and how individual practices are bundled to ensure the desired outcomes. I have through this study provided a foundation for understanding the different practices that constitute a TM architecture and how these practices enable the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value. I suggest that future research should explore these bundles of practices in more depth.

To this end, I would like to revisit and revise my original definition of 'Talent Management Architecture' (presented in Chapter 2 - Literature Review as 'the combination of the talent systems, processes and practices developed and implemented by an organisation to effectively manage its talent') to reflect the findings of this research and the concepts of 'value':

*'a 'Talent Management Architecture' is a deliberate bundle of practices designed and implemented by organisations to enable the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value'.*

These practices include the attraction, acquisition and identification of high potential and value enabling talent, capitalising on talent potential through the systematic management of knowledge, the extension of talent capabilities through a continuous learning process, and the protection of talent through a targeted approach to retention.

## **6.7 TALENT MANAGEMENT VERSUS HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**

There is no doubt that Talent Management and Human Resources Management have a rather tangled and complicated relationship, with similar core practices, and so it is not a surprise to

find that TM is usually confused with HRM. Indeed, the confusion around the definition and scope of TM is still reflected in the literature, and this has no doubt hindered the development of the field. Yet there is an implicit consensus that TM is fundamentally about attracting, retaining and developing a select and unique group of individuals who are of particular value to their organisations (Makram et al., 2017). I, therefore, argue that it is the intended outcome and scope of the practices of TM that differentiates it from traditional HR.

The premise on which TM rests is that it is an exclusive practice which assumes that high potential individuals (i.e. employees with valuable and unique skills) create more value for their organisations and contribute to competitive advantage, and so they are worthy of getting different investments in their development (Lepak and Snell, 1999, Becker et al., 2009, Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013, Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). The findings indicated that MNCs are more inclined to adopt an exclusive approach to TM, as despite claiming that their TM practices are inclusive, the implementation of these practices is more oriented towards differentiation between employees. These findings add to what has already been suggested in the literature, i.e. that the exclusive approach to TM is dominant among MNCs (Ready et al., 2010, Cappelli, 2014, Morley et al., 2015). Therefore, I argue that what distinguishes TM from traditional HR is its focus on the ideas of 'segmentation' and 'differentiation' between employees.

It was found in this study that the practices of TM undeniably involved and included all employees, but the intended outcome of these practices was to differentiate and identify a select group of individuals based on their ability and contribution to value creation (Axelrod et

al., 2001, Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005, Mäkelä et al., 2010). TM is indeed underpinned by the idea of an élite - those who deliver high performance and are presumed to have high potential (Swales, 2013), and thus if it is not defined as an exclusive and distinctive approach to the management of talent it will seem more and more like HR, with little to set it apart from the traditional management of human resources. In practice, this means making disproportionately high investments in employees who are expected to deliver a greater return and value for their organisations (Huselid and Becker, 2011, Collings et al., 2017).

What was truly interesting from the findings is that although the organisations endorsed and advocated an inclusive approach to TM, in practice, it was observed that the approach was mostly geared towards an élite, or a select few. This indicated a clear disconnect between the belief or understanding and the actual implementation of the practices of TM. This disconnect is perhaps triggered by the preference of organisations to promote and pursue an inclusive model of TM as an ideal, but at the same time recognising that those who possess the capability to outperform others and have the potential to grow and take on more complex responsibilities will have a greater positive impact on organisational performance than others (Ready and Conger, 2007, Ingmar et al., 2007). Organisations are therefore interested in providing such employees with different management experience from that enjoyed by the majority of the workforce (Swales, 2016).

Again, this does not come as a surprise: - the mainstream view in the TM literature is based on an exclusive and élitist perspective, which suggests that 80% of an organisation's added value derives from about 20% of its talent (Lepak and Snell, 1999, Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005,

Becker and Huselid, 2006, Ready et al., 2010, Sparrow et al., 2011, Swailes, 2013). Despite its popularity, the exclusive approach to TM has been criticised and described as being dehumanising (Swailes, 2013). Swailes argues that exclusivity in practice could have the non-trivial effect of triggering negative emotions among those excluded by the organisation. While I recognise that singling out some employees over others may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy which might negatively impact those not identified as high potentials and diminish teamwork and thus have a negative impact on the organisation (Thunnissen et al., 2013, Pfeffer, 2001), I also recognise that if organisations do not recognise those with high performance and high potential and provide them with opportunities to flourish and develop, they will see their talent fleeing the company and joining other employers where they feel recognised and appreciated. There is I believe a need to find a delicate balance between the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of an organisation's TM approach, and there is definitely a need for better theoretical positioning (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013).

## 6.8 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide rich insights into the meaning of TM and how it may add value to organisations. And despite 'value' not being a term commonly used in organisations, introducing the concepts of 'value' prompted strategic actors to think about TM and helped them to understand how it is different from traditional HR. Despite the sophisticated state of the TM literature both in academic circles and in work targeted at practitioners, borrowing the ideas of 'value' has helped me realise that the current state of the TM field in practice is very much underdeveloped and driven mostly by old assumptions and ideologies introduced to

practice a long time ago. There are certainly similarities between the practices of HR and TM, but what differentiates them is the intended outcome and scope. Both the TM literature and the findings indicate that TM is underpinned by the ideas of 'segmentation' and the need to differentiate between employees to identify those with high performance and high potential. This is based on an acknowledgement that some employees add more value than others (Huselid and Becker, 2011) and that there is accordingly a need to invest differently in the management, development and retention of such employees. The value model provided a good foundation to help the strategic actors think about TM more strategically, which led to the realisation that TM architectures may play a significant role not only in enabling the creation of value in organisations, but also the capture, leverage and protection of such value.

In this research, I used a dichotomy of strategic actors – which revealed that the use of dichotomy to differentiate between strategic actors, whilst being helpful in realising the responses of both groups, was not necessarily helpful in identifying differences in the way they think about TM. This is perhaps because, in this research, the two groups (system designers and system implementers) showed the same level of interest in and understanding of TM, and thus had mostly similar rather than conflicting views.

I also borrowed the notion of 'architecture' to describe a deliberate bundle of practices designed and implemented by organisations to enable the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value. This led me to realise that whilst organisations do not use the notion of 'architecture' and its underpinning assumptions to think about their talent systems, in reality, they do implicitly embrace these assumptions when thinking about their TM practices and their intended outcomes. One of the key observations in this research was the implicit expectation



that the outcome of one practice informs another, which implies a level of interrelatedness and dependency among the collective practices constituting a TM architecture. Finally, the findings also aligned with the common view that TM is mainly concerned with the management of a small group of high performers and high potentials, and is thus different from traditional human resources.

## CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION

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### 7.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This study has examined the question of ‘how talent management architectures may add value to MNCs’. Using a multiple-case study research design, I examined the value of TM in five global MNCs, mostly American, with a strong presence in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) regions. The access provided was predominately in the MEA region, as well as in a few Asia-Pacific and European countries. These companies were selected on the assumption that they would have a relatively sophisticated TM approach, and thus would provide rich insights which would sufficiently inform the research problem.

To enable me to generate rich and detailed accounts, I used a qualitative approach and conducted a total of 52 semi-structured (face-to-face or Skype) in-depth interviews to solicit the logics and understandings of two groups of strategic actors, HR and talent managers (system designers) and business leaders (system implementers). The study focused on two key research questions: the first question was whether ‘strategic actors believed that the talent management architectures (implemented within their organisations) add value to their organisations, and if so, what value did they believe they add’ The second question, expressed through four research propositions, examined ‘how talent management architectures may add value in relation to four value processes (creation, capture, leverage and protection)’.

To address these questions, I had first to understand how ‘talent management’ is defined and implemented in these organisations, and how the strategic actors think about the concepts of

'value' (i.e. how value is defined and how it is created). I then used a 'Value Model' which included four value processes (value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection) to guide me in the data collection interviews while addressing the second research question, and to enable me to keep the study within defined boundaries. In Chapter 3 (Literature Review), I investigated how the four value processes are explicitly and implicitly debated in the value creation, dynamic capabilities and RBV literature. The findings of the study showed that borrowing concepts from the non-HR and talent literature was a useful approach which broadened and developed our understanding of TM. It also helped to address the current definitional problem in the TM discourse and led to interesting insights for our understanding of the value of TM, itself an underdeveloped area in the literature.

### **7.1.1 The Meaning of Talent Management**

Based on the empirical findings of this study, I argue that the practice of TM has developed little beyond the initial models of performance and potential (e.g. the 9 box) (Makram et al., 2017). While many researchers have attempted to conceptualise TM (e.g. Lewis and Heckman, 2006, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, Tarique and Schuler, 2010, Scullion and Collings, 2011, McDonnell, 2011), in practice, there is a lack of understanding which means that it is difficult to articulate what TM means. I observed in the examined organisations that these were not particularly concerned about having a formal definition to describe what they meant by TM. This was due to TM being mostly perceived as just another HR process, or as an umbrella term describing what has been the focus of HR for many years. That said, the findings showed that borrowing ideas of 'value' prompted the strategic actors to think differently about TM, and thus to shift their views about TM from it being just another HR process to a more strategic perspective

which sees TM as an enabler of value creation. Therefore, I argue that introducing ideas of 'value' to the TM discourse brings new perspectives into the discussion and thus should help academics to address the question of how to define TM.

I was also interested in this study to examine what practices constituted a TM system (if indeed there was one) in these organisations. From the findings, it was apparent that although these organisations invested in a number of practices (i.e. talent identification, performance management and succession planning), there was no evidence to suggest that these practices were deliberately bundled and interrelated to form a TM system. In fact, there was no explicit evidence to suggest that the organisations thought about their HR or talent practices as a set of activities put together to form a system or an architecture. Nevertheless, it was implicit in some of the comments that these strategic actors expected that the outcome of one practice would inform another - for example, that performance management feeds into the identification of high potential, and that this, in turn, feeds into succession planning. The findings also showed that although organisations did not seem to think about their talent systems in terms of 'architecture', they implicitly embraced its underpinning assumptions when thinking about their TM practices. For example, they implied that there was a level of interrelatedness and mutual dependency in the practices of TM. They also indicated that the practices of TM were mostly focused on the management of a select group of high potential talent.

So, what in the view of these strategic actors constitutes a TM system? The findings showed that through its practices a TM system is expected to enable organisations to differentiate

between employees. Critical to a TM system is performance management, which is a practice used to differentiate between poor and high performers, and which therefore predicts how employees might perform in the future if they are assigned to more complex roles. Performance management was used to predict whether an employee is a high potential or not. Yet this is problematic: there is not enough evidence in the literature to suggest that past and current performance are indicators of future performance (Silzer and Church, 2010). Relying heavily on performance data without recognising the external factors which might affect employee performance, such as how the employee fits the organisation's culture, their relationship with colleagues and managers, changes in strategic direction, or even external market conditions might mean investing TM efforts in the those who are not high potentials.

This brought to the surface another definitional problem – the absence of clear criteria and a definition of 'potential'. The findings suggested that in these organisations, decisions made about potential were not objective and were very much dependant on how strategic actors perceived it, – which implies that the identification of high potentials is a rather a subjective process. The risk of this is inconsistency in how high potentials are identified, or high potentials being identified against the subjective views of actors, which of course will differ from one actor to another, rather than being identified against clearly defined criteria provided by the organisation to guide in the identification of high potentials.

Another key practice is succession planning, which again is believed to be a critical practice in TM, as it enables organisations to establish a pipeline of future leaders and to groom those with high leadership potential to take on advanced leadership roles. In addition to performance

management and succession planning, the strategic actors believed that the development of high potentials is a critical function of TM, and there were expectations that talent development should not only develop and prepare talent for the future but also provide a mechanism for retaining these talent. And whilst the findings have shown that when organisations engage in designing their TM architectures, they perhaps do not think about how the different practices are interrelated, when such a system is put into practice there seemed to be a shared perception that the outcome of one practice supports the implementation of another ( as I explained earlier).

The key principle underlying all these practices is the differentiation between employees. This, therefore, indicates that although organisations might perceive TM as just another HR practice, or as an inclusive approach which takes all employees into consideration regardless of their potential, its application is orientated towards differentiating between employees. The findings showed that although organisations claim their TM practices are inclusive, when put into practice they are exclusive in nature, intended mainly to identify, develop and retain a small group of élites in the organisation, and so TM is just another way of differentiating between employees. Although it might increase inequality in the workplace and create a divide between the élites and the broader workforce, organisations seem to invest more in those labelled high potentials than in other employees who are not.

Based on this, I propose a new definition of TM as *“an exclusive strategic approach which enables organisations to create, capture, leverage and protect value through the effective management of a selective group of élite talent”*.

### 7.1.2 The Value of Talent Management

There is no doubt that borrowing concepts of 'value' and using them in the TM discourse helped to prompt new insights into the meaning of TM. The findings showed that although the language of value was not commonly used in practice, getting strategic actors to reflect on how value is created in their organisations enabled them to think more strategically about TM rather than seeing it as just another HR process. And although if left to their own devices they would probably not use the language of value, they seemed in the main to have a mindset (a cognitive framework) which enabled them to contribute to a value discourse, and to perceive TM as an enabler of value creation. These findings suggest that TM adds value by enabling organisations to:

- a. translate their corporate and business strategies into the types of talent and capabilities they need to enable them to create value and achieve sustained competitive advantage,
- b. capitalise on and leverage the potential of their talent so that they contribute to value creation,
- c. extend the capabilities of their talent by acquiring and institutionalising new knowledge, and finally
- d. develop the right culture to nurture, develop and grow their talent.

Underpinning these suggestions is the assumption that human capital is a potential source of sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Therefore, TM may add value if it enables organisations to recognise the types of talent they need, capitalise on and leverage the

potential of such talent, create an environment in which talent can acquire new skills and finally create an environment in which talent is nurtured and retained. Such a shift in views demonstrates that central to TM is the management of a selective group of élites. Thus, I argue that this might help academics define the boundaries of TM and emphasise its role as an enabler of value creation rather than just another HR process. In that case, we do not need to use the 'talent management' label to describe the more egalitarian and cross-hierarchical activities which can also be part of a TM function but continue to use the term HRM for these broader interventions. In other words, an élite approach to TM can help organisations think more broadly about the development of 'all talent', but this can be (and generally is) done in part by using traditional HR approaches.

### **7.1.3 Talent Management Architectures as Enablers of Value Creation, Capture, Leverage and Protection**

Whilst these descriptions of the value of TM provide a foundation for understanding 'how TM architectures may add value to organisations', I argue that it is the exploration of *how* they enable and contribute to the four value processes which lead to a fuller understanding of this question. To prepare strategic actors to think about the value of TM in relation to the four proposed value processes, I used the literature to develop generic descriptions for each process (see Appendix Four). My intention was to help the strategic actors to grasp the meaning of each process, and so I intentionally kept these descriptions generic without any link to how they might relate to TM. I also developed four value propositions to help me realise how TM architectures may enable the creation of value. The initial versions of these propositions were mainly derived from the literature, in which some of them (i.e. value creation and value capture)



have been explicitly debated by scholars, while others (i.e. value leverage and value protection) have been implicitly referred to. In relation to these propositions, the approach taken in this study enabled an in-depth engagement with the strategic actors, which then helped me to cast out how TM architectures may enable the four processes. It generated rich insights and data that helped to develop the value propositions, which threw into focus a contrast between academia and practice. In Chapter 6 (Discussion), I used the findings to develop further and refine these propositions based on the evidence that had emerged (see Table 2). I now briefly explain and expand upon these modified propositions:

	Original Proposition	Revised Proposition
Value Creation	<i>“value is created when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to attract, acquire, and accumulate valuable and unique talent resources.”</i>	<i>“value is created when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to translate its corporate and business strategies into types of talent and capabilities critical to value creation, which subsequently enables the organisation to attract, acquire, and accumulate such talent.”</i>
Value Capture	<i>“value is captured when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to weaken the bargaining powers of its talent resources and capture their knowledge and expertise and transfer them to</i>	<i>“value is captured when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to exploit, decode and transfer the knowledge and expertise of its most valuable</i>

	<i>where they can be widely applied in the organisation.”</i>	<i>talent so that they can be widely applied in the organisation.”</i>
<b>Value Leverage</b>	<i>“value is leveraged when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to extend, mobilise (replicate), integrate and deploy the capabilities of its value-creating talent resources.”</i>	<i>“value is leveraged when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to create a learning organisation where talent resources are engaged in a continuous process of learning and unlearning to extend their capabilities, nurture expansive patterns of thinking and encourage collective learning”.</i>
<b>Value Protection</b>	<i>“value is protected when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to develop isolating mechanisms to protect its talent resources from being lost to competitors.”</i>	<i>“value is protected when a firm’s TM architecture enables it to develop a targeted market-driven approach to retaining its most valuable talent resources and prevent them from being lost or poached by competitors.”</i>

**Table 7: Value Propositions**

The initial proposition for value creation suggested that value is created when TM architectures enable organisations to attract, acquire and accumulate valuable talent. This proposition was in principle aligned to how actors thought about TM and how it may enable the generation of value, – but on the basis of the findings it was developed to extend beyond the attraction, acquisition and accumulation of talent. The re-phrased proposition (see Table 7) is one which I

think TM researchers should now move forward with, as it now reflects a more strategic perspective on the role of TM architectures in translating a corporate strategy into the types of talent and capabilities needed to help organisations create value and achieve sustained competitive advantage. This version suggests that the role of TM architectures in value creation is not simply transactional or tactical (i.e. sourcing, recruiting and identifying talent) but rather that of a strategic enabler of value creation.

Value capture, on the other hand, was initially described as the process through which organisations weaken the bargaining powers of their talent so that their knowledge and expertise are dependent on the organisation and it becomes much easier to capture, share and transfer their knowledge. While in principle the strategic actors believed that organisations need mechanisms to enable them to capture and transfer the knowledge and expertise of their valuable talent so they can capitalise on their potential and thus capture the value they add, they strongly rejected the idea of 'weakening bargaining powers'. This is attributed to the fact that organisations spend a lot of time attracting and acquiring the best talent in the market, and therefore it does not make sense for them to weaken the powers of the talent and increase their reliance on the organisation. TM architectures are therefore expected to enable organisations to exploit, decode and transfer the knowledge of their valuable talent.

In the literature, the process of value leverage has been debated less than the processes of value creation and value capture, and so I turned to the dynamic capabilities literature (Teece et al., 1997, Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000) to understand how the process of value leverage is understood in the literature. The initial proposition suggested that value may be leveraged when TM architectures enable organisations to extend, mobilise (replicate), integrate and

deploy the capabilities of their value-creating talent resources. The essence of this proposition is the idea of extending capabilities and enabling talent to learn new skills which can be deployed as needed by the organisation. While the essence remains the same, however, the findings showed that the strategic actors realised the importance of creating an environment of continuous learning, in which valuable talent are continuously engaged in a learning process that enables them to extend their skills, expertise and knowledge so that they remain relevant. The suggestion of continuous learning was underpinned by the idea of enabling a learning organisation.

Finally, in relation to the value protection process, the literature focused on the creation of isolating mechanisms which protect organisational resources and capabilities against being imitated and lost to other competitors. While it was clear from the findings that the term 'isolating mechanisms' is not commonly used in practice, the ideas underpinning it were used by strategic actors to describe the importance of preventing an organisation's valuable talent from being poached by and lost to competitors. These protection mechanisms were mostly related to an organisation's ability to develop targeted retention programmes specifically designed to meet the needs of high potential talent.

Introducing the value model to strategic actors elicited interesting views and insights to inform our understanding and hopefully contribute to developing the field of TM. The value model enabled the strategic actors to think more strategically about TM and view it as a critical enabler of value generation. Therefore, while some might see a risk in imposing such models on strategic actors, I argue that introducing models of value to the discourse of TM provides greater opportunities to understand the meaning of TM and differentiate it from traditional HR

management. This is shown in the way the value propositions evolved as an outcome of this study.

## 7.2 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

The findings of this study contribute to knowledge and understanding in a number of ways:

- First, borrowing ideas and concepts of 'value' has contributed to identifying four ways in which TM may add value to organisations. This helped to surface new perspectives on the meaning of TM, and thus theoretically should help in overcoming the current TM definitional problem by providing a clear distinction between TM and traditional theories of HR management.
- Second, incorporating a broader range of (non-HR literature) into the discourse of TM resulted in identifying four value processes (value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection) and subsequently developing four value propositions which once tested should help explain how TM architectures may enable organisations to effectively manage their valuable resources (i.e. talent resources).
- Third, it suggests how other strands of the literature might impact the development of the TM field, and thus raises the need for TM researchers to broaden their current scope and bridge the gap between TM and other fields (e.g. knowledge management, risk management, learning organisations, corporate culture) which are critical to our academic understanding.

- Fourth, it brings the notion of ‘architecture’ into the TM discourse and provides a theoretical foundation for identifying the practices which constitute a TM architecture, and how their interrelatedness enables the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value.
- Fifth, it contributes to the egalitarian versus elite debate by drawing attention to the fact that even when organisations advocate a more collective and inclusive approach to TM, the actual practices of TM are aimed at differentiating and segmenting employees into pools of high performers and high potentials and 'the rest'.
- Sixth, the study demonstrates the weaknesses of relying mainly on the HR and human capital literature to develop the field of TM, and therefore alerts academics to the need to augment the use of HR and human capital literature by drawing on the general management literature and importing novel ideas (such as the customer lifecycle, intellectual property, supply chain theory) from non-HR and talent studies.

### 7.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The main aim of this study was to examine how TM architectures may add value in MNCs. I have investigated this question by using a strategy-as-practice approach to find how different groups of strategic actors (system designers and system implementers), think about TM and the value it may add to their organisations. The findings showed that regardless of which group the actors represented, there was lack of critical thinking and little evidence to suggest their participation in strategic thought about their TM architecture. This was clear from the way they struggled to justify their role in the design, implementation and execution of TM strategies.

They perceived their role as that of an active strategist (by which I mean actively engaged in the design of TM strategies), when in reality they were passive and obedient executors (i.e. executing a strategy which was centrally designed by head office). It was clear from the findings that titles and seniority (as an indication of the role a specific group may have in the design and execution of strategy) are misleading. The idea that strategy is only developed by top management is therefore not a valid assumption, because the reality is that “strategy is not only developed by top management but is also a venue where other actors play a key role” (Mantere and Vaara, 2008, p. 342). Therefore, organisations need to be careful about how they understand and define ‘strategy’ and have a clear understanding of how different members are involved in the design, implementation and execution of strategy.

Practitioners should also be aware of the disjunction between academic critiques of the link between TM and other practices such as performance management and their assumption that past and current performance are predictors of future performance and indicators of potential. In practice, organisations seem to rely on the outcome of performance management to predict future performance and potential, and this might be problematic if the process of performance management is not effectively implemented in a way which differentiates between high and low performers, to begin with, let alone predicting future performance and potential. Moreover, with more and more organisations moving away from an annual performance appraisal approach to a continuous feedback approach, practitioners need to think about how continuous feedback can be used to predict potential and future performance.

They also need to appreciate the risk of not defining what 'potential' means and allowing the subjectivity of people managers to inform critical decisions in areas such as the identification of high potential and succession planning. This subjectivity might lead to inconsistency in how high potentials are identified, which will mostly be based on how managers perceive potential and thus will differ from one manager to another. Although it is important to acknowledge that even with the use of talent models (i.e. defining criteria for recognising potential) there might still be some degree of subjectivity: the models might help to minimise the effect of subjectivity in the identification of talent, but not completely eliminate it. Therefore, practitioners need to engage in more critical thinking and use it to translate their corporate and business strategies into the types of talent and capabilities their organisations need and thus define 'potential'. They should realise that attracting and acquiring valuable talent is not enough for the generation of value: they also need to engage in a set of activities and practices which enable them to capitalise on the potential of their valuable talent, create an environment where talent are engaged in continuous learning which enables them to remain relevant in terms of their knowledge and expertise, and finally they need to consider walking away from traditional retention programmes to more targeted market-driven programmes which address the specific needs of valuable talent. Thinking about value and TM should enable them to contextualise what they mean by TM and thus align their TM strategies and architectures to the creation, capture, leverage and protection of value.



## 7.4 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are some clear limitations to this study. First of all, the study is limited to five MNCs, and broadly investigates the logics of strategic actors who operate at a regional level within these MNCs. Accordingly, had I interviewed strategic actors from the central or corporate functions of these organisations rather than at regional level, I might have obtained different results (Scullion, 1994, Scullion and Starkey, 2000). Therefore, it would be useful to apply the same form of analysis with strategic actors at head offices, or corporate centres of expertise, where it is assumed that most of the TM architectures (i.e. processes, policies, practices) are designed and then cascaded down to regional centres. The current research could provide a good starting point for this and guide any future research which investigates the views of corporate centres of expertise on how TM architectures may add value to organisations, and this would also enable findings to be compared. Conducting a similar study at head office level with strategic actors responsible for the global design and implementation of TM might bring to the surface different views on how TM architectures may add value to organisations.

Second, whilst the main focus of the research was to understand how TM architectures may add value to organisations, it is important to note that this focus was at a macro level of analysis, and that there was no attempt to examine the individual practices of the TM architecture. By this I mean that it was not my intention to examine how individual practices and processes are designed and implemented by organisations. Therefore, it would be very useful for future research to take the findings of this study to the next level and closely examine how these

practices are designed and implemented by different organisations and how they are bundled as part of the talent architecture.

There is also a need to examine how these practices might be interrelated and thus how the implementation of one practice impacts on others. For example, I see a great opportunity for further academic research to examine the interrelatedness of performance management and TM and to explore how best the outcome of a performance management system may be used by organisations to inform their TM investments. Another focus of research might be to examine how organisations can best identify their talent, which includes not only the development of a model of potential which could be used by practitioners, but also the development of a detailed approach to talent identification which would perhaps not rely on current or past performance.

Third, it is important to acknowledge that although the value model introduced four value processes to the discourse of TM (all of which were identified from the literature), there might be other value processes to consider. Therefore, future research should explore what other value processes could be relevant to the discourse of TM and focus on surfacing the implicit assumptions and logics which strategic actors and organisations might have in relation to these. The value model was used to examine how TM architectures add value through the four value processes, and a number of TM practices were then outlined against each process, and so further research could usefully validate these practices and their relevance to each of the four processes. This would enable hypothesis testing, and thus bring more objectivity to the findings.

Fourth, this study focused mainly on surfacing how strategic actors (i.e. system designers and system implementers) perceive the value of TM, but did not consider the views of those considered to have high potential or to be a top talent. It is important to acknowledge that there might be differences between the way strategic actors and such top talent perceive the value of TM, and further research could, therefore, focus on understanding the experience of those seen as high potentials, and whether they perceive the TM practices implemented by their organisations to add value to themselves.

Fifth, this study focused on MNCs, which are large, sophisticated organisations by nature, and so the views and logics that surfaced within this context might not be the same as those in small and medium-size enterprises. Perhaps more research is needed to examine how the value of TM is perceived in small and medium-size enterprises.

Last but not least, the sample of MNCs were mostly from within the same sector (information technology) except for one from the healthcare sector. This was mostly due to me leveraging my professional network which was mostly in the information technology sector. Therefore, unique sector factors were not taken into consideration, and there is a chance that the findings might vary from one sector to another. Therefore, it is recommended that future research focuses on comparing different sectors to identify whether industry and sector factors impact how the value of TM is perceived in organisations.

Having outlined some of the most obvious limitations of this study, I turn to a more positive topic and outline the opportunities this study has opened up. There is an opportunity for research to develop further the idea of TM architectures. The findings surfaced a number of

interesting themes such as the notion of ‘learning organisations’ and the enablement of a continuous learning environment, as well as the role of ‘knowledge management’ in capitalising on talent potential and the need for targeted retention programmes. I would, therefore, recommend that future research should focus on examining how these ideas may contribute to the development of the TM practice - for example, how TM architectures may enable a learning organisation. Other topics might be how TM architectures can help organisations extract, exploit and transfer the knowledge of valuable talent, and how this would be perceived by individual talent as well as suggesting the sort of targeted retention programmes organisations might need to develop, retain and protect their most valuable talent. Finally, it would also be interesting to examine how corporate culture and perhaps politics impact TM and influence the talent decisions taken by strategic actors.

## **7.5 REFLECTIONS OF A RESEARCHER**

As I reflect on the years invested in doing this research, I appreciate every aspect of what for me has been a fascinating journey and is no doubt my highest achievement so far. Every step along the way challenged and pushed me beyond my limits, there was never a dull moment, and for that I am thankful. Although at times it seemed a long and lonely journey, it was well worth my while. I was taught to believe that every stage of a PhD is the most important stage and it just gets easier afterwards (thanks to my supervisors). So, I learned that worrying about all the stages at the same time would probably not help me survive the journey. Instead, I challenged myself to worry less and realise that I could only cross one bridge at a time. This made it much easier to focus on each stage and only worry about what was to come when I got

there. I also learned (the hard way of course) that this is an iterative process, so being a perfectionist would not do me any good. There were times of excitement and times when it seemed easy, and there were times of difficulties and frustrations.

The first challenge I had to face was to come up with a topic that would contribute to knowledge and understanding and would make me think throughout the journey, and I had to do this before it had even started. It was important that the topic and research questions would add value to academic research. So, the challenge was to dive into a deep ocean of previous empirical and theoretical research to identify a research problem which was worth exploring and examining further. This is when I realised that relying only on the HR and TM literature would not help me to pin down a unique research problem. Thus, I had to cross over into other domains (i.e. strategic management, value creation, dynamic capabilities, the resource-based view) and identify opportunities where I would be able to identify links between the TM and the general management literature. This stage resulted in a PhD proposal, which provided the blueprint for the rest of the journey.

Stepping into my researcher role following my upgrade was the most exciting yet frightening phase of the journey. At first, I was not sure whether I would be granted access to the organisations I was targeting or not, and if I were, what levels of access would be given. What worked in my favour was two things. First of all, TM is a topic of interest to practitioners (be they HR and talent professionals or leaders), and so these organisations were very interested in participating in the research as they saw it as an opportunity to learn more about what is happening in the field in relation to best practice and also from other organisations. Secondly,

working in a large, well-known airline in the Middle East and leveraging the relationships my organisation had with these companies helped tremendously in establishing credibility and facilitating easy access to these companies. So, while in a number of ways I was an insider (being a professional in the field), I was also an outsider to these organisations and was not perceived as a manager but as a researcher. This enabled me to meet different groups of strategic actors from within the HR and talent area as well as business leaders.

Although I recognise that qualitative research is perhaps not the most favoured approach in some fields, I have to acknowledge that if it was not for the flexibility that this approach provided, I would not have been able to collect in-depth and rich perspectives and accounts about TM and its value. From using qualitative research, I learned to listen carefully and pay attention to the context as much as to what is being said. I learned how to ask questions, when to intervene and probe and when to allow space and time for reflection; I also learned to read between the lines and document all my observations even if they did not make sense at times. The only challenge I experienced was the amount of time it took me to complete all the interviews (which involved commuting and sometimes travelling to conduct my face-to-face interviews). That said, being in the field was a very interesting and rewarding experience for me – not only as a researcher but also as a practitioner and professional in the field. Straddling these two worlds was a unique experience, which made me realise what practice requires is more research to inform the thinking and understanding of practitioners, and how many opportunities there are for academics to explore and develop the TM field beyond the dominant practitioner research.

I found the data analysis stage the most fascinating and fun stage. I thoroughly enjoyed navigating my way through the chunks of data and making sense of the spoken and unspoken words. Although spending 550 hours transcribing 60 hours of interviews was rather painful and draining, it allowed me to fully familiarise myself with my data. I do not think I could have learned about my data in any other way. So, despite it being a painful task, dissecting, finding connections and generally making sense of my data served me well. The analytical journey was quite exciting - seeing how the data unfolded and identifying the conclusions which could be made helped me to widen my horizons and develop my understanding of TM and the opportunities and challenges of developing this field. There were times when I wished I could start this journey all over again to choose other topics (for example, the impact of corporate politics on TM) that I found particularly interesting and which would help practitioners to develop their TM practices.

The writing was a bit challenging – I realised that academic writing was a skill I needed to develop, so I was frustrated most of the time by my ‘writer blackout moments’. Indeed, I found that it was important to have time to think alone and work alone, but also to have time to talk about my thoughts with others – in this case, mostly my supervisors, with the exception of a small number of work colleagues who were genuinely interested in discussing and learning from my research. The writing phase taught me the power of perseverance and resilience. I also learned the importance of organising my thoughts and material in such a way that enables the reader to go on the same journey I went on, and to understand the many routes I had to take to reach my final conclusions. In my writing, I always had to remind myself that I needed to contribute to knowledge and understanding and that I needed to be explicit about the

originality of the study. Preparing for submission was time-consuming – having to go back to revise the format and structure and to correct typos took longer than I would have expected, but there was definitely a need to go through this phase to ensure that the final copy of this thesis is in line with university standards and guidelines. I realise that it isn't over until it is over – going through the viva and defending my research is the final hurdle at the end of a long and winding road. And although there is a need for further preparation, I look forward to being able to stand there and defend my ideas and celebrate my contributions to the TM field.



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## APPENDIX ONE: RESEARCH INVITATION LETTER

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Heba Makram  
PhD Candidate – Management School  
Lancaster University, LA1 4YX, United Kingdom  
M: +44 7769386358, M: +971 504980209  
E: h.makram@lancaster.ac.uk  
www.lums.lancs.ac.uk

### THE VALUE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT ARCHITECTURES TO MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

Dear xxxxx,

I would like to invite your organisation to take part in a qualitative research study conducted in partial fulfilment of a PhD research program. The purpose of this research is to examine how Talent Management is implemented in your organisation and understand whether it adds value to your organisation, or not.

The research introduces a new way of thinking about talent management and addresses an important gap in both practice and academic research. The findings of this research will contribute to advancing the knowledge and understanding of both practitioners and academics on talent management. Moreover, it will provide decision-makers in your organisation with new insights into the practice of talent management, which will then hopefully guide them through the talent management strategies implemented in your organisation and an opportunity to benchmark with other leading organisations.

In return for your participation, I intend to:

- Share and discuss with you the overall findings of the research. This will provide you with insights into how the practice of talent management is evolving in multinational companies.
- Provide a summary report highlighting the findings from your organisation and recommendations on how you can further develop your talent management strategies to add more value.
- Provide expertise to support your HR/TM teams in the design and development of any talent management strategies they may wish to revisit as an outcome of the study.

I'm also happy to discuss any other specific requirements you may need in return to your participation in this study.

I would like to conduct interviews with members of your executive team, HR/talent management professionals and Line Managers responsible for the management of talent. Thus, the access I require is to 10-12 participants; each will be invited to a 60-90-minute (approximately 16-18 hours) audio-taped interview, during which they will be asked to share their views on talent management and the value it might add to your organisation. If needed, a follow-up interview might be requested.

The privacy of your organisation and participants is of the highest priority. The data you provide will remain confidential and will not be disclosed or shared with other organisations. It is expected that the final report produced as an outcome of this research may be published in peer-reviewed journals and conference presentations. In such a case, no reference will be made

to identify your organisation or participants. The data you provide will be stored and accessed only by the researcher. This research adheres to the Lancaster University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and complies with the university ethical code of practice.

I look forward to hearing back from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours Sincerely,

Heba Makram



## APPENDIX TWO (A): PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET

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Heba Makram  
PhD Candidate – Management School  
Lancaster University, LA1 4YX, United Kingdom  
M: +44 7769386358, M: +971 504980209  
E: [h.makram@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:h.makram@lancaster.ac.uk)  
[www.lums.lancs.ac.uk](http://www.lums.lancs.ac.uk)

### THE VALUE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT ARCHITECTURES TO MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

Dear xxxxx,

I would like to invite your organisation to take part in a qualitative research study conducted in partial fulfilment of a PhD research program. Before you decide, I would like to explain to you the purpose of the research and what your involvement would be. Please take the time to carefully read the following information.

The purpose of this research is to examine how Talent Management is implemented in your organisation and understand whether it adds value to your organisation, or not.

You will be invited to participate in a 60-90-minute audio taped interview. During the interview, you will be asked several questions about talent management and your views on how it might add value to your organisation.

Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary. You can change your mind and withdraw from the research at any point prior to the interview. If you choose to withdraw within the first two weeks post the interview, the data you provide will be destroyed and not used. However, after this point, the data will remain in the study and will be used. During the interview, you

may omit or refuse to respond to any questions that are asked of you. If needed, a follow-up interview might be requested.

The interview audiotapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked secure place and will be destroyed at the end of the research. The data you share will be treated with strict confidentiality and will not be shared with other participants. No reference will be made to identify you or your organisation in any reports or publications produced as an outcome of this research. The final findings from your organisation will be compiled in a summary report along with other participants and might be shared with your organisation without disclosing your identity.

I shall contact you once again to ask if you would like to take part in this research or not. If you wish to participate, please sign the attached consent form. If you wish not to participate, I fully respect your decision. I am happy to respond to any questions or concerns you might have; you may contact me either via email or mobile (contact details are mentioned above).

I look forward to hearing back from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours Sincerely,

Heba Makram

## APPENDIX TWO (B): PARTICIPANTS CONSENT FORM

Please complete, if you are happy to take part in this research.

1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the research information sheet and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I understand that my participation in the research is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time prior to the interview without giving any reasons.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I understand that if I choose to withdraw within the first <u>two weeks</u> post the interview, any data provided by me will be destroyed and not used.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I understand that if I choose to withdraw beyond two <u>weeks</u> post the interview, any data provided by me will remain in the study and will be used.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	I understand that the interview is audiotaped and that these recordings will be protected, archived and destroyed by the researcher once the research is complete and findings are reported.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	I understand that confidentiality of records will be preserved and that no reference will be made to my identity/name/organisation in any reports, publications or presentations produced as an outcome of the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	I understand that if applicable data provided by me maybe be quoted in future reports, publications or presentations without disclosing my identity.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I understand that the researcher might contact me for a follow-up interview. I also understand that I am not obliged to participate in such a follow-up interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>

I have completed the consent form and have given my consent to participate in this study.

Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Researcher:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX THREE (A): INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (PILOT QUESTIONS)

---

### THE VALUE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT ARCHITECTURES TO MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research, I appreciate your time. As I explained in the 'Participant's Information Sheet', this is a qualitative research study conducted in partial fulfilment of a PhD research program. The purpose of this research is to examine how Talent Management is implemented in your organisation and understand whether it adds value to your organisation, or not.

As you already know, this is an audiotaped interview and should take approximately 60-90 minutes. The information you share will remain confidential (no direct reference to you or your identity will be made in any of my published reports).

There are two parts to this interview. In the first part, we will have an overall discussion about talent management and its implementation in your organisation. The second part we will specifically discuss how you believe talent management adds value to your organisation. I will share with you a value model that I have designed to support this research study. We will use this model to guide us in the discussion.

Do you have any questions that you would like me to address before we commence?

### Opening Questions

- Q.1 I'd like to start by asking you to briefly describe your current role in the organisation?
- Q.2 How long have you been working with the organisation?
- Q.3 What other positions have you held with the organisation, if any?
- Q.4 How do you describe your involvement with Talent Management?
- A strategy designer, or
  - A strategy implementer?

### Organisation Context and Talent Management

- Q.5 How is TM defined in your organisation? How do YOU define TM?
- Q.6 What is your organisation approach to TM (inclusive or exclusive)?
- For example, does your organisation consider all your employees as talent or only a selective group of employees?
  - Regardless of your organisation approach, which approach do you lean more towards (inclusive/exclusive)?
- Q.7 How is 'Talent'/High potential defined in your organisation?
- do you have different levels of talent?
  - how do you differentiate between them?
- Q.8 Do you have a TM strategy in your Organisation?
- do you have a common TM strategy across your organisation, or does it vary?

- how does it differ/align with your people strategy?
  - what is the objective of your TM strategy?
  - what drives the design of your TM strategy?
  - What is the impact of the organisation culture, values, corporate strategy, industry factors on TM?
- Q.9 Tell me more about your TM strategy processes – how do you identify/develop talent?
- Q.10 What challenges do you face while implementing your TM Strategies?
- What is the impact of the organisation culture, values, corporate strategy, industry factors on TM.
- Q.11 How do you know if TM has achieved its objectives?
- Q.12 How do you evaluate/ measure its effectiveness?

**The Value of Talent Management (Value Model)**

- Q.13 How is value defined in your organisation?
- How is value created and captured?
- Q.14 Generally speaking, how do YOU define value?
- Q.15 In your own views, what should the value of TM be?
- How do you define the value of TM?
- Q.16 Do you see TM adding value to your organisation?
- If yes, what value does it add?
  - If no, why?

- Q.17 What makes a talent/ high potential valuable to an organisation?
- define the value of key talent/ high potentials?
- Q.18 How should key talent/ high potentials add value to originations?
- do you see talent/ high potentials central to the creation of value in your organisation? Why?
- Q.19 Do you see your current talent/ high potentials adding value to your organisation?
- If yes, in what way?
  - If no, why not?

At the beginning of the interview, I mentioned the value model which I designed for the purpose of this research. The value model consists of four value processes, these are: value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection. To put some context around these processes, I developed generic definitions to introduce you to these four processes:

**Value Creation:** activities which enable the organisation to effectively manage its value-creating resources in order to increase the worth of its goods, services or its business overall.

**Value Capture:** activities which enable the organisation to recover some or all of the value created by its value-creating resources.

**Value Leverage:** activities which enable the organisation to improve and extend the capabilities of its value-creating resources.

**Value Protection:** activities which enable the organisation to protect its value-creating resources from being captured or duplicated by competitors.

What I would like is for you to take a few minutes to go through the model and let me know if you have any questions before we move on.

Now that you became familiar with the four value processes, I would like you to answer the following questions:

**Value Model**

Q.20 How can TM enable organisations to create value through their talent/high potential resources?

Q.21 How can TM enable organisations to capture the value that has been created by their talent/ high potential resources? (Capture value from talent)

Q.22 How can TM enable organisations to leverage the value that has been created by their talent/ high potential resources?

Q.23 How can TM enable organisations to protect the value that has been created by their talent/ high potential? (i.e. protect talent – sources of value creation)?



**Concluding the  
Interview**

Q.24 Have you ever thought about talent management in relation to these four value processes? If yes, in what way?

Q.25 Do you think this is a useful way to think about the value of talent management? Why?

Q.26 Do you have an alternative perspective on how I should think about talent management in relation to value?

Q.27 Is there anything else you would like to add? Do you have any questions?

## APPENDIX THREE (B): INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (FINAL QUESTIONS)

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### THE VALUE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT ARCHITECTURES TO MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research, I appreciate your time. As I explained in the 'Participant's Information Sheet', this is a qualitative research study conducted in partial fulfilment of a PhD research program. The purpose of this research is to examine how Talent Management is implemented in your organisation and understand whether it adds value to your organisation, or not.

As you already know, this is an audiotaped interview and should take approximately 60-90 minutes. The information you share will remain confidential (no direct reference to you or your identity will be made in any of my published reports).

There are two parts to this interview. In the first part, we will have an overall discussion about talent management and its implementation in your organisation. The second part we will specifically discuss how you see talent management adding value to your organisation. I will share with you a value model that has been designed to support this research study.

Do you have any questions that you would like me to address before we commence?

### Opening Questions

- Q.1 I'd like to start by asking you to briefly describe your current role in the organisation?
- Q.2 How long have you been working with the organisation?
- Q.3 What other positions have you held with the organisation, if any?
- Q.4 How do you describe your involvement with Talent Management?
- A strategy designer, or
  - A strategy implementer?

### Organisation Context and Talent Management

- Q.5 How is talent management defined in your organisation? How do YOU define talent management?
- Q.6 What is your organisation approach to talent management– is everyone in the organisation considered a high potential or only a selective few?
- Q.7 Who is a (how do you define) high potential in your organisation? Or what are the criteria for identifying an employee as a high potential?
- Q.8 Do you have a common talent management strategy across your organisation, or does it vary? How does it vary?
- Q.9 What do you think drives the design of your talent management strategy/practices globally?
- Q.10 Tell me more about your talent management strategy/ processes, for example:

- How are high potentials identified in your organisation?
- How are high potential developed in your organisation?
- How do you retain your high potentials in your organisation?

**The Value of Talent Management (Value Model)**

Q.11 In your organisation, how do you define 'value'?

Q.12 In your organisation, how is value created?

Q.13 In your views, what are the value creating resources in your organisation? Or who/what creates value in your organisation?

Q.14 In your views, what are the value creating capabilities in your organisation?

Q.15 Do you think talent management adds value to your organisation?

- What value does it add?
- What other value do you expect talent management to add?

At the beginning of the interview, I mentioned the value model which I designed for the purpose of this research. The value model consists of four value processes; these are value creation, value capture, value leverage and value protection. To put some context around these processes, I developed generic definitions to introduce you to these four processes:

**Value Creation:** activities which enable the organisation to effectively manage its value-creating resources in order to increase the worth of its goods, services or its business overall.

**Value Capture:** activities which enable the organisation to recover some or all of the value created by its value-creating resources.

**Value Leverage:** activities which enable the organisation to improve and extend the capabilities of its value-creating resources.

**Value Protection:** activities which enable the organisation to protect its value-creating resources from being captured or duplicated by competitors.

What I would like is for you to take a few minutes to go through the model and let me know if you have any questions before we move on.

Now that you became familiar with the four value processes, I would like you to answer the following questions:

Q.16 How do you see talent management contributing to value creation?

Q.17 How do you see talent management contributing to value capture?

Q.18 How do you see talent management contributing to value leverage?

Q.19 How do you see talent management contributing to value protection?

**Concluding the Interview**

Q.20 Have you ever thought about talent management in relation to these four value processes? If yes, in what way?

Q.21 Do you think this is a useful way to think about the value of talent management? Why?

Q.22 Do you have an alternative perspective on how I should think about talent management in relation to value?

Q.23 Is there anything else you would like to add? Do you have any questions?

## APPENDIX FOUR: VALUE MODEL

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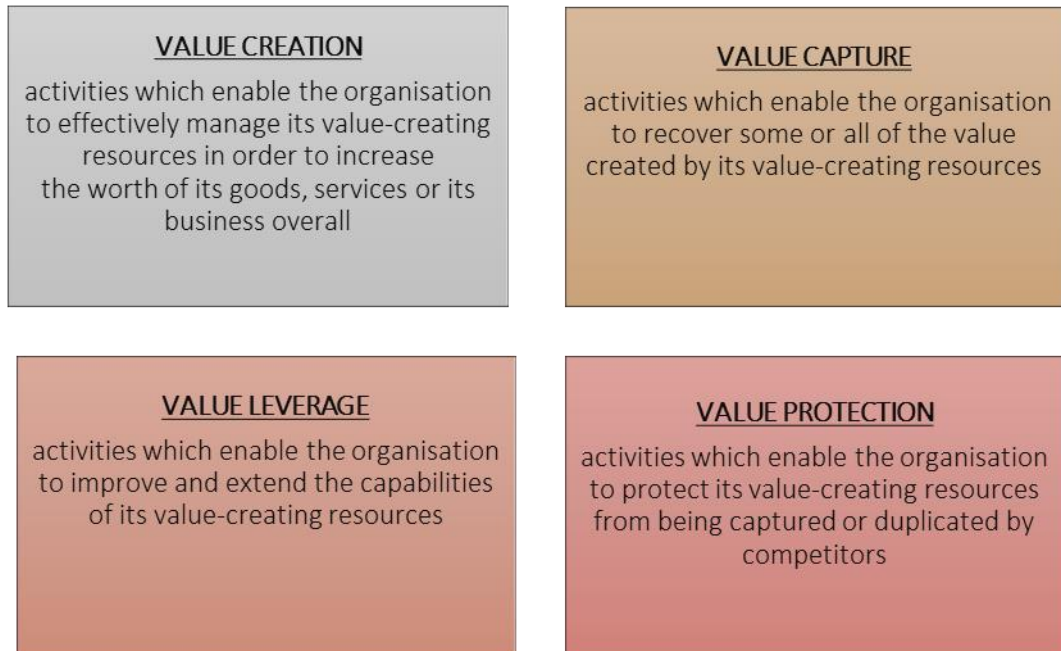


Figure 1 – Value Model

## APPENDIX FIVE (A): PARTICIPANT DETAILS – ORGANISATION X

Table 8 – Appendix Five: Participant Details, Organisation X

Participant ID	Interview Type (Skype, F-2-F)	Current Role and Responsibilities	Location	Length of Service (Years)	Case Experience	Involvement with TM (implementation/strategy, design)
<i>Org.X-AK-BS-01</i>	Skype	Leading one of the business intelligence teams (cloud solutions)	Israel	15	Has had different roles in the same location in addition to having head office experience	More implementation but also gets involved in designing local strategies
<i>Org.X-BG-BS-02</i>	Skype	Leading commercial operation for the MEA region	Turkey	7	Worked across different segments and locations	More implementation and landing the strategy locally
<i>Org.X-AS-BS-03</i>	F-2-F	Leading marketing and operations for the MEA region	Dubai	16	Worked across different locations and has had different roles in the sales and marketing organisation	Both implementation and strategy design
<i>Org.X-MR-BS-04</i>	F-2-F	Leading the enterprise business in the MEA region	Dubai	8	Worked across different locations in Europe	Both implementation and strategy design



Participant ID	Interview Type (Skype, F-2-F)	Current Role and Responsibilities	Location	Length of Service (Years)	Case Experience	Involvement with TM (implementation/strategy, design)
<i>Org.X-MM-BS-05</i>	F-2-F	Leading the marketing and operations in a local subsidiary	Turkey	6.9	Led marketing operations in home country before moving to the region	Involved in tailoring strategy to fit local needs.
<i>Org.X-MK-BS-06</i>	F-2-F	Leading end-to-end business operations	Turkey	12	Worked across different segments overseeing operations in different locations, but always based in Turkey	More implementation, but gives input into type of talent needed to support strategy
<i>Org.X-VC-BS-07</i>	F-2-F	Leading finance operations across the MEA region	Turkey	18	Worked across different locations including Head Office	Implementation
<i>Org.X-AS-HR-08</i>	Skype	Leading HR for R&D	Israel	10	Has had different roles within HR in same location	Both implementation and strategy design
<i>Org.X-DE-HR-09</i>	F-2-F	Managing HR operations for Services in the MEA region	Turkey	2.5	Always been in same role	More of an implementer but a bit of a designer as well

Participant ID	Interview Type (Skype, F-2-F)	Current Role and Responsibilities	Location	Length of Service (Years)	Case Experience	Involvement with TM (implementation/strategy, design)
<i>Org.X-EL-HR-10</i>	Skype	Leading HR end-to-end for the services group	South Africa	1.6	Always been in the same role	More on the design locally, tailoring a global strategy to fit locally
<i>Org.X-EG-HR-11</i>	F-2-F	Leading HR operations for a number of segments across the MEA region	Turkey	8	Has had different roles within HR (recruitment, development, on-boarding, HRBP)	About 30% design and 70% implementation
<i>Org.X-FS-HR-12</i>	F-2-F	Directing the HR function across the MEA region	Turkey	24	Has had different roles in sales and marketing and worked across different locations (Europe, Asia, ME, Africa) and Head Office before moving to HR	Both design and implementation. Gives input into the global design of talent management strategy
<i>Org.X-KM-HR-13</i>	Skype	Generalist HR lead for the sales organisation	South Africa	1	Always been in the same role	Implementation

Participant ID	Interview Type (Skype, F-2-F)	Current Role and Responsibilities	Location	Length of Service (Years)	Case Experience	Involvement with TM (implementation/strategy, design)
<i>Org.X-OB-HR-14</i>	F-2-F	Leading HR and Talent Management across the MEA region	Turkey	9	Has had different roles within HR (leading HR operations across different segments)	Design and Implementation
<i>Org.X-PH-HR-15</i>	Skype	Leading global executive talent acquisition team	UK	2	Always been in the same role	Implementation of talent acquisition strategy
<i>Org.X-SS-HR-16</i>	Skype	Leading talent acquisition for MEA region	Egypt	16	Started career in the business, then moved into HR	Implementation and design of talent acquisition strategy for MEA region
<i>Org.X-VB-HR-17</i>	F-2-F	Leading HR for the Turkish subsidiary	Turkey	4	Leading HR in home country before moving to MEA region	More of an implementer
<i>Org.X-AK-HR-18</i>	Skype	Leading HR in Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	8	Different roles within HR in the same country	A bit of both but primarily strategy implementer
<i>Org.X-NG-HR-19</i>	F-2-F	Managing HR projects for the Turkish subsidiary	Turkey	4	Head Office experience within HR before moving to MEA region	Implementation

## APPENDIX FIVE (B): PARTICIPANT DETAILS – ORGANISATION Y

Table 9 - Appendix Five: Participant Details, Organisation Y

Participant ID	Interview Type (Skype, F-2-F)	Current Role and Responsibilities	Location	Length of Service (Years)	Case Experience	Involvement with TM (implementation/strategy, design)
<i>Org.Y-GK-BS-01</i>	F-2-F	Managing the sales team across East and Central Africa	Dubai	21	Managing different sales teams across MEA region and Balkan countries	More implementation but also gets involved in designing local talent management strategies
<i>Org.Y-HH-BS-02</i>	F-2-F	Managing technology sales for the Gulf cluster	Dubai	12	Managing financial services	More implementation but gives input on how talent should be developed in the region
<i>Org.Y-KA-BS-03</i>	F-2-F	Managing sales for the Eastern and Central Europe, Central Middle East and Africa regions	Dubai	20	Managing sales across different countries in the MEA region	Implementation
<i>Org.Y-RH-BS-04</i>	Skype	Directing the enterprise cloud business	Netherland	12	Different roles within the organisation across Europe	Implementation
<i>Org.Y-TS-BS-05</i>	Skype	Responsible for the cloud activities in Europe, Middle East and Africa	Italy	10	Has led different businesses within the organisation	Design and implementation

Participant ID	Interview Type (Skype, F-2-F)	Current Role and Responsibilities	Location	Length of Service (Years)	Case Experience	Involvement with TM (implementation/strategy, design)
<i>Org.Y-RM-BS-06</i>	Skype	Business director – sales organisation	Australia	12	Has led different businesses within the organisation	Design and implementation
<i>Org.Y-AM-HR-07</i>	F-2-F	Managing HR operations across the MEA region	Dubai	2	Always been in the same role	Tailoring global strategy and implementing it
<i>Org.Y-AB-HR-08</i>	Skype	Leading the organisation and consulting team across different regions and segments	Italy	10	Has supported HR and talent development across different segments	Leads design of talent management strategy for MEA region
<i>Org.Y-AT-HR-09</i>	F-2-F	HR business partner for the sales organisation in the Gulf region	Dubai	4	Always been in the same role but supporting different segments	Implementation
<i>Org.Y-AT-HR-10</i>	F-2-F	Leading HR operations in MEA, Europe and Russia	Dubai	19	Has had different HR roles within the MEA and European regions	Implementing strategy and ensuring consistency across MEA region

## APPENDIX FIVE (C): PARTICIPANT DETAILS – ORGANISATION W

Table 10 – Appendix Five: Participant Details, Organisation W

Participant ID	Interview Type (Skype, F-2-F)	Current Role and Responsibilities	Location	Length of Service (Years)	Case Experience	Involvement with TM (implementation/strategy, design)
<i>Org.W-SM-BS-01</i>	F-2-F	Heading special teams and IT architectures for ME region	Dubai	5	Managed different accounts across ME region	Both the design and implementation
<i>Org.W-FY-BS-02</i>	F-2-F	Heading the sales function for the private enterprise sector	Dubai	10.5	Supported the sales organisation and was located in different countries in the MEA region	Implementation
<i>Org.W-FK-BS-03</i>	F-2-F	Leading partnerships and account management for government organisations and leading marketing operations in the MEA region	Dubai	12	Has had different roles across Europe	Implementation

Participant ID	Interview Type (Skype, F-2-F)	Current Role and Responsibilities	Location	Length of Service (Years)	Case Experience	Involvement with TM (implementation/strategy, design)
<i>Org.W-LC-BS-04</i>	F-2-F	Leading delivery for MEA and Russia	Dubai	15	Has had different roles across Europe and in emerging markets	Supports implementation and occasionally gives input into design of local processes
<i>Org.W-MA-BS-05</i>	Skype	Leading the sales organisation in Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	10	Has managed different sales teams and segments in Saudi Arabia	Implementation
<i>Org.W-TA-HR-06</i>	F-2-F	Leading HR operations in the MEA region	Dubai	9	Based out of Europe before moving to MEA region and supporting different roles in HR	Implementation but also has a say in how global strategy should be tailored to meet local needs
<i>Org.W-JN-HR-07</i>	F-2-F	Supporting HR operations across the sales organisation for Gulf countries	Dubai	5	Has had different HR roles in Gulf region	Implementation

## APPENDIX FIVE (D): PARTICIPANT DETAILS - ORGANISATION V

Table 11 – Appendix Five: Participant Details, Organisation V

Participant ID	Interview Type (Skype, F-2-F)	Current Role and Responsibilities	Location	Length of Service (Years)	Case Experience	Involvement with TM (implementation/strategy, design)
<i>Org.V-NK-BS-01</i>	Skype	Heading the consulting group	Australia	2	Has always headed the same function	Both the design and implementation
<i>Org.V-NK-BS-02</i>	Skype	Heading the sales enablement team for Asia and the MEA region	Singapore	18	Has managed different accounts and led different sales team across Asia Pacific and EMEA regions	Gives input into the design of global strategy and implementation
<i>Org.V-RH-BS-03</i>	F-2-F	Heading the finance function in the EMEA region	Dubai	1	Always been in the same role	Gives input into the local design but mostly into implementation
<i>Org.V-SH-BS-04</i>	Skype	Heading the business transformation strategy function	Singapore	8	Has had different strategic roles to support business transformation	Involved in both design and implementation
<i>Org.V-WK-BS-05</i>	F-2-F	Leading business operations in ME and NA	Dubai	10	Has had different roles in the MEA region	Implementing global initiatives



Participant ID	Interview Type (Skype, F-2-F)	Current Role and Responsibilities	Location	Length of Service (Years)	Case Experience	Involvement with TM (implementation/strategy, design)
<i>Org.V-ST-BS-06</i>	Skype	Leading the strategy design team in sub-Saharan Africa region	South Africa	2	Always been in the same role	Influencing design but more towards implementation
<i>Org.V-RK-BS-07</i>	F-2-F	Heading the regional consulting team in the MEA region	Dubai	5	Always been in the same consulting role	Implementation
<i>Org.V-AJ-HR-08</i>	Skype	Heading HR operations in the EMEA region	South Africa	10	Has had different HR roles overseeing different regions	Localising global strategy based on local needs
<i>Org.V-KW-HR-09</i>	Skype	Leading HR operations across Australia	Australia	7	Has had different HR roles in Australia (different locations)	Implementation and design
<i>Org.V-AJ-HR-10</i>	F-2-F	Heading HR operations for EMEA	Dubai	5	HR lead roles in AMEA region	Implementation and design

## APPENDIX FIVE (E): PARTICIPANT DETAILS - ORGANISATION Z

Table 12 – Appendix Five: Participant Details, Organisation Z

Participant ID	Interview Type (Skype, F-2-F)	Current Role and Responsibilities	Location	Length of Service (Years)	Case Experience	Involvement with TM (implementation/strategy, design)
<i>Org.Z-AR-BS-01</i>	F-2-F	Leading marketing team for MEA and Pakistan	Dubai	15	Has had similar roles based out of UK but overseeing different regions and countries	Implementation and supporting local HR teams in tailoring global strategy
<i>Org.Z-JS-BS-02</i>	F-2-F	Leading neuroscience team in Saudi Arabia	Dubai	5	Has had similar roles in different regions	Gives input into local strategy but mostly implementation
<i>Org.Z-GM-BS-03</i>	F-2-F	Leading business operations in medical devices	Dubai	3.5	Has had similar roles in the Pharma segment	Implementation
<i>Org.Z-AM-BS-04</i>	F-2-F	Leading oncology team for local distributors	Saudi Arabia	21	Has had different roles within Saudi Arabia	Both implementation and design
<i>Org.Z-LV-HR-05</i>	F-2-F	Supporting HR operations for commercial and sales organisation	Dubai	12	Has worked in different HR roles across different European countries	Implementation and tailoring local strategy

Participant ID	Interview Type (Skype, F-2-F)	Current Role and Responsibilities	Location	Length of Service (Years)	Case Experience	Involvement with TM (implementation/strategy, design)
<i>Org.Z-LV-HR-06</i>	F-2-F	Leading talent acquisition team for the MEA region	Dubai	4	Had HR generalist lead role prior to moving into talent acquisition	Implementation and steering local design to align to local needs