GAINING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE: EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTIONS ON THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP AND TALENT MANAGEMENT FACTORS IN A SMALL COMPANY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

Purpose – This research paper falls within the interpretive research philosophy and considers talent management within the field of competitive advantage. It aims to explore the organisation members' perceptions of talent, talent management, the factors perceived to facilitate competitive advantage and the role of leadership in the facilitation of talent management. It attempts to achieve a greater understanding of talent management as practically applied by organisations.

Design/Methodology – A qualitative research approach in collecting and analysing data was implemented for this particular research study to address the research problem. The research design consists of a qualitative case study of one organisation. The organisation was purposively selected due to its superior performance in its particular industry. The data was collected by using in-depth interviews and observation and analysed using qualitative content analysis. Organisational documents supplemented the data collection process.

Rationale – Current talent management literature shows a lack of understanding of talent and the role leadership plays in talent management. A number of authors have called for research which focuses on the perspectives of all stakeholders, especially at the individual level. It was also suggested that greater focus is allocated to small to medium enterprises, as multi-national corporations dominated the

current literature. This research paper has the potential to increase levels of understanding at both organisation and individual level. This study examined TM from a range of perspectives, focused on a smaller organisation and is one of the few qualitative studies in the world within a developing country—research that is lacking in the literature.

Findings – Participants held different views on talent and talent management, supporting the lack of consensus on these topics and the lack of a standardised understanding. The findings highlight that talent management was mostly perceived to involve the correct positioning of people within the organisation and that talent involved skills, knowledge and abilities to perform their roles well. Organisational structure, processes, and the lack of leadership ability were perceived as the dominant factors affecting the effective implementation of talent management practices. Talent management was perceived as important by the middle and lower-level participants of the study and was perceived as not important by higher-level participants—a contrasting finding due to the fact that the higher-level candidates felt that it was important to retain staff, understood the consequences of staff loss and that it was difficult to replace talent.

Theoretical and managerial implications – The findings correspond with previous studies that the understanding of talent management is still lacking and thus potentially jeopardizes shaping a competitive advantage. The leadership cadre at the case organisation failed to see the importance of talent management and failed to link talent management to competitive advantage and ultimately failed to strategise potential talent management practices and effective talent management implementation. The modern business environment is changing and the realisation that talent management is of crucial importance to sustained competitive advantage is becoming evident.

Limitations – The main source of error was a potential bias of results and a lack of rigorous data analysis, which was overcome by attending to the reliability of the research.

Future research – There is potential for further empirical research to be conducted in other industries while maintaining focus on smaller businesses. The focus must also be maintained on the perspectives of all stakeholders in organisations.

Keywords – Talent, talent management, talent retention, leadership, competitive advantage.

1.1 Background

Organisations recognise that talent management (TM) is important in ensuring a competitive advantage (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Fegley, 2006a; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Goetsch, 2010; Khoreva, Vaiman and Van Zalk, 2017; McDonnell, Collings, Mellahi and Schuler, 2017; Vaiman, Scullion and Collings, 2012), however, they lament their TM efforts fail (Ashton and Morton, 2005; Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Bersin, Houston and Kester, 2014; Collings, 2014, 2015). A number of reasons are advanced for the ineffective TM efforts, ranging from skills shortages and the 'war for talent' (Frank, Finnegan and Taylor, 2004; Ewerlin, 2013; Hejase, Hejase, Mikdashi and Bazeih, 2016; Nilsson and Ellström, 2012; Vaiman et al. 2012), the retiring of Baby Boomers (McCollum and Na'Desh, 2015), Generation X and Y, the majority of the workforce (McCollum and Na'Desh, 2015), display nomadic behaviour as they stay, respectively, on average three, five and two years at an employer (Nolan, 2015), which is compounded by globalisation, and the mobility of especially skilled workers (Ashton and Morton, 2005; Axelrod, Handfield-Jones and Welsh, 2001; Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Collings, 2014, 2015; Farndale, Scullion and Sparrow, 2010; Lepak and Snell, 2002; McDonnell et al. 2017; Ployhart, Nyberg, Reilly and Maltarich, 2014). However, it has recently been argued that one of the most important reasons for the ineffectiveness of TM efforts is the fact that the concept "talent" is "slippery" (McDonnell et al. 2017; Thunnissen, 2016)

What exactly is meant by the term "talent"? Does it refer to the "gifted" individual or does every individual possess the ability to be talented? How does an organisation manage these "talented" individuals effectively to ensure a competitive advantage for the organisation? These questions are rather difficult to answer definitively because there are many ways in which talent can be defined and each organisation approaches talent differently (Tansley, 2011; Thunnissen, 2016).

Talent is often described as the collection of an individual's abilities, skills and knowledge in connection with filling key organisational roles, while TM is often described as the attraction, development and retention of identified talent (Collings, 2014; Stadler, 2011; Thunnissen, 2016). Effective TM is linked to a sustainable competitive advantage, which is described as having a set of resources that create more economic value for customers than does that of their competitors thus allowing the organisation to outperform their competitors with performance that is difficult to imitate (Barney, 1991; Campbell, Coff and Kryscynski, 2012; Fegley, 2006b; Hejase et al. 2016; Peteraf and Barney, 1993; Porter, 1985, 1988; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013b; van der Merwe and Nienaber, 2015). Human resources are the most important resources underpinning competitive advantage, especially in respect of the knowledge, skills, experience, attitudes, motivations and health (mental and physical) they bring to the workforce (Nienaber and Sewdass, 2016). The lack of a standardised approach to TM should compel researchers to acquire a greater understanding of the topic in order to answer the above-mentioned

questions and assist organisations to create a competitive advantage, thus ensuring their sustainability (Collings, 2015; Guest, 2011; McDonnell et al. 2017; Thunnissen, 2016).

The research area of TM through the lens of strategy and competitive advantage is a relatively new concept in the modern world of business and is often seen as the same concept as human resource management (Lewis and Heckman, 2006; McDonnell et al. 2017; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a). Recent research studies of TM have been labelled as not being up to modern standards and are believed to be too narrow in scope, only focusing on a select category of organisations, thus leading to a decline in publications in this field since 2014 (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). The modern world is moving towards the human component of business, this being the scarce resource that is hailed as having the highest importance in successfully executing strategy to achieve the goals of the organisation and outperform the competition; hence the focus on human resources forces organisations to manage talent as a critical resource in order to achieve performance targets as they compete in the war for talent (Goetsch, 2010; Lockwood, 2007; Masibigiri and Nienaber, 2011; Stadler, 2011; Swailes and Blackburn, 2016).

Recent studies portray research from the organisational perspective as being given preference over research at the employee level of TM, even though talent has been found to be difficult to define at the organisational level (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; McDonnell et al. 2017; Tansley, 2011). In a modern world characterised by intense competition for scarce resources, especially human resources, organisations should be prepared to handle issues encompassing TM from both the organisational and employee level perspectives (McDonnell et al. 2017; Minbaeva and Collings, 2013).

Nevertheless, the responsibility for TM is considered to be a leadership function, at all hierarchical levels of the organisation, to shape the overall strategy, manage talent, motivate and develop talent, retain talent and to be held accountable for strategic decision-making, including TM decisions (McGee, 2006; Ulrich and Smallwood, 2015). Leadership occurs when the organisation develops a team of current and future talent who possess the ability to shape organisational strategy and culture to create a dynamic, centred on organisational success (Ulrich and Smallwood, 2015). Leaders are taking stock of the importance of taking a strategic approach to TM, but lack the skills to effectively manage the process, underestimate their role in the practice and generally lack a sound understanding of the practice, thus leading to ineffective TM and diminished views on the retention of talent (Ellehuus, 2012; Deery and Jago, 2015; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007).

1.2 Rationale of the research

A preliminary study of the literature highlights fundamental issues relating to the lack of understanding of talent and leadership, and what role leadership plays within TM. By exposing the gaps in the literature, the areas requiring exploration and further study are identified. This particular research paper could provide crucial steps towards forming a clearer understanding of how these issues are experienced on

a macro level, where the increasing mobility of people across geographical and cultural boundaries is having a profound effect on TM (McDonnell et al. 2017; Vaiman et al. 2012).

This view pertains to South Africa, where the skills shortage is a well-known fact, acting as one of the major obstructions to building an economy of sustainable growth (Grobler and Warnich, 2016; Kerr-Phillips and Thomas, 2009; Rasool and Botha; 2011). The sustainability of the South African labour markets has been impacted by the country's own political, economic and social actions and history, leading to large-scale emigration caused by uncertainty about the future of the country, job insecurity and fear (Kerr-Phillips and Thomas, 2009). This leaves South Africa at a major disadvantage from a macro perspective, costing the country millions of Rands in staff turnover costs (de Villiers and Stander, 2011; Kerr-Phillips and Thomas, 2009). It is maintained that leadership fails to succeed in building success within human capital and that management generally undervalues the coalition of talent in the pursuit of business outcomes, an issue that could be overcome by effective leadership training (Lin, Wang, Wang and Jaw; 2017; Nienaber, 2007).

Research of this nature has the potential to increase leaders' levels of understanding at both the organisational and individual level regarding the factors necessary to effectively retain talent. The retention of talent is a crucial practice to sustaining competitiveness, as the loss of talent costs organisations an immense amount of money as well as major losses in productivity and knowledge (Winning the talent war … 2015; de Villiers and Stander, 2011; Frank et al. 2004). These crucial areas in talent management in need of further exploration, was the motivation behind this choice of topic.

1.3 Research problem statement

The core problem is that there is a lack of understanding of, and consensus on, TM (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013; McDonnell et al. 2017; Ross, 2013a; Thunnissen et al. 2013a; Thunnissen, 2016) which causes leadership structures to fail in their execution of effective TM (Collings, 2014). This results in inferior and neglected talent retention, poor customer satisfaction, diminished competitive advantage, and ultimately decreased business performance (Hejase et al. 2016). An abundance of reviews exist within the current TM literature, but a clearer image of TM needs to be constructed, paying close attention to the definition, scope and theoretical background of the concept (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Lewis and Heckman, 2006).

In developing countries, small to medium enterprise (SME), traditionally dominate the amount of economically active organisations and is considered to be vital in addressing several major economic objectives (Masarira and Msweli, 2013; Masutha and Rogerson, 2014; Smit and Watkins, 2012). SMEs in the South African economy are considered crucial for the promotion of economic growth, job creation and the mitigation of poverty (Agupusi, 2007; Masarira and Msweli, 2013; Masutha and Rogerson, 2014; Smit and Watkins, 2012). 90% percent of all formal businesses in South Africa are considered to be SMEs, contributing between 50-57% of the gross domestic product, resulting in SMEs being one of the largest contributors to the South African economy (Masarira and Msweli, 2013; Smit and Watkins,

2012). SMEs provide for 60% of employment in South Africa and are responsible for 75% of new jobs due to the slow growth of new employment opportunities within the larger formal organisations (Masarira and Msweli, 2013; Masutha and Rogerson, 2014; Smit and Watkins, 2012). SMEs are highly revered for their adaptability, innovative nature and agility, allowing the organisations to have a close proximity to their customers, possessing the ability to take risks with new and improved work methods and flexibility to mitigate risks during economic recessions (Smit and Watkins, 2012). These factors have led to the focus of this study being on an organisation considered to be an SME, as this type of organisation is highly valued in a developing country such as South Africa. TM research efforts within SME settings are generally lacking (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; McDonnell et al. 2017).

The literature highlights certain issues with the current understanding of talent and TM. It is found that organisations vary in their approach to TM, thus leading to the problem of there being no consensus in practice as to what talent really is and how to retain said talent (Winning the talent war…, 2015; Foster, 2015; Tansley, 2011; Thunnissen et al. 2013b; Thunnissen, 2016). This results in organisations formulating their own understanding of what talent is, instead of searching for and developing, a universal standard (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; Tansley, 2011), hampering theory development.

According to Tansley (2011), the current research focus takes an approach that is too narrow, taking into account that talent is exploited to implement strategies that can be used to respond to market opportunities and lead to sustained competitive advantage; the problem being that this performance and its value are considered mostly in terms of shareholder returns. This narrow approach is then translated into human resource-specific actions that leaders must follow, thereby missing important employee-level concerns regarding talent and TM and failing to align the individual and the organisation in the generation of value (Collings, 2014; McDonnell et al. 2017; Tansley, 2011; Thunnissen, 2016). This lack of consistency regarding the overall understanding of what talent really is and how to manage it leaves space in the TM research focus area to explore the true meaning of the term talent, explore the different views on talent and the current factors that affect TM.

The above issues with talent and TM can be linked to the leadership structures within organisations as already stated. Leadership, is ultimately responsible for the performance of the organisation, which is associated with the practice associated with strategy formulation and implementation, is still relevant in modern literature and portrayed within the classical management body of knowledge (Grant, 2016; Nienaber and Roodt, 2008). Currently, leaders within organisations are recognising the necessity of adopting a strategic approach with large investments being made in TM systems and processes (McDonnell et al. 2017; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007).

The literature highlights some major pitfalls regarding leadership, focusing on the fact that leadership research has taken the same narrow approach as talent research, where there is a lack of standards across views and leading academics do not agree on what leadership encompasses and what leadership practices should be followed for organisation success (Allio, 2012). This narrow approach creates a clear problem that has resulted in leaders and organisations being poorly equipped to respond to talent, TM decisions and the effective management of talent, with a large majority of leaders lacking

the skills to manage talent and improve business outcomes (Allio, 2012; Ellehuus, 2012; Tafti, Mahmoudsalehi and Amiri, 2017). This problem has a profound effect on TM, business performance and competitive advantage (Hejase et al. 2016).

It is clear from the above that leadership is failing in their TM initiatives, creating a gap in the research to explore leadership's role in TM and the TM factors that all organisational members consider to ensure competitive advantage.

The literature highlights an overlap of leadership and TM, the issue that the talent retention component of TM is neglected and that more emphasis is placed on recruitment and selection components of TM. A recent review of employee retention sees that previous literature is still valid, but sound literature on TM is still lacking, especially with regard to individual factors, employee well-being and work-life balance (Deery and Jago, 2015). Research portrays that organisations meet their recruitment needs rather effectively, but lack a detailed process focusing on TM and generally fail to succeed in making their human resources productive (Deery and Jago, 2015; Nienaber, 2007; Nienaber, 2016; Nienaber and Sewdass, 2016; Thunnissen, 2016). Future research is vital in determining the role of leadership in TM, and how it leads to the effective talent retention of the right talent in the right role while focusing on the overall factors affecting TM and how leadership can reduce the rejection of TM (Deery and Jago, 2015).

This study explored the TM factors that organisational members at all hierarchical levels perceived to facilitate competitive advantage, in order to achieve a greater understanding of TM as practically applied by organisations as limited empirical evidence in this regard is available (Collings, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnessen, 2016; Guest, 2011; Tansley, 2011; Tlaiss, Martin and Hofaidhllaoui, 2017) and can be phrased as: "Gaining a competitive advantage: Employees' perceptions on the role of leadership and talent management factors in a small company in South Africa". A qualitative case study was employed to study the problem by collecting data from interviews conducted within one organisation, which will be augmented with relevant organisational data (secondary) and observations. The unit of analysis will be TM factors perceived to facilitate competitive advantage and the unit of observation will be the individuals at all hierarchical levels of the organisation.

1.4 Statement of purpose

The aim of this research is to conduct empirical research to explore the TM factors that the organisational members, including all individuals and leaders, of a purposively selected organisation, perceive to facilitate competitiveness/competitive advantage, with a view to achieving a greater understanding of TM; particularly in the context of a SME in a developing country.

1.5 Research objectives

The general objective of this study is to achieve a greater understanding of the TM focus area, in particular, the factors that organisational members perceive to facilitate competitive advantage, with the intention of adding to the existing body of TM knowledge.

The empirical objectives are set across three specific areas of focus. Firstly, the study explores the TM factors that organisational members perceive to facilitate competitive advantage. This is the primary research objective and explores the perceptions of organisational members in connection with TM (recruitment, development and retention of employees with the required competence across occupations and hierarchies) factors facilitating competitive advantage. The unit of analysis is the TM factors facilitating competitive advantage and the unit of observation is the members of the organisation, across occupations and hierarchies.

Secondly, the study explores the different views on talent, TM, competitiveness/competitive advantage and talent retention held by members of the organisation. The unit of analysis is the views on talent, TM, competitiveness and talent retention. The unit of observation is the members of the organisation across occupations and hierarchies. This secondary objective explores whether the perceptions held by the different organisational members across occupations and hierarchies on the respective TM factors facilitating competitive advantage are different or similar.

Lastly, the study explores the TM factors perceived to facilitate talent retention and the role of leadership in talent retention practices. This last objective explores the factors perceived to facilitate and hinder the retention of talent. The unit of analysis is the factors perceived to facilitate or hinder talent retention and the unit of observation is the members of the organisation, across occupations and hierarchies.

1.6 Assumptions

A brief overview of the literature highlighted the following assumptions:

- TM is significantly affected by poor top leadership, thus resulting in poor employee performance (de Klerk and Stander, 2014).
- Talented individuals leave organisations due to a lack of development opportunities like performance appraisal, lack of a challenging work environment and lack of opportunities to grow (Masibigiri and Nienaber, 2011**).**

1.7 Literature review

A detailed review of the literature was conducted to effectively indicate what literature has been covered in the field of talent management. The views of the current and evergreen authors were vital in establishing the research problem and the direction needed in this particular field. The literature review

is structured according to relevant findings within each established theme and the specific issues relating to said themes.

1.7.1 Definitions and importance

TM is broadly defined as a set of integrated and well-planned practices and processes involving individual and organisational characteristics that focus on workplace culture, planning, development and human resources' actions to source the best possible candidates for all hierarchical levels of the organisation by identifying key positions and retaining said candidates (Collings, 2014; Fegley, 2006a; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Tlaiss et al. 2017). It can also be defined more narrowly as a collection of activities within the human resource function that ensures an adequate flow of employees into positions throughout the organisation (Lewis and Heckman, 2006). The collection of activities forms a framework of continuous value creation through the processes of attracting, selecting, engaging, developing and retaining talent to meet present and future talent demands (Nilsson and Ellström, 2012; Phillips, 2014; Tlaiss et al. 2017). These definitions have slight differences, yet they all adopt the resource-based view of strategy studies, which determines which particular resource (in this case human capital) or combination of resources, are employed to enable the organisation to remain competitive within a particular market and obtain an advantage over their competitors (Boxall, 1998; Campbell et al. 2012; Lepak and Snell, 2002). The broader definition (Collings, 2014; Fegley, 2006a; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Tlaiss et al. 2017) will be utilised in this study, i.e. talent management is defined as a set of practices focused on workplace culture, planning, development and human resources' actions to source the best possible candidates for all hierarchical levels of the organisation by identifying key positions and retaining said candidates (Collings, 2014; Fegley, 2006a; Lewis and Heckman, 2006).

Talent is defined as individuals who have systematically developed specialised competencies, skills, knowledge, experience in at least one field of human endeavour and are of strategic importance (possessing the ability to provide competitive advantage) to the organisation through value creation as they grow and develop (Foster, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo., 2013; Sripirom, Jhundra-indra and Raksong, 2015; Stadler, 2011; Tansley, 2011).

Leadership is defined as a process of continuous learning, the social exchange between leader and follower, actions that facilitate decision-making and the ability to influence the decision-making process which is important in shaping strategy (Nienaber, 2007; van der Merwe and Nienaber, 2015). Leadership is a practice that is a complex process, something that develops over time and is situational (Allio, 2012; Nienaber, 2007). The broad view of leadership will be utilised in this study, which accepts that leadership exists within all levels of the organisation, but requires different tasks, responsibilities and roles (Nienaber, 2010).

The importance of TM has become clear in today's environment which is composed of high competition and a shifting priority towards human capital practices to attract and retain key staff (Böhmer and Schinnenburg, 2016; Frank et al. 2004). It is crucial for organisations to arrive at the conclusion that it

is not enough to merely invest in talent, but they must sustain their greatest talent as well (Padmaja and Venkateswara Rao, 2015). This highlights a key problem area within current organisations whereby they place too little effort in retaining their greatest talent, yet they place great emphasis upon attracting talent and do not take into account the issue of talent leaving and the true cost of said talent loss (Hejase et al. 2016; McCollum and Na'Desh, 2015; Nolan, 2015; Padmaja and Venkateswara Rao, 2015). The importance of the strongest TM programmes being the result of united TM effort cannot be overlooked, and when successful, the most sustainable form of competitive advantage is created (Pruis, 2011).

1.7.2 Views on talent

Defining talent alone will not suffice in understanding "what talent really is"; further steps need to be taken to understand the various views and philosophies relating to talent.

It is accepted in the literature that organisations vary in their approach to talent, depending on their size and complexity, leading to multiple views on what talent is (Winning the talent war… 2015; Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; Tansley, 2011; Tansley, Kirk and Tietze, 2013). Talent is viewed from the group (organisational) and individual level where organisations usually take either an inclusive (gifted few) or exclusive approach (rare, gifted or specialised) to talent (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; Tansley et al. 2013; Thunnissen et al. 2013a; Thunnissen and Van Arensbergen, 2015). Additional talent considerations, whether opposing positions or in some combination, include: whether it is subject (person) or object (competence); unique (company-specific) or generic (applicable to a variety of contexts); and whether competence is innate (a predetermined and fixed capacity) or malleable (can be developed) (Becker, 1962; Boudreau, 2013; Campbell et al. 2012; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013(a), (b); Farndale et al. 2010; Lepak and Snell, 2002; Ployhart, Van Iddekinge and MacKenzie, 2011; 2014; Schuler, Jackson and Tarique, 2011; Tansley, 2011; Teece, 2014). It stands to reason that due to the dynamic nature of relationships, the contribution of individuals to organisational performance is greater than merely aggregating individual actions (Boxall and Purcell, 2011; Campbell et al. 2012; Lepak and Snell, 2002; Pfeffer, 2001; Ployhart et al. 2011; Ployhart and Moliterno, 2011; Pugh and Dietz, 2008; Sirmon, Hitt, Ireland and Gilbert, 2011; Teece, 2014; Wright and McMahan, 2011).

Talent at the individual level is generally taken to mean an individual who is "special", "gifted" or "unique", someone who excels easily (a high performer), is capable of adding value to their organisation and possessing a mixture of specific behavioural aspects, knowledge, skills, competencies and cognitive abilities and has a large amount of potential (King, 2015; Tansley, 2011; Thunnissen and Van Arensbergen, 2015).

Talent at the group level is difficult to conceptualise due to the lack of consensus on what talent really is, but organisations still group their talent based on their own formulation of what talent the organisation requires (McDonnell et al. 2017; Tansley, 2011). Talent at group level is broken down into the following elements: leadership talent, which is individuals who are indispensable to the organisation because of their mixture of critical skills and abilities e.g. top-level managers and executives; key talent, which is

high-performing individuals who are not seen on the same level as leadership talent e.g. mid-level to senior-level managers; core talent, which is individuals who perform core business processes and execute short-term actions e.g. production staff; peripheral talent, which is individuals who provide essential services that are not seen as core business processes e.g. contractors (Tansley, 2011). This breakdown of talented individuals is usually grouped within talent pools which are seen as a collective of individuals the organisation has identified as talent (McDonnell et al. 2017; Tansley, 2011).

Organisations group these individuals into talent pools based on their inclusive or exclusive talent approach (Thunnissen and Van Arensbergen, 2015). The exclusive talent approach focuses solely on the individuals who are labelled as "special" or "high-potential" and possess the ability to reach an executive level within the organisation based on the mixture of skills and abilities listed above (Winning the talent war … 2015; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007). The inclusive talent approach is broader in nature, viewing all individuals as talented and assuming that every employee possesses a set of skills and has the potential to add value to the organisation if they are willing to undergo development to fit key positions or combined with other staff (Winning the talent war … 2015; Böhmer and Schinnenburg, 2016; Lepak and Snell, 2002; Thunnissen and Van Arensbergen, 2015). This view is also supported by the fact that relationships are dynamic and amplifier effects can be achieved by combining resources optimally instead of relying on high-performers alone. It is known that organisations utilise both the inclusive and exclusive approaches to talent, although the exclusive approach tends to be the preferred approach, especially in multinational enterprises (MNEs) (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; McDonnell et al. 2017; Thunnissen et al. 2013b). The inclusive approach will be utilised in this study. This will ensure that talent and talent combinations are not overlooked.

Expanding on the above, the literature highlights four different philosophies of TM, namely the people approach, the positions approach, the practices approach and the strategic pools approach (Sparrow and Makram, 2015). The practices, positions and strategic pools approaches focus attention on key human resources practices and the identification of critical positions, ensuring that talent is sourced and readily available for current and future talent requirements to replace the planned or unplanned loss of talent (Sparrow and Makram, 2015).

The people approach is of particular interest in this study due to the problem of the lack of consensus on what talent really is. The people approach focuses attention on the categorisation of people and differentiates the management of talent based on how rare the individuals are and the proposed value they can offer the organisation (Sparrow and Makram, 2015). The Human Capital Characteristics and Employment Mode Matrix by Lepak and Snell (2002) is an important consideration in this approach, highlighting that individuals are assessed based on the scales of uniqueness and strategic value, which forms the basis for their categorisation (Lepak and Snell, 2002). The individuals ranked as having high uniqueness and high strategic value are seen as the key positions of the organisation providing the organisation with a competitive advantage; and the individuals ranked as having low uniqueness and low strategic value are seen as the non-key positions, providing support to the key positions of the organisation (Lepak and Snell, 2002). Key positions and high-uniqueness essentially mean the roles that are essential to the operation of the organisation and that competitors would not possess the same

value. Each organisation will approach this categorisation of talent differently, with varying degrees of differentiation and decisions on the amount or split between core and non-core talent (Sparrow and Makram, 2015).

These approaches all focus on value generation, as business leaders translate the identified value that talent offers into business performance and achieve specific business outcomes, which can prove to be a problem if talent approaches are not clearly defined and if there is a lack of consensus on what talent really is (Ulrich and Smallwood, 2015). If organisations want to categorise talent and formulate claims about value generation, the organisations need to assess how the different levels of talent are linked to organisational performance and focus on the limitations of leadership and how leadership leverages talent to create value (Sparrow and Makram, 2015). The focus on leadership is crucial due to their ability and responsibility to shape strategy and organisational culture by ensuring that a systematic and integrated approach to TM is implemented, thus resulting in coordinated, talent-orientated processes in pursuit of sustained competitiveness (Hejase et al. 2016; Sparrow and Makram, 2015).

1.7.3 Leadership issues and effects on talent management

The literature clearly highlights that leadership is, overall, responsible for the TM process, which makes it crucial to explore the role of leadership in TM and the factors leadership consider in shaping the competitive advantage of the organisation.

Recent studies show that executive-level business leaders are currently spending as much as 30% of their time on TM—setting requirements that business leaders at all hierarchical levels take responsibility for identifying talented individuals, supporting and developing their careers, upholding their well-being and being held responsible for a sophisticated performance management system (McGee, 2006; Ulrich and Smallwood, 2015). These business leaders are tasked to identify, what talent is required at all hierarchical levels of the organisation, to build future talent and to assist said talent in being successful (Ulrich and Smallwood, 2015).

The role of leadership in TM varies based on their degree of support and commitment for TM initiatives. A small percentage of these leaders are fully committed and effective in TM practices, while some show strong support for TM, but lack effective implementation skills (Collings, 2014; Ellehuus, 2012). These leader roles in TM could be causing the failure or success of their TM efforts, as the commitment of the leader to TM will shape the motivation and attitudes of talented individuals, as talented individuals who are able to connect with the organisation and its leaders are known to be psychologically present and available to perform to the best of their abilities (de Klerk and Stander, 2014).

The theory on what TM should be, as shown above, creates a virtually perfect practice where leaders are effective at shaping the minds of tomorrow and achieving business results and sustained competitive advantage through the continuous transfer of knowledge; but in practice, a vastly

contrasting reality is achieved. The reality portrayed in the literature emphasises inefficiency among business leaders in TM implementation, which views organisations and their leadership systems as being poorly equipped to respond to talented professionals and views leaders as underestimating the importance of their role in TM and failing to link TM to the success of the business (Collings, 2014; Ellehuus, 2012; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007).

Recent research has highlighted that almost half of business leaders display high levels of commitment and investment in TM, but lack the skills required to improve TM performance and business outcomes within their function of the organisation—a rather disappointing statistic as businesses are realising the importance of taking a strategic approach to TM (Collings, 2014; Ellehuus, 2012). These issues originate at the top, as many executives believe that a strong TM strategy is not of great importance and display a lack of strategic approaches to TM (Ellehuus, 2012). This then filters down to the individual level, creating dissonance between individual and organisation, as stated by recent reviews in the literature in which employees ranked leadership and management issues, insufficient managerial involvement, lack of commitment to develop talent and underperforming leaders as the overall problems in TM inefficiency (Beer and Eisenstat, 2000; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007; Tafti et al. 2017). Hence the views of organisational members on TM are also needed, to get the full picture.

It is critical for leaders to evaluate their TM efforts and to realise their impact. Business leaders who are effective at TM show greater success in business outcomes, but these leaders require knowledge and are required to know what to expect and when to expect it in order to truly be successful in their TM efforts (Ellehuus, 2012; de Klerk and Stander, 2014; Ulrich and Smallwood, 2015). If leaders can adopt this level of focus and effort, customer satisfaction would drastically increase resulting from increased stakeholder confidence at all levels which in turn will build stronger organisational capabilities with strong competitiveness (Ellehuus, 2012).

1.7.4 The shortage of skills and other factors affecting talent management

A fundamental motivator for organisations to implement effective TM strategies is the apparent shortage of skilled individuals (Frank et al. 2004; Hejase et al. 2016; McDonnell et al. 2017). This theme raises notable questions as to why there is a shortage of talent, what the barriers to TM are and the effects of losing skilled labour.

Common reasons for the shortage of talent are the effects of globalisation, changing demographics and intensified competition for talent (Ewerlin, 2013; McDonnell et al. 2017; Nilsson and Ellström, 2012). The impact of these effects is felt on a global scale to the extent that economic growth is affected in all industrial countries caused by the increased mobility of people across geographical and cultural boundaries, which seems to be causing more damage, larger expenses and possible future layoffs (Frank et al. 2004; Vaiman et al. 2012).

Company relocations and the mobility of highly-skilled employees have also been identified as a cause for the loss of skilled labour and the talent shortage, significantly increasing the demand and competitiveness for talent retention (Ewerlin, 2013). The loss of skilled employees is also linked to high labour costs, low employee morale and engagement, poor customer satisfaction, financial losses, loss of knowledge and expertise, and the need to invest more funds to train and replace lost talent (Winning the talent war… 2015; Frank et al. 2004). This trend of increases in the mobility of talent has had a severe effect on TM, however, very few organisations seem to take into account the issue of talent leaving their organisations and fail to see the true cost of said losses (Hejase et al. 2016).

TM strategies are affected by a broad range of factors stemming from the internal organisation, individuals and the environment which greatly affect the implementation process (Thunnissen, 2016). Factors at the organisational level surface from a lack of adequate, effective and consistent processes, a poor infrastructure to support the processes and a lack of internal strategic consistency regarding human resource management practices (Thunnissen, 2016). Management practices have inauspicious effects on the TM framework that show evidence of no enhancement in organisational performance practices such as downsizing (Pfeffer, 2010). Downsizing has proven to negatively disrupt existing internal and external relationship networks resulting in increased job fear and heavily influencing employee engagement and development (Pfeffer, 2010).

Factors at the individual level are predominantly associated with a difference in perception to what individuals find important compared to the organisation, regarding TM (Thunnissen, 2016). The disparity originates from the organisation building TM strategies around economic goals whereas the talent has its own unique non-economic goals (Thunnissen, 2016). Other individual-level factors affecting TM were reported as being uncertainty about career possibilities (an insufficient training and development strategy), unclear promotion criteria and increasing insecurity regarding their long-term future with the organisation (poor retention strategies), inability to negotiate, overly-strong self-determination leading to unfair expectations from the organisation and the inability to develop interpersonal relationships (Ross, 2013b; Thunnissen, 2016). These observations provide further support for the inclusion of the perceptions of all organisational members' perceptions of TM factors that facilitate or hinder competitive advantage.

The above is a clear indication that organisations are not placing enough strategic emphasis on TM, failing in most areas within the TM framework. These risks could be proving costly in terms of competitive advantage and consequently organisational performance, especially in sustainability.

1.7.5 Current issues with talent management strategic initiatives

The problem with current TM initiatives starts at the very beginning: the definitions of TM. The current definitions often lack clarity by referencing particular leaders and high-potential individuals which result in the concept becoming difficult to comprehend and failing to answer the question "what is talent?" (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013; McDonnell et al. 2017; Ross, 2013a; Thunnissen et al. 2013a). The current definitions and understanding of TM, as stated previously, is largely competency-based; obsessing about the right talent for the right position and thus preventing organisations from asking the critical questions relating to talent development, leveraging and retention (Ross, 2013a). This can be overcome by understanding the link between talent and organisational success/competitive advantage, with an emphasis on talent development and talent retention (Ellehuus, 2012; Panda and Sahoo, 2015; Ross, 2013a).

The literature portrays that organisations do not have a clear understanding of how TM supports their long-term organisational strategies and they lack a knowledge of strategies for dealing with talent, the literature also emphasises that modern organisations have not made efforts to formalise strategies for TM and lack the understanding of talent pool architecture and individual characteristics regarding these talent pools (Hejase et al. 2016; Lewis and Heckman, 2006). This lack of knowledge has led to TM being implemented by actors not responsible for the decision-making, resulting in discrepancies between intended (planned) TM practices and actual (measured) TM practices (Thunnissen, 2016). An organisational and internal fit of the TM practices is vital to curb this issue and ensure that the intended TM practices are implemented as planned (Thunnissen, 2016).

Current strategies for TM are focused on improving effectiveness regarding selection processes within human resource practices, offering vacation and holiday benefits and providing competitive compensation structures, all of which prove to be ineffective strategic initiatives for TM while diminishing its focus on talent retention (Deery and Jago, 2015; Frank et al. 2004). Recent studies have highlighted certain factors that are fundamental when creating strategies for TM. These factors include: assigning challenging assignments to employees, involving talent in decision-making processes, managers motivating and leading effectively and encouragement for teamwork, creativity and innovation (Ewerlin, 2013). These strategies should be centred on aligning talent to organisational objectives and policies, providing employees with opportunities for career advancement and providing leadership programmes to ensure that talent systems, processes and core beliefs are congruent with the aspirations of the organisation (Ellehuus, 2012; Ewerlin, 2013; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007).

As mentioned previously, talent retention is a practice within the TM framework that has been clearly overlooked, with sourcing, recruiting and development of talent gaining the greater portion of leadership's attention and investment—a problem that is clearly misunderstood as leaders do not take into account the true losses that occur when talent is not retained (Hejase et al. 2016). This is a serious problem, as future demand for talent will inevitably surpass the supply of talent; yet leaders still do not believe in talent retention strategies. Recent research portrays evidence that most talent development

and retention strategies are reactive, close to half of organisations rarely identify why talent leaves the organisation and more than half of organisations do not have active strategies in place to combat competitor poaching of their most talented individuals (Winning the talent war… 2015; Ellehuus, 2012; Hejase et al. 2016; Soewignyo and Soewignyo, 2015). Aligned with what was previously mentioned in section 1.2, talent retention is of critical importance as employee turnover is accompanied by substantial costs due to its influence on the stability and productivity of organisations (Aguinis, Gottfredson and Joo, 2012; de Klerk and Stander, 2014; McCullom and Na'Desh, 2015; Nolan, 2015). Focusing on learning, development and retention strategies, which are proactive in nature, would greatly curb the issue relating to inferior talent retention and offer much greater support to individuals managing their career development (Winning the talent war… 2015; Foster, 2015).

1.8 Research methodology and research design

The problem under investigation falls within the interpretivist philosophy because it endeavours to explore and understand what TM factors are perceived by organisational members at all levels to facilitate competitiveness. This philosophy is subjective in nature with the viewpoint that our knowledge of reality is a social construction by human actors (Ponelis, 2015). Interpretivism is characterised by a need to understand phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to explore, interpret and make sense of the world through the production of descriptive analyses (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Richards and Morse, 2013).

Following the description of interpretivism, it is suggested that a qualitative research approach in collecting and analysing data be implemented for this particular research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Richards and Morse, 2013; Yin, 2016). The research design will consist of a qualitative case study of one organisation. Case studies are widely used in organisational studies of a qualitative nature; they are appealing to applied disciplines since processes, problems and programmes can be studied for a greater understanding which has the potential to improve practice (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Kohlbacher, 2006; Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Ponelis, 2015; Richards and Morse, 2013). The distinctive need for a case study design stems from the desire to understand complex social phenomena in their natural setting and focuses on understanding "how", "why" and "what" questions to generate an understanding of said social phenomena, making it an appropriate design for this particular study—a study that attempts to explore and understand the complex factors affecting talent management (Kohlbacher, 2006; Ponelis, 2015; Yin, 2016). Yin (2016), states additional considerations for case study approaches, highlighting that case study designs are utilised when the researcher cannot manipulate the behaviour of the participants and that the contextual conditions of the themes to be covered are believed to be relevant to the phenomenon under exploration.

1.8.1 Sampling

Interpretative research usually yields a small number of participants (Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Ponelis, 2015; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston, 2013). Recommendations can be found in the literature regarding sampling size, for example Eisenhardt (1989 in Ponelis, 2015), deems four to ten cases to be the most effective, Crabtree and Miller (1992 in Ponelis, 2015), suggest six to eight cases, Curran and Blackburn (2001 in Ponelis, 2015) propose ten or fewer cases, while Myers (2009) suggests that one case is adequate. Hence, one organisation will be selected for the purpose of this study. However, participants in the organisation will be interviewed until saturation occurs, which according to Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) may occur between interview numbers six and 12, which is supported by Mason (2010).

Sampling in case study research is largely purposeful (Guest et al. 2006; Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2009). This includes the selection of information-rich cases by selecting participants based on pre-determined criteria relevant to the research objectives who have the knowledge and are willing to assist (Guest et al. 2006; Mills et al. 2009). Particular characteristics, knowledge and anticipated rich sources of data are in direct relation and relevance to the research questions of this study (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg and McKibbon, 2015; Ritchie et al. 2013).

One organisation will be purposively selected based on inclusion criteria as proposed by Yin (2016) on their superior performance in the industry (determined by industry benchmarks and documented industry purchasing data), which has attracted the most talented leaders and individuals, making the particular organisation an appropriate choice for the study. The superior performance and talented staff lead to this case being complex and unique, which suggests that a single case approach is adequate and within the norm for qualitative case study research (Mills et al. 2009). The participants will consist of employees at all hierarchical levels in the case organisation.

1.8.2 Data collection

The data will be collected using in-depth interviews (Guest et al. 2006; Mouton, 2011; Ponelis, 2015; Ritchie et al. 2013; Trumbull, 2005). An interview guide with themes will be prepared, which will guide how the interviews are done. The interview guide will be arranged according to the topics to be explored, namely the participant's definition of talent and TM, what factors they consider in TM, if they see the organisation as having an effective TM strategy, if they see their TM efforts as successful, if they feel the organisation manages retention and does enough to retain talent and other identified themes.

The core strength of the interview technique is its depth of focus on the individual, allowing for detailed observation of each participant's personal perspective, attitudes, feelings and behaviours, which will result in a greater understanding of perceptions of TM factors perceived to facilitate competitive advantage (Ritchie et al. 2013). The interview process needs to be structured making sure that the topic of TM is aligned with the research questions and that the same questions are asked to all participants,

but also possess some form of flexibility to allow responses to be fully observed and recorded (Ritchie et al. 2013). The interviews will also need to be interactive in nature (Ritchie et al. 2013). Keeping a record of key decisions and events during the fieldwork process will form part of quality assurance (Mouton, 2011).

A total of 6–12 interviews will be conducted with each interview following the interview guide. Data saturation is expected to occur before twelve interviews have been completed (Guest et al. 2006). The first stage of the interview will involve the initial contact between researcher and participant; followed by the researcher introducing the research and gaining consent to participate; followed by the commencement of the interview, observation and document recording during the interview; and concluding with the post-interview where gratification is shown and further explanation of the benefits of the research is given (Ritchie et al. 2013). In order for the research to be acceptable, the researcher needs to demonstrate to the reader that the procedures used in its methods are reliable and the findings are trustworthy (Silverman and Marvasti 2008, cited in Loh, 2013). Transcripts of interviews will also be made available to participants to ensure that the interview was accurately captured and to make amendments if they deem necessary.

Reliability (trustworthiness) will be achieved through precise and careful data capturing, extensive record keeping, ensuring that the conducted fieldwork is carried out consistently, the data is analysed systematically and comprehensively so as to be successful enough to be replicated by other researchers, thus ensuring transferability (Ritchie et al. 2013; Trumbull, 2005). Trustworthiness will be accomplished by using multiple sources to validate information, such as having participants read over the notes for review and accuracy and attempting to remain unbiased while capturing data (Trumbull 2005). It is also necessary to ensure that the environment and quality of questions allow for the effective capturing of the participant's view, which they can explore and express entirely (Ritchie et al. 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Ritchie et al. 2013; Loh, 2013), state that trustworthiness is established through the credibility and transferability of the data.

Credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness which examines how confident the researcher is with the truth of the findings and establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information derived from the original participant data and whether the interpretation of such data is correct (Lincoln and Guba 1985, cited in Anney, 2014; Krefting, 1991; Shaw, Houghton, Casey and Murphy, 2013; Shenton, 2004). Keeping clear written accounts on how the research was conducted and explaining how the chosen design met the objectives of the research will display credibility (Lincoln and Guba 1985, in Ritchie et al. 2013).

Transferability is achieved by ensuring transparency of the research process (Lincoln and Guba 1985, in Ritchie et al. 2013). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) in Krefting (1991) and Shenton (2004), transferability in qualitative research is more the responsibility of the individual/s who is/are attempting to transfer the data to new settings than that of the researcher of the original research and states that if the original researcher presents sufficient descriptive data to allow future comparison, transferability has been addressed.

Consistency, also known as dependability, is utilised to establish trustworthiness, which assesses whether the findings of the study would be consistent if replicated in similar contexts, a rather complicated setting in qualitative research as variability is assumed to take place (Guba 1981, in Krefting 1991), a view also held by Marshall and Rossman (1999) in Shenton (2014). Variability must be tracked by being explained and documented in order to establish dependability (Guba 1981, in Krefting 1991).

The final measure of trustworthiness is referred to as neutrality, which refers to the findings as a sole function of the research participants, the conditions of the research and as free from bias (Guba 1981, in Krefting 1991). Neutrality can be achieved by decreasing the distance between researcher and participant, e.g. prolonged contact with participants during interviews (Lincoln and Guba 1985, in Krefting 1991; Shaw et al. 2013; Shenton, 2004).

Data will continue to be collected until data saturation is reached (Guest et al. 2006; Saunders and Rojon, 2014). Data saturation is defined as the point of informational redundancy where additional data collection yields no new information and is seen as a vital point in qualitative methods (Lincoln and Guba 1985, in Gentles et al. 2015). Generally reached at between six and 12 interviews (Guest et al. 2006).

1.8.3 Data analysis

To establish the collection and transformation of data into useful information, the data from the case study will be analysed using qualitative content analysis, a method commonly used for analysing data and interpreting its meaning (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen and Kyngäs, 2014). Qualitative content analysis is defined as the use of replicable and valid methods for establishing specific inferences from the text (Krippendorff 1969, in Mayring, 2000). This examines data that is aimed at detail and depth, rather than measurement, allowing for the immersing of rich data and development of new insights (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Ulrich and Ratcliffe, 2008). This data analysis technique is interpretative in nature, making this technique the most prevalent in qualitative analysis and leading to it being the most appropriate for this study (Kohlbacher, 2006; Ulrich and Ratcliffe, 2008).

The analysis process will commence by thoroughly reading through the collected data repeatedly to become familiar with the contents, followed by coding of data to uncover themes and categories. Notes on first impressions, thoughts and initial analysis will then be made (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2014). Links between themes, codes and categories will be broken down further in preparation for reporting (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2014). Data will be analysed manually to take advantage of latent information which may be lost in the application of software.

1.9 Limitations of the study and ethical considerations

The main sources of error are a potential bias of results and a lack of rigorous data analysis (Mouton, 2011). This can be overcome by ensuring neutrality within trustworthiness. This study will reflect proper and sound ethics. The study will only be conducted when permission is granted by all the relevant parties, the organisation (permission already granted), the selected participants as well as the University of South Africa. A consent form will be sent to all the participants in the proposed sample in order to gain their consent and cooperation. Included in the consent form will be a discussion of the nature of the research to be conducted, what the participant is required to do and the potential benefits of partaking in the study. It will be communicated to all participants that their identities will remain confidential and anonymous in the final discussion, offering them adequate security. The participants will also be made aware that they may leave the study at any time should they wish to do so. The organisation that will form part of the sample has provided written consent for research to be conducted within their organisation. The names of their employees will not be reflected in the study.

1.10 Outline of dissertation

The background has been provided, with a detailed overview of the current literature in the TM field. The research problem and the objectives of the study have been outlined, with an appropriate research design and methodology to capture rich data in pursuit of exploring and understanding the TM field.

Chapter 2 will follow the review of the literature based on chapter 1, providing a detailed approach to current peer-based reviews. The current literature in the field will be highlighted which will explain the phenomenon being studied. Chapter 2 will provide a bibliometric account of previous studies and focus on the main topics of each study. This will allow the portrayal of a global account of the literature in its current state.

Chapter 3 builds upon the research design and methodology approach as stated in this chapter. A detailed summary will be provided as to how the research was conducted and how the interviews were successfully conducted, transcribed and coded. Chapter 3 will also focus on how reliability (trustworthiness) of the study was achieved.

Chapter 4 will present the findings of the study. The main and sub-themes of the study will be discussed, according to their relevance to the research problems and objectives. The findings will also be linked to the evidence provided from the current literature.

Chapter 5 will present the conclusions of the study. The purpose of this chapter is to offer a reminder of why the topic was chosen, what the research attempted to find, a summary of the critical findings of the study and how it is relevant to the current literature and previous studies and will touch on recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Talent and talent management have emerged as central focus areas in past and modern literature, quickly rising to become key areas of interest to many current businesses (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; Thunnissen et al. 2013b). It has become clearly evident that talent management has a profound effect on the performance of the business and its competitive advantage, thus adding to the interest TM has gained since 2001 (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Fegley, 2006a; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Goetsch, 2010; McDonnell et al. 2017; Vaiman, Scullion and Collings, 2012). This has resulted in TM becoming a key management and leadership issue (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; Thunnissen et al. 2013b), something in which leadership is failing in their execution (Collings, 2014). Despite the importance of TM and the noteworthy contributions of a number of authors, TM is still perceived to be in its infancy regarding empirical richness, but seems to be moving away from infancy (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; McDonnell et al. 2017; Thunnissen et al. 2013b).

This chapter serves as an extension of the information provided in Chapter 1 and attempts to further explore the state of the TM field. A description of TM research will be provided, followed by a summary of previous TM literature reviews and a discussion of identified themes from TM literature.

2.2 Description of talent management research

This research paper utilised a total of 104 papers, incorporating a broad range of published academic works and practitioner articles which were believed to meet the inclusion criteria of this study. Practitioner articles were suggested and provided by colloquium members who are deemed established researchers in the field, who considered it necessary to include research of this nature while analysing the TM literature to be comprehensive. The analysis of TM articles focused on the key findings of studies, the themes in the TM field, the discussion on future research recommendations and focusing on key gaps in the literature that were identified as crucial to explore to gain a deeper understanding of the TM phenomena. From the literature, it seems as if TM is still developing, there is not yet a single theory explaining this phenomenon. Hence, it is sound to explore the phenomenon from different contexts, with a range of research designs and methods.

It is important to state the different search criteria that were utilised (McDonnell et al. 2017) The Web of Science bibliographic citation database provides online access to current multidisciplinary information on research journals; it is also the biggest database that ensures that researchers cover the breadth and depth of available literature to ensure a comprehensive literature review. The Web of Science database was thus used in the search for articles meeting the inclusion criteria of this study. Inclusion criteria included articles with specific reference to the themes of this study, that being talent, talent

management (TM), talent retention, leadership TM and competitive advantage within talent management. Articles meeting the inclusion criteria were chosen in an attempt to provide a comprehensive display of the past and current body of knowledge.

Conducting a search for "talent management" articles on the Web of Science bibliographical database portrayed a total number of 638 published TM articles between 2008 and July 2017, with a substantial increase in the number of publications from the year 2008: 2004(1), 2005(4), 2006(3), 2007(8), 2008(21), 2009(25), 2010(56), 2011(75), 2012(56), 2013(75), 2014(69), 2015(92), 2016(117), 2017(36). Figure 2.1 shows a graphical representation of the number of TM publications ranging from 2004 to July 2017. A total of 97.49% of TM articles from the year 2004 was published in the year 2008 until 2017, with 2016 holding the greatest number of published articles at 18.4%. The year 2017 only held 5.64% of the total 638 published TM publications. McDonnell et al. (2017) suggested that the TM field has most likely peaked as it evolved with a decrease being experienced in terms of new insights. This seems to be the case when considering the drastic decrease in the number of publications in the short space of one year.

Figure 2.1: Number of TM Publications
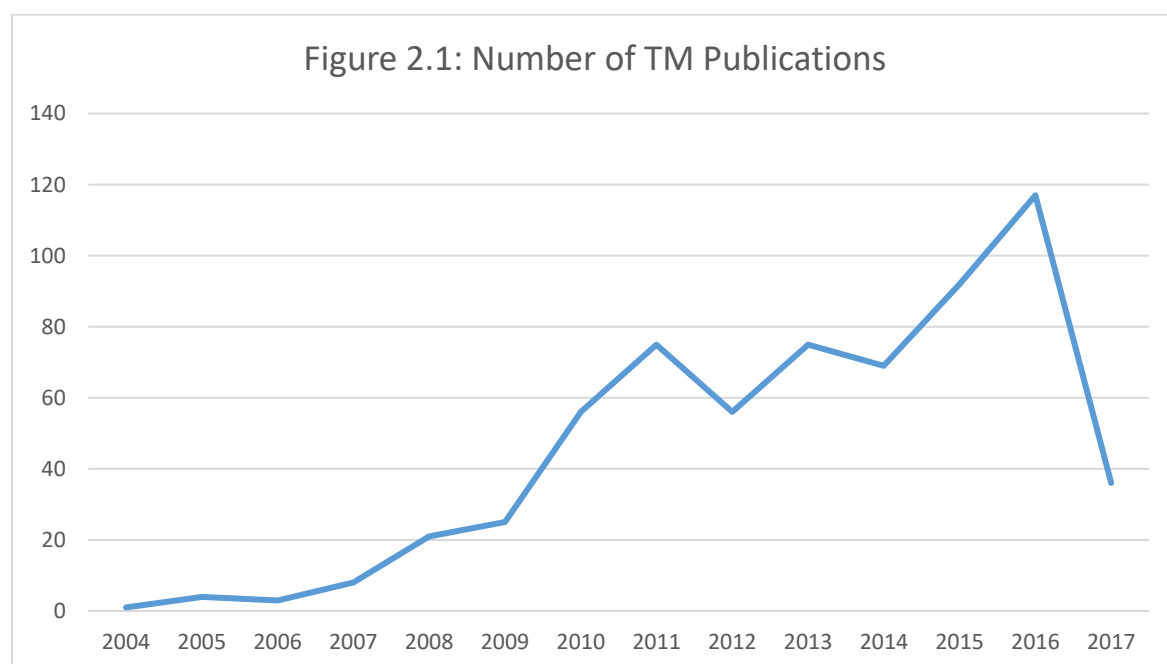
Source: Web of Science search, July 2017

The Web of Science search results also indicate that the fields of Management, Business and Applied Psychology were dominant with regards to the number of TM studies: Management (376), Business (160), Applied Psychology (49), Economics (43), Educational Research (38), Public Administration (19), Computer Science Information Systems (19), Social Sciences Interdisciplinary (18), Engineering Electrical and Electronic (18), Planning Development (14), Computer Science Theory Methods (13), Business Finance (13), Multidisciplinary Psychology (12), Operations Research Management Science (11), Information Science Library Science (10), Computer Science Artificial Intelligence (10), Health Care Sciences Services (8), Engineering Industrial (8), Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism (7), and Health

Policy Services (7). The research focus areas with the most number of TM articles were found to be Business Economics, Psychology and Educational Research: Business Economics (474), Psychology (72), Educational Research (40), Engineering (35), Public Admiration (34), Computer Science (34), Social Sciences (25), Operations Research Management Science (11) and Health Care Sciences Services (11).

Figure 2.2 shows the number of TM publications per author with a minimum number of four articles being authored from the year 2004 until 2017, as per the Web of Science search July 2017. Authors who were most dominant in the TM field with the number of TM publications were found to be Scullion, H, Collings, DG, Sparrow, P and Dries, N: Scullion, H (26), Collings, DG (18), Sparrow, P (15), Dries, N (15), Vaiman, V (9), Horvathova, P (8), Thunnissen, M (7), Tarique, I (7), Schuler, RS (7), McDonnell, A (7), Iles, P (7), Hatum, A (7), Farndale (7), Urbancova, H (6), Pettigrew, AM (6), Pepermans, R (6), Othman, ZA (6), Jantan, H (6), Hamdan, AR (6), Church, AH (6), Vnouckova, L (5), Swailes, S (5), Festing, M (5), Bjorkman, I (5), Whelan, E (4), Tansley, C (4), Smolova, H (4), Raghavan, R (4), Morley, MJ (4), Mellahi, K (4), Macnulty, Y (4), Hartmann, E (4), Gallardo-Gallardo, E (4), Elegbe, JA (4), Cappelli, P (4) and Brewster, C (4). The contributions from the top ten authors is a remarkable achievement, with 18.11% of the total 638 TM publications being authored by these individuals.

Figure 2.2: Number of TM Publications per Author
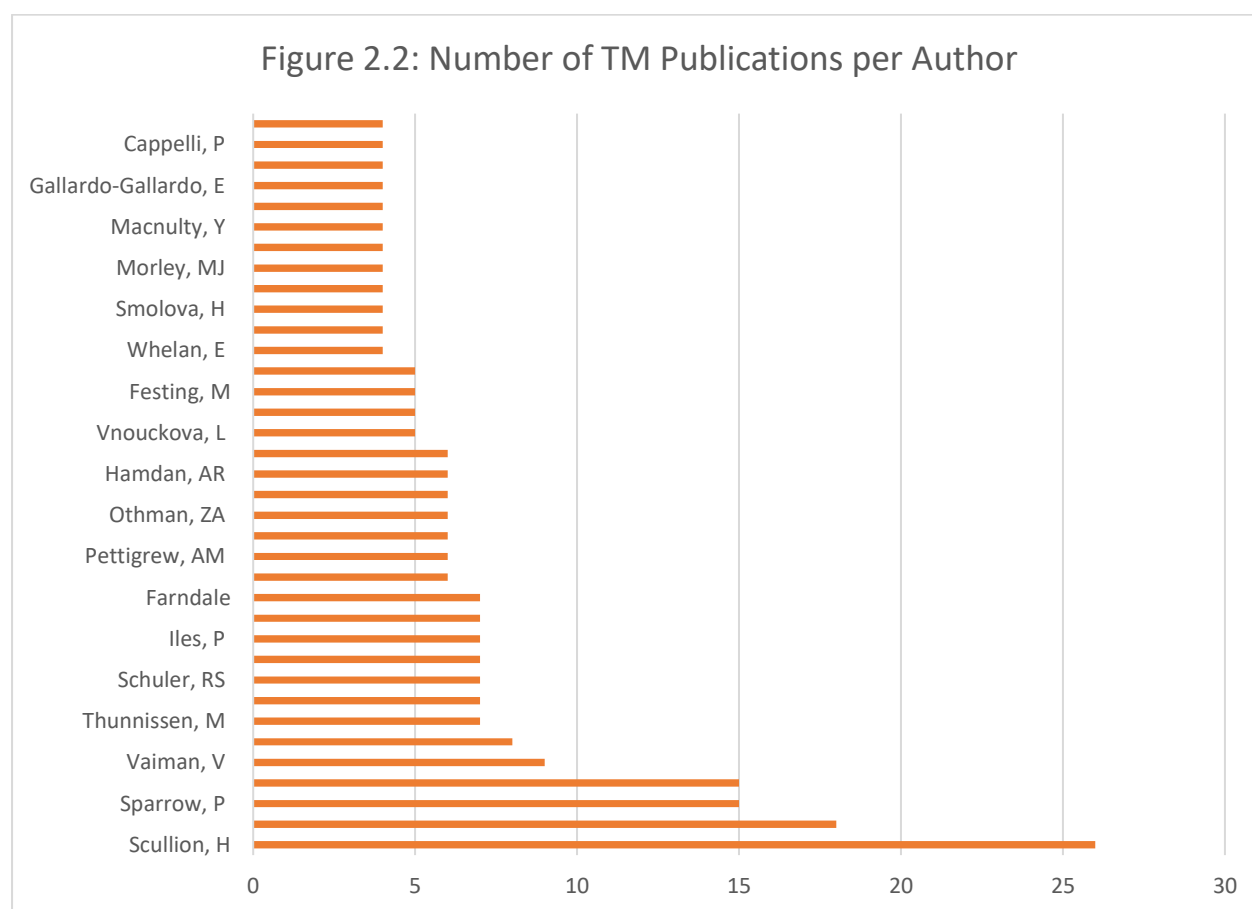
Source: Web of Science search, July 2017

Collings et al. (2009) was ranked as the TM publication with the most number of citations: Collings et al. (2009) (230), Tarique and Schuler (2010) (159), Mellahi and Collings (2010) (86), Schuler, Jackson and Tarique (2011) (76), Cappelli (2008) (71), Iles, Xin and Preece (2010) (68), Scullion, Collings and Caligiuri (2010) (67) and Scullion and Collings (2011) (64), as per Web of Science search in July 2017.

TM articles fell within a range of Journals: International Journal of Human Resource Management (32), Journal of World Business (31), Human Resource Management Review (23), European Journal of International Management (14), Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences (13), Human Resource Management (12), Strategic Talent Management Contemporary Issues in International Context (10), Routledge Global Human Resource Management Series (10), Employee Relations (10), Cambridge Companions to Management (10), Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources (10), Personnel Review (9), Global Talent Management (9), Next Generation Talent Management Talent Management to Survive Turmoil (7), Chandos Asian Studies Series Contemporary Issues and Trends (6), Public Personnel Management (5), Internal Journal of Psychology (5), Human Resource Management Journal (5), Career Development International (5), Aebmr Advances in Economic Business and Management Research (5), Advances in Social Science Education and Humanities Research (5), and Advanced Series in Management (5), as per Web of Science search in July 2017. The broad range of journals that have published TM articles highlights that TM is a multidisciplinary interest and gives evidence to the evolutionary path the field has taken (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen et al. 2013b; McDonnell et al. 2017). This shows Web of Science is an appropriate database to conduct a literature search that would result in a comprehensive coverage of the field/topic.

USA dominated the number of TM publications as per countries or territories: USA (146), England (102), Peoples Republic of China (62), Ireland (48), Australia (43), Netherlands (28), Germany (25), Czech Republic (22), Spain (19), Malaysia (19), South Africa(16), India (16), Canada (16), Turkey (15), Belgium (15), France (13), Poland (12), Finland (12), Singapore (10), Romania (10), Portugal (10), Slovakia (9), Scotland (8), Italy (8), Switzerland (7), Russia (7), Iran (7), Iceland (6), United Arab Emirates (5), Sweden (5), South Korea (5), and Indonesia (5), as per Web of Science search in July 2017. It is clear TM research is under-represented in developing countries and focus needs to be allocated to these regions to advance the understanding of the field (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016).

The research paper types were dominated by journal articles: Journal articles (386), proceeding paper (182), book chapter (69), editorial material (29), literature review (21), meeting abstract (8), book review (8), book (8), letter (2), new item (1) and correction (1), as per Web of Science search in July 2017. The majority of the publications were found to be empirical in nature, favouring quantitative research methods (McDonnell et al. 2017).

Given the above exposition of TM research, it is clear that there is a gap in terms of context, specifically a developing world context; research approach/design qualitative and method, particularly SMEs. This study aims to fill this gap, as previously mentioned.

2.3 Summary of talent management literature reviews

Numerous (21) literature reviews regarding TM have been conducted since 2006, many of the publications being approached from a single perspective, offering little or no integration towards integrative approach (Thunnissen et al. 2013b). McDonnell et al. (2017) challenges this view by stating that an integrative and standardised approach to TM is no longer desirable and greater focus should rather be placed on the boundaries of the TM field. Summarising the systematic literature reviews of previous TM publications captures the current state of the field, identifies key themes, highlights potential issues which are causing the potential stall of field advancement and provides the best possible pathways for future TM research advancement (McDonnell et al. 2017).

Lewis and Heckman (2006) focused on practitioner-orientated publications to determine the implications of TM. The review found that definitions of TM are not clear, leading to confused outcomes and processes, a view shared by many future publications (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo, Nijs, Dries and Gallo; 2015; Ross, 2013a; Thunnissen et al. 2013a; Thunnissen, 2016). Lewis and Heckman (2006) highlight additional problems such as, TM being unnecessary, not being implemented correctly by leadership and human resources, issues with succession planning not being integrated into organisational staffing models and errors in the categorisation of talent. The point is also stressed that TM as a field of study, lacked empirical depth, approaches are narrow in scope and were still in the stage of infancy (Lewis and Heckman, 2006). Lewis and Heckman (2006) concluded on a suggested strategic framework to clearly direct talent decisions and calls for future research aimed at the greater empirical scope and clearer consensus on the understanding of the concept.

Collings and Mellahi (2009) followed a conceptual approach by considering a strategic TM model while focusing on key positions within the organisation. This paper has emerged as the most influential in modern literature, being cited by one in three publications due to the widely used definition of TM (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2015). Collings and Mellahi (2009) state, that TM literature lacks a consistent and universal definition and transparent conceptual boundaries, a view shared by Lewis and Heckman (2006). A challenging situation is created when all roles in the organisation are filled with top performers and the retrenchment of poor performers, but a similar situation is formed when a TM system is applied to all employees within an organisation in order to manage top and poor performers (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). This creates an environment whereby talent is not understood and is more effective in identifying key roles within the organisation and developing talent pools in order to fill said positions. This is suggested instead of solely focusing on talented individual performers (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). These positions require scrutinising in order to identify the potential for competitive advantage and impact on performance (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). Collings and Mellahi (2009) concluded that TM literature is still in its infancy and that the theoretical foundations that underpin TM must be advanced.

Tarique and Schuler (2010) emphasise that organisations are subjected to a global, unpredictable and competitive environment, resulting in challenges being created within TM and an overall shortage of talent. This essentially means that talent is mobile, which has the possibility of being a factor affecting

TM and talent retention. The mobility of talent and the shortage of skills it creates has precipitated the requirement for organisations to adopt global talent management strategies in order to gain and maintain a competitive advantage (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). Much like talent and TM, global TM suffers the same limitations by its lack of understanding and consensus regarding a definitive definition (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). Lewis and Heckman (2006) stated that talent management is treated as generic, lacking an integrated approach, the same research framework that Tarique and Schuler (2010) utilised in their review of the literature. This view links human capital to strategic organisational goals (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). Human capital is defined as competitive advantage achieved through employees' skills, knowledge, experience and abilities that can be developed (Lin et al. 2017). Tarique and Schuler (2010) observed that TM lacked depth in terms of empirical publications, that the majority of publications were descriptive essays and quantitative in nature and that global TM literature is still in its infancy. An integrative framework for understanding and advancing global TM literature was developed, in the hope of directing and shaping future global TM systems (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). Tarique and Schuler (2010) concluded that more work needs to be conducted in the global TM field, where a strong need for theory building exists, whereby academics can transfer knowledge to human resource professionals to build on and understand the complexities surrounding global TM systems.

Collings, Scullion and Vaiman (2011) highlight what many authors previously discovered, that academic research in TM lacked depth and the field was primarily dominated by publications based in the United States of America. It was evident that a European contribution to the field was necessary in order to provide empirical insights with theoretical approaches considered from various publications. It was reported that TM is one of the most faced challenges in modern businesses, but the TM function was the least competent, pointing to a clear leadership issue (Collings et al. 2011). Collings et al. (2011) concluded that the TM field portrayed signs of moving from infancy to adolescence.

Dries (2013a) also emphasises the lack of theory development and the limitations in the TM field caused by minimal empirical evidence and aims to advance the literature by conducting a comparative review of the literature. There is no formal TM definition in place, a lack of understanding of the concept and a large number of organisations have no formal TM structure implemented (Dries, 2013a). The relevant theoretical perspectives discuss how talent is viewed, operationalised and the research gaps, which need to be considered for future TM research (Dries, 2013a). Dries (2013a) observes tensions between the considered theoretical perspectives:

1. Tension between objective and subjective views on talent, which refers to how talent is defined and who in the organisation should manage talent, an important tension to consider as these perspectives denote a specific TM framework.
2. Tension between inclusive and exclusive approaches to talent, whereby talent is either considered to exist throughout the entire organisation (inclusive) or by a few gifted individuals (exclusive), challenges existing within both approaches.
3. Tension between innate or acquired talent, which has implications on whether to focus on selection, assessment and identification of talent for an innate perspective or to focus on training and development for an acquired perspective.

4. Tension between input and output perspectives, which considers if talent is dependent on ability or motivation of talent, input perspectives focusing on effort, motivation and career progression and output perspectives focusing on performance, output and achievements. It was found that most organisations focus on input perspectives.

5. Tension between transferable and context-dependent perspectives, which focuses on the extent to which talent is conditional on environmental factors. The idea of transferable skills relates to the ability for talented individuals to utilise their talent in any industry, whereby skills can essentially be transferred between industries. Context-based perspectives refer to talent as being a product of certain interactions between talent and contexts.

Dries (2013a) concludes by stating the importance of exploring the TM phenomena for future studies, listing that interview-based studies, amongst other types of studies, are paramount for the advancement of theory in the TM field. Dries (2013a) suggested that exploration of the perspectives of different stakeholders in the TM process as a relevant future study.

Thunnissen et al. (2013a) focus on developing a broader, multi-level, multi-value approach to TM through a more critical review of the literature. Consensus on the meaning of TM poses a major problem in the literature, as the question is raised if the current publications are perceived to be appropriate to describe and empirically study TM (Thunnissen et al. 2013a). The need for a broader approach is stressed, one which encompasses multiple perspectives simultaneously, known as a pluralistic approach (Thunnissen et al. 2013a). Thunnissen et al. (2013a) introduced new perspectives in order to achieve this broader approach:

1. Focus on both employment and the work relationship, instead of the previous focus on narrow human resource practices. This perspective focuses on the people and the work, highlighting the employment relationship for its economic exchange, but more importantly, the employer investing in the well-being of the employee.

2. Taking into account the needs of all stakeholders in the organisation, across all levels.

3. Considering the value of talent management at both the individual and organisational level.

Thunnissen et al. (2013a) concludes by stating that the publication is highly conceptual and requires testing through empirical research. It also highlights the need to study TM at the level of the individual.

Cappelli and Keller (2014) focus their literature review on the issues currently being faced by modern businesses regarding TM, caused by turbulent labour and economic environments, uncertainty in the demand and supply of talent, decreased market demands, increased employee mobility and high staff turnover. This particular research paper adds depth to the different approaches to TM, namely inclusive and exclusive approaches, whereby exclusive approaches were found to be the most commonly utilised approach in practice (Cappelli and Keller, 2014). Depth was added by highlighting debates within the exclusive approach, discussing whether the focus of the approach should be targeted at the individual or the specific job (Cappelli and Keller, 2014). The perspective that is most dominant in practice is that of the specific job, placing jobs at the centre for business success and attempting to make jobs strategic,

i.e. key positions (Cappelli and Keller, 2014). Key positions constitute investments in selection, evaluation and development of the specific jobs perceived to be of the highest potential to achieve crucial returns and increased business performance (Cappelli and Keller, 2014). Cappelli and Keller (2014) highlight the clear issue of talent retention, stating that modern employers are facing increasing challenges in retaining top employees and have little practical understanding as to why talented performers choose to leave organisations. Cappelli and Keller (2014) concludes by stating that despite an increase in TM literature from a number of different research streams, very little is known about the new practices in TM, with no systematic data on employment practices or how individual organisations conduct TM.

Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2015) utilise a phenomenon-driven approach to their review of the literature to evaluate the state of the TM field. The field is perceived to be phenomenon-driven, as opposed to the more traditional, theory-driven, due to the field lacking appropriate theory to describe the phenomenon (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2015). Based on their findings, Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2015) claim that the field of TM is currently in the growth stage of phenomena, whereby the phenomena has become visible and is applicable to the broader research community. Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2015) conclude that the TM field is currently facing challenges in its transition from the growth stage to the mature stage due to the lack of established measure, casual theories and its inability to generate theory-driven results. There is a call for TM research to be more contextual in nature, whereby TM practices are best suited when aligned to organisational strategy, goals, structure and culture (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2015).

Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016) explore the literature by employing a systematic approach, recognising that TM is vital to business growth and to competitive advantage, but lacks support for finding legitimate TM solutions and fails to appropriate any value in terms of direction and vision on the subject field. Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016) found that certain topics were favoured for research studies as at 2016, these being TM practices, conceptualisation of TM, and the meaning of the word "talent" and the factors affecting it. An important finding regarding the conceptualisation is highlighted, expressing that the TM approach most prevalent in the literature is one of a strategic nature, following an exclusive perspective on talent (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016) conclude by emphasising that further research needs to be conducted in other geographic contexts, including Africa and more work is required regarding the use of TM definitions. The lack of information on studied organisations is also an issue, with heavy prevalence on large, private companies, thus resulting in a call to focus future research efforts on small to medium-sized businesses (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). The findings reflect studies that are more geared towards the manager's perspective, an issue which is leading to the lack of understanding of TM, requiring a broader, multi-level approach to be adopted to explore the impact of all levels of the organisation on TM (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Future research, lastly, must attempt to solicit the perspectives of these multiple stakeholders in the organisation in an effort to expand the knowledge and understanding of TM and whether it is working well or failing (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016).

McDonnell et al. (2017) adopts a systematic review of TM literature to trace the path TM has followed and proposes prospects to propel the field forward. The review recognises the significance of the review conducted by Thunnissen et al. (2013a) and looks to build upon said significance to grasp the field in a more comprehensive manner. McDonnell et al. (2017) recognises a range of micro and macro factors that have led to the emergence and importance of TM to both academic and practitioner fields. Previous peer reviews found that current empirical papers on TM seemed to be lacking, McDonnell et al. (2017) suggested contrasting findings by stating that the majority of papers were based on some form of empirical findings. McDonnell et al. (2017) support Thunnissen et al. (2013a) by stating that TM literature is mostly viewed from the managerial perspective and papers on the individual perspective are lacking. Focus is directed towards understanding organisational concerns instead of individual TM concerns, thus creating a lack of understanding as to how talented individuals should be effectively managed. McDonnell et al. (2017) agrees with previous publications by stating that a lack of theoretical cohesion still exists within TM literature, making it challenging to construct a standard definition. This lack of cohesion also creates the lack of conceptualisation on the exact meaning of TM. McDonnell et al. (2017) highlights the lack of alignment between academic and practical settings in TM literature, making it difficult to create a shared knowledge of TM within organisations which in turn hinders the capture of the correct commitment and interest from the relevant parties required to successfully implement TM. McDonnell et al. (2017) propose that a greater understanding of the TM field will be achieved if the focus on TM literature was centred around how human resources add value to the organisation, how talented individuals can influence the overall performance of organisations and how TM practice can optimise the value gained from said influences on performance. These focuses all lead to the idea of sustainable organisational performance and how TM can be aligned in reaching sustainability (McDonnell et al. 2017). McDonnell et al. (2017) concludes by stating that TM literature should focus on understanding the antecedents of high-performing talent individuals and by focusing on how talent is identified. McDonnell et al. (2017) also raises the importance of considering TM research in contexts outside of the large private sector organisations and by considering the views of lower and middle management as opposed to current literature focusing mostly on top-level management.

To synthesise the above literature reviews, similar topics are usually discussed, especially the topic of the TM field lacking empirical depth. The reviews are in agreement that the lack of empirical depth is an issue in the TM field which is affecting its ability to advance, with the latest review by McDonnell, et al. (2017) being the only publication to disagree by finding that most publications in TM showed some form of empirical evidence. The issue was highlighted that the TM field is dominated by publications from the managerial perspective and fails to include the views of all stakeholders, especially those of the individuals of organisations. Khoreva, et al. (2017) provides new insights from the employees' perspectives, but the issue still exists and calls for future research which places focus on all stakeholders. The literature reviews highlight the overarching need to search for a formal definition of TM, as it was found to be non-existent and resulting in a lack of development of the field. Despite the efforts of many research studies addressing this issue, the issue still remains and is being challenged on its validity (McDonnell et al. 2017; Tlaiss et al. 2017). Lastly, the literature reviews are in agreement

that a broader approach be taken on future TM research, approaches aimed at different stakeholders, how talent management is linked to performance and conducting research in smaller business settings. A recent article from Krishan and Scullion (2017), highlights the importance of the difference between large firms and smaller organisations with regards to talent management and calls on future researchers to pursue this area further.

2.4 Main themes in talent management literature

An in-depth analysis of the articles chosen, 104 articles, for this research study resulted in a list of main themes that were utilised in the formulation of the research problem and objectives, as highlighted by previous authors and via studying the articles. Below, these themes are discussed as evident from the literature.

2.4.1 The acknowledgement that TM is a key area of interest for modern businesses, but there is a lack of consensus on the definition and understanding of the concept

Boxall (1998), highlights the importance of human resources and its relevant link to competitive advantage. The paper highlights that human resources, being an organisation resource, can gain a competitive advantage through being rare and difficult to imitate, a form of competitive advantage which is known as the resource-based view. This view equates talent to human capital that is perceived to be both highly valuable and unique, resources that are essential to the organisation's core business and performance (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2015). Despite the acknowledgement as a key area of interest, TM literature has been plagued by issues relating to the lack of sound empirical evidence, no consensus regarding TM definitions and a general lack of understanding (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013a; Foster, 2015; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen. 2016; McDonnell et al. 2017; Ross, 2013a; Tansley, 2011; Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen et al. 2013b; Thunnissen and van Arensbergen, 2015). Current studies in TM do not offer to expand on current definitions or new definitions, close to half of recent studies were found to repeat other authors' definitions and just over a quarter of studies offer no definition of talent or TM at all (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016).

The implication of the pursuit of a standardised definition of TM is that the point has been reached whereby this research objective is no longer desirable and that these studies are essentially flawed in terms of making a potential contribution in expanding the boundaries of TM (McDonnell et al. 2017). I tend to agree with McDonnell et al. (2017) in that TM research should be focused on how competitive advantage is reached through TM practices. Soliciting the perceptions of all stakeholders in the organisation on which TM factors facilitate this value has the potential to provide TM research with a fresh insight into competitive advantage from the TM perspective.

2.4.2 The approach to talent

The understanding of talent has proven to be challenging, as talent is perceived differently across multiple organisational contexts without conforming to a particular approach (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013). This lack of understanding leads to researchers not clearly following a specific theoretical framework that is applied consistently throughout the study (Dries, 2013a; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen. 2016). Tension is thus created on whether to adopt an exclusive or inclusive approach to talent, a rather crucial decision as these two approaches are perceived to be two extremes (Dries, 2013a). Decision-making on resource allocation, organisational structure and culture, long-term and short-term organisational strategies, and productivity must be considered which impacts business performance and ultimately, competitive advantage (Dries, 2013a).

The literature extensively explores these different approaches, but offers no clear direction as to which is best suited for certain business settings, stating that the inclusive approach, as defined in 1.7.2, is not wrong, although the exclusive approach, as defined in 1.7.2, is strongly favoured in practice (Cappelli and Keller, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen , 2016; Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; Thunnissen. 2016).

There is a clear issue regarding how talent is identified in organisations and it is vital to explore how this is done in practice (McDonnell et al. 2017) and can be achieved through soliciting the perceptions of all stakeholders in the organisation on their views on talent. Key positions are vital for organisation success, but competitive advantage might be compromised without the contribution of all stakeholders, as supported by Becker (1962), hence, for the purpose of this study, talent is considered to be inclusive, in the pursuit to capture talent from all stakeholders (Thunnissen and Van Arensbergen, 2015).

2.4.3 Leadership and TM

The theme of leadership is highlighted throughout TM literature, stating that TM is the responsibility of the leadership structure and that Chief Executive Officers and other key leadership figures are known to be actively involved in the talent management process (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Ulrich and Smallwood, 2015). Despite key leaders spending half their time on talent issues, it is stated that their TM efforts fail (Ashton and Morton, 2005; Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Bersin et al. 2014; Collings, 2014, 2015; Collings and Mellahi, 2009). Clear leadership issues have been raised in the literature such as leaders underestimating their role in managing talent and failing to strategically link talent to successful business performance (Ellehuus, 2012; Hejase et al. 2016). These issues are further compounded by leaders lacking the skills and understanding to effectively manage TM practices and influence TM outcomes, ultimately leading to their failure to implement effective TM strategies (Collings, 2014; Ellehuus, 2012; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007).

2.4.4 The issue of talent retention

The literature portrays that current TM studies favour TM practices such as attracting, selection, recruitment and development. Little interest has been experienced in TM practices related to talent retention, such as performance management, succession planning, management of development and promotion and work practices (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Organisational leaders do not value strong TM strategies, do not consider why talented employees choose to leave by not offering exit interviews, do not consider the impact of competitors poaching their talented individuals and ignore the costs involved with high turnover (Deery and Jago. 2015; Elehuus, 2012; Stadler, 2011). A positive work environment, the role of line managers, opportunities for learning and growth and financial incentives are known to impact talent retention (Tlaiss et al. 2017).

TM strategies that are focused on development and retention of talent have the most positive effect on business outcomes, employee well-being, job satisfaction and inspires trust and commitment in the organisational leadership (Collings et al. 2011). Future research is vital to determine decision-making processes that lead to effective talent retention practices, as the literature on talent retention is found to still be lacking in understanding (Deery and Jago. 2015).

2.5 Conclusion

The broad TM field, although showing promise by exiting the infancy stage and an increase in empirical interest, clearly portrays evidence of the requirement for more empirical studies to be conducted in the pursuit of a standardised TM framework and a greater understanding (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). The validity of the pursuit of a standardised approach to talent and a formal definition of TM has been challenged, as definitions are specific to the organisation or industry (Tlaiss et al. 2017) and consensus on a universal definition has still not been achieved after many publications over many years, essentially making the research objective undesirable (McDonnell et al. 2017).

One word unmistakably resonates throughout TM literature, that word being "misalignment". Evidence suggests misalignment between TM academics and TM practitioners (Dries, 2013a; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; McDonnell et al. 2017; Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Thunnissen, 2016), misalignment regarding the understanding of talent, TM and a standardised theoretical framework (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Foster, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; McDonnell et al. 2017; Ross, 2013a; Tansley, 2011; Thunnissen and Van Arensbergen, 2015), misalignment between perspectives, views and approaches to talent and TM (Dries, 2013a; Foster 2015), misalignment between organisational and individual TM perspectives and ultimately organisational culture (Thunnissen et al. 2013a; Thunnissen, 2016) and misalignment between leadership efforts and talent retention (Deery and Jago. 2015). These misalignments will ultimately affect competitive advantage, as the lack of TM understanding and how it affects TM compelled the exploration of this topic, as mentioned previously

(McDonnell et al. 2017; Thunnissen, 2016). Careful considerations of these misalignments were utilised in developing the problem statement and set a clear direction for this particular study.

It is crucial to solicit the perceptions of all stakeholders in the organisation and to broaden the scope of the TM field by conducting empirical research in more countries and other organisational settings, especially smaller businesses (Dries, 2013a; Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; McDonnell et al. 2017), issues this study aims to address.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the research philosophy, the approach and research design implemented to achieve the research objectives. Information will be provided on the case organisation, as well as on the instruments used in collecting and analysing the data. The chapter will conclude by attending to the trustworthiness of the study.

3.2 Approach and research design

This study held the purpose of exploring and gaining a deeper understanding of TM via the production of descriptive analysis, meaning the study falls within the interpretivist philosophy (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Richards and Morse, 2013). The identified research philosophy, being exploratory in nature, suggested that qualitative research was an acceptable research approach for this particular study philosophy (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Richards and Morse, 2013; Yin, 2016). Interpretivism in this study was characterised by the need to understand TM phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to explore, interpret and make sense of the perceptions the participants held on talent, TM, the factors affecting TM, the TM factors facilitating competitive advantage and the role of leadership in TM (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Richards and Morse, 2013). This research was conducted within the guidelines and framework of the University of South Africa's Research Ethics Policy.

The research design consisted of a qualitative case study of a single case (Myers, 2009), the case being a single organisation. The single case meets the norm of case studies as discussed in chapter 1, section 1.8.1. The study aimed at soliciting the perceptions of participants regarding processes and problems in connection with TM, thus case study research was perceived to be an appropriate study with the potential of improving the understanding of TM in practice (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Kohlbacher, 2006; Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Ponelis, 2015; Richards and Morse, 2013). Case studies are widely utilised in research studies of a qualitative nature, appealing specifically to this study, as TM factors can be studied in a great level of detail at the individual level, thus contributing to the stated improvement of TM in practice. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Kohlbacher, 2006; Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Ponelis, 2015; Richards and Morse, 2013). This greater understanding enables further understanding of the complex TM phenomena by soliciting the perceptions of the participants by asking "why", "how" and "what" they felt about TM factors, how and why they felt TM was effective, how they felt leaders influenced TM and which TM factors they felt facilitated competitive advantage, etc. Due to the purpose of the study being to solicit perceptions, it was deemed that the participants' behaviour could not be manipulated and that their perceptions were relevant to the exploration of TM (Yin, 2016).

3.2.1 The organisation and sampling

The organisation for the case study was carefully considered based on its relative success in their respective market and the assumption that their employees would ensure the collection and transfer of quality data. The sampling method was chosen based on its relevance to the chosen case organisation and its specific application within the interpretivist research philosophy.

3.2.1.1 The organisation

The case organisation, during the course of the study, operated in a niche market of engineering and was an organisation that was considered to be one of the top-performing organisations in the field. In terms of the provisions of the National Small Business Amendment Act, 2003 (Act No 26 of 2003) this organisation can be classified as a very small business because it employed twenty employees or less at the time of the study. Major contributors to its success in the market can be attributed to their specialised understanding of the application and its ability to innovate in terms of unique product offerings, which are rooted in the competence of their employees and valued by customers. The ability to hold highly competitive positions in the market has the expectation that the attraction of highly skilled and talented individuals who add a great deal of value to the operation and the potential for growth will occur.

A truly dynamic, technically gifted organisation which had achieved many successes in terms keeping the organisation active and thriving for many years, retaining crucial skills and holding competitive positions in the market, was sadly plagued by many issues which affected TM discussions, as chapter 4 will explore and discuss. Superior performance in the industry and the attraction of talented individuals who are specialised in the industry make this organisation an appropriate case for this study (Yin, 2016).

3.2.1.2 Sampling

The participants of this study were chosen purposively based on inclusion criteria which were relevant to the research objectives, as it was assumed that the participants possessed the relevant knowledge which would lead to information-rich data (Guest et al. 2006; Mills et al. 2009). Inclusion criteria that were set for sampling included a minimum period of at least one year of employment at the case organisation, thus ensuring sound knowledge of the operation of the organisation and adding to the potential of understanding TM practices. Individuals at the case organisation who met the inclusion criteria at the time of the study were invited to participate. The participants of the study were directly available to the researcher, as the researcher was a member of the organisation. The study was briefly discussed during the invitation, with responses being mostly positive. A total of twelve participants volunteered to take part in the study, five participants from lower-levels, four participants from middle management and three participants from upper management.

3.2.2. Data collection

Empirical data was collected by conducting in-depth interviews, a data collection technique which was deemed appropriate with studies falling within the interpretivist research philosophy (Guest et al. 2006; Mouton, 2011; Ponelis, 2015; Ritchie et al. 2013; Trumbull, 2005). An interview guide was prepared which guided the direction of the interview and is attached as Annexure A. This guide was pre-tested with a candidate with a similar profile to the participants of the study and was deemed effective for use, with no changes being affected prior to participants' interviews were conducted. The interview guide had a list of questions which explored themes in TM which were relevant to the research problem and objectives. The interview data collection method was deemed appropriate due to its depth of focus and allowing for detailed observation to probe each question effectively (Ritchie et al. 2013). Interviews were all conducted in person, at times which were convenient for the participants. The informed consent forms were made available to the participants prior to their interviews and were signed on the day their interviews were conducted. All the interviews were conducted at the case organisation's business location. The interview guide was followed closely, which introduced the participant to the study, gave brief definitions of talent, and TM and the participant was made aware of the objectives, purpose and benefits of the study. The introduction to the study also took the time to allow for any questions the participants had in the study, gained consent to proceed to the questioning and assured each candidate that the protection of their identities would be upheld at all times. It was also stated that they could exit the interviews at any time without any negative consequences. A total of 21 interviews were conducted, for which a second round of interviews aimed at the lower and middle-level participants was conducted to clarify answers to previous questions relating to competitive advantage, as the first round of interviews did not capture a sufficient amount of data to achieve the research objective. Overall, the interview guide was effective in capturing the perceptions of each candidate and allowed for deeper exploration via probing. The majority of the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants, with all interviews being transcribed and given to the participants for verification. There were no requested amendments to any of the transcripts. No visible discomforts were observed during the interviews. The participants were mostly confident in their answers and reasoning for certain answers, displaying an interest in exploring most of the questions from the interview guide. This structured approach allowed for detailed observation and deep focus on each participant's personal perspectives and feelings on a broad range of TM themes, perspectives which were fully observed and accurately recorded (Ritchie et al. 2013).

Points of saturation were experienced during both stages of interviews which is defined as points where additional data collection yields no new information (Lincoln and Guba 1985, in Gentles et al. 2015). During the first stage of interviews, saturation occurred after interview number seven, as no new patterns in the data emerged due to the similarity of the participants' views, especially regarding their perspectives on factors affecting TM and talent retention, their feelings about the organisation and its leadership and other themes relating to TM. This is in agreement with Guest et al. (2006), which states that saturation occurs at between six and twelve interviews. It was decided to complete all the interviews during stage one to ensure every participant's perspectives were effectively captured and to ensure that

no datum was missed during the process. During the second round of interviews, focusing specifically on competitive advantage, data saturation occurred after interview number four, as most of the views the participants stated were similar and no new patterns of data emerged. The same approach as the first round of interviews was taken during the second round of interviews, deciding to complete all the interviews to ensure the data was indeed trustworthy and to eliminate the essence of bias.

3.2.3. Data analysis

Due to the study being interpretive in nature, qualitative content analysis was deemed an appropriate data analysis technique to establish specific inferences from the transcripts (Krippendorff, 1969, in Mayring, 2000). Each transcript was read thoroughly to gain first impressions of the data (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2014). The first stage of analysis began with codes being assigned to the text in each transcript which was relevant to the predetermined major themes (Kuckartz, 2014). Codes were further developed into sub-themes. The main codes and sub-codes are shown in table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Main codes and sub-codes

TALENT (A)
VIEWS ON TALENT (A1)
UNDERSTANDING OF TALENT (A2)
TALENT MANAGEMENT (B)
UNDERSTANDING OF TALENT MANAGEMENT (B1)
FACTORS AFFECTING TALENT MANAGEMENT (B2)
CURRENT TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AT CASE ORGANISATION (B3)
IMPORTANCE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT (B4)
PERCEIVED TALENT MANAGEMENT RESPONSBILITY (B5)
TALENT RETENTION (C)
FACTORS AFFECTING TALENT RETENTION (C1)
CURRENT RETENTION PRACTICES AT CASE ORGANISATION (C2)
FEELINGS ON CURRENT POSITION AND ORGANISATION (C3)
PERCEPTIONS ON STAFF LOSS (C4)
LEADERSHIP (D)
VIEWS ON LEADERSHIP (D1)
LEADERSHIP AND ROLE IN TALENT MANAGEMENT (D2)
VIEWS ON CURRENT LEADERSHIP AT CASE ORGANISATION (D3)
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE (E1)
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AND TALENT MANAGEMENT (E1)
PERCEIVED TALENT MANAGEMENT FACTORS FACILITATING COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE (E2)
OTHER (F)
TALENT MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE (F1)
INDIVIDUAL CONSIDERATION (F2)
HOW TALENT MANAGEMENT CAN BE IMPROVED (F3)

Source: Compiled by author

Once coding was completed, the major and sub-themes were transferred manually to a thematic matrix, capturing each theme and each participant's data in one central location, essentially portraying thematic summaries (Kuckartz, 2014). This process was deemed the most effective method of analysis, as creating theme-orientated summaries is a very effective process of analysis due to it consisting of paraphrases of the original data and covers all data (Kuckartz, 2014). It also allows the data to be interpreted and reported on in accordance with exact text as shared by the participants, enabling a true and exact reflection of their perceptions. The transcripts are not included in this script due to ethical considerations to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

3.2.4 Trustworthiness (reliability)

Trustworthiness (reliability) of the study was achieved by focusing on its credibility, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Ritchie et al. 2013; Loh, 2013)):

- Credibility, as defined in 1.8.2, examines how confident the researcher is with the truth of the findings (Lincoln and Guba 1985, cited in Anney, 2014; Krefting, 1991; Shaw, Houghton, Casey and Murphy, 2013; Shenton, 2004). Credibility was achieved by recording the interviews and by extensive, accurate note-taking. The method of member checking was utilised to ensure the trustworthiness of the transcripts, as the transcripts were evaluated and verified by all participants to ensure an accurate reflection of their perceptions/views was presented (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2012). This allowed for an accurate representation of the data. It is believed that the findings of this study accurately represent the original data and are truthful and correct. The chosen research design effectively met the objectives of this study, the purpose of this study being to solicit the perceptions of the participants on broad TM themes. The design, being interpretative in nature was believed to accurately explore these perceptions via an appropriate data collection technique and accurately interpreted via an appropriate analysis technique.

- Transferability, as defined in 1.8.2, attempts to transfer data to new settings to allow for future comparison (Lincoln and Guba 1985, cited in Krefting, 1991; Shenton, 2004). Transferability was achieved by the presentation of sufficient descriptive data, allowing for future studies to be conducted. It is believed that an ethical and transparent approach was taken and sufficient descriptive data was provided, which allows the findings to be explored in similar contexts for future comparison and exploration (Lincoln and Guba 1985, in Krefting, 1991 and Shenton, 2004).

- Dependability, as defined in 1.8.2, assesses whether the findings of the study would be consistent if replicated in similar contexts (Guba 1981, in Krefting 1991). Dependability was achieved by considering and accounting for variations. No variations on the participants' transcripts were observed and no notable discoveries were made when correlating the findings of the study with organisational secondary documents such as attending records, etc. Consistency is believed to have been achieved.

- Neutrality, as defined in 1.8.2, refers to the findings as a sole function of the research participants. The findings of this study were reported exactly as the data was portrayed by the participants, essentially resulting in the findings being a sole function of the participants and the conditions of the research (Guba 1981, in Krefting 1991). Each interview allowed for sufficient time for completion, thus decreasing the distance between myself as the researcher and the participants, creating a scenario of prolonging contact to build confidence and trust in their answers. Trust was also achieved due to me being a member of the organisation at the time of the study.
- Interviews were conducted consistently and the data were analysed systematically.
- The environment and quality of questions in the interview were relevant to the research problem and objectives. Participants were approached at times convenient to them, ensuring ample time to explore and express their perceptions entirely.
- Data saturation was achieved, as mentioned above.

3.5 Conclusion

The research philosophy has been explored, accompanied by a detailed account of how the study was conducted, especially relating to the manner in which the data was collected and analysed while focusing on maintaining rigour.

The research is a constituent of the interpretivist philosophy due to its exploratory nature. A qualitative case study, focusing on a single organisation was chosen as the appropriate research design. Sampling was conducted purposively, based on inclusion criteria which were deemed necessary to provide rich data. In-depth interviews were utilised to collect data from the participants which were guided by making use of a well-constructed interview guide. Data was analysed utilising qualitative content analysis which drew specific inferences from the transcripts and was coded using main and sub codes. Trustworthiness was achieved by focusing on credibility, member checking, transferability, dependability, neutrality and ensuring that data saturation was effectively achieved.

Overall, this research was conducted with the guidelines and framework of the University of South Africa's Research Ethics Policy, by carefully considering and utilising the above-mentioned research design to eliminate risk, capture data in an ethical manner and analyse and report the findings which were free of bias. The following chapter encompasses the findings of the research.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings of the study which focuses on the perceptions of all stakeholders in connection to their views on talent and TM, their perceptions on the factors affecting TM and talent retention, their perceptions on the role leadership plays in TM and the perceived TM factors facilitating competitive advantage. A profile of the participants who voluntarily participated in this study will be discussed, followed by the reported findings of the study, including the links between the findings and current TM literature. This chapter ends with a conclusion highlighting the essence of the chapter.

4.2 Participants

All twenty employed individuals at the case organisation were invited to partake in the study, of which twelve participants voluntarily made themselves available to partake. The participants met the inclusion criteria of being employed by this organisation for at least one year and were interviewed at times convenient to them at the business location of the case organisation. Limited biographical and personal data was collected so as to uphold anonymity, and only related to gender, generation, number of years employed at the case organisation and their skill level at the time of the study. Participants were further assured of identity protection prior to the interviews and were assigned pseudo-names. Table 4.1 below is a profile of the biographical data that was collected during the interview stage.

Table 4.1: Profile of participants*

	Lower-Level	Middle-Level/Management	Top-Level Management/Executive
Number of participants	5	4	3
Number of interviews	10	8	3
Skill Level / Education	Majority Degree Holders*	Majority Technically Skilled / Trade Qualifications*	Majority Technically Skilled / Trade Qualifications*
Gender	Mostly Male	Male	Mostly Male
Generation	Y and X*	X*	Baby Boomers and X*
Number of years employed at case organisation	Average 11.6*	Average 15*	Average 21*

* Further details cannot be divulged as that will risk the identification of participants

Source: Compiled by author

The above description of the participants presents an environment where the majority of the participants are skilled, holding degrees in various fields and technical qualifications, as can be expected in an organisation providing specialised engineering solutions. The participants mostly consisted of males. Participants holding top-level positions fall partly into the Baby Boomer generation, born 1946 – 1964 (Katz, 2017) and Generation X, born 1965-1980 (Katz, 2017), with the majority belonging to Baby Boomers. This level is expected to be the sole level for decision-making and strategy formulation, which could have negative implications for TM and competitive advantage. Middle-level participants belonged only to Generation X, a level which is seen to be the operational, daily drivers of the organisation. Lower-level participants consisted of both Generation X and Y, born 1982 – 2002 (Hills, Boshoff, Gilbert-Hunt, Ryan and Smith, 2015), with the majority belonging to Generation Y. The description of participants portrays a long number of the average of employment years at the case organisation, with the top-level showing the greatest average number and the lowest number of three years falling within the lower-level. The description of the participants has some similarities to the literature, whereby the literature states that the majority of the workforce consists of Generation X and Y individuals, a fact that is relevant on a micro scale when considering the workforce of the case organisation (McCollum and Na'Desh, 2015). The 11.6 average number of years employed at the case organisation with regards to Generation X and Y individuals in the lower-level and 15 average in the middle-level is an interesting finding. This finding is well above the average of 3.5 years and challenges the idea that these generations are known to be nomadic, as highlighted in the literature (Nolan, 2015). This would point to the realisation that the case organisation is effective in retaining their staff, but the question exists as to why they stay. The findings of the study will provide some clarity to this question.

4.3 Findings

The participants presented their perceptions on TM, talent retention, leadership, as well as the factors affecting TM, retention and the factors perceived to facilitate competitive advantage, as set by the interview guide. The findings correspond to the codes highlighted in section 3.2.3. The findings will be substantiated with quotes from the participants' transcripts. Due to the size of the organisation, it is important to state that no information can be provided relating to which level or where the quote originated from, for the sake of upholding anonymity.

4.3.1 Talent

As guided by the interview protocol, the participants presented their perceptions of their views on talent and their understanding of talent.

Figure 4.1: Views on Talent
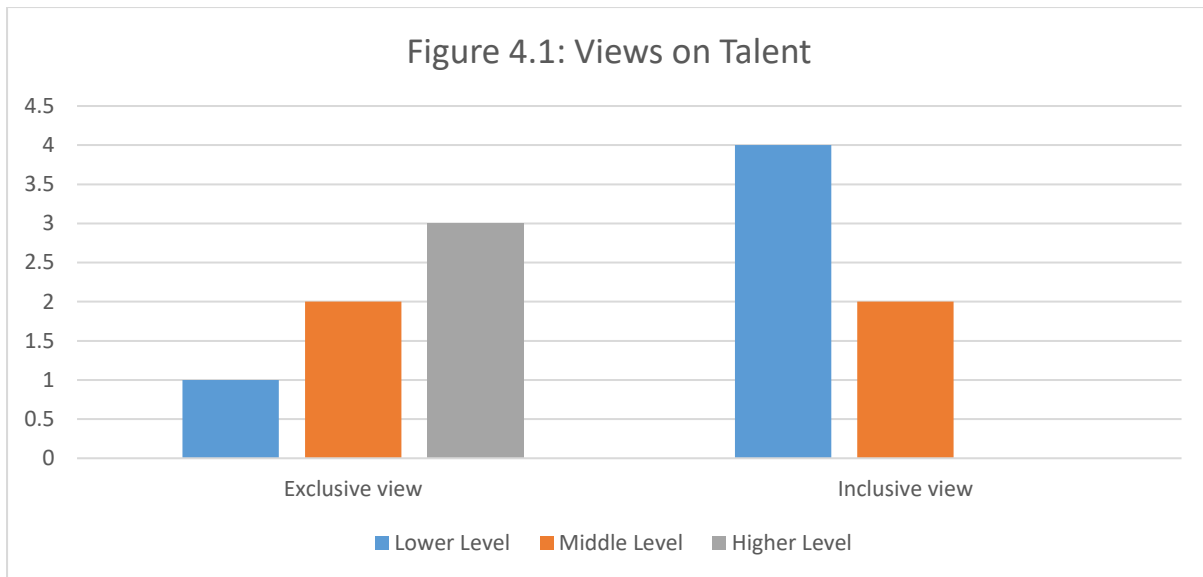
Source: Compiled from transcripts

4.3.1.1 Views on talent

Figure 4.1 presents the information of the participants' views on talent. The majority of lower-level participants held an inclusive view on talent, a view which holds the perception that talent exists in all individuals. The following quotes highlight these views:

"I think everyone has the ability. The more you do something, the better you get at it. If you have interest in what you are doing. If you love what you are doing, you are going to get better at it, want to be the best. It can be anyone, you just have to get them in the right position."

"To answer your question, I think talent can be developed, but what needs to be developed must be identified at an early stage in someone's career in order to get the most out of that person and hopefully become talented."

The above highlights that both participants support the view that talent can be developed, if placed correctly, and benefit both the individual and the organisation in the potential pursuit of competitive advantage (Krishan and Scullion, 2017).

Middle-level participants placed equal weight on both inclusive and exclusive views of talent while top level participants only held exclusive views of talent, exclusive views being the focus of select, high-performers and having the perspective that talent is rare (Krishan and Scullion, 2017; Tansley et al. 2013; Thunnissen et al. 2013a; Thunnissen and Van Arensbergen, 2015). The following quotes highlight these views:

"I think people have the potential to be talented and it's about the environment they are in, the stimulation and the guidance that determines how talented they become."

"I do not think that everyone has the ability to be talented. Certain people can be multi-skilled but other people are set on one talent and if they deviate, then they don't perform."

"Talent is like hen's teeth. They are far and few. It is rare, you do not get too many talented people out there. I have been faced within my time, out of the 100's of people I have been associated with, maybe only two or three really talented people."

The above views can thus be seen as the participants' definitions of talent, based on their own understanding. The literature suggests that an organisation such as the case organisation is likely to adopt both inclusive and exclusive approaches as the understanding of talent would differ between levels of management and would depend on the industry and organisational setting (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; Winning the talent war… 2015; Tansley, 2011; Tansley et al. 2013; Thunnissen et al. 2013b), yet as previously stated, the exclusive approach is favoured in MNEs (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; McDonnell et al. 2017; Thunnissen et al. 2013b).

The participants who held inclusive views on talent had the perception that every individual has the ability to be talented, that talent can be developed and development of talent was based on interest or passion for the work, findings that are supported in the literature, especially when this development can be combined to achieve competitive advantage (Winning the talent war … 2015; Böhmer and Schinnenburg, 2016; Lepak and Snell, 2002; Thunnissen and Van Arensbergen, 2015). The participants who held exclusive views on talent perceived talent to be rare, mostly possessing unique skills in one area of specialisation, views that are in alignment with the literature (King, 2015; Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; Tansley, 2011; Thunnissen and Van Arensbergen, 2015). The areas of specialisation in this particular case, revolves around technical capability and knowledge of the products and industry. They also perceived that talent is linked to the ability to learn and that talent cannot be trained or developed, thus the ability to learn is directly related to development.

The above findings highlight important information regarding the views of talent the participants perceived at all levels of the organisation, similarities and differences could have negative implications for competitive advantage. It is clear that all the lower-level participants share a different view of talent to that of the higher-level staff, believing that talent exists in everyone and can be developed. The view of the higher-level participants points to a situation where they are not interested in developing talent, instead, favouring individuals who they feel already possess the technical capabilities that they perceive grants an individual with a talent. This essentially means that investment would not be made in individuals, even if they possess potential talents that could be developed. The organisation would potentially miss or lose talent in this regard, as another company would potentially discover these talents and invest to develop them. Talent, in this case, was subject to the industry and the organisational approach to talent was dependent on the approach taken by higher-level staff. Earlier, it was stated that the higher-level participants are the sole decision makers at the organisation, resulting in the expectation that the organisation's view of talent would be that of an exclusive approach and that it would be highly unlikely that talent development practices would be in place. This is a result of the top-down approach to decision-making and not allowing participation from the lower-levels in the decision-

making process. In summary, it is expected that talent is fixed at the case organisation, as the sole decision makers feel that talent is innate, rare and gifted. It is also likely that a disconnect between the levels would be experienced because of talent being fixed, as lower and middle-level staff have different views as to how talent should be attracted, developed and retained.

Figure 4.2: Understanding of talent
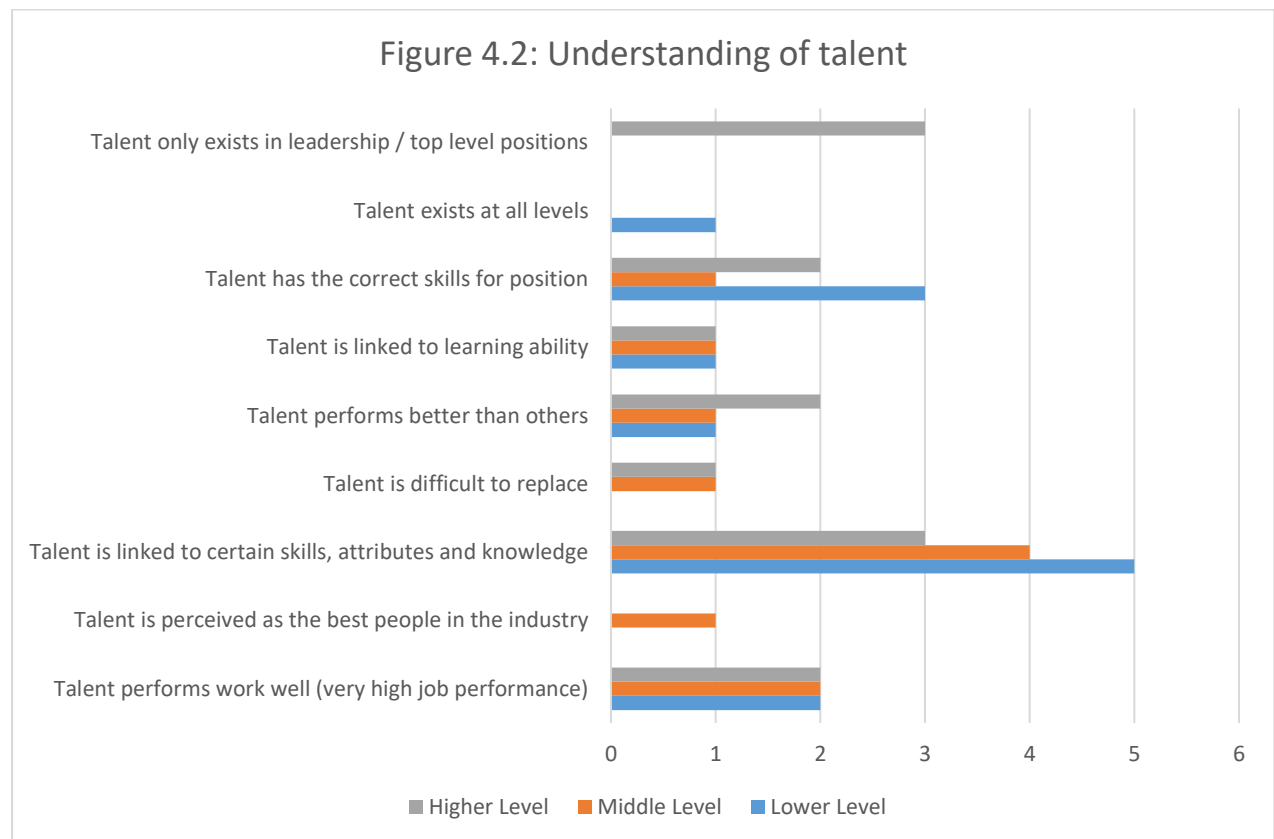
Source: Compiled from transcripts

4.3.1.2 Understanding of talent

Figure 4.2 highlights that all participants perceived talent to be linked to certain skills, abilities and knowledge, with a large number of the participants at all levels of the organisation perceiving that talent involves possessing the correct skills for the correct jobs and that proper placement of people is important, perceptions that are supported in the literature (Collings, 2014; Stadler, 2011; Thunnissen, 2016). Talent is perceived to be linked to performing the role well, a view held by all levels of management. The below quotes capture these views:

"I would say that is making sure the people who in their positions have the necessary skills to do well in those positions."

"This industry is very specialised, so you need people to know what they are doing and do things very well. Having the best people in the industry that do installations very well and sales people who know the products we sell very well. It's about having the right skills and performance for the job."

Some of the participants, also at all levels, perceived that being talented equates to superior performance compared to other staff who are not considered to be talented, as the below quote shows:

"I would think it is someone who understands the work better than the other staff. It also depends on the department. But I would say it is having the correct skills and knowledge to do the job you are paid to do, well."

All participants from the leadership cadre believed that talent only exists at the top-level of the organisation, a view shared by none of the middle and lower staff, while only one participant in the lower-level believed that talent exists at all levels. Some participants perceived that talent is linked to learning ability that learning a skill quickly contributes to someone being talented, views shared by middle and top management. This supports the findings in 4.3.1.1 that talent could be developed, thus supporting the inclusive view. This is also an interesting finding, which contradicts the findings in 4.3.1.1, as higher-level participants held an exclusive view of talent which suggested that talent is fixed. This suggests that the higher-level staff had a different understanding of learning ability and development. Higher positions believed that talent is difficult to replace.

Overall, most participants showed fair understanding of talent and could relate to how talent exists in their organisation and industry, which is centred on having the correct skills and knowledge of the product which would naturally attract the majority of the customers in the market, as the industry is highly technical. The participants showed similarities in their perceptions, but were still not unanimous as to what talent really is, a truth that is highlighted in the literature (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013; McDonnell et al. 2017; Tansley, 2011). This finding is congruent with earlier findings which may lead to a disconnect between the levels and might inhibit the ability to place the correct candidates in the correct positions and fully optimise the operation. The findings seem to agree with Thunnissen (2016) by stating that the different views on talent will be held, whereby the different levels follow inclusive or exclusive approaches, thus leading to the situation where their perspectives on the understanding of talent are not unanimous, thus making the concept "slippery".

A potential issue was found earlier in one of the higher-level participant's perspectives, as it perceived that the organisation is not interested in developing talent and follow an exclusive view, yet one of the higher-level participants felt that talent was linked to learning ability. Learning ability was found to be directly linked to development. This shows discrepancies and a lack of consistency amongst views. Quoting from the participant could help clarify this issue:

"I do not think talent is rare, I do think it is unique though. I think skills can be developed, but not talent. Talent is unique as in I feel talented people are naturally good at the rare thing that makes them talented, they reach a certain higher-level faster than the average person."

The above quote adds clarity by showing that higher-level staff see learning ability and development as separate entities. They still perceive that talent cannot be developed, but the learning ability enables people who already possess the innate talent to achieve their potential quicker than people who are not perceived to be talented. Another potential issue relating to higher-level participants relates to their view that talent is difficult to replace, yet they follow an exclusive approach to talent, believing that talent cannot be developed. This would have serious negative implications for succession with the organisation, as a loss of key staff would result in a gap in the operation that could not be filled. This finding is in alignment with TM literature, whereby leaders lack the skills to effectively manage the TM process, underestimate their role in the TM practice and lack an understanding of TM in general (Ellehuus, 2012; Deery and Jago, 2015; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007).

4.3.2 Talent management

As guided by the interview protocol, the participants presented their perceptions on the factors affecting TM, their understanding of TM, the perceived importance of TM, who they felt was responsible for TM, the current TM practices at the organisation.

Figure 4.3: Participants' Understanding of TM
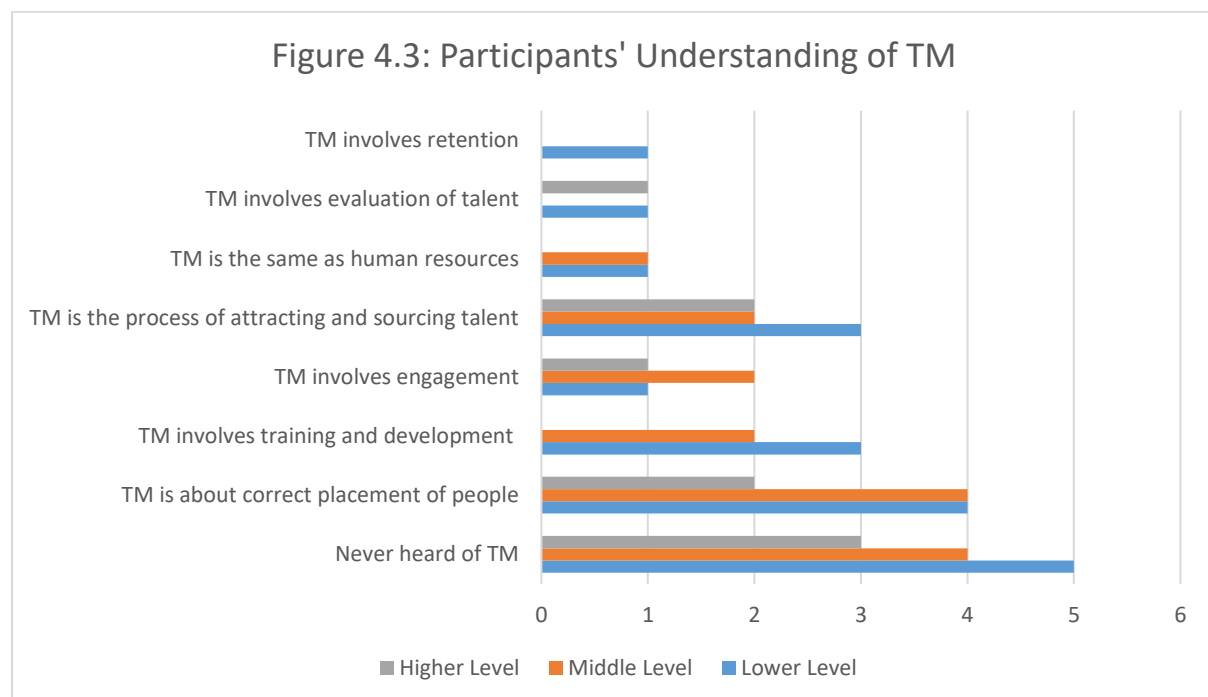
Source: compiled from interview transcripts

4.3.2.1 Participants' understanding of TM

Figure 4.3 highlights that all the participants had never heard of TM at the time of the study. An explanation of the study gave the participants the opportunity to formulate their own ideas and understanding of what they thought TM involves, thus these views can be seen as their definitions of TM. The below quotes from the participants illustrates this point:

"From what you have explained, it seems like human resources to me, so I would assume that talent management is about identifying areas in the business that could use additional people and source talented people that suit those jobs. Then it's about how those people are looked after and grown in terms of things they can offer the business".

"It's about having the right skills and performance for the job."

This finding is in alignment with the literature, which suggests that there is a lack of understanding of TM (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013; Ross, 2013a; Thunnissen et al. 2013a; Thunnissen, 2016). The finding also shows that participants understood TM as mainly associated with elements of recruitment, based on the following evidence from figure 4.3:

- Recruitment: placement (4/5, 4/4, 2/3); attracting/sourcing (3/5, 2/4, 2/3);
- Development: Training and development (3/5, 2/4);
- Retention: 1/5
- Other: Engagement (1/5, 2/4, 1/3), HR (1/5, 1/4)

The majority of the participants (4/5, 4/4, 2/3), at all levels of the organisation, perceived that TM is centred on the correct placement of people, who have the correct skills and abilities for said positions. This seems to be a central theme, as it was also discovered as a factor affecting TM. This finding is also known to be common in practice, whereby jobs are placed at the centre of business success and sourcing the correct people for said jobs (Cappelli and Keller, 2014).

Some of the participants holding lower and middle positions (3/5, 2/4) had the perception that TM involves effective processes linked to training and development of skills and talent. This point validates earlier findings stating that higher-level participants were not interested in the development of talent, while lower and middle-level participants felt it was a vital factor affecting TM. This confirms the finding that the organisation takes an exclusive approach to talent, whereby talent is fixed. A small number of participants from all levels (1/5, 2/4, 1/3) perceived that TM involves effective engagement and that staff should be recognised, valued and rewarded for their efforts. The below quote illustrates this point:

"I would certainly work at evaluation processes that recognise staff members who have done good work. I would also look at empowering staff members. I would also look at a system to evaluate staff performance and increase staff members' abilities and increase their talent. I would also look at setting

more concrete goals that staff members can understand and work towards achieving. I think that some form of financial incentive would work well, because it does have a positive effect on work ethic."

Participants (3/5, 2/4, 2/3), at all levels, perceived the importance of attracting and sourcing of talent and that the correct people must be sourced for the correct positions. This finding confirms the TM factor mentioned earlier, where participants (3/5, 2/4, 2/3) perceived the recruitment processes involved with attracting and selection of talent to be an important factor affecting TM. Only one participant, holding a lower-level position, made mention that retention is important for TM.

A small number of participants, from lower and higher positions, perceived that the evaluation of talent falls within the TM framework, meaning the identifying of gaps within the organisation and monitoring of performance is linked to TM. The below quote illustrates this point:

"Let's say one of our technicians has procurement skills that we didn't see before. The evaluation process must be in place in order to discover those skills. Once found, processes for decision-making regarding how to act on the discovery, as in, do we keep that person in his current role or move him."

Figure 4.4 : Perceptions on Factors Affecting TM
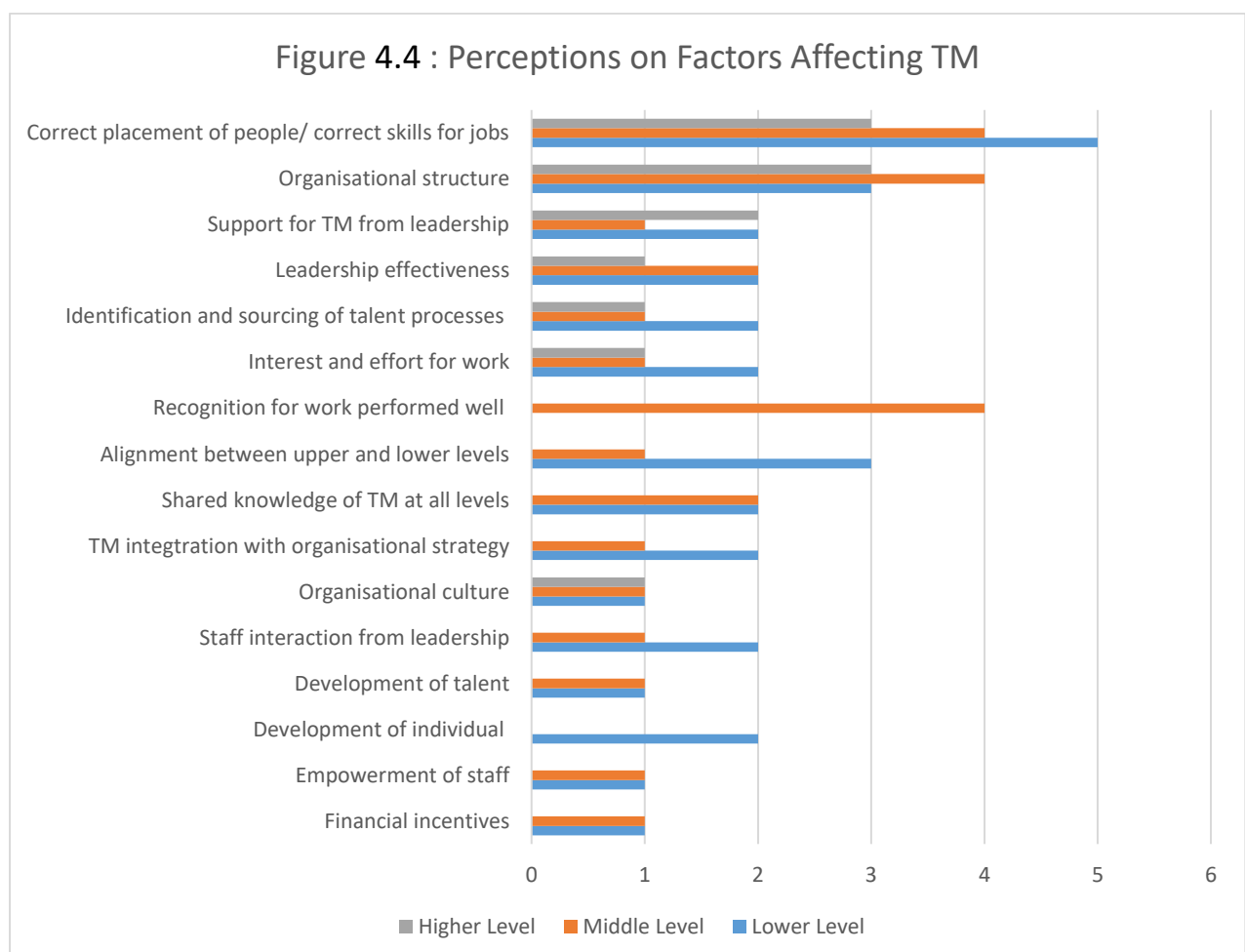
Source: compiled from interview transcripts

4.3.2.2 Perceptions on factors affecting TM

Figure 4.4 represents the perceived factors affecting TM of the participants at all hierarchical levels. A description of the factors, by the rating of the number of times mentioned by the participants, is shown below, with substantiating quotes from the participants:

- The placement of people and the correct skills for jobs – Ensuring that jobs within the operation have the required skills and the correct people, also known as the strategic positioning of skills and people. The following quote offers some insight:

"Repeating what I just said, to source and employ the people with the correct skills for the different positions to optimise the flow to achieve greater productivity."

Correct placement of people with the skills for the positions featured as the most important factor. This was due to all the participants stating the importance of strategic placement of skills and people. The specialised nature of the business could be adding to the importance of this factor. This finding is in contrast to the literature, Krishnan and Scullion (2017) suggested that identifying strategic alignment to roles would not be an important theme in TM with regard to small to medium enterprises as they would be more focused on the daily operational requirements of the business. The findings suggest that decision makers in small to medium enterprises value the correct placement of people and skills just as greatly as larger organisations.

- Organisational structure – Relates to how TM fits into the overall structure of the organisation and planning and coordination processes.

The majority of participants (3/5, 4/4, 3/3) representing all hierarchical levels of the organisation perceived organisational structure to be an important factor affecting TM, shown under "organisational structure" on figure 4.4. The literature confirms the above findings whereby it was discovered in previous studies that organisational infrastructure, processes and other internal organisational factors influenced TM effectiveness (Thunnissen, 2016). The below quotes substantiate these observations:

"Well, if you have a structure whereby talent is being sourced properly and being used to fill the gaps where required, then you should have the proper mix of skills you need in order to add to business success."

"I don't think our company is built for that or cares about that. I just don't see much of it. There is no course to grow talent further and we do not sit around a table to discuss ideas."

"I would just like it to be more structured and more in order. There should be processes. Processes make things easier and keep things in order. I would want things to run more smoothly."

- Support for TM from leadership and leadership effectiveness – The level of support given by leadership for TM practices and the level of effectiveness of the leadership cadre. Support from leadership for TM practices (2/5, 1/4, 2/3) and leadership effectiveness (2/5, 1/4, 1/3) was perceived by participants at all levels to affect TM. It is important to note the level of understanding of TM that is held by leadership, as the participants felt that leadership must possess a firm understanding of TM in order for TM practices to be implemented effectively. The importance of TM factors relating to leadership is supported by the literature where it is highlighted that leadership and management issues are seen as the overall problem in TM inefficiency (Beer and Eisenstat, 2000; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007; Tlaiss et al. 2017). The below quotes illustrates these findings:

"I think to implement a system that focuses on talent and people, the top managers must be the ones driving it, they must be the ones that say that this is the way forward and make sure everyone understands and is on board."

"I also think that the managers won't understand something like that, what is the point of following that system if no one understands it. I think it would need a person or a team of people at the top who understands it and who are good at making it happen and to maintain it properly."

- Processes for identifying and sourcing talent – The recruiting efforts of the organisation and if the efforts are reaching the correct audience. Participants from all levels (2/5; 2/4, 1/3) believed that the identification and sourcing of talent are important to TM, that it was important that the correct candidates are being sourced for certain positions. This factor is thus linked to the strategic positioning of people and skills, the most important factor the participants perceived to affect TM. This finding essentially requires that recruitment practices are important.

"I also don't think that there is a good understanding between talent management and finding talent because the criteria are really weighted heavily on what is written in CVs and I don't think it weighs heavily enough on the potential or experience. There is an oversupply of qualified people, which is actually doing damage to the concept of talent management and talent development. People are being vetted based on what their qualifications are and I think often it is not the most effective way to match a specific job."

The above quote highlights the view that the process of identifying and attracting talent is an important factor and could potentially have implications for competitive advantage, as the process must be effective in matching talent to specific jobs. McDonnell et al. (2017) stated that problems existed in

understanding what talent is made of and that processes to identify talent on a more effective basis would result in better TM decisions.

- Interest and effort for work – Due to the organisation existing in a highly specialised industry, requires the staff to have interest for the type of work and make a reasonable effort.

  Participants at all levels (2/5, 1/4. 1/3) believed there was a requirement to be interested in the work, possessing a certain level of passion for the work and industry and that securing people with an interest will add value to TM, shown under "interest and effort for work" in figure 4.4.

  "The last thing is about having interest in the product and the work. I am not going to say passion, because there are only a few people that show real passion at this organisation, so you need to at least have interest."

- Recognition for work performed well – The amount of recognition the leadership cadre gives staff for performing well in their roles. All middle-level participants had the perception that recognition from leadership was an important TM factor, a view that was not shared by the participants in the other/higher levels.

  "The guy has to be looked after and recognised for what he is putting into the company and a bit of recognition shown for his efforts."
  "First and foremost, the most vital thing is recognition. Recognition in terms of the job that the person is doing. So if you are doing a job, you need to get recognition for that."

- Alignment between upper and lower-levels – The situation where there is cohesion between all hierarchical levels in the organisation, where all levels feel they are being treated equally. The lower and middle-level participants held the perception that TM would add value if alignment between upper and lower-levels was experienced with regard to goals, a finding that has similarities in the literature, Thunnissen (2016) stating that disparity between organisational and individual goals creates problems with TM implementation.

  "The lower part of the business feels disconnected from the top and they just do whatever. I think alignment would be needed prior to considering such a system, it would just seem like everyone needed to be on the same page."

- Shared knowledge of TM at all levels – The level of TM understanding throughout the entire company, i.e. everyone knows what TM is, everyone knows a TM structure is in place and everyone knows what to do to contribute and add value to the system. Participants from lower and middle positions (2/5, 2/4) believed that the education of the staff on TM practices and processes will create a shared knowledge of TM and possibly aid in effective TM implementation, thus resulting in a system that is easier for everyone to follow.

"I think a starting point would be to tell people about the system and gain buy-in, this way you get everyone on the same page and everyone knows what to expect, it is important for them to know where their new responsibilities lie. The only way to do this is if everyone understands the new system."

- TM integration with organisation strategy – Ensuring a link between TM strategies or goals with organisational strategies or goals. A small number of participants (2/5, 1/4) from the lower and middle-levels perceived that TM would only be effective if the processes were integrated with the overall organisational strategies represented in figure 4.4 under "TM integration with organisational strategy".

"Does this new system replace company direction? If not, then I assume that it would need to fit in with the goals the company already has in place to have any sort of success."

- Organisational culture – A small number of participants (1/5, 1/4, 1/3) believed the importance of organisational culture, that it must be considered during TM processes to ensure that the talent being sourced fits the position and the overall organisation.

"The issue is how do you evaluate what you need in a talented individual and balance that with the goals of the organisation and make it more efficient. The way I evaluate it is, once you determine what goals you want to achieve, then you can determine whether it's your structure or culture that is stopping you from achieving those goals. So, if you believe that you do not have the culture to take you where you want to be, then you need to implement a structure that will force the culture to change. If your structure is not working, then you want to adapt the culture around the structure."

- Staff interaction from leadership – The level of interest leadership shows for lower-levels and the manner in which they interact. A small number of participants from the lower and middle-levels (2/5, 1/4) held the perception that interaction from leadership affects TM, as this affects staff morale.

"Going back to what I said earlier, maybe it's because they don't understand the individual. Obviously, I know your position has nothing to do with your emotions, but we are all individuals, things happen. If one had a manager that came to you every morning and asked "How are you doing, are you ok?" then you would feel as if you could talk to that person, but there is none of that."

- Development of talent and development of individuals – Development also featured as a factor affecting TM. The lower-level (2/5) had the perception that development at the individual level was important to TM, while a few participants from both the lower and middle-levels (1/5, 1/4) had the perception that the general development of talent was important to TM, reflections

represented in figure 4.3 under "development of talent" and "development of individual". There is alignment with the literature regarding the participants' views on development of talent, Krishnan and Scullion (2017) stating that the rate at which employees are acquired and developed is vital to smaller organisations.

"Well, the business should recognise the individuals within that position and should keep that person, not let that person be unhappy and look for another job, that is bad for the company. If you have a talented individual doing something for the company, keep him."
"I think development is important to focus on so that people are always learning new things, making their talents better. Maybe a rival is doing that and you aren't, so the rival's people would get better and yours won't, which is not good."

- Empowerment of staff – The power given to lower-levels to make independent decisions and have authority in their position. A few (1/5, 1/4) participants stated that empowerment of staff was important for TM practices.

"So yeah, recognition and appreciation and also a clearer, more modern business structure that empowers people, where they can use their ideas and make important suggestions that could change the company for the better."

- Financial incentives – A small number of participants (1/5, 1/4) perceived that financial incentive was a factor affecting TM.

"Give them their yearly increases and keep a happy environment here."

The interaction between factors – On the surface, these factors do not tend to show any form of pattern or link between each other, but closer observation, taking into full consideration what the participants perceived, paints a picture of a holistic system. It begins with the structure of the organisation, ensuring that the structure makes the necessary changes to support a TM system. The positions and skills required would be determined when these changes are made, necessitating the need for processes associated with attracting and securing talent via its recruitment efforts. Once suitable talent has been successfully identified, it would then be a question of how best to strategically place and/or combine these individuals to gain the most value throughout the entire organisation. Once talent is securely in place, the next processes are ensuring that they are presented with adequate development opportunities and that their individual goals are considered. Throughout this, culture would begin to set in, where values and norms begin to mould the specific culture, which the TM process must constantly evaluate. Retention is also a process that is ongoing from the moment talent is secured, as long-term sustainability of these skills is vital to ensuring lasting competitiveness. The process will only be implemented effectively if leadership supports the system and maintains it at every process and ensuring that everyone throughout the organisation understands TM and the expectations. Leadership

is the champion of the TM process and must make sure all these elements are operating effectively. If the entire process is managed correctly, it is expected to ensure competitive advantage.

Figure 4.5: Perceived TM Importance
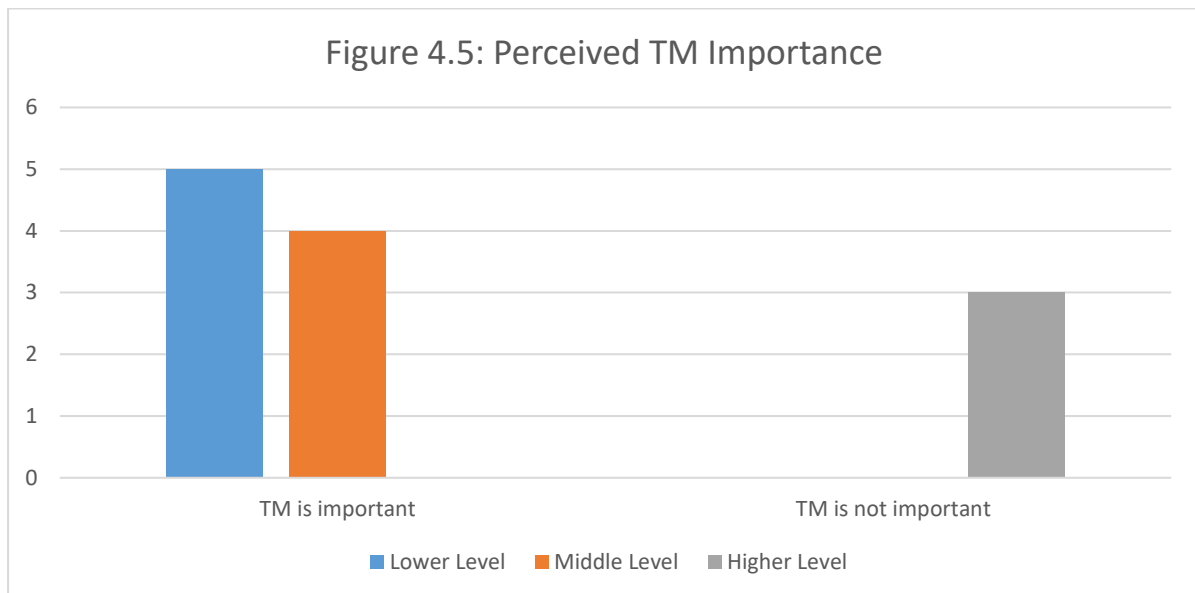
Source: compiled from interview transcripts

4.3.2.3 Perceived TM importance

Figure 4.5 shows the participants' perceptions regarding TM importance. All participants in the lower and middle-levels (5/5, 4/4) believed that TM is important for modern businesses. The reason most perceived this as important was the potential performance increases due to the correct skills being linked to jobs. This link was also perceived to contribute to growth in individual development and output (business performance) growth. Lower-level participants had the perception that effective TM processes could lead to a happier working environment, as people in the correct positions would enjoy their work, be interested and have the opportunity to showcase their talent. The below quotes substantiate these observations:

"Because then skills would be considered appropriate for all positions here, so everyone will have a clear indication on what they need to do and what their responsibilities are. I also think that the people here would be happier and feel valued because it seems like a system that would consider the people and not the current model whereby turnover and costs are heavily focused on."

"It doesn't help you if you employ someone who is counterproductive to the whole system. Being a small business which is highly specialised, it takes some time to get people to perform the way you want them to perform and you really don't want a high staff turnover."

All participants in higher-level positions perceived that TM is not important for modern businesses. One of the reasons given for this perception was the belief that the organisation, at the current state, did not possess the financial power to offer talented individuals any form of career path and individual growth, that all talented staff sourced would eventually leave the organisation due to the lack of growth opportunities. The only other reason stated was the size of the organisation at the time of the study. Higher-level participants had the perception that the organisation was not big enough to warrant the implementation of a TM system, that it would not add any new value or provide solutions to the current problems it was experiencing. Ellehuus (2012) highlights the same finding, stating that higher-level employees do not believe that TM is of great importance and fail to conceptualise strategies linked to TM. It is also suggested by Krishnan and Scullion (2017), that further research on the link between the organisational context and TM is required. The below quotes illustrate these observations:

"I think the company is too small to implement a system like that. Even if talent was identified, the company would not offer that person any room for growth or to develop his skills further."

"We do not take on enough new people to warrant such a system. It sounds like it would need radical change to occur, which could cost in terms of productivity. No, I think this sort of small to medium type business is not the correct type of business to support a system like that."

"I don't know if talent management would make that better because you just get a person in HR that could deal with this, it doesn't take talent to discipline someone. In my category, it is someone who has acquired the necessary skill to deal with people on a day to day basis. Talent, is when you have a person that has a gift."

The views stated by the higher-level participants is an interesting finding, as these views are similar to the views found in larger companies which do not acknowledge that smaller businesses differ in their talent management needs which creates the false assumption that the small size of the organisation essentially means that formal approaches to TM have no importance (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). A discrepancy was also found with higher-level participants' views on the importance of TM, as they previously stated that having the correct people in the correct jobs was important. The above quotes provide clarity to this discrepancy, as they keep mentioning the size of the company. Further probing showed that the leadership believed that TM has its place in the business world and could be of significant value, but it is not important for their current operation and for the industry, thus stating their reasons for recognising that skilled and talented people are vital, but talent management practice is not. They do not see the value in TM practices due to the size and financial implications. The following quote from one of the higher-level participants illustrates this finding:

"I think it would definitely work in a corporate structure or much larger companies, but a company such as this one will always be too small and is too specialised to focus on generic talent or the management thereof."

Figure 4.6: Perceived TM Responsibility
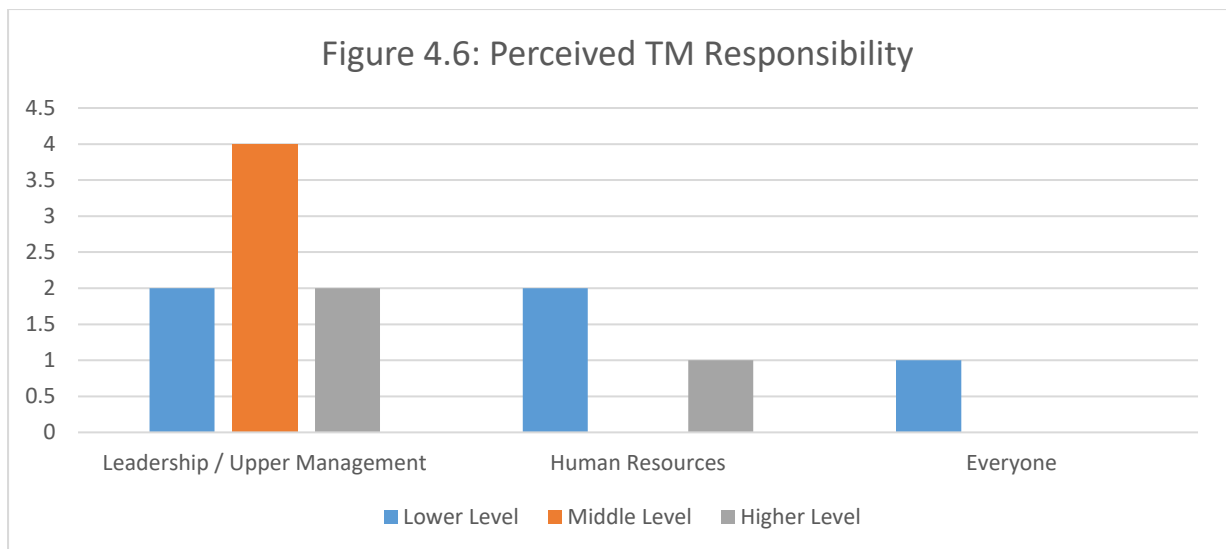
Source: compiled from interview transcripts

4.3.2.4 Perceived TM responsibility

Figure 4.6 shows the participants' perceptions on who they felt is responsible for the TM decisions. The majority of participants (2/5, 4/4, 2/3), at all levels, felt that leadership/upper management is solely responsible for TM decisions, a finding congruent to the literature (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; McGee, 2006; Ulrich and Smallwood, 2015). The below quotes illustrate this point:

"The upper management I think would make the ultimate decisions on who to bring in and who to keep."

"I would imagine that your upper-level management would be responsible for that. I think that upper-level management are the only ones that have some sort of idea of direction and structure, so with them deciding what must happen, then surely those decisions must be part of their job description."

A few participants from the lower and higher-levels (2/5, 1/3) felt that human resources were responsible for TM decisions, while only one participant from the lower-level felt that everyone was responsible for TM decisions. The below quotes illustrate these observations:

"Human resources are known to deal with the people of the company and look for gaps and fill them when there is a requirement, but they would need to follow the direction of the upper management."

"I would say everybody is responsible. But, of course, that needs to be narrowed down within the company and that starts with upper management. I have always believed in a team effort in the companies I have been in. I think we have always had very good teams, and the team is everyone. So that's why I think it is everybody's job to assist one another and themselves to identify talent."

The above findings are in alignment with previous findings in this study, confirming that leadership at the case organisation are the sole decision-makers, which includes decisions on staff and TM.

Figure 4.7: Views on Current TM Practices at Organisation
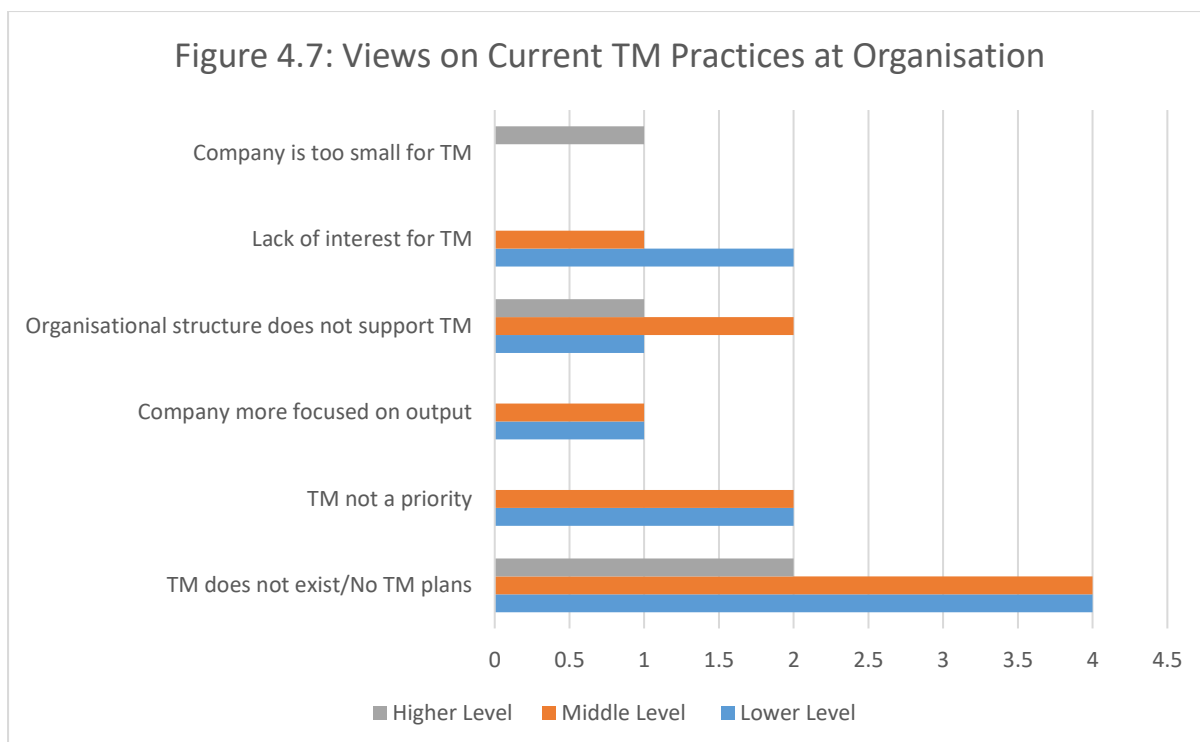
Source: compiled from interview transcripts

4.3.2.5 Views on current TM practices at organisation

Figure 4.7 shows the participants' views on current TM practices at the case organisation, where the majority of the participants (4/5, 4/4, 2/3), at all levels felt that TM does not exist at the organisation and no plans to manage talent are currently in place. The below quotes illustrate this point:

"Even though there is no formal structure to support talent management, gaps are still considered and filled when there is a requirement to do so. We offer training and develop people to be able to do their work, but any further development must be done on a personal level. As I said above, developing a person further in terms of skills would not offer the individual much as there would be no room for growth. So yes, to being able to link people to certain jobs and providing the skills needed, but no, to formal talent management processes."

"Based on what I can see and hear, I just do not think that a system even remotely close to that exists here."

Some of the lower and middle participants (2/5, 2/4) held the perception that TM is not a priority and that the company is focused on output (business performance) and not showing an interest for the people or for TM practices. This finding provides further evidence that the talent approach at the organisation is fixed and could result in negative implications. These participants state that TM is not a priority, yet the majority of the participants perceived that people with the correct skills are required to be in the correct positions, which begs the question if the leadership cadre understands the skills

required for these positions are they placing people correctly. TM literature conducted in South Africa supports these views, stating that only a portion of surveyed organisations had TM practices in place (Oosthuizen and Nienaber, 2010). Later findings in this study could clarify this point.

Participants at all levels (1/5, 2/4, 1/3) felt that the current organisational structure does not support TM. The below quotes illustrative this observation:

"I think it's because there is a general lack of structure that we have and because there is a lack of structure, there is no real planning and goal-setting. Because of that, the need arises haphazardly, not calculated. Also, there are motive issues. Because of the lack of structure and any real direction, it leaves it open to spur-of-the-moment, snap decisions. The issue is how do you evaluate what you need in a talented individual and balance that with the goals of the organisation and make it more efficient."

One of the higher-level participants perceived that the organisation is too small for TM and that is why TM is not a priority. These findings are supported in the literature, Dries (2013a) stating that a large number of organisations have no formal TM structure.

4.3.3 Talent retention

As guided by the interview protocol, the participants presented their perceptions on their feelings toward the current organisation, the factors affecting talent retention, current retention practices at the organisation and staff loss.

Figure 4.8: Participants' Feelings About Case Organisation
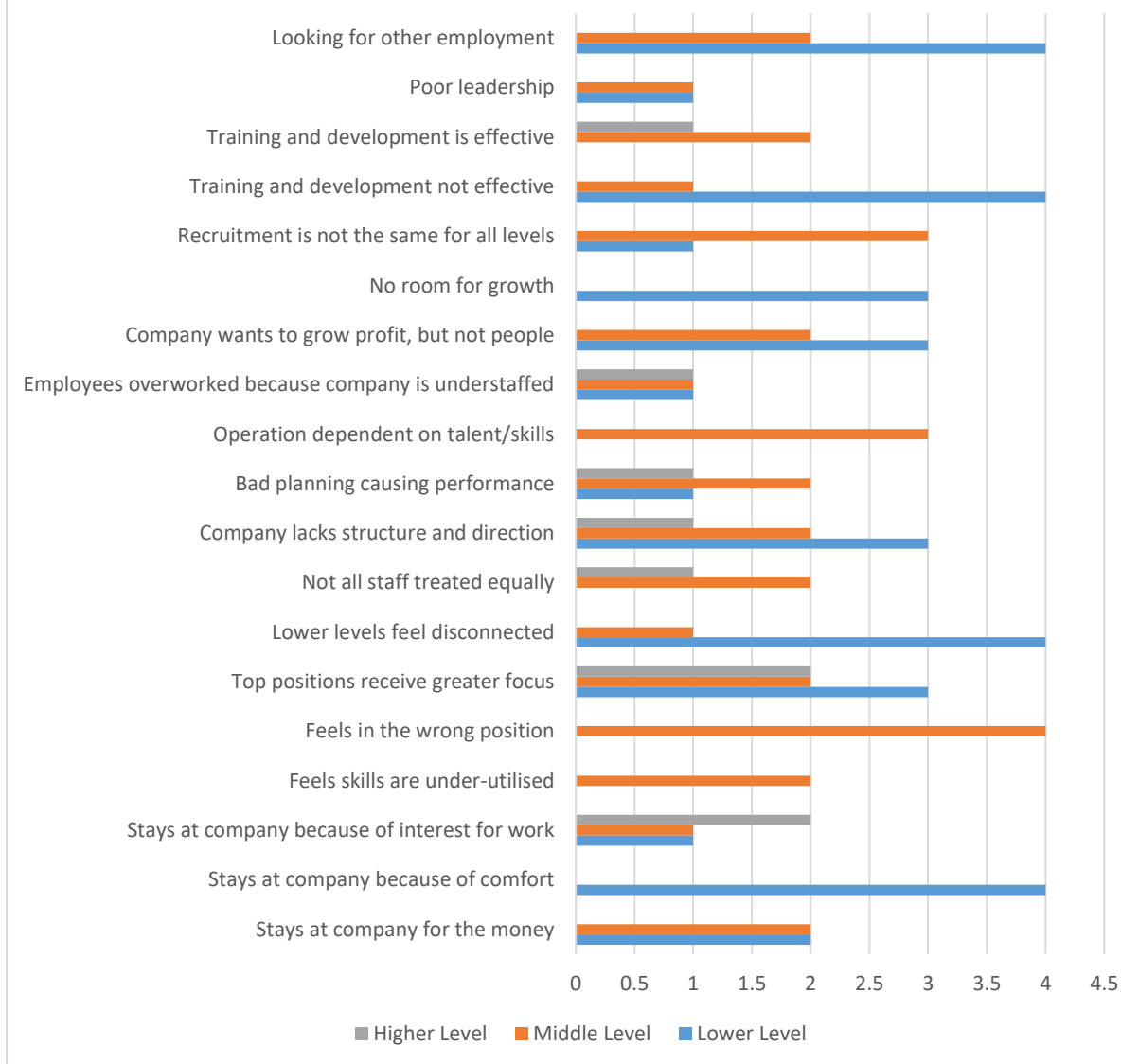
Source: compiled from interview transcripts

4.3.3.1 Participants' feelings about case organisation

Figure 4.8 portrays the participants' feelings towards their current positions and overall feelings towards the organisation at the time of the study. Participants were questioned on their reasons for staying at the company, with most lower and middle participants stating that money (2/5, 2/4), comfort (4/5) and interest (1/5, 1/4, 2/3) toward their work were the main reasons. The below quotes illustrate these points:

"The reason I wake up every morning is because of the money."

These reasons were not shared by participants in upper management, stating that only interest for the work was the main reason for staying. The below quote illustrates this point:

"I have a passion for the work. It always challenges me and changes which keeps me interested. I would also say that I am paid fairly well, considering the size of the company and the number of years I have been here, but it's not about the money, I would think it is more about the type of work we do that keeps me interested."

Half of the participants (4/5, 2/4) revealed that they were seeking other employment at the time of the study, all from the lower and middle-level, a surprising finding considering the long tenures at the case organisation. The below quote illustrates this observation:

"To be honest, I am here just until I find a new job, with benefits, where there is talent management or a company with human resources. An individual within the company who understands me as an individual and allows me to grow and helps me to grow. When I want to work for a company where I can grow in, and I know that is a bad thing to say."

"I know off-hand that about 80% of the lower staff are looking for new jobs right now."

A quote on the desire to leave shares some insight:

"In some levels of the organisation yeah. Leadership did exist at a high level, but the leadership criteria I mentioned, I feel that those are being slowly eroded away and that a lot of faith has been lost in leadership."

This quote points to a serious negative implication, that possible changes in leadership style are causing a loss of faith in their ability to lead. It is important to probe the idea of leadership and TM further. Later findings in this study could share some new insight on this issue.

Participants in the middle-level felt that their skills were underutilised at the time of the study. They also felt they were not positioned or placed properly within the organisation, i.e. they felt underemployed. This finding gives insight into the question posed earlier on whether the leadership cadre is placing people correctly in the organisation, the below quote providing evidence of this point:

"I don't enjoy the paperwork side or running the technicians, I think it's not my best work. I would prefer to focus on the clients, maybe doing some more sales. Well, there is no one else to do the work. You need to do certain things for the company to make sure things get done."

Participants at all levels had the perception that the higher-level positions at the organisation received greater focus, essentially meaning that these positions are favoured, the below quote offers some insight on this point:

"Certain positions naturally have higher focus because of the position's importance. You must look at the ease of finding a suitable replacement for certain positions. Certain jobs are critical to the operation of this business, and those are the positions that receive greater focus."

The perception was held by participants at all levels that the organisation lacked structure and any form of real direction at the time of the study, a finding in alignment with earlier observations. There was the belief that bad planning in the business was causing performance hindrances. A small number of participants in the lower and middle-levels (1/5, 1/4) felt that leadership was poor. The below quote provides an illustration to this point:

"No, like I said, it is non-existent. I do not see a leader. I see people who have leadership qualities, but no leaders. But that is just my opinion."

Most of the middle-level participants believed that the operation was heavily dependent on skills and talented individuals, the below quote providing evidence of the point:

"I don't want to say that the company is in dire straits, but there has been a definite decline in certain areas and it is affecting the talent that we have. It is also causing us to rely heavily on some of those talents, meaning if we do lose some of that talent, it will hurt the company because we have become so dependent on talented people."

The lower and middle-level participants (3/5, 2/4) held the view that the organisation had the goal of growing profits, but not growing staff capacity simultaneously. Most lower-level participants (3/5) stated that individual growth opportunities didn't exist at the time of the study. Most lower-level participants and one middle-level participant (4/5, 1/4) stated that there was a clear disconnect between lower and upper-levels. The below quotes offer evidence of these observations:

"I think this company, from my perspective, is just trying to expand. Trying to sort of get customers in other areas, but not expanding their workforce:"

"I feel as if I cannot grow within the company. From what I see day to day, I don't see any opportunities, everybody has a position and that is their position, finished."

"The upper positions have more flexibility and just seem happier in general than the people below them. The lower part of the business feels disconnected from the top and they just do whatever."

The participants were also questioned about their views on current recruitment and training practices. Most of the lower-level participants (4/5) held the view that training and development was an informal process and was not effective, a view shared by a small number of middle-level participants (1/4). The below quote illustrates this observation:

"OK well, I don't think there is anything [training and development], I think there are individuals within the business that take it upon themselves to better others and I think that's about it. We do not get called around or into meetings to learn a new product or anything like that. It doesn't happen. Not at all. You sort of have to find out for yourself."

Higher-level positions (1/3) and middle level positions (2/4), in contrast, felt that training was effective, evidence shown by the below quote:

"We provide the training that is needed. I feel the staff are well equipped."

Training and development have been identified as a TM issue, as previously stated, the leadership cadre at the case organisation are not interested in talent development, resulting in talent being fixed. This finding is important as it is expected that training is informal due to this approach, yet the lower-levels feel that training and development are ineffective and have stated the importance of it. This could have implications on TM in terms of retention, yet they stay due to the comfort, money and interest for the work.

The lower and middle-level participants (1/5, 3/4) thought that recruitment strategies were not the same for all levels. The below quote illustrates this point:

"Management seems to go on hearsay and who you know. Lower management goes through a proper recruitment process."

The above findings paint a vastly negative image of the case organisation, an image that clearly represents an unhealthy work environment, yet there appear to be some good things going for the organisation, as they perform well in the industry and have managed to retain staff at all hierarchical levels as the previous findings show. There is a clear misalignment regarding how the different levels perceive the effectiveness of TM processes. The current work environment consists of a culture of lower and middle-level employees who feel that their skills are not utilised correctly, not positioned correctly, but stay at the organisation as they feel they have no other options and need the money. This is a potentially toxic scenario which would make talent retention challenging for any organisation.

The capturing of perceptions with regard to the participants' feelings about the case organisation is vital to this study, as retention is linked to employees' perceptions of the organisation and how they feel about the organisation has a direct impact on their intentions to remain or leave the organisation (McDonnell et al. 2017).

Figure 4.9: Perceptions on Factors Affecting Talent Retention
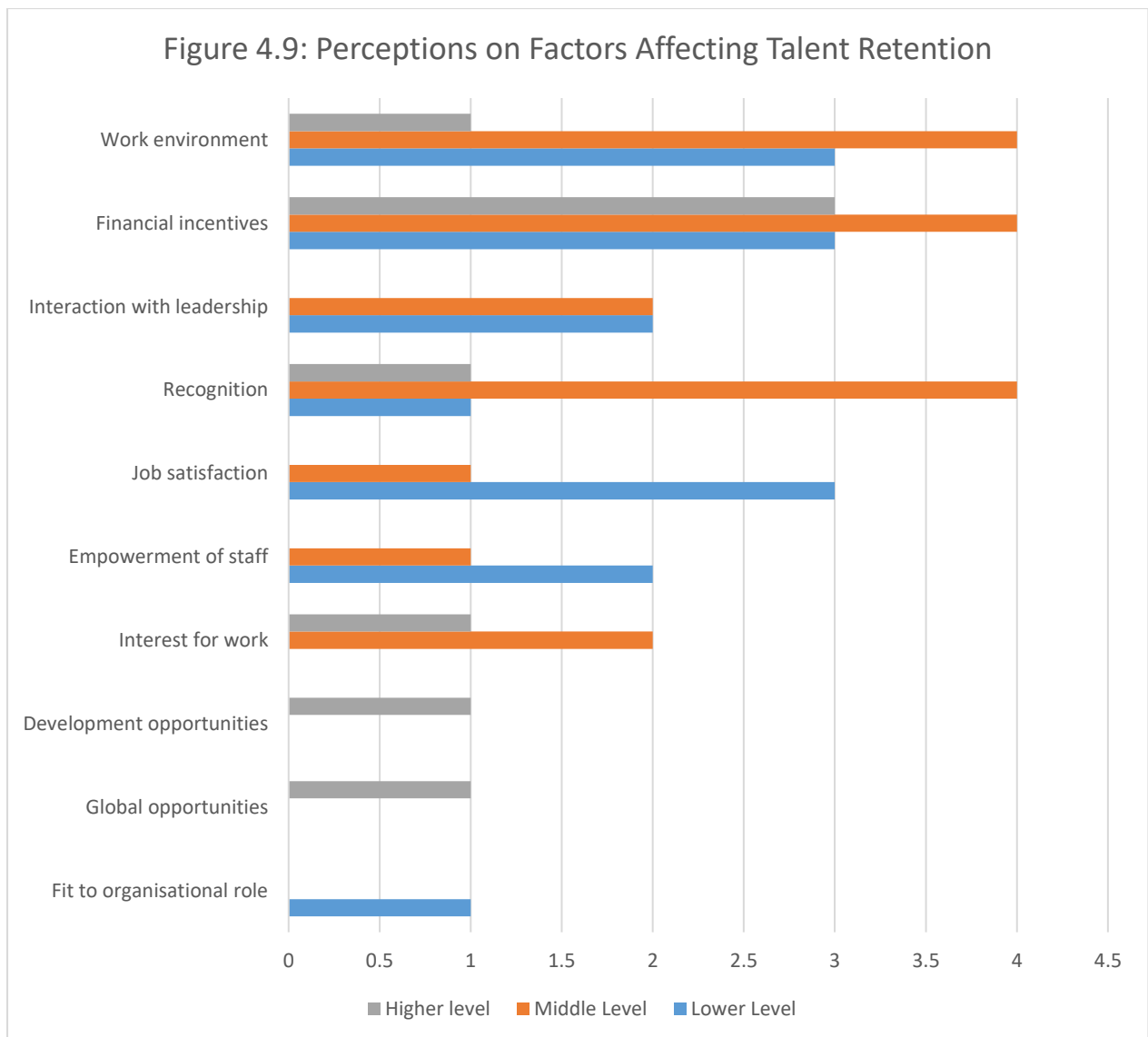
Source: compiled from interview transcripts

4.3.3.2 Perceptions on factors affecting talent retention

Figure 4.9 shows the participants' perceptions of the factors they perceive to affect talent retention. Participants at all levels held the perception that the work environment (3/5, 4/4, 1/3), financial incentives (3/5, 4/4, 3/3) and recognition (1/5, 4/4, 1/3) are important factors affecting talent retention. The below quotes illustrate these observations:

"A good working environment in terms of culture. If you are doing something you don't like, you are not going to stick around. If you go to work and if you don't suit the culture, then it's also not going to work. If management showed an interest in the employees, then they will feel appreciated."

"Money. Of course, there are other subtleties in place, like offering benefits like pension, medical aid, a free company car and petrol, like incentives. But it is all money. If you give him a salary and give him a

car, the basis of it is still more money, because now he doesn't have to pay for a car. If you are paying for his medical aid, it's still money, because he doesn't have to pay for it himself. So, benefits are deemed as another form of money."

"Show them a bit of gratitude for their work. Give them their yearly increases and keep a happy environment here. At the moment, I do not think we are in a happy environment here."

The lower and middle-levels (2/5, 2/4) felt that leadership interaction with lower-levels had a role to play in retention, which was previously found to be lacking, as well as job satisfaction. These factors are supported in the literature, McDonnell et al. (2017) stating that responsible leadership is a critical factor in talent retention. It was also suggested that employees who believed that their employers were socially responsible and effective, would essentially result in a reduction in the desire to leave, resulting in positive outlooks for career success and ultimately creating a better working environment (McDonnell et al. 2017). Tlaiss et al. (2017) made similar findings in their study, stating that financial incentives, training and development opportunities, positive work environments, the feeling of appreciation and leadership all affected talent retention practices.

Middle and higher-level participants (2/4, 1/3) stated that interest for the work and industry also affected talent retention, which was previously found to be a factor affecting TM. This is an important finding, as interest for the type of work is expected to affect both TM and talent retention efforts. The below quote illustrates this point:

"I think that is largely up to the individual and up to his passion for what he is doing. Making the guy happy is not going to help if he is not passionate about being here or having a lot of interest in what he is doing."

Higher-level participants perceived global career opportunities and the lack of development opportunities for all employees as a factor affecting talent retention. The below provides evidence of this point:

"We haven't been extremely successful because they basically get the skills, then move out of South Africa, and employ their skills somewhere else. That could be for many reasons you know, for safety, security, feeling that the grass is greener on the other side and make more money, here even though you have the skill, you may be undermined because the workplace is full and because there is not enough economic growth in South Africa to cover for all the unemployment."

One participant in the lower-level highlighted, fit to organisational culture, as a factor affecting talent retention.

Figure 4.10: Perception on Current Retention Practices
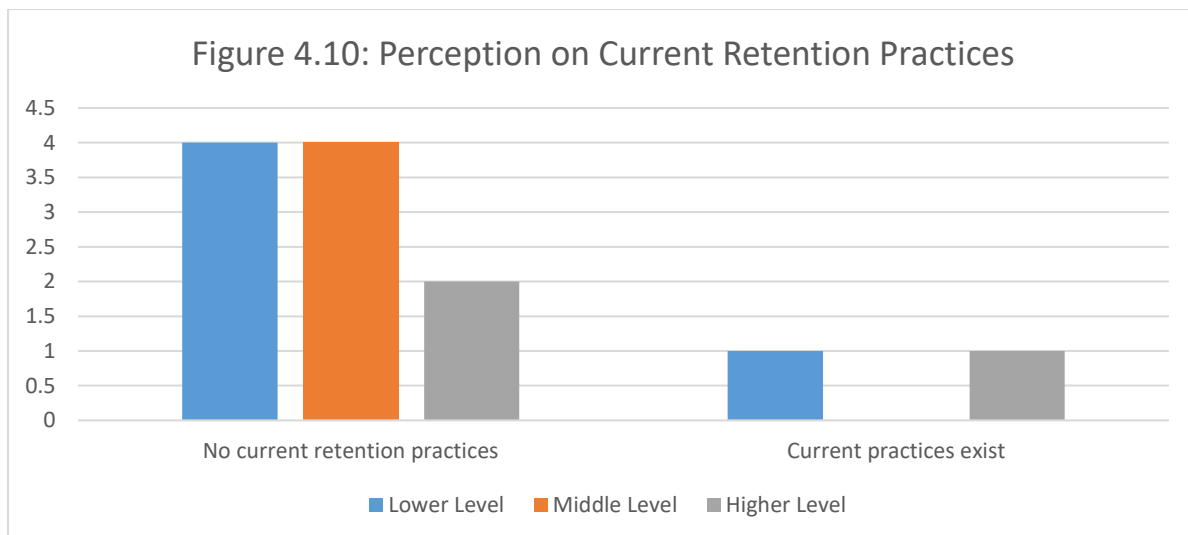
Source: compiled from interview transcripts

4.3.3.3 Perception on current retention practices

Figure 4.10 represents the questions directed at the participants' perceptions on current talent retention at the organisation at the time of the study. A small number of participants (1/5, 1/3), from the lower and higher-levels, held the perception that talent retention did exist in certain forms, as the below quote shows:

"I think it is [effectiveness of current retention practices] and I think the quickest measure of that is the staff turnaround, which has been fairly low throughout all the years within the company and I think that it's a good indicator that something is working."

The participants were questioned on their reasons for the perceptions. Half of the participants, representing all levels, stated that no exit interviews were ever conducted in the event of staff loss. The below quote provides evidence of this observation:

"Our technicians keep leaving, if there were plans in place to manage them then surely, they wouldn't leave, right? The company doesn't ask them why they are leaving, they just let them go and we replace."

Lower and higher-level participants highlighted the fact that leadership is not interested in retention and that staff are only replaced when lost. Middle-level participants stated that recognition was not given and felt that the staff were not motivated. Most of the higher-level staff held the view that the organisation was not in a position financially to focus on talent retention. These findings are in alignment with how these employees were feeling about the organisation and their current positions and also in alignment with the factors they felt affected the retention of talent. Lower and higher-level staff perceived that only key staff (the staff considered vital to the operation) were considered for retention.

The above findings were consistent with the literature, stating that most organisations do not have active talent retention strategies in place, have limited talent retention understanding and do not consider the impact of losing talent (Winning the talent war… 2015; Cappelli and Keller, 2014; Ellehuus, 2012; Hejase et al. 2016; Soewignyo and Soewignyo, 2015). This loss of talent and the apparent lack of recognition of the possibility of staff loss could have negative implications for competitive advantage, as it was suggested that talent exists within the certain skills the industry required and possessing these specialised skills would allow for competitive advantage. It was also stated earlier that the organisation was dependent on skills and talent, meaning a loss of skills would be detrimental to the productivity, and eventually, competitive advantage. Exploring the participants' perspectives on staff loss has the potential to add valuable insight to this issue.
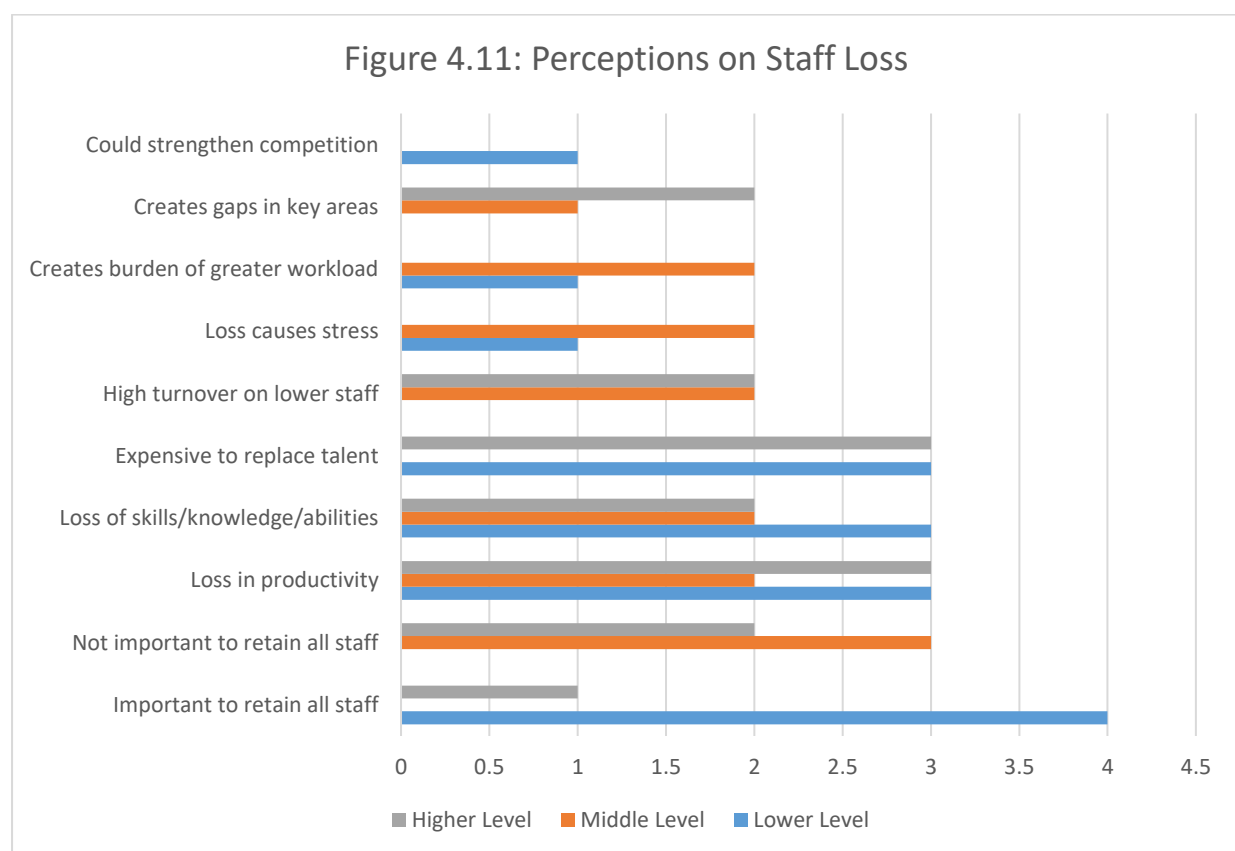
Source: compiled from interview transcripts

4.3.3.4 Perceptions on staff loss

Figure 4.11 represents the participants' perceptions on the loss of staff. The majority of lower-level participants (4/5) held the view that the retention of staff at all levels was important for the organisation and the type of industry, a view shared by only one of the higher-level participants. The below quote gives evidence of this observation:

"On all levels, on the whole, yes. If you have staff and they have been with you for a while, then they have an understanding."

The majority of middle and higher-level participants (3/4, 2/3) did not see the importance in retaining all staff. The below quote illustrates this point:

"I think it is unachievable to retain all the staff here because of our size. It is not uncommon for companies to offer better pay, pay that we can't match. We also seem to be used as a stepping stone for the younger generation. In that sense, I would say no, it is not important to retain all the staff."

The above findings highlight discrepancies on the importance of retaining all staff, with the lower-levels perceiving that it is important due to the knowledge the staff have obtained, thus keeping the knowledge would benefit the company, and the higher-level participants preferring to focus on retaining the staff that are vital to the operation. The size of the operation was again brought into question, as the higher-level participants perceived that the organisation was too small for the practice of retaining all staff to be achievable. The loss of knowledge the lower-levels have sustained could impact negatively on the organisation's ability to maintain a competitive advantage, as this knowledge can be applied elsewhere.

Participants at all levels perceived the loss of staff negatively. The majority of them believed that the loss of staff results in losses in productivity and losses in skills, knowledge and abilities, perceptions that are supported in the literature (Winning the talent war… 2015; de Villiers and Stander, 2011; Frank et al. 2004),

Lower and middle-level participants perceived that loss of staff caused stress and creates the burden of a greater workload for the current staff capacity. Middle and higher-level staff stated that there was high staff turnover at the lower-levels at the time of the study and that losses in talent or skills creates gaps in key areas of the operation. It was also perceived that talent is expensive to replace, a view shared by lower and higher-level participants. This finding was in alignment with previous findings in this study, where higher-level participants had the perception that talent was difficult to replace, yet they take an exclusive approach to talent and only place their interest in retaining staff who they perceive are vital to the operation, approaches which are expected to have negative implications for maintaining competitive advantage.

4.3.4 TM Improvement

The participants were questioned on what they thought could be done to improve TM. Figure 4.12 shows their perceptions relating to TM improvement.

Figure 4.12: Perceptions on TM Improvement
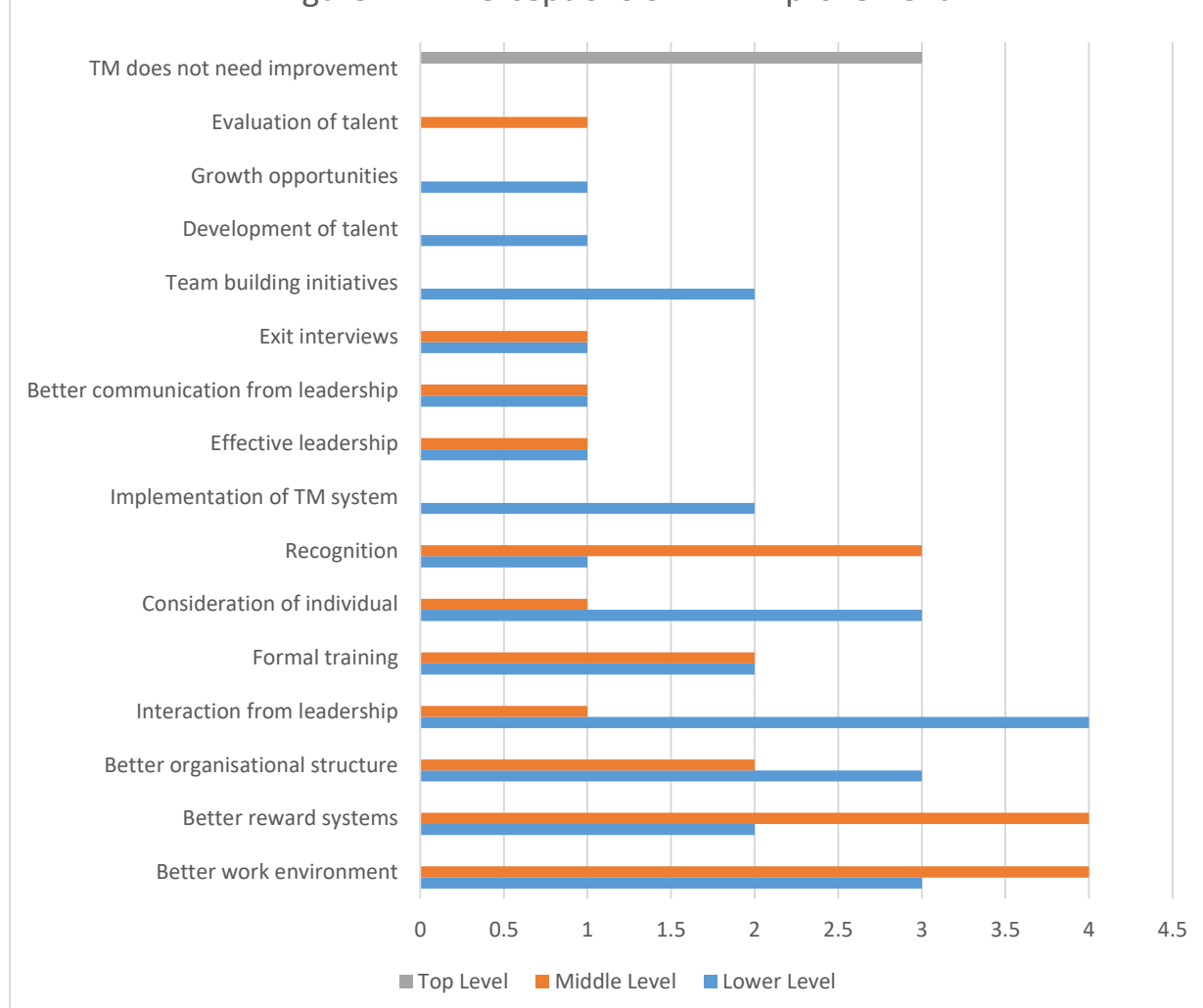
Source: compiled from interview transcripts

Most of the participants holding lower and middle-level positions (3/5, 4/4) had the perception that a better working environment would translate into better working conditions, making implementation of TM easier and more effective. The below quotes illustrate this observation:

"I think it would be important to engage your staff, communicate with them and make sure there is an environment that gives the impression that they can voice their concerns without negativity coming from it."

Better reward systems (2/5, 4/4) that are more inclusive in nature, was also highlighted by the same group of participants, as the below quotes show:

"Offer some incentive, it doesn't always have to be with money."

"Offer some form of rewards, just something small at least and give some recognition if they are working hard."

Organisational structure was perceived to contribute to TM improvement, specifically an organisational structure that supported TM. The below quotes support this point:

"Because it is kind of left up to the individuals to do their own thing if they have a responsibility, they just have to do it. On the whole, there is no structure. If things were clearer, if there were more meetings and everybody was in the loop to what was going on. The greater flow of information. All departments were in sync with each other."

"To move the company into the next level, you need some form of structure for the employees to grow into and somewhere for them to go. You can't expect your employees to work the same job forever, to grow their talent."

This finding is interesting, as it confirms the importance of organisational structure to the participants in all TM processes. It was found to be a factor affecting TM and talent retention, as well as the participants having the perspectives of the current structure at the case organisation not supporting TM and it lacked structure and direction. If the correct placement of people is important to the organisation and achieving competitive advantage via correct placement, then it would have serious implications on the ability to achieve competitive advantage if the structure is not placing people correctly, as previous findings show.

The same group of participants (4/5, 1/4) also felt that better quality interaction and communication from leadership was important if TM were to be improved. Formal training (2/5, 2/4) was perceived to add value to potentially make processes more effective with regards to the development of talent and processes that also considered the individual. Much like the organisational structure, training and development have also been common to all TM processes.

A small number of participants in the lower-level (1/5) and the majority of the participants in the middle-level (3/4) felt recognition was required to be more prevalent if TM were to be improved. A small number of participants in both lower and middle-levels (1/5, 1/4) felt that leadership had to be more effective and had to possess knowledge of TM processes. The same number of participants in these levels believed that exit interviews needed to be conducted so that the organisation could gauge how to improve retention practices in TM. The below quote illustrates this point:

"If one of the employees said that they were unhappy, I would have an interview with them, an exit interview which included the upper management and the talent management individual. To discuss what the problem is and try to figure something out, because you can't just let someone leave if they have been working for the company for how many years, they obviously know what they are doing."

Some of the participants in the lower-level (2/5) held the perception that implementing a TM system is the first step to improving TM. The same number of participants at this level stated that team building efforts would contribute to TM improvement. A small number of participants at the lower-level (1/5)

perceived that the development of talent must be focused on evaluation and that growth opportunities must exist to improve TM.

All participants at the higher-level did not believe that TM could be improved as there was no interest in TM at the time of the study in the case organisation. The below quote illustrates this observation:

"Most of the time, we are not in a financial position to offer more money, so the person ends up leaving. No I don't think anything else can be done [to improve TM]."

4.3.5 Leadership

As guided by the interview protocol, the participants presented their perceptions on leadership, views on the leadership of the organisation and the linkage between leadership and TM.

Figure 4.13: Views on Leadership
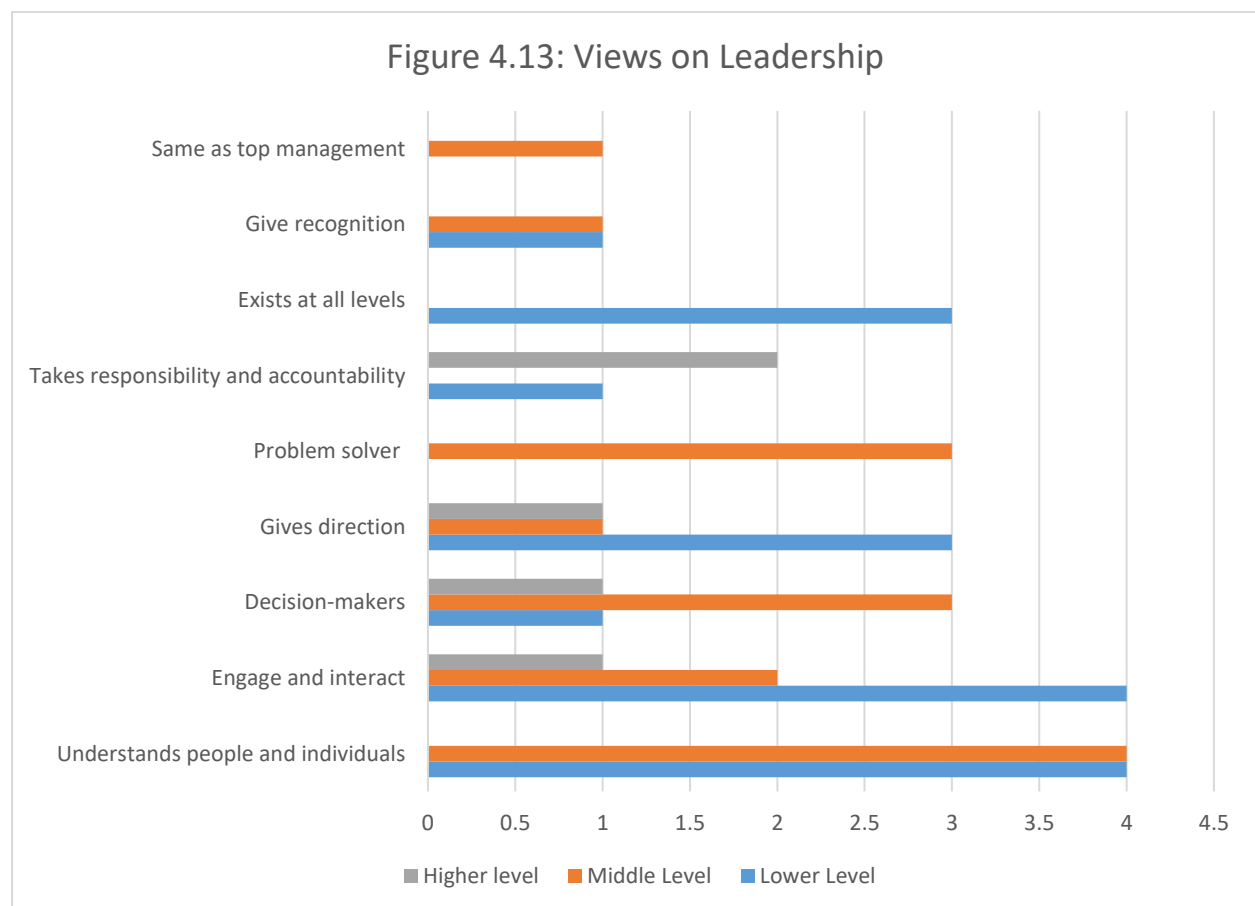
Source: compiled from interview transcripts

4.3.5.1 Views on leadership

Figure 4.13 shows the participant's views on what they perceived leadership entailed. It was considered important to gauge the participants' overall understanding of leadership prior to gauging their understanding of how leadership influences TM.

Most of the lower and middle-level participants (4/5, 4/4) believed that leadership was about people and that a good leader understands the people at the organisation, especially as individuals. They also perceived the ability to give recognition (1/5, 1/4) as an important function of leadership. The below quotes illustrate these observations:

"But a good leader is able to identify situations, good and bad, gaps and knowing their people. Not just being a leader, if you can be a leader and a mentor to your people at the same time, then you have a winning formula. Because then people look up to you, not because of your position but because of what you have achieved or what you can offer them or teach them. The minute you have that mentorship, then you are close with the people."

"A person who can motivate and recognise people and then it's a person that can show empathy, understanding people's personal issues."

Participants at all levels (1/5, 3/4, 1/3) held the view that leadership holds the responsibility for decision-making, especially decisions relating to the placement of people. A finding in alignment with the previous expectation that the leadership cadre was solely responsible for decision-making, thus being responsible for the placement of people, the previous finding being (2/5, 4/4, 2/3), while the rest of the participants (3/5, 1/3) felt that HR and their entire organisation was responsible for the placement of people and TM. Leadership was also perceived to involve the ability to give direction, strategise and to engage and interact with members of the middle and lower-levels. These perceptions are similar to findings from studies in leadership literature (Nienaber, 2007, van der Merwe and Nienaber, 2015). The below quotes illustrate this point:

"Leadership is about motivating and setting an example, engaging and communicating, takes accountability, giving recognition and criticism."

"Someone who sets directions, sets responsibilities and accountabilities and takes corrective action when needed."

Participants at the middle-level (3/4) perceived leaders to be problem solvers. Participants in the lower and higher-levels (1/5, 2/3) stated that leadership is related to positions where responsibility and accountability are taken and upheld.

Most of the lower-level participants (3/5) held the perception that leadership exists at all levels, while only one of the middle-level participants perceived leadership to be the same as top management.

4.3.5.2 Leadership's role in TM

The participants were asked questions relating to their perception of the role that leadership plays in TM. All the participants held the perception that leadership has a role to play in TM, from its implementation to the maintenance and driving of the processes. The participants at the middle and higher-levels viewed leadership as the only level that could influence or change structures and processes, thus being the only level that could possibly implement a TM structure, a finding which validates the previous expectation that the leadership cadre are the sole decision-makers and is in alignment with the previous findings where the majority of the participants felt that leadership was responsible for TM. The below quotes show evidence of these observations:

"Well, if the leadership is good, then the staff are going to stay. On the other hand, it is up to the leaders to keep the staff."

"Because again, the leadership or the person steering the ship is critical, and it is primarily up to them to ensure that everyone on the ship is in order, and that includes people."

"Because the leaders of the company should know what is required in the business. They are the only ones who can influence the success of such processes [TM]."

The lower and middle-level stated that leadership has this responsibility because they are assumed to understand the staff, not only the current and potential value they add to the organisation but to understand them as individuals as well. The participants felt that in order for this assumption to be realised, it required that leadership be effective in their efforts and possess the skills to implement TM systems.

The above findings are supported in the literature, Ulrich and Smallwood (2015) stating that business leaders take responsibility for sourcing, attracting and developing talented individuals.

4.3.5.3 Views on current leadership at the case organisation

The participants were questioned on their views and feelings towards current leadership at the case organisation. The majority of the participants held the perception that the current leadership was not effective at the time of the study. The below quotes illustrate this point:

"The upper management who is currently in power, who are supposed to be doing the leading, does not do a good job at leadership in my opinion. When you have a staff member who has an issue, and says that he doesn't want to take it to the leadership because they will get upset with him and wouldn't care, that means your leadership are not showing signs of being good leaders."

"I think those characteristics [good leadership characteristics] aren't really shown in my department. We often find that we are not really on the same page, planning is not always done properly and people get really frustrated."

The lower and middle-level participants felt that this ineffectiveness was a result of a lack of planning and communication and a general lack of interest in interacting with the members of the staff, observations also illustrated by the above quotes. It was also stated that the current leadership did not always choose the correct people for roles and did not position people correctly, they were perceived to lack the understanding of the skills and culture required for each role in the organisation. This finding provides insight into the question that was asked in section 4.3.2.5, which challenged whether leadership at the case organisation was placing people correctly based on their views on talent. Based on the views of the participants, it is believed that the leadership cadre does not fully understand the skills and culture required for jobs at the organisation, thus leading to an unproductive workforce, an unhappy working environment and decreased ability to achieve competitive advantage. The below quotes illustrate this observation:

"Because certain people have been put into positions where I feel they could have done a better job at it. Not just, ah no come work here, you know."

"I think some people are not aligned properly to the work that they do. I don't think that culture is considered. The culture here is to get your work done and perform for the company."

"Because they make the decisions and the owner should know what the company needs. We do tend to lose our new staff quite often, so I am not sure if they understand the culture or why or what, but like I said, I don't know. Also, they also don't always choose the right people. Sometimes they lack the practical experience."

All middle-level participants felt that leadership at the organisation had deteriorated as the operation evolved, that it had eroded as responsibilities were given to individuals who lacked the skills to be good leaders and did not understand the people. It was also perceived that the current leadership were not interested in empowering the middle and lower management levels. The below quotes point to this deterioration of leadership at the case organisation:

"Well the owner used to be actively involved with us, he was my boss for many years. Things were smoother then I think. He gave the responsibility to manage the company to other people, and things just aren't what they used to be. Even though we still do well, things just aren't smooth anymore."

"The owner used to lead the company quite well, not anymore."

"Leadership did exist at a high level, but the leadership criteria I mentioned, I feel that those are being slowly eroded away and that a lot of faith has been lost in leadership."

A small number of lower-level participants felt that the current leadership were threatened by lower talented staff and this created barriers to develop said talent and they were doing everything possible to resist positive change. It was also stated that the lower staff feel intimidated by the current leadership. The below quotes provide evidence for this observation:

"There are also some people who are better equipped to take more responsibility in the running of the company, and everyone is calling for it, but nothing happens. I guess if there were talent management systems in place that this person would already be positioned to run the company. Obviously, the current upper management is threatened by this person. The old mindset is that you must protect your territory, so they don't allow a talented person in who could make a positive difference, quite the opposite actually, whereby they do whatever it takes to keep the person out. This person is better equipped because there is an understanding of modern business, a new mindset that focuses not only on financial control but mostly on developing and inspiring the staff."

"I personally feel that there is one person at this company that should run it. The current management, in my opinion do not have the skills to run the company and aren't the right people for the job."

The higher-level participants held the perception that the current leadership of the organisation was effective at the time of the study, as they felt the staff did not show initiative and required constant direction.

"Yes definitely, the staff there do not take initiative, they need constant direction, which they get from leadership."

The above findings suggest that leadership is failing in the following key areas of TM:

- The goals and strategies of the organisation – It is clear from previous findings in this study that the current leadership is failing to align organisational goals with individual goals. Leadership understands the importance of strategic jobs, but fails to see the importance of TM and aligning TM to the overall business strategy. This is an interesting finding, as the current leaders do recognise that their role and influence in a TM system is paramount. This finding is supported in the literature, stating that organisations are failing to strategically link TM to business success (Collings, 2014; Ellehuus, 2012; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007).
- The correct placement of skills and people – It is clear from the participants' perceptions that the current leadership is not effectively placing people within the correct positions at the organisation. The staff feel their skills are underutilised and are not in the right positions.
- Lack of consistency regarding TM processes – The participants feel recruitment and retention efforts are approached differently throughout the organisation, with higher positions receiving greater focus, something that most of the participants felt was unfair at the time of the study.
- Lack of focus and interest in the individuals of the organisation – Participants felt the current leadership lacked the general interest of interacting with lower levels and failed to allocate recognition when required. This lack of interest in individual aspects at the organisation is detrimental to TM, as talented individuals who feel connected to their leaders are likely to be psychologically present and would want to work to the best of their abilities (de Klerk and Stander, 2014).
- The required skills for TM implementation – The findings portray that the leaders of the organisation at the time of the study did not possess the required skills to implement and

effectively manage TM processes. This finding is supported in the literature, suggesting that leaders are poorly equipped to manage talent effectively due to a lack of the required skills (Allio, 2012; Collings, 2014; Deery and Jago, 2015; Ellehuus. 2012; Stadler, 2011).

4.3.6 Competitive advantage and TM

The participants were questioned on their perception of possible links between competitive advantage and which factors they perceived facilitated competitive advantage in relation to TM. All participants holding lower and middle-level positions held the perception that TM is linked to competitive advantage because people who are correctly placed and are good in their positions have the potential to perform better and possibly be the best in the field, adding a unique value that competitors could not match. This finding corresponds with previous studies in TM literature, stating that organisations, in this case, the lower and middle-level staff in the organisation, recognise that TM is important to facilitate competitive advantage (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Fegley, 2006a; Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013; Goetsch, 2010; Vaiman et al. 2012). The participants' reasons for it being important to facilitate TM were very similar to the reasons stated in previous studies in TM literature (Barney, 1991; Campbell et al. 2012; Fegley, 2006b; Hejase et al. 2016; Peteraf and Barney, 1993; Porter, 1985, 1988; Thunnissen et al. 2013b; van der Merwe and Nienaber, 2015). The below quotes provide an illustration to this observation:

"Having talented people would ensure the company is the best in the field and add to business success."

"Talented people who are good in their positions would lead to better performance over competitors, I assume."

"Managing talent maintains skills, keeps talent properly which automatically gives you a competitive advantage."

The participants holding higher-level positions held the perception that no link existed between TM and competitive advantage, that it was the unique product offerings and technical capabilities that offered a competitive advantage, not the people of the organisation. To reiterate an earlier finding in this study, leaders are failing to recognise the importance of TM and fail to link TM to business performance and competitive advantage, as supported in the literature (Collings, 2014; Ellehuus, 2012; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007). It is also important to reiterate that higher-level participants saw the importance in linking skills to jobs, but felt that talent management practices were not suitable for the type of organisation and the industry it operates in.

Figure 4.14: Perceived TM Factors Facilitating Competitive Advantage
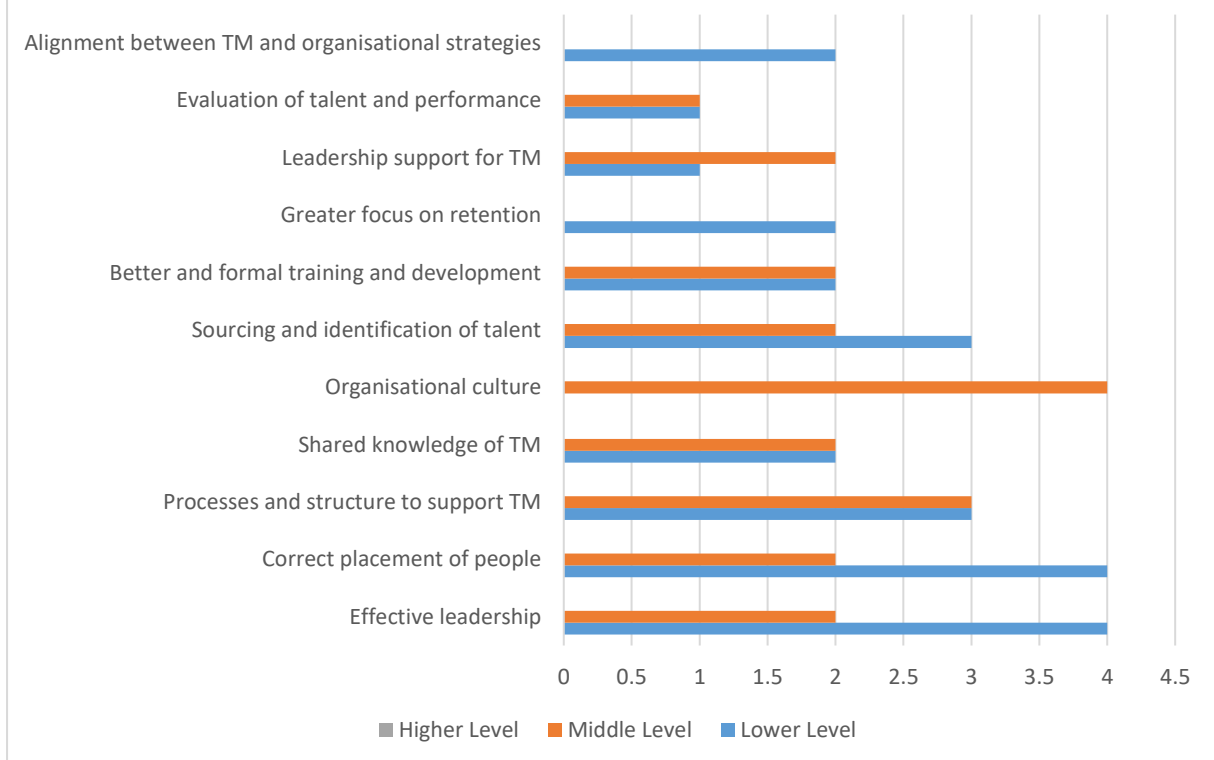
Source: compiled from interview transcripts

4.3.7 Perceived factors facilitating competitive advantage

Figure 4.14 shows the TM factors that the participants perceived to facilitate competitive advantage. Only the lower and middle-level participants' perceptions are represented, as the higher-level participants felt that TM does not affect competitive advantage for the industry that the case organisation operates in, as earlier findings shows.

The above findings highlight the following factors which could facilitate competitive advantage:

- The attraction, selection of talent and the strategic positioning of people – It was perceived that processes involved with the sourcing and identification of talent were paramount, as reaching and attracting the correct candidates could offer a competitive advantage. The correct focus must be allocated to implementing effective TM attraction and selection processes. Many of the participants held the perception that the correct placing of people and having the correct skills for jobs were important TM factors relating to competitive advantage. The below quotes illustrate these observations:

"The correct skills are needed for the correct jobs with an effective HR department to identify talent using correct methods."

"The right fit-to-role is essential. Good performance will not be achieved with the incorrectly placed people."

"The sourcing of talent needs is important, it needs to understand what is needed and what culture."

- Talent evaluation and development – The participants felt that training needed to be more formal and become more effective in order to develop skills and talent to the point where competitors could not imitate. The evaluation of talent and performance was also an area of interest that should be considered. The below quotes illustrate these observations:

"How you train and develop talent with the correct processes in place with more formal processes is important."

"Talent and performance must be assessed to identify gaps."

- Talent retention – Some of the lower-level participants felt that greater focus needed to be in place with regard to retention practices, that a loss of talent and skills could hinder competitive advantage. There is a need for a tailored approach to motivate and strategise to retain talent effectively (McDonnell et al. 2017). The below quote illustrates this point:

"Focus on retention. Not maintaining skills means no competitive advantage."

"Retention. Making sure staff are happy means they are productive. Productive means success, success means better performance. Happy staff mean they won't go work for competitors. Voila…competitive advantage."

- Organisational structure and strategy – It was perceived that having effective processes and structures in place that supported TM was important for competitive advantage. This confirms the validity that organisational structure is vital to competitive advantage when considering TM, as it was found to be a factor affecting TM. It was felt by the participants that a lack of structure and direction was being experienced at the company, essentially having negative implications for TM practices and it was found that the current structure cannot support TM. All these elements impact competitive advantage, as the lack of structure to support TM makes it challenging to implement effectively. In achieving effective implementation of TM, it was believed by some of the participants that a shared knowledge of TM was vital, that if everyone in the organisation understood TM and were on the same page, that it would possibly create an environment that competitors would struggle to compete against. The lower level participants believed alignment must exist between TM and the other organisational strategies. The below quote illustrates these points:

"Having effective TM processes in place that everyone understands is important to achieve competitive advantage."

"Organisational structure and support for TM processes. Without structure, proper people cannot be sourced and placed."

- Leadership – Leadership featured as a broad factor, the participants stating that effective leadership and leadership support for TM systems were important to gain a competitive advantage. It has been a clear finding throughout this study that leadership is a TM factor that is vital to the process and indeed vital to competitive advantage. The participants' negative perceptions of current leadership abilities is a clear indication that leaders need to possess the required skills for leadership and for effective TM implementation. It is also clear that in order for TM to be successfully implemented, leadership requires the full support and availability of individuals at all levels. The below quotes provide evidence for these observations:

"Leadership that supports TM and all staff is a must."

"Leadership must change. The environment is changing, leaders are old and new leaders must change in order to change with the environment."

- Organisational culture – All the middle-level staff held the perception that organisational culture was a factor that linked TM to competitive advantage. The importance for employees to fit into the existing culture was stated. The below quote illustrates this point:

"Organisational culture where talent fits in. Staff must be happy, to achieve productivity. The happier the environment, the more competitive."

4.3.8 Culture and individual consideration

Sub-themes relating to the participants' views on culture and individual consideration at the case organisation were discovered during the interview process. Organisational culture is defined as the practices and values that the employees share within the organisation (Gillespie and Reader, 2017).

Most of the participants held the perception that culture is linked to TM. Most of the lower and middle-level participants felt that culture was vital to TM because individuals need to fit into the organisation to ensure optimisation of roles and skills, thus leading to a happier work environment. The below quote illustrates this point:

"I think they have an understanding [skills and culture] of what the role is that they want the person to fill, but I am not convinced that there are structured criteria in place to evaluate the person for that role. I don't think there is enough thought that goes into the evaluation process."

Most of the participants at all levels felt the required culture for roles was not understood, while participants in the lower and middle-level stated a change in mindset was required for TM. This change in mindset required a shift in focus from output to people. A small number of participants in the lower-level perceived that culture impacts TM through the development of talent. Performance stalls when talent is not developed due to culture not favouring the environment. Most of the higher-level participants believed that resistance to this change in mentality was affecting decisions to implement a system such as TM. The culture was found to be a TM factor facilitating competitive advantage. Thus, ensuring that the individuals within the organisation fit the culture, it would enable a happier working environment which tends to the well-being of the staff, and thus increases productivity to a point at which competitors would struggle to compete against. The below quotes illustrate these observations:

"Without singling anyone out, you have an individual who maybe interviewing for a technician, and they know exactly what is required of the technician, so all that ticks the boxes, but they may not have the personnel skills or the skills to identify other aspects of the individual."

"I think some people are not aligned properly to the work that they do. I don't think that culture is considered."

Many of the participants highlighted the theme of individual consideration at the case organisation. The majority of all participants stated that individual plans, goals and career aspirations were not considered, with some stating that some level of consideration was noticed, but was not motivated by the organisation and had to be completed via personal efforts. The below quotes provide evidence of these observations:

"Because certain people who have left said clearly that they feel that the organisation doesn't care about them."

The lower and middle-level participants perceived that leadership was not interested in understanding the individuals at the time of the study and that no alignment existed between leadership and individuals at the organisation. It was also perceived that individual aspects were not considered for roles during the recruitment process. This finding is supported in the literature (Collings, 2014; Tansley, 2011). The below quote provides evidence of these observations:

"No I think it is more about business and making money. Well, they just aren't sympathetic and don't look at peoples' circumstances. Like when people complain about their job and they are unhappy about it, nothing gets done about it until the person decides not to come back."

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter reported on the factual findings of the study which focused on the perceptions of all stakeholders in connection to their views on talent and TM, their perceptions on the factors affecting TM and talent retention, their perceptions on the role leadership plays in TM and the perceived TM

factors facilitating competitive advantage. The conceptual links to the factual findings were also considered. A profile of the participants who voluntarily participated in this study was provided and precautions were taken to uphold anonymity.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore the factors in TM that participants of a single case study organisation perceived as facilitating competitive advantage, the factors affecting TM and retention, while also focusing on the role of leadership in TM. The study attempted to gain a rich description of the factors that the participants viewed to affect talent management, talent retention and competitive advantage within the TM framework, as well as the role of leadership in TM. Organisations in modern business environments are recognising the importance of TM in relation to competitive advantage (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Fegley, 2006a; Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013; Goetsch, 2010; Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; McDonnell, et al. 2017; Vaiman et al. 2012), but each organisation approaches talent differently (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; Tansley, 2011), leading to the misunderstanding of the concept (Thunnissen, 2016).

To gain a deeper understanding of TM, it was suggested that interview based studies which focused on the perspectives of different stakeholders (Dries, 2013a), studies targeted at all levels, especially at the individual level (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen et al. 2013a) and studies conducted in different geographical areas were all paramount in advancing knowledge in the field (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; McDonnell et al. 2017). It was also suggested that focus must be allocated to small to medium enterprises (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; McDonnell et al. 2017). This study attempted to gain a greater understanding of the TM field by following these suggestions.

The purpose of this chapter is to conclude the study by presenting factual and conceptual conclusions and highlight issues that still remain while making recommendations for future/further research.

5.2 Factual conclusions

Firstly, an SME was selected and responded – twelve persons from lower, middle and top management, with more than one-year experience – thus they were in a position to be knowledgeable about TM in this organisation. The exploration of views on talent, TM, competitive advantage and talent retention brought some interesting findings into the light. These twelve participants voluntarily took part in the study, of which the majority were skilled and mostly male. Data saturation was achieved after interview seven during the first round of interviews, and after interview four during the second round of interviews.

It was found that participants held different views and understanding on talent and what the concept of talent means, but most of the participants linked talent to skills, knowledge and abilities. The lower-levels held an inclusive view on talent, feeling that talent exists in everyone and can be developed, while some of the middle and all of the higher-level participants held an exclusive view on talent,

meaning that talent is innate and rare, only belonging to a select few high-performers. It was found that the organisation held an exclusive view on talent, based on their higher-level staff being the sole decision-makers, resulting in the talent being fixed at the organisation. Most of the participants understood TM to be matching the correct skills and people to jobs, with only lower and middle-level employees believing that TM is important in the modern business world. The perceived factors affecting TM were mostly related to organisational structure, processes, leadership and individual level aspects such as recognition and empowerment. The factors were found to be linked, the pattern starting at the very beginning with the organisational structure to support TM, to the proper processes to identify and secure talent, to leadership effectively driving, evaluating and correcting the system where needed. The lower and middle levels believed in the importance of TM, mainly due to the potential increase in productivity and business success due to the correct skills being aligned to the correct jobs. It was also believed that TM would contribute to affect development and a happier working environment. Leadership failed to see the importance of TM, stating the type of structure was not appropriate for the industry it operated in due to the size and lack of financial power of the business. Leadership did see the importance of strategic positioning of people, but that TM practices would not be effective in providing them with the value they require. However, they did state that TM has a place in the business world. The participants also provided their perspectives on factors affecting talent retention. It was found that work environment, recognition, global career opportunities, leadership and financial incentives all affected talent retention. The factors affecting both TM and retention were aligned to a certain extent, with crossover being experienced with the role of leadership and recognition. The overall view on the current TM practices at the case organisation was that of a lack of activity, whereby the majority of the participants felt that TM practices did not exist due to the organisational structure not supporting it, nor was the leadership cadre interested. The same finding was observed for TM retention practices at the case organisation, participants feeling that retention practices did not exist.

All the participants felt that leadership had a role to play throughout all TM processes. Leadership's role in TM was found to be a clear problem, as discovered from the perceptions of the participants. The views the lower and middle participants held in comparison to the higher-level participants were vastly different, a clear dissonance between the different levels was stated. Leadership was found to be the sole decision maker, especially on matters such as the placement and retention of employees, yet they did not see the importance of TM and failed to link TM to competitive advantage. Leadership was found to lack the required skills to be effective leaders, as well as not possessing the necessary level of understanding of TM to implement such as system. It was also found that leadership had no talent retention practices in place, yet they had a full understanding of the effects of losing talented staff. It was also highlighted that leaders are not placing the correct people in the correct positions and lack the understanding of the skills and culture required to optimise jobs and the organisational structure. These negative views on the current leadership have led to lower levels feeling disconnected, a working environment where employees do not feel recognised or appreciated and the feeling that everyone is not treated equally. Half the employees at the time of the study stated that they were searching for employment elsewhere, but most chose to stay because of a lack of opportunities in the labour market, comfort and for the money. That being said, the case organisation had been in operation for a vast

number of years at the time of the study, with their higher-level staff showing an average of twenty-one years employment and their middle-level staff showing an average of fifteen years employment with the organisation. This is an indication that the organisation has been effective at retaining their core and talented staff. The perceptions of the participants suggest that the mentality and culture at the organisation are in need of change and retention will continue to be effective, should these changes occur effectively.

The above findings have implications for competitive advantage, which were explored by questioning the participants on their perception between the links between TM and competitive advantage and the TM factors facilitating it. The lower and middle-level participants perceived that TM was linked to competitive advantage, as the proper positioning of skills and people enabled greater productivity which created value and ultimately challenged competitors. Leadership did not see a link between TM and competitive advantage, as previously found in the study. The exploration of the participants' perceptions on which TM factors facilitate competitive advantage reiterated some of the earlier factors that were perceived to affect TM but brought some valuable insight to the theme. Again, effective leadership featured as a crucial TM factor affecting competitive advantage, with effective TM processes, strategic positioning of people, organisational culture and the level of TM understanding throughout the organisation, also featuring as critical TM factors.

The findings in the study take a step forward in understanding the perceptions of all stakeholders with regard to TM. It is clear that leadership is the lynchpin of the success or failure of TM. Consideration on how leadership can develop a greater understanding of TM needs to be conceptualised. It is also apparent that the leaders should possess the correct skills to make effective TM decisions and that more work needs to be conducted to firstly understand TM and secondly to engage all stakeholders, to relay TM knowledge, to gain buy-in from said stakeholders and create a shared knowledge of TM throughout the organisation.

Relevant questions must be considered in practice in order to tailor a TM approach that is applicable to the type of business and the industry it operates in. Organisations must ask if their efforts are reaching the correct candidates, if said candidates possess the correct skills and culture for the organisation, if they have the correct skills and technology to proactively measure performance and offer development opportunities, understand why their employees choose to stay or leave the organisation and effectively link these processes to business performance and success. They also need to ask which essential mix of these processes will result in the best possible scenario where competitive advantage is achieved.

5.3 Conceptual conclusions

The findings of this study coincided with much of the current TM literature. Views on talent at all hierarchical levels were found to adopt both inclusive and exclusive approaches, but overall these views were subject to the organisation and the industry (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017; Winning the talent war… 2015; Tansley, 2011; Tansley et al. 2013; Thunnissen et al. 2013b). Talent was found to not be

unanimous, with no formal understanding (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013; McDonnell et al. 2017; Tansley, 2011). The perceived factors affecting TM were aligned to TM literature, the strategic positioning of jobs (Collings, 2014; Stadler, 2011; Thunnissen, 2016), the organisational infrastructure and processes (Thunnissen, 2016), leadership and management issues affecting TM implementation (Beer and Eisenstat, 2000; Powell and Lubitsh, 2007), alignment between organisational and individual goals (Thunnissen, 2016) and the rate at which talent is acquired and developed (Krishnan and Scullion, 2017). It was observed that jobs were the core for business success (Cappelli and Keller, 2014) and that leadership failed to see the importance of TM and failed to link it strategically to the organisation (Collings, 2014; Ellehuus, 2012; Hejase et al. 2016). Leadership was found to be responsible for TM decisions (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; McGee, 2006; Ulrich and Smallwood, 2015). No formal TM structure existed at the organisation (Dries, 2013a). Factors affecting retention were aligned to the literature, leadership was found to be paramount for effective retention (McDonnell et al. 2017), as well as financial incentives, training and development opportunities, positive work environment and recognition (Tlaiss et al. 2017). Loss of talent was linked to losses in production and skills, which were viewed negatively (Winning the talent war… 2015; de Villiers and Stander, 2011; Frank et al. 2004). TM was recognised as important in the facilitation of competitive advantage (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Fegley, 2006a; Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013; Goetsch, 2010; Vaiman et al. 2012).

Calls from previous authors suggested further TM studies be conducted that focus on the perspectives of all stakeholders (Dries, 2013a, Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen et al. 2013a), different geographical areas (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016) and smaller businesses (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016) made important suggestions on the future direction of the advancement of the TM field. This study provided new insight based on these recommendations and made a reasonable attempt at closing these gaps, but the gaps remain open. The issue of perspectives of all stakeholders, as most of the TM studies, focus on the perspective of management, an issue that must continue to be explored in different organisational settings.

Further studies on the perceptions of employees are required, as the limitation of this study is a single-case qualitative study exists. Recommendations on further empirical studies should be conducted in small to medium enterprises, existing in other fields to ensure that the understanding of TM from the perspective of the individual is broadened. The processes involved in the identification and attraction of talent was not fully understood and conceptualised in this study, as the organisation did not actively partake in identifying talent. This was considered to be important to TM, thus further research is suggested, researching companies that are actively looking for talent, what methods they utilise to identify and attract talent and what the success rate is of their efforts, especially compared to their competitor's efforts. The development of talent was also identified as a potential area for further exploration, as this element could not be conceptualised due to the organisation not being interested in developing talent. It is seen as an important area to study, to review organisations who currently focus on the development of talent, their methods of doing so and a measurement of their success, especially when linking it to potential competitive advantage. Culture was also an area where sufficient data lacked in this study, but also was identified as an area of importance, thus the suggestion exists to explore this

in greater detail in TM practice. These suggestions have the potential for organisations, in practice, to tailor TM strategies and make TM decisions based on what their most valuable resource thinks and feels, their employees.

5.4 Chapter conclusions

This chapter presented the factual and conceptual conclusions of the study and highlighted that gaps still exist in TM literature relating to research involving all stakeholders and research conducted in smaller business, with recommendations being provided on the possible future research studies which have potential to build upon the findings of this study and pursue a greater understanding of TM from all stakeholders.

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Interview protocol: Gaining a competitive advantage: Employees' perception on the role of leadership and talent management factors in a small company

Prof/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms .....

Thank you for the opportunity to interview you in connection with the study relating to talent management and the factors that organisational members perceive to ensure competitive advantage.

Please note that you are currently being recorded and my supervisor and I will be the only individuals with access to the recordings. Also, your participation is voluntary, anonymous and you may withdraw at any stage. If you do not wish to answer a particular question, then please feel comfortable not to do so. Your identity will be protected at all times. Do I have your permission to continue?

This particular study aims to explore and understand the talent management phenomena, as perceived by practitioners and potentially add to existing literature forming a greater understanding of the focus area. Scholarly literature on talent management suggests that practitioners' views are lacking. Talent and talent management are not uniformly defined in the literature and your views may add clarity. Talent is often described as the collection of an individual's abilities, skills and knowledge in connection with filling key organisational roles, while TM is often described as the attraction, development and retention of identified talent In addition, many modern businesses believe that managing talent effectively will allow the organisation to outperform competitors, thus ensuring competitive advantage and ultimately increased business performance.

The purpose of this research is to conduct empirical research to explore the talent management factors that the organisational members at all hierarchical perceive to

facilitate competitiveness/competitive advantage, with a view of achieving a greater understanding of talent management.

Hence, the objectives are to find out:

1). To explore the different views on talent, talent management, competitiveness/competitive advantage and talent retention held by all members of the organisation.

2). To explore the talent management factors that organisational members perceive to facilitate competitive advantage.

3). To explore the talent management factors perceived facilitate talent retention and the role of leadership in talent retention practices.

Please note that your participation in this study is anonymous and your identity will be protected at all times, as clearly stated in the participant agreement.

Do you have any questions at this stage?

Interview

Biographical and General

1. Briefly, discuss yourself in terms of your age category and gender.
2. Do you hold any qualifications? If yes, what was your field of study/specialisation?
3. Are you employed in a managerial role or a non-managerial role within the organisation?
4. What is your role in the organisation?
5. How many years have you been employed with this organisation?
6. Describe your career path that has led you to take a position within this organisation and please describe your movement within the organisation (promotions, etc).
7. Why did you join this organisation? What makes you stay?

8. Do you feel that the organisation that you currently work for is successful and why? What is the criteria for a successful organisation in your field

Talent Management

1. Have you ever heard the concepts of talent and talent management? If yes, where did you come across these concepts?
2. Explain your understanding of talent in your environment.
3. Explain your understanding of talent management in your environment.
4. Do you feel that talented individuals are unique or do you feel that everyone has the ability to be talented? Please give a brief motivation for your answer. Do you feel that the organisation allocates focus to certain key positions?
5. After considering what talent management is and what it means to be talented, do you think that it is important for modern businesses to focus on the management of these practices and ideas?
6. Do you feel that your current organisation has plans and actions to manage talent? If yes, please briefly explain what you think the organisation is doing to manage talent. Are these plans aimed at a specific level or function? Please tell me more about talent management plans at your organisation if anything more comes to mind.
7. Who do you feel is responsible for talent management at your current organisation?
8. After considering the importance of talent management, do you feel that talent management has any effect on the success of the business, i.e, do you think it puts the organisation in a better position to do well compared to other organisations in the industry?

Recruitment

1. Explain your understanding of recruitment
2. Tell me about the recruitment practices at your organisation

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3. Who do you feel is responsible for recruiting at your organisation?
4. Do you feel that those who are responsible for recruitment at your organization, understand what is skills and culture are needed to fill roles?
5. Recruitment strategy the same for all employees? Just to fill positions? Tailor made?

Development

1. Explain your understanding of training and development.
2. Tell me the about the training and development practices at your current organisation.
3. Do you think that training and development programmes are targeted at all the staff or specific staff members at your organisation? What type of training is given?
4. Training for all staff?
5. If you were in a position to change anything about the training and development practices in your organisation, what would you do and why?
6. Do you think that developed is aimed purely at advancing organisational goals, or do you feel the organisation considers individual development and goals as well? Why do you say that?

Talent Retention

1. How would you describe talent retention?
2. Tell me about the goals of your organization, what do they want to achieve?
3. Now please tell me about your goals, what you want to achieve from working at the organization?
4. What do you feel is vital in order retain employees? If yes, would you say it's vital to retain all staff or a certain staff?
5. Do you feel that it is important to prevent loss of staff and why?

6. Tell me about the talent retention practices at your organisation. Do you think it is effective?
7. If you were in a position to change anything about the retention practices in your organisation, what would you do and why?
8. Do you feel that leadership has a role to play in the retention of staff?

Leadership

1. Tell me how you view "leadership".
2. After considering what leadership is, what characteristics do you feel a leader should have?
3. Do you feel that leadership only exists at the top of organisations, or do you feel that leadership exists within all positions in the organisation?
4. Tell me, do you feel that leadership is (a) involved in TM and (b) effective in their TM practices.
5. Overall, do you feel that leadership exists and is effective in your current organisation?

Thank you for your participation. I will transcribe the interview and send it to you for verification and ask any questions if I find any conflicts.

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

02 February 2017

Gaining a competitive advantage: Employees' perception on the role of leadership and talent management factors in a small company

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Brendon Ladewig and I am doing research under the supervision Hester Nienaber, a professor in the Department of Operations Management in the College of Economics and Management Sciences at the University of South Africa, towards a Bachelor of Commerce (Masters) degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Gaining a competitive advantage: Employees' perception on the role of leadership and talent management factors in a small company".

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study aims to collect important information that could aid in the achievement of a greater understanding of the field of talent management, specifically considering the factors that organisational members perceive to facilitate a superior performance to competitor organisations.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

It has been decided that all members of the chosen organisation (20 members) will be invited to take part in the study. This will ensure that the amount of data collected will be enough to achieve data saturation. This will also ensure that the best possible data will be collected.

It is my lawful duty as a South African citizen, under the Protection of Personal Information Act, (number 4 of 2013), to disclose how your personal information was chosen and why you were chosen to participate. Your personal information was obtained conveniently, as the researcher (Brendon Ladewig) and the participants are employed by the same organisation, within separate

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functions of the organisation. As stated above, you were chosen as a participant in this study because it was deemed that you are knowledgeable about the topic and hence can benefit a better understanding, particularly from a practical point of view, which according to the literature is lacking.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves an in-depth interview, which will the recorded with your permission. General questions regarding the themes of this study will be asked to solicit your perception. All participants will be presented with the same questions. The expected duration of each interview will be 1 to 2-hour sessions. After transcribing the interview, I will present you with the transcription to check for accuracy. At this stage, you may add information and change information to ensure that your perceptions are accurately reflected.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Please note that participation is voluntary and that there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. You are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason or negative consequences.

ARE THEIR ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

Please note that there are no risks or negative consequences involved if you participate in this research project. It aims to solicit the perceptions of practitioners on the topic studied. Hence, there are no correct or incorrect answers. In addition, you will be able to respond anonymously and such response will be treated as confidential.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your name will not be recorded anywhere and all reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give, ensuring complete anonymity. Your interviews will be assigned a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way

in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings, ensuring confidentiality.

The principal researcher (Brendon Ladewig), will be the individual with sole access to the data. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the supervisor, transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee, but please note that your personal information will not appear on any of these documents.

The collected data may be used to write a journal article, a study that may be submitted for publication. As mentioned above, your personal information and identity will not appear in publication and journal article.

Please note that there are no scenarios whereby confidentiality is excluded. This study will make use of a data collection instrument whereby confidentiality is upheld.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your transcribed interviews will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in locked storage, at the principal researcher's property, for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Backup electronic copies will be kept on a password protected flash drive. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. If deemed necessary, the information will be destroyed by shredding of the hard copy data and permanent deletion of the electronic copies using the latest software.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

Please note that you as a participant of this study will not incur any financial costs or loss. There will be no incentives or payment for participating in this study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee the Department of Operations Management of Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Brendon Ladewig, 0741342681, brendon_ladewig@hotmail.com, who will provide a summary.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Brendon Ladewig with the above information.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Professor Hester Nienaber at nienah@unisa.ac.za,

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

Brendon Ladewig
Principal Researcher

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____, confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname...

Participant Signature..Date....................

Researcher's Name & Surname...

Researcher's signature..Date....................

ANNEXURE C: TURNITIN ORIGINALITY REPORT

GAINING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE: EMPLOYEES'
PERCEPTIONS ON THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP AND
TALENT MANAGEMENT FACTORS IN A SMALL COMPANY IN
SOUTH AFRICA

ORIGINALITY REPORT

9% SIMILARITY INDEX	8% INTERNET SOURCES	4% PUBLICATIONS	5% STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to University of South Africa Student Paper	1%
2	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source	1%
3	usir.salford.ac.uk Internet Source	1%
4	www.saibw.co.za Internet Source	<1%
5	auntiebelhams.smokiesrentals.com Internet Source	<1%
6	aaltodoc.aalto.fi Internet Source	<1%
7	Submitted to University of Huddersfield Student Paper	<1%
8	repository.nwu.ac.za Internet Source	<1%

ANNEXURE D: LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

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Dip Edit (Merit)
14 Emlyn Place
Torbay, Auckland 0630
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₱ Proofreading

17 September 2017

Brendon Roy Ladewig
ID: 8904175008080
UNISA Student Number: 44005831
brendon_ladewig@hotmail.com

Dear Brendon

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you on your Master's thesis.

I am a professional freelance proofreader with a Diploma in proofreading and editing (with merit) from the New Zealand Institute of Business Studies. I also have a Certificate in small business management.

I am pleased to have provided you with proofreading services for your 37,730 word 103 page Master's thesis. Your document was proofread for spelling, grammar, correct word placement, and referencing with Harvard referencing style. There was no input or suggestions for content change.

Yours sincerely

Phyllis Dean