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POSITIONS OR PEOPLE – IS TALENT SELECTION OF KNOWLEDGE-WORKERS DETERMINED BY EXCLUSIVE APPROACHES?

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Abstract

This paper investigates, if talent selection for knowledge-workers (functional specialists, future organizational leaders) is determined by exclusive approaches in large private enterprises (250 and more employees) of the Metal- and Electronic (M+E) industry in Germany. Based on 542 responding companies (quantitative analysis) and 9 face-to-face interviews (qualitative analysis) findings indicate that mostly exclusive approaches are in use for both employee groups. Functional specialists were selected on majority by an exclusive-position approach and functional criteria are more important than management criteria. Future organizational leaders were selected on majority by an exclusive-people approach and management criteria are more important than functional criteria. For selection of both employee groups, the importance of management criteria rises with the hierarchical level of positions. Total 14 hypotheses were postulated to be tested empirically. The study provides furthermore the following findings: the bigger the companies, the more they define talent, the more different talent definitions are in use, the higher the willingness for financial investments in TM, the more formal processes are in use, the more often a TM strategy is existent, the more often

one or several talent pool(s) are in use and the more they select employees for TM participation. In general, TM activities are running predominantly hidden for employees, independent from company size-classes.

Keywords: Talent management, human resource architecture, talent management approach, talent selection, knowledge-workers

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years talent management (TM) has become one of the most discussed topics in human resource management (HRM) literature and practice (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013b). Despite the enthusiastically treatment of TM demonstrated by human resource (HR) practitioners, TM suggestions, practices and theories are on majority only based on little theoretical and empirical fundament (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013b). Research meanwhile improved for instance, on the development of conceptual boundaries and definitions of TM (Collings, Scullion and Vaiman, 2011) but, still needs a strong fundament of empirical data for testing and validating conceptual ideas (Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a). TM therefore “is partly still in its infancy, with some progress towards adolescence” (Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a, p. 328).

Current literature streams of TM are related to the conceptualization on talent and TM, TM practices and activities (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Thunnisssen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a), TM outcome (Thunnisssen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a) and strategic TM (Collings and Mellahi, 2009).

Future TM research is suggested to explore TM approaches e.g., exclusive TM approaches (Iles, Preece and Chuai, 2010; Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a) and the clarification of related conceptual boundaries (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010; Scullion, Collings and Caligiuri, 2010; Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a). Exclusive approaches can have two forms, the exclusive-people and the exclusive position approach. The *exclusive-people* perspective (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010) is related to people with significant contributions to organizational success e.g., via performance, competencies, potential (Tansley et al., 2007; Tansley, 2011) and not to be seen in connection with a certain role or title (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010). The

exclusive-positions perspective takes a more narrow view on talent than the above described one, because of its additional focus on key positions, decisive for the achievement of organizational objectives (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010). Further, it is proposed to explore practice adoption of theoretical TM models and variations regarding sector (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013b), size and nationality (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010) e.g., Germany (Festing, Schäfer and Scullion, 2013), because the most part of the empirical and theoretical work on TM is grounded on North American research and thinking and should therefore being counterbalanced by other regions e.g., Europe (Collings, Scullion and Vaiman, 2011; Schuler, Jackson and Tarique, 2011; Vaiman, Scullion and Collings, 2012). In addition, future research should explore knowledge-workers (Lepak and Snell, 2002) e.g., functional specialists and future organizational leaders (McDonnell et al., 2010) and related TM practices (e.g., talent selection) (Höglund, 2012; Iles, Preece and Chuai, 2010; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; McDonnell et al., 2010; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a) because these employees contribute to organizational strategic objectives based on their high levels of value and uniqueness (Lepak and Snell, 2002).

This paper will respond to the above mentioned calls by trying to answer the question 'positions or people – is talent selection of knowledge-workers determined by exclusive approaches?' The objective is to understand *how* talent selection of functional specialists and future organizational leaders takes place. This is linking HR architecture (see Lepak and Snell, 2002; McDonnell et al., 2010) and TM approaches (see Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010). Considering TM in context of HR architecture "offers a system-level, strategic perspective that makes the TM concept one that adds value and opens new research possibilities" (Lewis and Heckman, 2006, p. 143). HR architecture characterizations by Lepak and Snell (2002) "offer legitimacy towards the development of talent management as a research field" (McDonnell et al., 2010, p. 151). The fast growth of knowledge-based economies leads to a growing demand of organizations for knowledge-workers (Festing, Schäfer and Scullion, 2013). Knowledge-workers (Lepak and Snell, 2002) "lie at the heart of talent management" (McDonnell et al., 2010, p. 151). Furthermore, the outlined investigation is related to the Metal and Electronic (M+E) industry in Germany, considered as Germany's industrial key sector (IW Consult, 2016) and companies with 250 and more employees, because TM is generally more adopted in practice at major companies (Tansley et al., 2007). Finally, this approach intends to contribute to the literature stream 'conceptualization of TM' (see Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Thunnisssen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Conceptual design and procedure

The conceptual design consists of two parts. The first part is a quantitative analysis followed by a qualitative one. *Quantitative analysis* achieved 542 responding private M+E companies of different size classes in Germany (0-49; 50-249; 250 and more employees) as a part of a sample with 1.769 responding firms in total. The used sampling method is based on a weighted random-sample drawn from a German business register. The survey was conducted by the IW personnel panel, which is managed by IW Consult, the research company at the Institute of the German Economy in Cologne. HR decision makers were invited to take part in the survey by e-mail. An overview regarding extent and structure is provided in table 1. The survey includes industry companies (including construction industry) and service sector, which employ at least one employee. 542 enterprises can be assigned to the M+E sector. It contains 8 hypotheses related to the exploration of development structures of TM: The use of formal processes, talent pools, strategy or selection of employees regarding private sector companies with sizes 'small' (0-49), 'medium' (50-249) and 'large' (250 and more) employees in the M+E segment of Germany. For theoretical underpinning of hypotheses 4 to 8 a model is used outlined by The Chartered Institute of Personnel and development (CIPD) (Tansley et al., 2007) which is focused on the description of TM development stages. Hypotheses 1 to 3 are considered to have an introducing character. The hypotheses are described below:

The bigger the companies,

1. *the more they define talent.*
2. *the more different talent definitions are in use.*
3. *the higher the willingness for financial investments in TM.*
4. *the more formal TM processes are in use.*
5. *the more TM activities are running predominantly open for employees.*
6. *the more often a TM strategy is existent.*
7. *the more one or several talent pools are in use.*
8. *the more they select employees for TM participation.*

The (verified) hypothesis 8 'the bigger the companies, the more they select employees for TM participation' is the linking element between the quantitative and qualitative part of the research conception. This result and the outlined suggestions of further TM research (see chapter 1) are both building the scientific base for deviation of this paper's research question (see chapter 1).

Qualitative analysis is related to 9 face-to-face interviews with HR responsible staff (e.g., Head of TM, HR management or HR specialists) conducted by the author in April 2015. The interviewed firms are private M+E companies with 250 and more employees located in

Germany. It investigates, if exclusive approaches (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010) are in use for functional specialists and future organizational leaders (Lepak and Snell, 2002; McDonnell et al., 2010)? If yes, exclusive-positions or exclusive-people approach (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010)? In addition, commonalities and differences between functional specialists and future organizational leaders (Lepak and Snell, 2002; McDonnell et al., 2010) regarding position- or not position-related selection aligned with functional and general management (e.g., leadership) abilities and hierarchy are extracted.

Regarding *functional specialists* (Lepak and Snell, 2002; McDonnell et al., 2010) the hypotheses are:

9. *Talent selection is determined by an exclusive-position approach* (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010)*. Firstly, positions will be defined and secondly, potential candidates for filling them will be selected (e.g., according to the criteria 'performance' or 'potential').*
10. *At the determination of talent selection criteria there is a preponderance of functional criteria while general management criteria (e.g., leadership competencies) play a secondariness role.*
11. *The higher the position in hierarchy, the more important are management criteria (e.g., leadership competencies) in relation to functional expertise.*

Regarding *future organizational leaders* (Lepak and Snell, 2002; McDonnell et al., 2010) the hypotheses are:

12. *Talent selection is determined by an exclusive-people approach* (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010)*. Talents are selected not position-related.*
13. *At the determination of talent selection criteria there is a preponderance of general management criteria (e.g., leadership competencies) while functional criteria play a secondariness role.*
14. *The higher the positions in hierarchy, the more important are general management competencies (e.g., leadership abilities) in relation to functional expertise.*

Research segment

The M+E industry in Germany consists on a broader view (Gesamtm et all, 2016) of the commercial sectors 'metal processing and converting', 'metal goods production', 'production of data processing, electronic and optic devices', 'electronic equipment production', 'engine building', 'manufacturing of cars and car parts' and 'other vehicle manufacturing' (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2008) which are determined by the Federal Department of Statistics in Germany.

Within all German industry segments the M+E-industry stands for 2.65 percent of all enterprises, 14.19 percent of employees with social insurance and 17.87 percent or 1.087 billion

Euro of segment turnover in 2013. Enterprises with 250 and more employees represent 2.31 percent of all M+E segment companies. This company size-class also stands for 64 percent or more than 2.4 million segment employees as well as more than 76 percent or 835 billion Euro of segment turnover in 2013 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015).

Characteristic for the M+E segment in Germany are the pioneering spirit embodied in a top level of patent applications (IW Consult, 2014) and the meanwhile very high level of industrial automation to come along with a decreasing level of ordinary operations (IW Consult, 2016). These aspects underline the importance of knowledge-workers (Lepak and Snell, 2002) for the M+E segment either.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Quantitative findings and formulation of key statements

The allocation of main unit and random sample are divergent. In the sample bigger companies are proportionately more represented as well as companies of industry compared with the main unit. This approach is used consciously in order to receive adequate number of cases for evaluation of these groups. In order to receive representative total values for the main unit, the results were extrapolated based on the amount of companies according data of the official company register in Germany. In this connection (see table 1) will be differentiated between the four segments ‘other producing industry (including construction industry)’, ‘M+E’, ‘company- and society-related services’ and the three employee size ranges ‘1 to 49 employees’, ‘50 to 249 employees’ and ‘250 and more employees’ (IW Consult, 2013, in this article).

Table 1: Sample structure (amount of companies)

Industry segment	Employee size-class			
	1-49	50-249	250 and more	Total
Other producing industry and constructing industry	165	193	80	438
M+E	167	254	121	542
Company-related services	190	132	138	460
Society-related services	119	128	82	329
Total	641	707	421	1.769

Source: IW Consult (2013, in this article)

At the evaluation according to the amount of companies smaller ones are weighted stronger than bigger ones. The results give information about an average company in Germany is rating an issue. Most of the companies in the main unit belong to the size range of 1 to 49 employees.

Therefore these enterprises determine the percentage of total value for the different questions. The small society-related service companies achieve with around 6.37 a very high weighting coefficient (see table 2). The survey results in this document will be presented continuously weighted (IW Consult, 2013, in this article).

Table 2: Weighting coefficients

Industry segment	Employee size-class			
	1-49	50-249	250 and more	Total
Other producing industry and constructing industry	1.95	0.06	0.03	0.77
M+E	0.36	0.03	0.02	0.13
Company-related services	2.95	0.14	0.03	1.27
Society-related services	6.37	0.14	0.05	2.37
Total	2.65	0.08	0.03	1.00

Source: IW Consult (2013, in this article)

In the following key statements regarding hypothesis 1-8 are provided for an overview (see table 3).

Table 3: Key statements of quantitative findings

M+E segment Germany The bigger the companies,
1. the more they define talent. *(verified)*
2. the more different talent definitions are in use. *(verified)*
3. the higher the willingness for financial investments in TM. *(verified)*
4. the more formal processes are in use. *(verified)*
5. the more TM activities are running predominantly open for employees. *(falsified)*
6. the more often a TM strategy is existent. *(verified)*
7. the more often one or several talent pool(s) are in use. *(verified)*
8. the more they select employees for TM participation. *(verified)*

Source: Statements 4-8 based on Tansley et al. (2007)

The usage of talent definition (see table 4) is increasing with company size *(hypothesis 1)*. For instance 2.4 percent of the companies with size-class 1-49 employees use a talent definition. At the size-class of 250 and more employees the usage of a talent definition is already 20.7 percent.

Table 4: Hypothesis 1 and 2 – definition of talent

Is in your company defined what a talent is about?				
Percent regarding employee size-classes	Total	1-49	50-249	250 and more
Yes, there is one talent definition existing, which is used company-wide.	3.2	2.4	5.1	20.7
Yes, there are different definitions of talent according company sections.	8.4	7.8	11.4	14.0
No, there is no talent definition existing.	88.4	89.8	83.5	65.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: IW Consult (2013, in this paper)

Further, the quantity of different talent definitions (see table 4) is also increasing with the company size *(hypothesis 2)*. The percentage rises from 7.8 percent at smaller companies (1-49 employees) to already 14.0 percent at bigger enterprises (250 and more employees). On average 88.4 percent of all companies have no talent definition in use. The average percentage of companies with no talent definition related to the size-class of 250 and more employees is 65.3 percent.

Table 5: Hypothesis 3 – financial investment in TM

What about the willingness for financial investment in TM within your company?				
Percent regarding employee size-classes	Total	1-49	50-249	250 and more
Very high	2.6	2.4	3.2	7.4
Rather high	14.3	13.2	16.3	39.7
Rather low	22.5	22.2	23.4	29.8
Low	10.9	10.8	13.1	7.4
Not existing	49.6	51.5	44.0	15.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: IW Consult (2013, in this paper)

The willingness for financial investment on TM (see table 5) increases with company size *(hypothesis 3)*. Between small companies (1-49 employees) and companies with 250 and more employees there is a triplication of percentage in the categories ‘very high’ (2.6 to 7.4 percent) and ‘rather high’ (13.2 to 39.7 percent). In total the share of companies with no willingness for financial investment is around 50 percent. This value is mostly influenced by companies with 1-49 employees (51.5 percent) and 50-249 employees (44.0 percent), because enterprises with

250 and more employees (15.7 percent) stand for a significant lower level of disinterest on financial investments.

Table 6: Hypothesis 4 – development of TM (processes)

How is TM featured in your company?				
Percent regarding employee size-classes	Total	1-49	50-249	250 and more
Predominant informal processes	77.3	78.8	77.3	57.0
Predominant formal processes	22.7	21.2	22.7	43.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: IW Consult (2013, in this paper) based on Tansley et al. (2007)

On average TM processes (see table 6) run predominantly informal in the M+E industry (77.3 percent). At companies with smaller sizes-classes (1-49 and 50-249 employees) the level of percentages regarding formal processes are comparable with around 21.2 and 22.7 percent. At companies with 250 and more employees the usage of formal processes achieve with 43 percent is nearly twice as much. Therefore, formal TM processes increase with the company-size *(hypothesis 4).*

Table 7: Hypothesis 5 – development of TM (activities)

How is TM featured in your company?				
Percent regarding employee size-classes	Total	1-49	50-249	250 and more
TM activities are running predominantly hidden for employees	63.4	62.3	71.3	61.4
TM activities are running predominantly open for employees	36.6	37.7	28.7	38.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: IW Consult (2013, in this paper) based on Tansley et al. (2007)

In total, nearly two third of TM activities (see table 7) are running hidden for employees (63.4 percent) and a level of around 60 percent over all employee size-classes is not undercut. Therefore, hypothesis 5 ‘the bigger the companies, the more TM activities are running predominantly open for employees’ is not possible to verify.

Table 8: Hypothesis 6 – development of TM (strategy)

How is TM featured in your company?				
Percent regarding employee size-classes	Total	1-49	50-249	250 and more
Ad-hoc TM without strategy	85.2	87.1	84.1	59.4

Table 8...

TM strategy existent	14.8	12.9	15.9	40.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: IW Consult (2013, in this paper) based on Tansley et al. (2007)

Most of the companies, in total 85.2 percent practice an ad-hoc TM without strategy (see table 8). The existence of a TM strategy *(hypothesis 6)*, on average 14.8 percent, is increasing via company size-classes from 12.9 percent (1-49 employees) and 15.9 percent (50-249 employees) to 40.6 percent (250 and more employees).

Table 9: Hypothesis 7 – development of TM (talent pools)

How is TM featured in your company?				
Percent regarding employee size-classes	Total	1-49	50-249	250 and more
No talent pools in use	91.9	93.8	91.2	63.7
One or several talent pool(s) in use	8.1	6.3	8.8	36.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: IW Consult (2013, in this paper) based on Tansley et al. (2007)

The vast majority of companies (on total 91.9 percent) have no talent pools in use (see table 9). The usage of one or several talent pool(s) is rising over the size-classes *(hypothesis 7)* from 6.3 percent (1-49 employees) and 8.8 percent (50-249 employees) to 36.3 percent (250 and more employees).

Table 10: Hypothesis 8 – development of TM (employee participation/selection)

How is TM featured in your company?				
Percent regarding employee size-classes	Total	1-49	50-249	250 and more
Only selected people have the chance to participate	55.4	53.0	62.1	74.0
A major part of employees have the chance to participate	44.6	47.0	37.9	26.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: IW Consult (2013, in this paper) based on Tansley et al. (2007)

On average 55.4 percent of all enterprises work exclusively with selected people in TM (see table 10). The picture is changing considerably facing the company size-classes on detail. According to these categorizations the selection for TM participation increases with the

company size *(hypothesis 8)*. The percentage of talent selection for example is located at 53 percent at smaller companies (1-49 employees), 62.1 percent at middle-sized companies (50-249 employees) and 74 percent at bigger enterprises (250 and more employees).

Qualitative findings and formulation of key statements

Information on face-to-face interviews for qualitative analysis is provided by table 11.

Table 11: Face-to-face interview partner

Issue	Site	Employees (site and worldwide)	Production (examples)	Position interview partner	Interview date
1	Frankfurt	4.000 80.000	Braking systems	HR head of the production site	April, 20, 2015
2	Heuchelheim	2.000 8.150	Environmental simulation systems	Head of central HR department	April, 20, 2015
3	Mannheim	1.050 33.800	Rail vehicles	HR business partner	April, 22, 2015
4	Waldkirch	3.800 7.000	Sensor systems	HR learning and development	April, 23, 2015
5	Mannheim	1.300 153.000	Motors	Head of HR	April, 24, 2015
6	Mannheim	3.000 16.000	Buses	Head of HR development	April, 27, 2015
7	Walldorf	485 2.000	Lubrication systems	Head of HR south plants	April, 27, 2015
8	Frankenthal	2.000 16.300	Pumps	Head of TM	April, 28, 2015
9	Mannheim	1.050 5.600	Sensor systems	Head of HR and organizational development	April, 30, 2015

Results of hypotheses 9-11 related to functional specialists and hypothesis 12-14 related to future organizational leaders (see table 12) specify in the following the approach, *how* talent selection for these groups of knowledge-workers is being conducted.

Table 12: Findings hypotheses 9 – 14

Functional specialists	Future organizational leaders
Hypothesis 9: Verified (7 yes / 2 no) Talent selection is determined by an exclusive-position approach. Firstly, positions will be defined and secondly, potential candidates for filling them will be selected (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010: 182) (e.g., according to the criteria 'performance' or 'potential'). Remark regarding the 2 answers 'no': Companies choose an exclusive-people approach.	*Hypothesis 12: Verified (5 yes / 4 no)* Talent selection is determined by an exclusive-people approach. Talents are selected not position-related (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010: 181). Remark regarding the 4 answers 'no': Companies choose an exclusive-position approach.
Hypothesis 10: Verified (8 yes / 1 no) For talent selection functional criteria are more important than general management criteria.	*Hypothesis 13: Verified (8 yes / 1 no)* For talent selection general management criteria are more important than functional criteria.
Hypothesis 11: Verified (6 yes / 3 no) The higher the hierarchical positions, the more important are general management competencies (e.g., leadership abilities) in relation to functional expertise.	*Hypothesis 14: Verified (8 yes / 1 no)* The higher the hierarchical positions, the more important are general management competencies (e.g., leadership abilities) in relation to functional expertise.

Table 13 shows key statements based on qualitative results regarding the knowledge-worker groups 'functional specialists' and 'future organizational leaders' (Lepak and Snell, 2002; McDonnell et al., 2010).

Table 13: Key statements of qualitative findings

Subject	Functional specialists	Future organizational leaders
Type of exclusive approach (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010)	Exclusive-positions approach (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010)	Exclusive-people approach (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010)
Importance of functional versus management criteria	Functional criteria more important than management criteria	Management criteria more important than functional criteria
Importance of functional versus management criteria in context of hierarchy	Importance of management criteria rises with hierarchical level of positions	Importance of management criteria rises with hierarchical level of positions

Regarding the selection of functional specialists, functional criteria are considered to be more important than management criteria *(hypothesis 10)*. Contrary to that, management criteria (e.g., leadership abilities) are more important for the selection of future organizational leaders *(hypothesis 13)*. Both groups of knowledge-workers have in common, that with the rise of the

hierarchical level of positions the importance of management criteria (e.g., leadership abilities) are increasing also *(hypothesis 11* and *hypothesis 14*). Functional specialists are selected by an exclusive-position approach *(hypothesis 9)*. Future organizational leaders in contrast are selected by an exclusive-people approach *(hypothesis 12)*. This hypothesis was verified less clearly (5 yes / 4 no). However, all interviewed nine companies mentioned definitely, that talent selection for functional specialists and future organizational leaders are conducted by either the 'exclusive-positions' or the 'exclusive-people' approach (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010). Therefore, the research question *'positions or people – is talent selection of knowledge-workers determined by exclusive approaches?'* is clearly to be answered with *yes*.

DISCUSSION

Linking research limitations and research conception

The research conception is based on both quantitative and qualitative analyses and related data. Therefore it is not subject of limitation caused by missing research-based results (see Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013; Lewis and Heckman, 2006). The results furthermore contribute to the postulated counterbalance referring to the domination of US-research and thinking in TM (see Collings, Scullion and Vaiman, 2011). The research conception is exclusively related to an employer-perspective (employer point of view on talent selection and corresponding criteria regarding knowledge-workers) and implies not perspectives of other stakeholders (e.g., external consultants). For this reason it may deliver the feature of a one-dimensional approach (see Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a).

Contrasting findings in TM literature

According to several authors (Stahl et al., 2012; Tansley et al., 2007; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a) many organizations use exclusive and inclusive approaches (see Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010) for TM. Although tendencies for inclusive approaches exist (Dries, 2013; Festing, Schäfer and Scullion, 2013; Tansley et al., 2007) for instance, at the public or non-profit sector (Tansley et al., 2007) or for small and medium-sized companies in Germany (Festing, Schäfer and Scullion, 2013), the exclusive approach seems to be more preferred in general at major multinational companies (Festing, Schäfer and Scullion, 2013; Sparrow, Hird and Balain, 2011; Stahl et al., 2012; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a). Similar to other research (see Sparrow, Hird and Balain, 2011; Stahl et al., 2012) the qualitative research findings (see table 5) confirm the use of exclusive approaches, but additionally by providing a clear link of certain positions (functional specialists or future organizational leaders), the kind of exclusive approach (exclusive-people or exclusive-position approach) and selection criteria (leadership

and functional criteria). Contrary to other research (see Festing, Schäfer and Scullion, 2013; Sparrow, Hird and Balain, 2011; Stahl et al., 2012; Tansley et al., 2007) the study findings are related to M+E companies with size-class 250 and more employees in Germany and provide therefore TM statements which were neither based on cross-industry nor cross-national data.

Describing implication for TM practice

Adopting an 'exclusive-people' approach may organizations provoke to focus resources and efforts on attracting and retaining 'talents' (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010) based on the understanding that those people are key drivers for the achievement of high organizational performance. Adopting an 'exclusive-position' approach may cause organizations to focus resources and efforts on selected positions (Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010). Both exclusive approaches are more likely to fit well in organizations with competitive culture or up-or-out promotion schemes than in organizations promoting egalitarianism and diversity (Dries, 2013).

If organizations considering engaging in TM, a deep consideration of talent definition, approach and practices is crucial (Festing, Schäfer and Scullion, 2013). Organizations should determine explicitly the goals and interventions of TM and follow them up centrally in order to avoid ad-hoc approaches which commonly lead to discrepancies between theory and practice (Dries, 2013). The evaluation of both exclusive approaches is dedicated to support practitioners in finding the form TM should have, for instance related to above-average investments in talent development (Iles, Preece and Chuai, 2010) facing the specific organizational culture, mission (Dries, 2013; Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010; Iles, Preece and Chuai, 2010) and challenges caused by demographic transformations and labor shortages (Festing, Schäfer and Scullion, 2013), because declining birth rates and shortages of skilled labor in Germany will lead to a strong war for talent in the near future (Festing, Schäfer and Scullion, 2013).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In this paper we sought to answer the question 'positions or people – is talent selection of knowledge-workers determined by exclusive approaches?' We revealed that it is clearly to be answered with yes for companies with 250 and more employees in the M+E industry in Germany and related to functional specialists or future organizational leaders. Functional specialists were selected on majority by an exclusive-position approach. For talent selection, functional criteria are more important than management criteria and the importance of management criteria rises with the hierarchical level of positions. Future organizational leaders were selected on majority by an exclusive-people approach. For talent selection, management criteria are more important than functional criteria. For the selection of both employee groups,

the importance of management criteria rises with the hierarchical level of positions. The study provides furthermore the following findings: the bigger the companies, the more they define talent, the more different talent definitions are in use, the higher the willingness for financial investments in TM, the more formal processes are in use, the more often a TM strategy is existent, the more often one or several talent pool(s) are in use and the more they select employees for TM participation. In general, TM activities are running predominantly hidden for employees, independent from company size-classes.

TM literature proposes several areas for further research, beside the above mentioned in the article introduction (see chapter 1). Future research for instance can contribute to clarify the content of talent (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013; Tansley, 2011; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a), to explore TM on a global level (Mellahi and Collings, 2010; Scullion, Collings and Caligiuri, 2011; Tarique and Schuler, 2010) or to enhance talent decisions and related measurement to qualify and quantify impact on talent practices (Bethke-Langenegger, Mahler and Staffelbach, 2011; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Vaiman, Scullion and Collings, 2012). These suggestions for new research directions open many interesting fields for further research approaches on TM.

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