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## Global Talent Management The Identification Process of Pivotal Talent in Multinational Hotel Corporations

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**Global Talent Management**

**The Identification Process of Pivotal Talent in**

**Multinational Hotel Corporations**

**Stefan Jooss, BSc, MSc**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

*Doctor of Philosophy*

School of Hospitality Management and Tourism

Dublin Institute of Technology

Lead Supervisor: Dr Ralf Burbach

Advisory Supervisors: Dr Huub Ruël and Dr Ziene Mottiar

June 2018

## **Abstract**

Global talent management (GTM) has become a critical factor of organisational practice in multinational corporations. The key assumption is that GTM is a source of competitive advantage for organisations. The aim of this research is to explore and understand the talent identification process in multinational hotel corporations (MNHCs).

Drawing from multiple theoretical perspectives – human and social capital as well as agency and social network theories – the study takes an interpretivist stance to examine critically the talent identification process. By means of a qualitative collective case study design, three MNHCs were selected and 73 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders from these organisations. The interviews were held with human resources and operations leaders at business unit and corporate levels.

Findings show that the organisations developed a competency-based GTM strategy and applied various tools to differentiate the workforce. Firms conceptualise pivotal talent as high performers and high potentials. In addition, pivotal positions such as the general manager of a hotel, were identified. The MNHCs established a core talent identification construct with minor variations across regions at a corporate level, but with sometimes considerable differences in the implementation across business units.

The developed talent identification model shows that individual human and social capital attributes remain the dominant factors of the formal identification process. The two-level model further illustrates the discrepancies between the corporate GTM strategies and the actual global implementation at a business unit level. Relationships and social networks play a critical role during the talent identification. The current study contributes to the GTM knowledge with an extensive empirical research in the often disregarded context of MNHCs and the exploration of elected talent management theories. It provides greater clarity of the concept of pivotal talent and its identification.

## **Declaration**

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for graduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any other third level institution.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of DIT's guidelines for ethics in research.

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Dedication**

To my parents, Hans and Elisabeth Jooss

## **Acknowledgements**

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First and foremost, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my lead supervisor, Dr Ralf Burbach, for his continued support, inexhaustible amount of advice, and sympathetic ear.

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A special thanks goes to the participants of this study. Without their collaboration, this project would not have been possible.

I am grateful to all of my colleagues and friends, who not only inspired me and offered their genuine help during this research process, but also helped me to switch off from the academic life and reconnect.

I must thank my family for their continuous moral support and confidence in me.

Finally, and most importantly, I wish to thank my partner, Helen Sung, for her encouragement, patience, and love.

## Abbreviations

APAC	Asia Pacific
AT	Agency Theory
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
E-HRM	Electronic Human Resource Management
EMEA	Europe, Middle East, and Africa
F&B	Food and Beverage
F2F	Face-to-Face
GLP	Graduate Leadership Programme
GM	General Manager
GTM	Global Talent Management
HC	Human Capital
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Resource(s)
HRIS	Human Resource Information System
HRM	Human Resource Management
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
L&D	Learning and Development
MNC	Multinational Corporation
MNHC	Multinational Hotel Corporation
QDAS	Qualitative Data Analysis Software
RBV	Resource-Based View
RQ	Research Question
SC	Social Capital
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely
SNT	Social Network Theory
TA	Thematic Analysis
TAS	Talent Acquisition System
TM	Talent Management
TMS	Talent Management System
TP	Talent Pool
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

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## **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis explores the identification process of pivotal talent in multinational hotel corporations (MNHCs). This introductory chapter begins with the presentation of the rationale for research followed by current workforce trends, which are the drivers of the talent management (TM) challenge in organisations. Further, the research aim and four research questions (RQs) are introduced. The chapter concludes with the research methodology and the structure of the thesis.

## **1.2 Rationale for Research**

This section presents the rationale for the research. It outlines the apparent demand for talent, the challenge of managing talent in organisations, the lack of research to date, and the contribution of the current study.

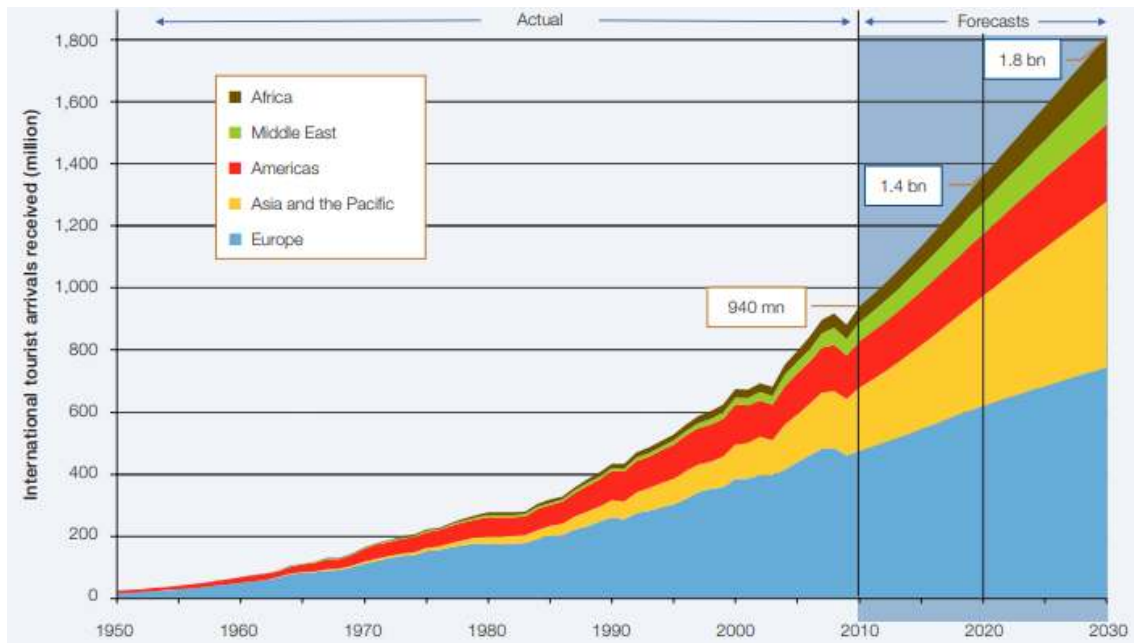
The term TM appeared for the first time in the late 1990s when McKinsey consultants wrote about the ‘war for talent’, describing the fact that talent is scarce and companies are competing against each other to obtain the best talent (Chambers, Foulton, Handfield-Jones, Hankin & Michaels, 1998; Iles, Preece & Xin, 2010b). Since then, TM advanced to be the most important term in the human resources (HR) field in the early 21st century (Cappelli & Keller, 2017). Organisations have recognised talent as a key asset and major success factor (Jones, Whitaker, Seet & Parkin, 2012; Scullion & Collings, 2011). Cascio and Aguinis (2008, p.136) describe talent as ‘the world’s most sought-after commodity’ and Erickson and McCall (2012) identify a clear link between investment in talent and profitability of organisations.

The hospitality industry has so far received little to no attention by TM scholars. This is despite its significant impact on the global economy and representing one of the fastest expanding industries with a concurrent high demand for talent (Davidson & Wang,

2011; Ernst and Young, 2013; Hein & Riegel, 2012). In recent years, strong investment and a significant rise in cross-border capital flows have been identified (Roth & Fishbin, 2015). A total of US\$68 billion in global hotel real estate transaction volume was estimated for 2015 (Jones Lang Lasalle, 2015). A continuously increasing number of destinations are opening up and thus offering many opportunities through the creation of new markets, hotels, and jobs within the hospitality industry (Sheehan, Grant & Garavan, 2018; United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2015). According to Smith Travel Research (2018), the global hotel inventory increased by 18 per cent between 2008 and 2018 (see Appendix A, Table A.1). MNHCs rapidly grow through new hotel openings and acquisitions (Dogru, 2017). As this current study focuses on these organisations, a snapshot of MNHCs is provided in Appendix A with the largest organisations being represented in Table A.2 and A.3.

In 2016, several countries recorded a double-digit year-by-year growth in international tourist arrivals, for instance, Nepal (40%), Iceland (39%), South Korea (30%), Moldova (29%), Chile (26%), Vietnam (26%), and Japan (22%) (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2017). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2017) states that one out of every ten jobs is provided by the hospitality industry and a record number of 1.2 billion international travellers were identified with a growth rate of four per cent in 2016. With the removal of travel and trade restrictions and barriers, the global thrive of travel is likely to continue (Bharwani & Butt, 2012; Jones Lang Lasalle, 2015; Paxson, 2009). Figure 1.1 illustrates the continuous growth of international tourist arrivals from 1950 to 2030 and an estimated 1.8 billion international travellers by 2030 (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2017).

**Figure 1.1: International Tourist Arrivals 1950 – 2030**



Source: United Nations World Tourism Organization (2017)

Commensurate with the growth of tourism and the increased competition that hotel organisations face today is the need to attract, identify, develop, and retain talent in order to succeed (Bharwani & Butt, 2012; Walsh & Taylor, 2007; Watson, 2008).

In the hospitality industry, people present the highest cost, with approximately 45 per cent of the operating expenses and 33 per cent of revenues (Deloitte, 2010). However, people have also been identified as a critical source of competitive advantage in MNHCs (Bharwani & Butt, 2012; Horner, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2015). The unique nature of this typical business-to-consumer industry is the elevated level of interaction between the guest and staff in providing the service in a 24/7 environment (Pizam & Shani, 2009). Effective work teams are vital in delivering high customer service, especially nowadays, when hotels face increased competition to provide high quality service and customer satisfaction (Crick & Spencer, 2011; Johanson, Ghiselli, Shea & Roberts, 2010).

In the 21st century, customers appear to be more sophisticated, travel experienced and demanding (Hein & Riegel, 2012; Sigala & Baum, 2003). Rather than providing a 'simple' service, it is now important to create a positive and memorable experience for guests (Baum, 2006; Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; D'Annunzio-Green, 2018b). Moreover, touchpoints – the moments when employees and guests interact – are significant impact factors on the guest experiences and level of engagement (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; Kworntnik, 2013). Successful TM and the ability to identify talent that can positively engage customers impact the guest experience and the long-term success of a hotel organisation (Popescu, Iancu, Popescu & Vasile, 2013; Reilly, 2018).

While talent has been identified as a critical source by both practitioners and academics, organisations struggle to manage talent effectively (Strack, Caye, Leicht, Villis, Böhm & McDonnell, 2013). Makram, Sparrow, and Greasley (2017) find that many organisations are not able to clearly articulate the value of their TM construct. TM, in practice, often appears to be 'ad hoc, unstructured and fragmented' (Jones *et al.*, 2012, p.399). Organisations seem to apply a 'practical and pragmatic' approach to TM which focuses on short-term needs and does not include long-term planning (Cooke, Saini & Wang, 2014, p.234). Strack *et al.* (2013) identify TM as the number one challenge through 2015. Multinational corporations (MNCs) face several challenges, such as attracting talent in different markets, developing leaders with a global mindset, and establishing a TM process (Creelman, 2014; Odell & Spielman, 2009). In 2015, 20 per cent of employers revised their TM strategies to establish more effective practices (ManpowerGroup, 2015). According to Guthridge, Komm, and Lawson (2008, p.51), the most common obstacles in organisations are (1) senior management that does not spend enough time on TM, (2) 'siloes' organisations with little or no encouragement of

constructive collaboration and sharing of resources, and (3) a lack of commitment from line managers to develop employees.

Baum (2008) asserts that hospitality organisations must be more efficient in inter-relating the processes of identification, development, and retention of talent. Because of a poor industry image, turnover and dropout rates in the hospitality industry are much higher than in other industries (Davidson & Wang, 2011; Popescu *et al.*, 2013; Walsh & Taylor, 2007). Riegel (2011) argues that high turnover rates are a major issue for any business, but particularly for a service industry such as the hospitality in which turnover rates can be as high as 300 per cent for some positions.

Studies show that employees in the hospitality sector leave for various reasons: employee dissatisfaction, lack of compensation, commitment, or trust, financial incentives, job security, career progress, an excessive workload, and work-life balance (see, e.g. Deery, 2008; Deery & Jago, 2015; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Peet, Walsh, Sober & Rawak, 2010; Poulston, 2009; Riegel, 2011). Many of the most talented graduates leave the industry to seek other opportunities and better conditions (Casado-Díaz & Hipolito, 2016; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). According to People1st (2015), 47 per cent of the workforce is employed only on a part-time basis. For many students, the hospitality industry is seen merely as an interstation while studying (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2015). Although some may argue that a certain level of turnover is useful for a flow of new ideas and innovation, the high levels experienced in hospitality firms appear to be a significant drain on productivity (Walsh & Taylor, 2007). People1st (2015) estimate a global labour turnover cost of £274 million in the industry. Therefore, there is undoubtedly a need for committed talent (Baum, 2008; Hein & Riegel, 2012).

Overall, there appears to be a disconnection between the importance of people and how they are managed in organisations. In conclusion, the attraction, identification, and retention of talent is a key challenge in the hospitality industry on a national basis and particularly for large MNHCs that need to source multi-skilled talent globally (Bharwani & Butt, 2012; Deloitte, 2010).

As MNCs employ TM on a global scale (King, 2015), global talent management (GTM) has also experienced an evolution in the academic literature (Scullion, Collings & Caligiuri, 2010). Although the identification of talent is one of the most important stages of GTM (McDonnell, Hickey & Gunnigle, 2011), relatively little research investigating GTM practices in MNCs has been conducted (McDonnell *et al.*, 2011). As Boudreau and Ramstad (2005a) propose, there is a need for a decision science in regard to the identification of pivotal talent and a closer link to strategic TM. Moreover, McDonnell, Collings, Mellahi, and Schuler (2017) contend that most studies discuss the management of talent without considering the identification process of this talent. Despite a notable advancement of TM research (Vaiman & Collings, 2013), there is considerable scope for greater clarity, conceptualisation, and theorisation of GTM as well as a need for more comprehensive research designs (Festing, Schäfer & Scullion, 2013b; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries & González-Cruz, 2013; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017).

This study contributes to the GTM literature by exploring the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs. This research operationalises talent as capital (Farndale, Scullion & Sparrow, 2010). Burton-Jones and Spender (2011) highlight human capital (HC) and social capital (SC) as the two dominant forms of intellectual capital in contemporary organisations. Corresponding with this view, Collings (2014a) asserts that the ultimate talent decision should be based on HC and SC, which is the approach that is also applied in this study. There is a considerable lack of theoretical development and

empirical evidence for this approach (Dries, 2013b) and little is known about the individual attributes that make up HC and SC (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013).

Drawing from agency theory (AT) and social network theory (SNT), the researcher further contends that agency relationships and the network position of actors impact the talent identification process. Bendickson, Muldoon, Liguori, and Davis (2016) assert that a contemporary approach towards AT, which looks at relationships and includes the consideration of networks of individuals, work units, and organisations, is needed (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve & Wenpin, 2004; Whelan, 2011). Organisations in the 21st century replace rigid hierarchies with global teams (Mockaitis, Zander & De Cieri, 2018) and flexible networks that allow efficient collaboration (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008). An increased internal collaboration and stronger engagement with external actors lead to a shift from traditional organisations to global teams and social enterprises (Abbatiello, Agarwal, Bersin, Lahiri, Schwartz & Volini, 2018). Due to the limited research of social networks in HR (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003), future studies need to demonstrate to what degree these dynamics impact the identification of pivotal talent (Whelan, 2011).

In summary, it is evident that this service-based global industry, in which people appear to be vital for organisations, contributes significantly to the world's economy (Hein & Riegel, 2012). However, organisations struggle to attract, identify, and retain key talent in this fast expanding sector (Barron, 2008) and a lack of theoretical and empirical research has been identified. Hence, this current study will contribute to the existing knowledge on GTM in the specific context of the hospitality industry. The importance and complexity of GTM is further reinforced by current workforce trends which are presented in the next section.

### 1.3 Current Workforce Trends

The identification, development, and retention of talent is a major challenge for today's HR departments (Vaiman, Collings & Scullion, 2017; Van den Brink, Fruytier & Thunnissen, 2013). A range of micro- and macro-factors include talent shortage, demographical changes, diversity in the workplace, and changing attitudes. These are the drivers of the GTM challenge, and hence, have contributed to the emergence of the GTM concept (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Sheehan *et al.*, 2018). Other factors are a multi-generational workforce, an increased mobility, new organisational designs, and technological developments (Fink & Sturman, 2017; Khilji, Tarique & Schuler, 2015; Schuler, Jackson & Tarique, 2011). Each of these factors are briefly presented below, as they are 'setting the scene' for GTM practices in organisations.

Several authors report a considerable talent shortage across organisations and industries (see, e.g. Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Beesley & Davidson, 2013; Cappelli, 2005; Merlino, 2011; Swailes, 2013). Figure 1.2 illustrates that 40 per cent of employers globally had difficulties filling positions in 2016 which was the highest proportion since 2007 (ManpowerGroup, 2017b).

**Figure 1.2: Global Talent Shortage 2006 – 2016**



Source: ManpowerGroup (2017a)



The ManpowerGroup (2015) further finds that 20 per cent of employers still do not have any strategies to address the talent shortage, and only ten per cent adopt their recruitment strategies to identify untapped talent groups. A recent study by Mercer (2017) displays a skills gap in areas such as core operations and service delivery, leadership, and sales and marketing. Therefore, talent is regarded as a scarce source (Arbadie, 2012; Barton, Farrell & Mourshed, 2012).

In the 1990s, Baum (1990, p.13) identified a ‘chronic’ talent shortage in the hospitality industry. Jayawardena, McMillan, Pantin, Taller, and Willie (2013) confirm that attracting employees still is and will be the number one challenge in the foreseeable future with an estimated talent shortage of approximately ten million people worldwide within the hospitality industry. A significant gap between the supply and demand of talent has been identified, in particular, in emerging countries (Dobbs *et al.*, 2012; Lam & Xiao, 2000).

A poor perception of the industry exists in many countries (Barron, 2008; Marchante, Ortega & Pagán, 2006; Nzozzo & Chipfuva, 2013). Traditionally, the hospitality industry has been described as a lower-skilled industry with a very dynamic labour market (Baum, 2008; Maxwell & MacLean, 2008; Popescu *et al.*, 2013). The industry is also often referred to as one with poor remuneration, challenging work conditions, and a volatile demand circle with distinctive seasons throughout the year (Casado-Díaz & Hipolito, 2016; Ferrary, 2015; Poulston, 2009; Walsh & Taylor, 2007).

Talent shortage in the hospitality industry is also closely linked to the prevalent lack of necessary skills, especially in the areas of higher supervisory level (Davidson & Wang, 2011; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). While graduates have a stable educational knowledge, they often lack practical experience (Harkison, Poulston & Kim, 2011), interpersonal skills (ManpowerGroup, 2015; Spowart, 2011), and creativity (Economist

Intelligence Unit, 2015). A talent shortage has also been found in the areas which require specialised knowledge, such as revenue, law, or culinary arts (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2015). As a result, organisations struggle to identify adequate talent (Baum, 2008).

In addition to talent shortage, current demographic trends are not in favour of the employers either. A low fertility rate results in a lower number of potential talent in many industrial countries, and the aging society leads to an increasing retiring population (Drabe, Hauff & Richter, 2015; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015). The shrinking workforce will directly affect an organisation's capabilities (Calo, 2008). A large number of retirements of knowledgeable and experienced baby-boomers is likely to lead to a loss of knowledge (Mutsuddi & Mutsuddi, 2008). Therefore, it appears crucial to identify and develop new talent (Nyberg, Schepker, Cragun & Wright, 2017).

In a GTM context, an increasingly diverse workforce is the norm, which requires experts in cross-cultural management (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). The hospitality industry is characterised by an extremely high level of diversity (D'Annunzio-Green, 2008; Gröschl, 2011). The need for global leaders has been identified in the 1990s (Conner, 2000). Since then, global talent has become significantly more important (Nankervis, 2013). There has been a trend in the hospitality industry towards the formation of large MNHCs, which operate in many countries (HotelNewsNow, 2015b; Littlejohn & Watson, 2004; Smith Travel Research, 2015a). Therefore, developing global leaders and managing diversity has become an even higher priority on the agenda of organisations (Littlejohn & Watson, 2004; Scott & Revis, 2008). With an increased awareness of equality and corporate social responsibility in society, organisations have to integrate the development of a diverse workforce in their GTM strategy (Baker & Kelan, 2017).

A further workforce trend is the change of attitudes, relationships, and priorities in organisations (Vaiman, Scullion & Collings, 2012). In previous decades, many organisations moved away from the lifetime-employment model (Bonet & Hamori, 2017). The traditional psychological contract (Argyris, 1960; Rousseau, 1989) describes a two-way relationship between employers, who offer job security and employees, who, in return, are loyal and committed. However, this traditional relationship no longer exists (Björkman, Ehnrooth, Mäkelä, Smale & Sumelius, 2013; Calo, 2008). Particularly Generation Y and Millennials manage their own employability and careers, and, consequently, employers must react with a novel approach, that is, TM (Vaiman *et al.*, 2012). In today's workforce, there are four different generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Millennials (Lapoint & Liprie-Spence, 2017). Having multiple generations in the workforce at the same time requires a nuanced approach towards TM to address the needs of all employees (Barkhuizen, 2014; Barron, Leask & Fyall, 2014; Plessis, Barkhuizen, Stanz & Schutte, 2015; Rose, 2013; Weyland, 2011).

An increasing mobility of people adds further complexity to the management of talent (Boudreau, 2013; Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2008; Festing, Kornau & Schäfer, 2015; Stewart, 2016). In a recent study by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2014), 89 per cent of executives from leading organisations state that they are planning to increase the amount of mobility within few years. MNCs need talent that is able to work across multiple geographical boundaries (Stahl *et al.*, 2012). PricewaterhouseCoopers (2014) argues that organisations will increasingly introduce 'talent swaps', that is, MNCs 'swap' talent between two locations to promote self-development, strengthen the company's culture, and build talent with a global mindset. Currently, little is known about how global mobility impacts GTM outcomes (McNulty & De Cieri, 2016).

A further trend in the workforce is the change of organisational designs (Torrington, Hall, Atkinson & Taylor, 2017). In a recent global study by the World Economic Forum (2016), HR leaders and executives identify the changing nature of work as the most important driver of change in organisations (44%). Contemporary organisations adapt their organisational design to become agile companies in response to a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous external environment (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). As part of this redesign, workforce flexibility is promoted (Hill *et al.*, 2008). A key component of this flexibility is the concept of work-life balance which must be considered when developing GTM strategies (Deery & Jago, 2015). This is further reinforced through increasing importance of a knowledge-based service economy which tends to be more flexible than industrial work (Torrington *et al.*, 2017).

In addition to the shift from industrial to service economies in many developed countries, technology continues to be a major impact factor on GTM practices (Merlino, 2011). Roth and Fishbin (2015) argue that the use of technology will increase substantially in the hospitality industry. In fact, legacy systems need to be replaced by new systems that are compatible with the latest digital media and technology available (El Ouiridi, El Ouiridi, Segers & Pais, 2016; Spitzer, 2014). From a TM point of view, organisations must invest in technology and a ‘smart’ environment to attract pivotal talent (Stanton, 2015). Today’s young workforce gear towards engaging with TM through technology, mobile applications, and digital platforms (Grooms, 2017). Organisations that neglect to innovate their TM process will fail to attract pivotal talent (Jooss, Burbach & Ruël, 2017a; Williamson, King, Lepak & Sarma, 2010). Yet, hotel companies do not appear to fully capitalise on digital human resource management (HRM) (Jooss & Burbach, 2017a).

The aforementioned changes in the economy and society must be considered by organisations as they impact both their approach to GTM and their overall financial performance. More research is needed to comprehensively understand the identification of talent. The research aim and questions addressed in this study are explained in the following section.

#### **1.4 Research Aim and Questions**

This study seeks to examine the talent identification process in the less considered context of the hospitality industry. The following research aim was formulated:

*To explore and understand the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs*

The study encompasses four RQs to address the overarching research aim. The research gaps identified in the literature which led to the development of the RQs are illustrated in Table 1.1. By addressing these gaps, the study provides an empirical contribution to the TM field. Focus is placed on (1) the conceptualisation of pivotal talent, (2) the formulation of strategies to identify pivotal talent, (3) criteria to identify pivotal talent, and (4) the implementation of the talent identification process across regions and business units (i.e. hotels). The RQs are presented below:

*RQ 1: How do MNHCs conceptualise pivotal talent?*

*RQ 2: What strategies do MNHCs use to identify pivotal talent?*

*RQ 3: What criteria do MNHCs apply to identify pivotal talent?*

*RQ 4: How effective are MNHCs in implementing their talent identification process?*

**Table 1.1: Development of Research Questions**

<b>Research Gaps</b>	<b>Research Question</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is TM different from HRM? (Iles, Chuai &amp; Preece, 2010a)</li> <li>• How is talent defined in practice? (McDonnell <i>et al.</i>, 2017; Meyers, Van Woerkom &amp; Dries, 2013; Thunnissen, Boselie &amp; Fruytier, 2013b)</li> </ul>	<p>RQ 1: How do MNHCs conceptualise pivotal talent?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do organisations link their TM strategy to their business strategy? (Bratton &amp; Waton, 2018; Collings, McDonnell &amp; Scullion, 2009a; Sparrow, Farndale &amp; Scullion, 2013)</li> <li>• How do organisations apply an inclusive or exclusive approach to GTM? (McDonnell <i>et al.</i>, 2011)</li> <li>• What strategies (internal/external talent) do firms use to identify talent? (Cappelli &amp; Keller, 2014; Wiblen, Dery &amp; Grant, 2012)</li> <li>• Do organisations apply differentiated HR practices between different key groups? (McDonnell, Gunnigle, Lavelle &amp; Lamare, 2015)</li> <li>• How do firms formally identify talent pools (TPs) and key groups? (Cappelli &amp; Keller, 2014; McDonnell <i>et al.</i>, 2015)</li> </ul>	<p>RQ 2: What strategies do MNHCs use to identify pivotal talent?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the reliability and validity of various approaches to identify talent? (Silzer &amp; Church, 2009b)</li> <li>• What determines performance (McDonnell <i>et al.</i>, 2017; Wiblen <i>et al.</i>, 2012) and potential? (Cappelli &amp; Keller, 2014; Dries &amp; Pepermans, 2012)</li> <li>• What HC attributes are needed for strategic positions? (Minbaeva &amp; Collings, 2013)</li> <li>• How is talent identified in practice? (McDonnell <i>et al.</i>, 2017)</li> </ul>	<p>RQ 3: What criteria do MNHCs apply to identify pivotal talent?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do firms integrate key elements of their talent management system (TMS)? (Collings <i>et al.</i>, 2009a; Minbaeva &amp; Collings, 2013)</li> <li>• How do organisations implement TM across departments, sectors, and countries? (Gallardo-Gallardo <i>et al.</i>, 2013; Sparrow <i>et al.</i>, 2013)</li> <li>• What is the impact of contextual factors on talent identification in organisations? (McDonnell <i>et al.</i>, 2015; Thunnissen &amp; Van Arensbergen, 2015; Vaiman <i>et al.</i>, 2017; Wiblen, 2016)</li> <li>• How do organisations measure talent and TM outcomes? (Collings, 2014b; Sparrow &amp; Makram, 2015; Thunnissen, 2016)</li> </ul>	<p>RQ 4: How effective are MNHCs in implementing their talent identification process?</p>

Source: Author

*RQ 1: How do MNHCs conceptualise pivotal talent?*

This RQ focuses on the definition and impact of pivotal talent, and the role of TM in the participating MNHCs. To address the RQ, the first objective is to investigate whether a formal definition of talent within the MNHCs exists and to what extent it is communicated across the organisations. The second objective is to interpret how participants view talent, including a comparison of global and regional views on the definition and impact of talent. The terms ‘talent’ and ‘pivotal talent’, and alternative terms such as ‘top talent’ or ‘high potentials’ need to be distinguished. The third objective is to ascertain potential discrepancies in how the construct of TM is viewed by HR and operational managers across regions.

*RQ 2: What strategies do MNHCs use to identify pivotal talent?*

This RQ aims to identify the formalised strategies and the philosophical approach towards the identification of talent. The first objective is to appraise the overall TM approach of the organisation, that is, the application of an inclusive or exclusive strategy. In addition, the strategy may focus on internal development of talent or sourcing of external talent. The second objective is to assess the process of how TM strategies are developed. TM strategies and processes may be a corporate-driven scheme with limited input from individual hotels, or a business unit project with individual properties developing their own strategies. The third objective is to examine critically to what extent organisations use different strategies to identify pivotal talent for individual departments or distinct levels within the organisational hierarchy.

*RQ 3: What criteria do MNHCs apply to identify pivotal talent?*

This RQ analyses the subjective and objective criteria used to classify pivotal talent. The first objective is to examine the basis of identification and assessment of talent, and the development of a formal criteria framework within organisations. The second objective is to identify tools, methods, and systems which may include assessments, review meetings, a human resource information system (HRIS) or TMS that organisations apply to assess criteria and review talent.

*RQ 4: How effective are MNHCs in implementing their talent identification process?*

This RQ focuses on the implementation of the talent identification process across the organisation. The first objective is to examine the degree of alignment of the process across regions and business units. The second objective is to validate the effectiveness of MNHCs in identifying pivotal talent. The third objective is to evaluate the alignment of the talent identification process to the overall GTM strategy. Having introduced the four RQs of the study, the next section will outline the chosen research methodology.

## **1.5 Research Methodology**

This research applies a social constructivist lens to explore and understand the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs. Some reference is made to more positivist views (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005b) in order to classify objective criteria and a decision science as part of the talent identification. However, the research applies a holistic view on the establishment of the talent identification process and also considers the impact of agency relationships and social networks on the process.



This qualitative multi-level collective case study consists of 73 interviews in 15 countries in three MNHCs. The participating MNHCs have headquarters (HQs) in the Americas, Asia Pacific (APAC), and Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA). In order to select the participating organisations, this study consulted the *Top 30 World Luxury Index* to review the most sought-after luxury hotel brands in 2014, which included both luxury and upper upscale brands (Digital Luxury Group & Laaroussi, 2014). These brands were managed by 18 MNHCs. This research employed the following criteria to identify potential case study organisations: (1) a global presence (defined as operating across continents) in order to compare practices across regions, (2) a portfolio of at least one luxury brand as these hotels have the highest standards of service which requires skilled talent (Tungate, 2009; Walls, Okumus, Wang & Kwun, 2011), and (3) more than ten hotels as larger organisations tend to have more TM structures and practices in place (McDonnell, Lamare, Gunnigle & Lavelle, 2010). This resulted in a sampling frame of 14 MNHCs of which three agreed to participate in this research.

For this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews with HR, talent, and operations managers were conducted to explore and understand the talent identification process from an operational and strategic perspective. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Interviews were coded according to thematic analysis (TA) and the six stages of analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), using the qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) NVivo. Further details on the methodology are provided in the fourth chapter of the study. An overview of all chapters is presented in the next section.

## **1.6 Structure of Thesis**

This thesis is structured in seven chapters: introduction, literature review, theoretical foundation, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion and recommendations.

### *Chapter One*

The first chapter is an introductory chapter. It provides an overview of the research. First, the rationale for the study, focusing on the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs, is explained. The chapter revisits the relevance of talent in today's business operations and presents the challenges faced by organisations in managing talent. As evidence supports the significant gaps in research on the talent identification process, the contribution of this current study made to the academic literature is highlighted. Second, current workforce trends, which are the drivers for the TM challenge, are reviewed. Third, the research aim and RQs, the research methodology, and the structure of the thesis are outlined.

### *Chapter Two*

This chapter reviews critically the extant literature on GTM and talent identification. The terms talent, TM, and GTM are defined, and the concept of TM is differentiated from traditional HRM. Following this, the most common approaches towards TM are interpreted. The chapter then outlines the key phases of GTM and discusses the global availability of talent. Subsequently, the identification process is reviewed. Identification criteria and tools are examined, and technology as identification support as well as staffing options are analysed. The chapter concludes with a discussion around the global implementation of the TM construct.

### *Chapter Three*

The third chapter provides the conceptual framework of the study. It begins with an overview of the various literature streams that can be applied to conceptualise talent. The chosen approach for this current study, talent as capital, is discussed in detail with a focus on HC and SC which are identified as the two dominant forms of intellectual capital. Following a brief historical introduction, different definitions and perspectives of both HC and SC are presented. The chapter continues with a discussion of the two other theories applied in this study: AT and SNT. Drawing from these theories, the potential impact of relationships and social networks on the talent identification process is examined. Both concepts are first introduced theoretically and then set into a TM context.

### *Chapter Four*

This chapter defends the research methodology chosen for the purpose of this study. The chapter begins with a summary of the methodological construct which consists of four stages: (1) the philosophical assumptions (ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological beliefs), (2) the interpretive framework (social constructivism), (3) the research design (qualitative approach, multi-level collective case study, semi-structured in-depth interviews, mixed-purposeful sampling), and (4) data analysis (TA by Braun and Clarke (2006)). All of these factors are illustrated in detail throughout the chapter. In addition, this chapter discusses the research aim and RQs in the context of the extant literature and outlines the research process. This chapter concludes with ethical considerations and a critical evaluation of the quality of research.

## *Chapter Five*

The fifth chapter presents the research findings under seven developed themes: (1) business strategy, (2) GTM strategy, (3) talent identification criteria, (4) talent identification tools, (5) talent identification initiatives, (6) global implementation impact factors, and (7) the evaluation of the talent identification process. The first and second themes are linked to the first and second RQs, the conceptualisation of pivotal talent and the formulation of strategies to identify pivotal talent. The third, fourth, and fifth themes focus on the third RQ, criteria to identify pivotal talent. Finally, the sixth and seventh themes engage with the fourth RQ, the implementation of the talent identification process across regions and business units (i.e. hotels).

## *Chapter Six*

This discussion chapter presents the talent identification model as one of the major contributions of the study. The model was developed as a result of the TA of the findings. The model illustrates a link between the business and GTM strategy with the core talent identification process. It further shows that the identification process affects the organisational performance. In addition to the core process, the model displays several factors that impact the established identification construct. After a brief overview of the model, the chapter engages with its individual elements as part of a discussion of the RQs. From a structural perspective, the chapter is guided by the four RQs which set the results in context with the existing literature.

## *Chapter Seven*

The final chapter draws conclusions upon the entire thesis. It begins with a brief summary of the developed themes in the context of the four RQs and the research contributions. The chapter continues with implications for management practice. Relevance for society is a key factor in responsible management research. Hence, the value of this research for practitioners is highlighted in this section. As constraints are inevitable in research, the chapter also presents the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with potential avenues of future research, which will extend the research findings of this study and further enhance the current understanding of the talent identification process.

### **1.7 Summary**

This introductory chapter presented the rationale for the research. It is evident that more clarity and theorisation of the talent identification process is needed. The identification of talent is viewed as particularly important in the people-centric hospitality industry. This qualitative study explores the talent identification process in MNHCs. As outlined in section 1.6, the next chapter reviews the extant literature on GTM and the talent identification process.

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## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

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## **2.1 Introduction**

Despite the rapidly growing need and interest in GTM, there appears to exist a lack of clarity and theoretical evidence surrounding the topic (Festing, Budhwar, Cascio, Dowling & Scullion, 2013a). Moreover, Davidson and Wang (2011) assert that there is an imperative need for more contemporary practices to identify pivotal talent in hotel corporations. By focusing on the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs, this current study contributes to the GTM literature with an empirical contribution in a specific context (i.e. the hospitality industry) and presents a model for the identification of talent.

This chapter commences with a conceptualisation of GTM including definitions of and approaches towards talent, TM, and GTM. Following this, the main phases of the GTM process and the availability of talent are reviewed. Subsequently, the focus lies on the talent identification process which includes criteria, tools, technology as identification support, and staffing options that are applied to identify pivotal talent. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the global implementation of the process.

## **2.2 Global Talent Management**

In recent years, GTM has become a key topic in HR and its importance for the success of international business as well as the need for a strategic approach towards GTM have already been established in the extant literature (Al Ariss, Cascio & Paauwe, 2014; Burbach & Royle, 2010; Collings, Scullion & Vaiman, 2015). In an increasingly competitive global business environment and within the context of the global 'war for talent' (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Iles *et al.*, 2010b), MNCs are under pressure to devise a GTM strategy and to develop a global mindset (Arp, 2012; Smith & Victorson, 2012). This implies that the HR department also functions globally to some degree and formulates a GTM process (Creelman, 2014; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). While

traditionally the focus was on managing the international workforce, particularly diversity of people and cultures, it is now equally important to have global processes, standards, and practices in place (Brewster, Sparrow & Harris, 2005). In order to develop a GTM strategy, organisations must first define talent and GTM in the operating context. Therefore, the next section presents an overview of perspectives on talent, TM, and GTM.

### **2.2.1 Definitions**

As the first RQ of this study focuses on the conceptualisation of pivotal talent, the terms talent, TM, and GTM are defined in this section. In order to subsequently explain TM and GTM, it is necessary to primarily define talent (Nzozu & Chipfuva, 2013). Currently, a clearly defined strategic approach is missing (Galagan, 2008). As Tansley (2011) indicates, the term talent has been used with different meanings for many centuries. While it described a denomination of weight and a monetary unit in antiquity, the meaning changed from an inclination in the 13th century to a treasure in the 15th century. It was not until the 17th century that talent started to be defined as a special natural ability. The Oxford English Dictionary (2017b) defines talent as ‘a natural aptitude or skill.’ Further perspectives on talent are provided in Appendix B, Table B.1.

Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2013) identify two key approaches in the literature towards talent: the object approach and the subject approach. The object approach views talent as characteristics of people, which is often linked to talent as either a natural ability or mastery, commitment, and fit (April & Jappie, 2008). In contrast, the subject approach views talent as people (talent as employees or talent as high performers and high potentials) (Blass & April, 2008; Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2008). From a practical perspective, Alziari (2017) argues that talent is never generic and varies depending on the organisation and context. Instead, talent is defined by a



company's business strategy and capabilities, and hence, 'talent for what?' is a critical question that must be addressed (Alziari, 2017).

Dries (2013b) asserts further that theoretical perspectives on talent have been provided by the HRM literature and various psychology streams, such as industrial/organisational, educational, vocational, positive, and social psychology. When following the psychology streams, talent is seen as individual difference, giftedness, identity, strength, or perception of talent (Dries, 2013b; Meyers & Van Woerkom, 2014). The HRM stream operationalises talent as capital and links individual talent to organisational context. As this is a collective case study of three MNHCs, the researcher chose talent as capital as the main theoretical perspective on talent (see Chapter Three). Thus, the main criterion is the contribution to the organisations. For this study, talent is therefore defined as follows:

Talent consists of those individuals who can make a difference to organizational performance, either through their immediate contribution or in the longer-term by demonstrating the highest levels of potential (Tansley *et al.*, 2007, p.7).

Although the amount of publications has accelerated since 2000, there is still a lack of clarity regarding the definition of TM (Dries, 2013a; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Ross, 2013). Some authors claim that TM is simply a new label for traditional HRM because it encompasses the same HRM activities (recruitment and selection, development, and retention) and does not provide any novel ideas (Iles *et al.*, 2010b; Preece, Iles & Chuai, 2011). According to Collings (2014b), HRM and TM have some related core beliefs, namely, that a company's objective should be the healthy growth and advancement of its people with commitment to human potential.

Nevertheless, various scholars contend that TM requires a different approach from HRM which is also the perspective applied in this study. Traditionally, HRM has focused on all employees and standardisation of HR practices and policies (Boudreau & Ramstad,

2005a; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). This was premised on the belief that equal treatment among employees will lead to co-operation and trust (Collings, 2017). After the economic stagnation in the 1970s, organisations tended to focus their investment on a smaller number of employees, and hence, a differentiation approach gained popularity (Cappelli & Keller, 2017). Nowadays, TM is often referred to as the management of star performers, workforce differentiation, and succession planning (Collings, 2014a, b; Meyers *et al.*, 2013; O'Boyle & Kroska, 2017). Workforce differentiation can be defined as 'formalized approaches to the segmentation of the workforce based on employees' competence or the nature of roles performed to reflect differential potential to generate value' (Collings, 2017, p.300). Succession planning refers to 'a process of anticipating and then planning for the replacement of important employees in an organisation' (Cappelli, 2011, p.673).

Collings and Mellahi (2009) argue that TM should focus on strategic positions which allow an employee to directly impact the organisational performance which generally includes managers in strategic positions and excludes line employees (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007). These strategic positions ought to be filled with talent – people who are high performers and/or high potentials (Collings *et al.*, 2009a; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Huselid, Beatty & Becker, 2005). Huselid *et al.* (2005) further differentiate between positions A, B, and C, with position A being the focus of TM processes in an organisation (see Table 2.1). The evaluation is based on defining characteristics (i.e. strategic impact and performance variability of a position), scope of authority, primary determinant of compensation, effect on value creation, consequences of mistakes, and consequences of hiring the wrong person. As a result, the value of talent can be maximised, and a sustainable competitive advantage for organisations can be achieved (Collings & Mellahi, 2013; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017).

A TM architecture which supports workforce differentiation based on the strategic importance and contribution of employees seems arguably appropriate (Collings, 2017; McDonnell *et al.*, 2015; Yanadori & Kang, 2011). Therefore, TM appears to be a discrete field (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). An overview of perspectives on TM is provided in Appendix B, Table B.2 in chronological order to illustrate the shift of focus within the definition of TM from 2001 to 2017. Early definitions refer broadly to a strategic activity that includes the identification, development, and retention of talent (see, e.g. Stahl, Björkman, Farndale, Morris, Paauwe & Stiles, 2007; Warren, 2006). They also focus on managing talent effectively by having the right person at the right place at the right time (Duttagupta, 2005; Sloan, Hazucha & Van Katwyk, 2003). In contrast, more recent definitions emphasise workforce differentiation, the identification of key strategic positions, the establishment of processes, and the use of systems (see, e.g. Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Dries, Van Acker & Verbruggen, 2012a; Höglund, 2012). In order to reinforce the concept of workforce differentiation including the management of TPs, this study defines TM as:

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

**Table 2.1: Positions in the Workforce**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Position A</b>	<b>Position B</b>	<b>Position C</b>
Defining characteristics	Has a direct strategic impact <i>and</i> exhibits high performance variability among those in the position, representing upside potential	Has an indirect strategic impact by supporting strategic positions and minimises downside risk by providing a foundation for strategic efforts <i>or</i> has a potential strategic impact, but exhibits little performance variability among those in the position	May be required for the firm to function, but has little strategic impact
Scope of authority	Autonomous decision-making	Specific processes or procedures typically must be followed	Little discretion in their work
Primary determinant of compensation	Performance	Job-level	Market price
Effect on value creation	Creates value by substantially enhancing revenue or reducing costs	Supports value-creating positions	Has little positive economic impact
Consequences of mistakes	May be very costly, but missed revenue opportunities are in a greater loss to the firm	May be very costly and can destroy value	Not necessarily costly
Consequences of hiring wrong person	Significant expense in terms of lost training investment and revenue opportunities	Fairly easily remedied through hiring of replacement	Easily remedied through hiring of replacement

Source: Amended from Huselid *et al.* (2005)

The goal of GTM is to identify, develop, and retain pivotal talent that has the necessary global competencies to manage a MNC (Collings, Scullion & Dowling, 2009b). Scullion *et al.* (2010) argue that the key differentiation to international HRM is the fact that GTM focuses on core talent within the organisation. While the importance of GTM in MNCs is evident, there appears to be no clear definition of GTM (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Tansley, 2011). According to Tansley, Kirk, and Tietze (2013), the definition is always context-driven meaning that factors such as sector, language, size of organisation, time, complexity, and location influence the definition. Collings and Scullion (2008, p.102) define GTM as ‘the strategic integration of resourcing and development at the international level that involves the proactive identification, development and strategic deployment of high-performing and high-potential strategic employees on a global scale.’ Alternative perspectives are presented in Appendix B, Table B.3. In order to reinforce the notion of a GTM construct (Downs & Swailes, 2013; McDonnell *et al.*, 2010), this current study defines GTM as:

Global structures and processes that allow the systematic identification of pivotal positions, and the development and deployment of a talent pool of high-performing, high-potential employees that contribute to the organisation’s competitive advantage in a short or long term.

According to Tansley *et al.* (2013), there are three levels of benefits of GTM: macro, meso, and micro. The macro level considers the society as a whole, meso focuses on the organisation, and micro on the individual employee. It is crucial to apply a multi-level and multi-value approach to GTM (Devins & Gold, 2014; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015). King (2016) differentiates between individual, team, and organisational level outcomes. Thunnissen *et al.* (2013b) distinguish between economic and non-economic value and Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Mäkelä, Smale, and Sumelius (2017) differentiate between proximal and distant outcomes of TM.

Table 2.2 presents an overview of potential outcomes of GTM. In summary, TM has become one of the most important topics on the agenda of organisations (Ashton & Morton, 2005; Collings, 2014b; Hays, 2015).

**Table 2.2: Potential Outcomes of Global Talent Management**

<b>Individual Level</b>	<b>Organisational Level</b>	<b>Societal Level</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial rewards</li> <li>• Job security</li> <li>• Meaningful and challenging work</li> <li>• Increased work motivation and commitment</li> <li>• Efforts to fulfil the psychological contract</li> <li>• Job satisfaction</li> <li>• HC and SC development</li> <li>• Additional attitudinal outcomes such as willingness to take on demanding work, build valuable competencies, and support company strategic priorities</li> <li>• Work-life balance</li> <li>• Fair and just treatment</li> <li>• Growth and social needs</li> <li>• Long-term career progression</li> <li>• Global mindset</li> <li>• Global leadership effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profitability, financial and stock market performance</li> <li>• Efficiency and effectiveness</li> <li>• Organisational flexibility</li> <li>• Increased knowledge sharing and transfers</li> <li>• Corporate-wide HC and SC enhancement through talent mobility</li> <li>• Reduced employee turnover</li> <li>• Employer branding and organisational reputation</li> <li>• Legitimacy</li> <li>• Shared values</li> <li>• Worldwide innovativeness</li> <li>• Competitive position</li> <li>• Market share</li> <li>• Composition of a top-management team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved economic condition and (inter)national competitive position of an industry, region, or country</li> <li>• Social responsibility (i.e. contributing to the social development of society)</li> </ul>

Source: Amended from Björkman *et al.* (2017) and Thunnissen *et al.* (2013b)

Having defined talent, TM, and GTM, the next section reviews approaches to TM.

### 2.2.2 Approaches

This section outlines two key approaches towards TM: an inclusive approach and an exclusive approach (Dries, 2013a; Sonnenberg, Van Zijderveld & Brinks, 2014). This facilitates the achievement of the second RQ which focuses on the formulation of strategies to identify pivotal talent.

An inclusive approach is following the philosophy that everyone can achieve or has some talent, and thus, recognises the value of all employees (Ross, 2013; Swailes, Downs & Orr, 2014). Swailes *et al.* (2014) differentiate between fully inclusive TM (i.e. the inclusion of all employees in the organisation for all practices) and partially inclusive TM (i.e. initially all employees are considered but eventually only a proportion of employees will be part of TPs and thus TM initiatives). Employees can be identified as talent by acquiring meta-competences such as knowledge and skills, and by placing focus on the strengths of an individual (Meyers *et al.*, 2013). Boyatzis and Saatchioglou (2008) argue that emotional, social, and cognitive intelligence can predict effective leadership and all can be developed within an organisation. If a company emphasises an inclusive and stable philosophy, it believes that everyone has particular talent; it identifies and uses this talent. If a company follows an inclusive and developable approach, it believes that all employees can become talent through development (Meyers & Van Woerkom, 2014). As a conclusion, the company tends to offer training to all employees (Meyers *et al.*, 2013). In contrast, an exclusive approach means that not everyone is considered as talent by an organisation (Stahl *et al.*, 2012).

Generally, an exclusive approach to talent is applied when talent is an innate gift or ability, and it is also implemented when a focus is placed on the potential or the performance of an individual (Meyers *et al.*, 2013). A company can follow an exclusive and stable or exclusive and developable approach (Meyers & Van Woerkom, 2014).

Meyers and Van Woerkom (2014) argue that the ‘war for talent’ is the central theme of an exclusive and stable approach. Organisations must identify, attract, and develop a limited number of talented individuals (Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2014).

If a company follows an exclusive and developable approach, the nature-nurture interactions play a major role; thus, companies try to develop employees with high potential (Meyers & Van Woerkom, 2014). Focus should be placed on talent for strategic, pivotal positions as organisational resources are limited (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Maynard, Vartiainen & Sanchez, 2017). Furthermore, Swailes *et al.* (2014) differentiate between an elite TM approach and a partially exclusive TM approach. When following an elite TM approach, all key strategic roles are filled with top talent and further differentiation of top talent takes place to identify a super elite. On the other hand, when implementing a partially exclusive TM approach, only small proportions of employees, aspiring managers for example, are included (Swailes *et al.*, 2014).

According to a study published by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, there is a noticeable shift from an exclusive to an inclusive approach among most organisations (McCartney & Worman, 2010). On the contrary, Tansley *et al.* (2013) argue that there is still an over-emphasis on exclusive approaches. Furthermore, Daubner-Siva, Vinkenburg, and Jansen (2017, p.322) find that many organisations struggle with the ‘exclusion-inclusion paradox’ which explains the need to ‘engage in exclusive TM practices while embracing diversity and inclusion principles.’

Contrary to Baum (2008) who purports that hospitality organisations which operate in a weak labour market should choose an inclusive and open approach towards TM, Collings *et al.* (2009a) draw on the concept of ‘the law of the few’ (Gladwell, 2000). They assert that organisations should focus on the identification, development, and retention of ‘key’ people. This current study chose a differentiated approach that is



initially inclusive and then exclusive in nature to managing talent. Focus was placed on pivotal talent, that is, high-performing and high-potential talent, as well as pivotal positions meaning positions of strategic importance (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). Regardless of whether an organisation follows an inclusive or exclusive approach to talent, they must analyse several phases as part of the overall TM construct which are presented in the following section.

### **2.2.3 Phases**

Several key phases of TM must be considered when developing a TM approach: attracting, identifying, developing, retaining, and deploying talent (Björkman *et al.*, 2017; Silzer & Dowell, 2009b). First, organisations must complete the recruitment and selection process (Goldstein, Pulakos, Passmore & Semedo, 2017; Phillips & Gully, 2017). The recruitment and selection of talent is key, and it can be achieved through internal and external talent identification (Mäkelä, Björkman & Ehrnrooth, 2010; Swailes & Blackburn, 2016). A variety of criteria and tools can be used to identify talent (Ross, 2013). The following phases of development, retention, and deployment of talent include a significant investment of resources from the company (Collings, 2014b). Development embraces the provision of training and career opportunities. Retention includes the creation of benefits in order to keep employees satisfied (Zhang & Stewart, 2017). Finally, deployment allows organisations to maximise capabilities and implement them strategically (Alziari, 2017).

Managing talent is based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976; Homans, 1958), or as Collings (2014a) states, it is a reciprocal process. First, an investment in talent is needed from the employer and in return, a higher level of commitment is gained from the employee (Björkman *et al.*, 2013; Collings, 2014a).

McDonnell *et al.* (2010) identify a GTM construct containing three main elements: global succession planning, global talent development, and global management development. While succession planning refers to the use of development or career plans, global talent development focuses on national and international assignments, task forces, further training and formal qualifications along with the overall assessment of performance (McDonnell *et al.*, 2010). Finally, global management development are formal management or leadership programmes that are usually offered to recent graduates; thus, they are often also referred to as graduate programmes (McDonnell *et al.*, 2010).

On a different note, Baum (2008) suggests that the type and extent of TM practices in the hospitality industry largely depend on the size of the operation along with its ownership, location, and the demand for labour. The availability of talent depends particularly on the location of an organisation which is further illustrated in the next section.

#### **2.2.4 Availability of Talent**

Björkman *et al.* (2013) identify a significant lack of leadership talent worldwide in all sectors. Odell and Spielman (2009) claim that global leaders must have experience living and working abroad, speak various languages, and be aware of cultural differences. Study findings (see, e.g. Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015; Lanvin & Evans, 2016, 2018; ManpowerGroup, 2017b; World Economic Forum, 2015, 2017) show that a location-specific perspective on the availability of talent is needed.

The ManpowerGroup (2015) finds that employers in Brazil, Hong Kong, Japan, Peru, and Romania reported significant difficulties in filling positions. On the other hand, organisations in the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland, Spain, and the United Kingdom (UK) are experiencing the least difficulties in finding talent (ManpowerGroup, 2015).

Table 2.3 displays two talent indexes by country from studies by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2015) and Lanvin and Evans (2018) and one HC index by country from a study by the World Economic Forum (2017).

**Table 2.3: Talent Index by Country**

<i>Rank</i>	<b>Economist Intelligence Unit (2015)</b>		<b>Lanvin and Evans (2018)</b>		<b>World Economic Forum (2017)</b>	
	<i>Country</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	USA	74.5	Switzerland	79.9	Norway	77.1
2	Denmark	65.4	Singapore	78.4	Finland	77.1
3	Finland	64.2	USA	75.3	Switzerland	76.5
4	Sweden	63.4	Norway	74.6	USA	74.8
5	Norway	62.3	Sweden	74.3	Denmark	74.4
6	Australia	61.9	Finland	74.0	Germany	74.3
7	Singapore	61.9	Denmark	73.8	New Zealand	74.1
8	Canada	61.3	UK	73.1	Sweden	74.0
9	Switzerland	60.9	Netherlands	72.6	Slovenia	73.3
10	Hong Kong	60.8	Luxembourg	71.6	Austria	73.3

Source: Author

Within the ten highest-ranked countries, there are six countries that appear in all three rankings: Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America (USA). According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (2015), talent flourishes the best in developed and wealthy nations with liberal and democratic political systems. A high number of excellent universities, a meritocratic environment, an adaptable and innovative workforce, and a low level of interventionist labour laws are major impact factors that allow the USA to lead the ranking presented by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2015). A substantial investment in education is the principal reason for the success of the Nordic countries. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (2015), Canada is the top riser in rank and China the top riser in score.

The study conducted by the World Economic Forum (2017) focusing on the HC index shows that there is a significant gap between large countries such as the UK (23rd), France (26th), China (34th), and India (103rd) and the countries that perform best according to this study. Overall, all countries could do more to foster the development of HC. Only 25 nations tapped into 70 per cent of their HC (World Economic Forum, 2017).

The talent competitiveness index by Lanvin and Evans (2018, p.11) refers to ‘the set of policies and practices that enable a country to develop, attract, and optimise the HC that contributes to productivity and prosperity.’ The index encompasses various input and output measures. Input measures are: the regulatory, market, and business and labour landscape, internal and external openness, formal education, lifelong learning, access to growth opportunities, sustainability, and lifestyle. Output measures are: global knowledge skills, and vocational and technical skills. Results show that there is a high correlation between the gross domestic product per capita and the talent score (Lanvin & Evans, 2016, 2018). Furthermore, Lanvin and Evans (2018) released a global city talent index (see Table 2.4). The city talent index shows that eight out of the ten highest-ranked cities are in Europe while two cities are located in the USA.

**Table 2.4: Talent Index by City**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Score</b>
1	Zurich	Switzerland	71.0
2	Stockholm	Sweden	68.2
3	Oslo	Norway	68.1
4	Copenhagen	Denmark	67.1
5	Helsinki	Finland	66.8
6	Washington DC	USA	66.5
7	Dublin	Ireland	66.1
8	San Francisco	USA	63.4
9	Paris	France	63.2
10	Brussels	Belgium	62.7

Source: *Amended from* Lanvin and Evans (2018)

Having provided an overview of the concept of GTM which included definitions of and approaches towards talent, TM, and GTM, the phases of the GTM process, and the availability of talent, the next section focuses on the core factor of this current study, the talent identification process.

### **2.3 Talent Identification Process**

This section analyses the talent identification process in organisations. A central point of consideration for organisations is to what extent they would like to focus on internal or external talent. This make-or-buy decision has been addressed by scholars for several decades (see, e.g. Lepak & Snell, 1999; Miles & Snow, 1984). External talent identification, which can be defined as the recruitment and selection of talent from outside the organisation, is also referred to as talent acquisition (Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001). Internal talent identification refers to the selection of talent inside the organisation (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2010). Bidwell (2017) contends that organisations can maintain and develop firm-specific skills, have more valuable information on the employee, and promote a prospect of internal mobility and promotion when following internal staffing. According to Reilly (2018), hospitality organisations centre their TM approach around the identification, development, and retention of internal talent due to a highly competitive environment. On the other hand, external staffing provides organisations with a greater variety of employees who may have unique expertise and allow the firms to learn and advance (Bidwell, 2017). Having identified internal and external talent identification strategies, the following section discusses specific criteria used to identify pivotal talent.

### 2.3.1 Identification Criteria

This section reviews criteria to identify pivotal talent which is the focus of the third RQ. Wiblen (2016) distinguishes between three types of identification: (1) intuitive, (2) individualised, and (3) systematic. Following an intuitive approach, decisions are made based on observation and the subjective evaluation of executives and managers who rely on their experience and on gut feeling (Wiblen, 2016). This approach was criticised by Highhouse (2008, p.333) who asserts that talent cannot be predicted based on the notion of intuitive experience. Highhouse (2008) refers to a ‘stubborn reliance on intuition and subjectivity.’ Moreover, Dries (2013b) contends that this approach may favour some employees, for instance, those who are similar to the assessor (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2010). The individualised approach focuses on individuals with certain competencies or traits without necessarily having a definition of talent or any formal assessment (Wiblen, 2016). Talent is described as employees who possess the ‘X-factor’ or ‘right stuff’ (Dries, 2013b, p.280). Finally, a systematic approach includes a strategic, integrated, and proactive view on identifying talent which includes specific criteria to support the talent decision process (Mellahi & Collings, 2010; Wiblen, 2016). According to Anderson, Lievens, Van Dam, and Ryan (2004), systematic talent decisions are based on three principles: person-job fit, person-team fit, and person-organisation fit. For the purpose of this study, the researcher applies a systematic approach towards the talent identification process. As HRM research has traditionally focused on individual attributes (Borgatti & Li, 2009), the following section reviews competencies that are needed to build HC and SC which may ultimately lead to a competitive advantage (Boxall, 2011).

### **2.3.1.1 Generic Competencies**

According to Charan, Drotter, and Noel (2011), a competency-based approach to talent can be used to enable the identification of pivotal talent. Competency-based management can be defined as the ‘application of a set of competencies to managing human resources so that performance contributes efficiently and effectively to organizational results’ (Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006, p.55). While first proposed in the 1970s as a key differentiator of performance, today, the majority of organisations use some sort of competency-based HR, and competencies are seen as ‘manifestations of talent’ (Boyatzis, 2008, p.8). When following a competency-based approach, the key competencies of an organisation need to be identified as a foundational step (Ross, 2013). Next, an assessment of employees based on these competencies can be applied to identify the above-average performers (Berger, 2004). Sandwith (1993) notes that while a competency profile can be implemented for every job, multi-skilled managers who fit into a number of positions are more appreciated. A competency profile or model can be used as a supportive tool for many HR processes such as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisals, coaching and counselling, reward systems, career development, succession planning, and change management (Chung-Herrera, Enz & Lankau, 2003).

The Oxford English Dictionary (2017a) defines competence as ‘the ability to do something successfully or efficiently.’ Tas (1988, p.41) defines job competencies as ‘those activities and skills essential to perform the duties of a specific position.’ Le Deist and Winterton (2005) argue that no universal definition of the term exists, and that the application significantly depends on local context. Traditionally, the USA has followed a behavioural approach, emphasising personal characteristics that allow superior performance and motivation (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005). These characteristics include

motives, traits, attitudes, and values as well as cognitive skills (Spencer & Spencer, 2008). By comparison, the UK has followed a functional approach, meaning there is a greater focus on vocational qualifications such as cognitive competence, skills, and know-how. France and Germany use a multi-dimensional approach which reflects a combination of both the behavioural and functional approach (Jooss & Burbach, 2016b; Le Deist & Winterton, 2005).

Academics, consulting firms, and practitioners have developed lists of competencies to identify pivotal talent (Baum, 1990; Boyatzis, 1982, 2008; Katz, 1974; Kay & Russette, 2000; Mayo & Thomas-Haysbert, 2005; Sandwith, 1993). An overview of frequently cited generic competency models is provided in chronological order in Table 2.5 followed by a discussion of hospitality competencies in the next section.

**Table 2.5: Overview of Generic Competency Models**

Author(s)	Clusters
Thorndike (1920)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mechanical intelligence</li> <li>• Abstract intelligence</li> <li>• Social intelligence</li> </ul>
Katz (1974)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical skills</li> <li>• Human skills</li> <li>• Conceptual skills</li> </ul>
Sandwith (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptual and creative competency</li> <li>• Leadership competency</li> <li>• Interpersonal competency</li> <li>• Administrative competency</li> <li>• Technical competency</li> </ul>
Le Deist and Winterton (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive competence (i.e. knowledge)</li> <li>• Functional competence (i.e. skills)</li> <li>• Social competence (i.e. attitudes and behaviours)</li> <li>• Meta-competence (i.e. facilitating learning)</li> </ul>
Boyatzis (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional intelligence</li> <li>• Social intelligence</li> <li>• Cognitive intelligence</li> </ul>

Source: Author



### 2.3.1.2 Hospitality Competencies

The identification of competencies pertaining to the hospitality industry has been researched since the 1920s, however there have been few key studies conducted since the 1980s (see, e.g. Buergermeister, 1983; Tas, 1988). Buergermeister (1983) deems customer satisfaction, training ability, profit realisation, and leadership (i.e. motivation and communication) as vital competencies for junior hospitality managers. Tas (1988) identifies eight key competencies for management trainees: problem-solving, ethical conduct, communication skills, professional appearance, building relationships, teamwork, leadership, and motivation skills.

The hospitality industry requires a range of transferable skills as well as sector-specific skills (Alhelalat, 2015; Finegold, Wagner & Mason, 2000). Hospitality employees also need a combination of hard and soft skills (Jooss & Burbach, 2016b; Weber, Crawford, Lee & Dennison, 2013). According to Weber *et al.* (2013), hard skills can be defined as competencies such as numeracy, literacy, fluency in a language, and specific technical abilities. Soft skills, on the other hand, are related to interpersonal abilities such as leadership, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving (Goleman, 2004; Heery & Noon, 2008).

Leadership seems to be the most relevant trait for management positions in the industry (Kay & Russette, 2000; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). Collings *et al.* (2009a) agree that global leaders must have a diverse set of competencies, such as cross-cultural skills, traits, and values along with global business and organising expertise, cognitive orientation, and foresight. Raybould and Wilkins (2005) and Reilly (2018) also emphasise the importance of professional appearance, interpersonal skills, and customer interaction. Mayo and Thomas-Haysbert (2005) find that revenue management is seen as the most critical competency followed by communication skills, team management, and strategic

planning. An alternative approach was chosen by Quinn (2013), who distinguishes between resource and interpersonal skills. In this approach, time management and efficient use of HR were rated the most important resource skills, while serving customers and participation as a team member were rated highest for the interpersonal dimension (Quinn, 2013). While technical skills can be trained, personality and attitude are arguably difficult to modify (Davidson & Wang, 2011). Soft skills are therefore crucial for any business, but particularly for the people-centric hospitality industry (Jooss & Burbach, 2016b; Quinn, 2013; Tas, 1988).

Depending on the position and department, the relevance of some competencies may have a higher precedence. For example, human skills are important when supervising a large team (Kay & Russette, 2000). Administrative accuracy is vital for financial reports or budgets. Interpersonal relations and presentation skills are crucial in the sales department (Kay & Russette, 2000). To create memorable customer service and experience, frontline employees need to demonstrate ‘hospitality intelligence’, otherwise summarised as a set of characteristics including emotional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal intelligence (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013, p.833). Similarly, Ramdhony and D'Annunzio-Green (2018, p.14) refer to ‘hospitableness’ as a key component within the hospitality industry. Table 2.6 presents hotel competency models in chronological order.

**Table 2.6: Overview of Competency Models for the Hotel Sector**

Author(s)	Focus	Construct	Clusters
Chung-Herrera <i>et al.</i> (2003)	Future hospitality leaders	8 clusters 28 dimensions 99 competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-management</li> <li>• Strategic positioning</li> <li>• Implementation</li> <li>• Critical thinking</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Interpersonal skills</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Industry knowledge</li> </ul>
Suh, West, and Shin (2012)	Future managers	6 clusters 25 competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospitality skills</li> <li>• Interpersonal skills</li> <li>• Supervisory skills</li> <li>• Food and beverage (F&amp;B) skills</li> <li>• Leadership skills</li> <li>• Communication skills</li> </ul>
Bharwani and Jauhari (2013)	Frontline employees	2 clusters 3 dimensions 22 competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical competence</li> <li>• Hospitality intelligence</li> </ul>
Wang (2013)	F&B employees	4 clusters 14 competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career development</li> <li>• Career adjustment and control</li> <li>• Workplace attitude</li> <li>• Communication and networking</li> </ul>
Bharwani and Jauhari (2017)	General managers (GMs)	4 clusters 43 competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive competence</li> <li>• Functional competence</li> <li>• Social competence</li> <li>• Meta-competence</li> </ul>

Source: Author

A full list of all clusters, dimensions, and competencies of each model presented in Table 2.6 is provided in Appendix C, Table C.1 – C.5. The models draw on a range of cognitive, functional, and social competencies. At a lower level in the organisation, technical skills are critical (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; Wang, 2013). In order to advance careers and to be considered a future leader or GM, emotional intelligence and social skills are paramount (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2017). In addition, industry and business

expertise is a beneficial component (Chung-Herrera *et al.*, 2003). The most common methods to identify the aforementioned criteria are presented in the next section.

### **2.3.2 Identification Tools**

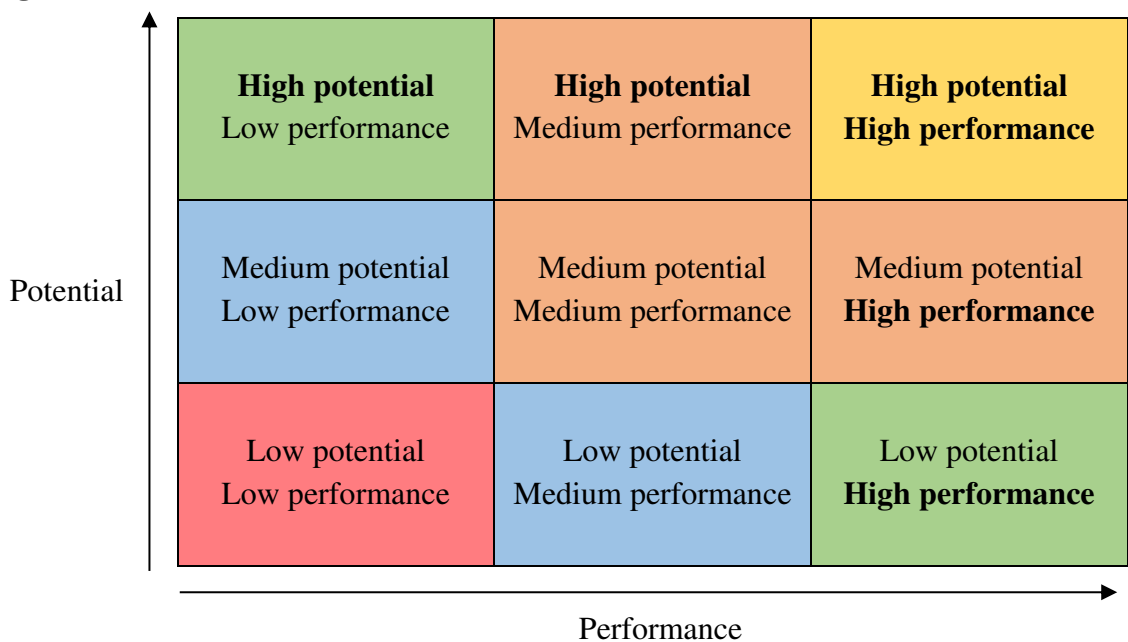
A variety of tools are applied across organisations for the identification of internal and external talent. Tools that aim to predict the success of external talent are, for example, curricula vitae, interviews, references, testimonials, work sample tests, role plays, simulations, multi-source assessments, and psychometric testing (e.g. personality tests, cognitive ability tests, integrity tests, and situational judgement tests) (Church & Rotolo, 2013; Corstjens, Lievens & Krumm, 2017; O'Leary, Forsman & Isaacson, 2017; Salgado, 2017).

Internal talent identification, on the other hand, includes experience-based online search and choice (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2010) accompanied by performance appraisals (Cascio, 2012). In addition, cognition-based offline search and choice, which includes interviews and talent reviews, is applied (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017; Mäkelä *et al.*, 2010). While performance appraisals are a formal evaluation of an employee's performance (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013; Pichler, 2012), talent reviews are calibration meetings among senior managers about people in the organisation to identify pivotal talent, discuss successors, evaluate risks of leaving, and establish development plans (Ammon & Falvey, 2016; Schuler, 2015). In the following section, a nine-box grid and TPs are discussed as two popular concepts to identify talent.

### 2.3.2.1 Nine-Box Grid

Research shows that many organisations use the traditional nine-box grid as part of their talent identification process (Alziari, 2017; Schuler, 2015). The nine-box grid encompasses the two axes of performance and potential, both of which have three levels: low, medium, and high (Iles, 2013; Schuler *et al.*, 2011). A classic example is presented in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1: Classic Nine-Box Grid**



Source: Amended from Lucy (2016)

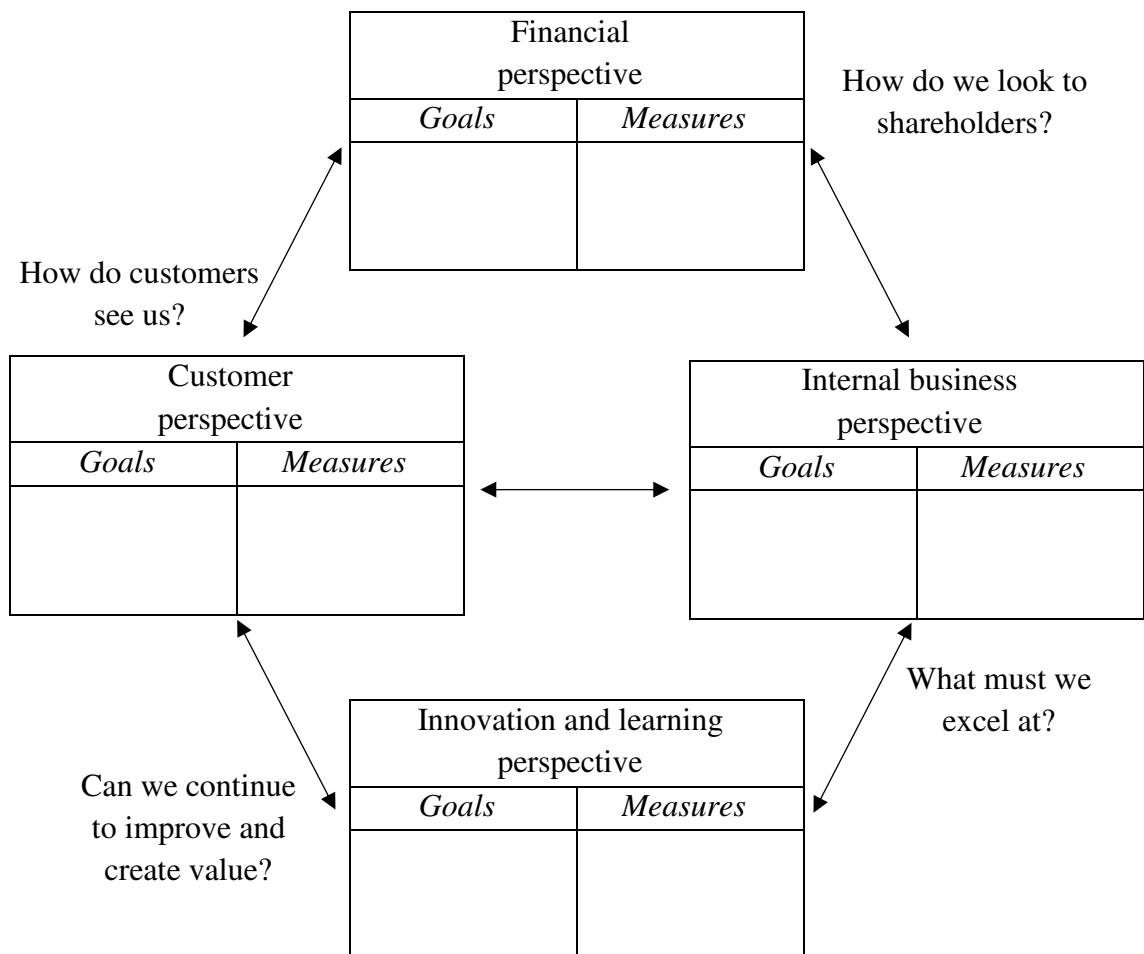
Managers discuss and assess the performance and potential of employees either as part of a formal performance management process (Claus & Briscoe, 2009), or during talent review meetings (Ammon & Falvey, 2016). Once a rating is determined, it is plotted in the nine-box grid (Brook, 2014; Lucy, 2016).

Highest performance usually refers to ‘exceptionally high quality and/or an exceptionally large quantity of output’ (O’Boyle & Kroska, 2017, p.43). In order to assess performance, many companies measure some or all factors of the balanced scorecard by Kaplan and Norton (1992, 1993, 2007). Figure 2.2 presents the balanced scorecard and

demonstrates the links between the various performance measures. The balanced scorecard uses a variety of key performance indicators (KPIs), such as financial metrics (e.g. cash flow, sales growth, and return on equity), customer metrics (e.g. customer satisfaction), internal business metrics (e.g. productivity, quality, efficiency, and competency profile), and innovation and learning metrics (e.g. new developments and improvements) (Kaplan & Norton, 1992).

Finally, it is important to note that organisations ought to measure ‘*in situ* performance’, which considers the contextual effects that may impact the performance result (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008, p.148), and the evaluation must be completed regularly as within-person variability in performance cannot be disregarded (Minbashian, 2017).

**Figure 2.2: The Balanced Scorecard**



Source: Amended from Kaplan and Norton (1992)

While organisations have established some performance metrics, empirical research seems to indicate that organisations struggle to pinpoint potential (Dries & Pepermans, 2012; Silzer & Boreman, 2017). As a result, firms rely significantly on their performance data to draw conclusions on current and future potential (Dries & Pepermans, 2007; Pepermans, Vloeberghs & Perkisas, 2003). This seems inherently flawed, as high and low performance do not necessarily correspond to high and low potential respectively, and thus, the validity of this assessment of potential must be questioned (Dries & Pepermans, 2012). Potential can be defined as ‘the promise or possibility of an individual becoming something more than what he is currently’ (Silzer & Church, 2009a, p.214). Thus, the concept of potential necessitates a broader future perspective as opposed to a narrow short-term, performance-based perspective (Silzer & Boreman, 2017; Silzer & Church, 2009b). Similarly, Finkelstein, Costanza, and Goodwin (2018, p.4) define potential as ‘the probable upper bound trajectory of what an individual may achieve during their career.’ Individuals with high potential may not yet possess what is needed but there are indicators that they will develop these components in the future (MacRae & Furnham, 2014).

Reviewing the literature, the four emerging clusters appear to be analytical skills, learning agility, drive, and emergent leadership (Dries & Pepermans, 2012). The first cluster – analytical skills – comprises four factors: intellectual curiosity, strategic insight, decision-making, and problem-solving. This has also been referred to as, *inter alia*, assertiveness, imaginativeness (Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994) and business knowledge (Hezlett, Ronnkvist, Holt & Hazucha, 1997; Spreitzer, McCall & Mahoney, 1997). The second cluster – learning agility – contains the factors of willingness to learn, emotional intelligence, and adaptability. This has been extensively discussed, in particular, by Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) who draw from educational psychology and the

existence of learning potential, and subsequently contend that potential involves learning new skills through on-the-job experiences. Likewise, Sternberg, Wagner, Williams, and Horvath (1995) purport that experiential learning has a more significant impact on future potential than intelligence. The third cluster – drive – includes results orientation, perseverance, and dedication. It has often been linked with opportunities for advancement (Spreitzer *et al.*, 1997) as well as motivation and commitment to work (Silzer & Church, 2009a). The fourth cluster – emergent leadership – comprises of motivation to lead, self-promotion, and stakeholder sensitivity. Factors pertaining to emergent leadership have been the key focus of Hezlett *et al.*'s (1997) model of potential, who distinguish between thought, results, people, and self-leadership. Table 2.7 presents an overview of academic models which attempt to delineate the concept of potential.



**Table 2.7: Academic Models for the Identification of Potential**

Author(s)	Clusters
Hogan <i>et al.</i> (1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surgency</li> <li>• Emotional intelligence</li> <li>• Conscientiousness</li> <li>• Agreeableness</li> <li>• Intellectance</li> </ul>
Hezlett <i>et al.</i> (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thought leadership</li> <li>• Results leadership</li> <li>• People leadership</li> <li>• Self-leadership</li> </ul>
Spreitzer <i>et al.</i> (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End-state competencies</li> <li>• Learning-oriented competencies</li> </ul>
Lombardo and Eichinger (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People agility</li> <li>• Results agility</li> <li>• Mental agility</li> <li>• Change agility</li> </ul>
Silzer and Church (2009a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive ability</li> <li>• Personality</li> <li>• Learning</li> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Performance</li> <li>• Knowledge and values</li> </ul>
Dries and Pepermans (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analytical skills</li> <li>• Learning agility</li> <li>• Drive</li> <li>• Emergent leadership</li> </ul>

Source: Jooss, Burbach, and McDonnell (in review)

In addition to the nine-box grid and the evaluation of performance and potential, organisations implement TPs to manage their talent which are further explained in the following section.

### 2.3.2.2 Talent Pools

TPs have been described mostly as a pool of employees with either high potential or high performance (Collings, 2014a; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Mäkelä *et al.*, 2010). In addition, McDonnell *et al.* (2011) emphasise the future role of these employees within key strategic positions. Tansley and Tietze (2013) define a TP as a collective of employees with specific characteristics set by the company. Sparrow (2007, p.856) asserts that TPs allow recruitment to be ‘ahead of the curve’ rather than demand-led recruitment. It enhances the proactive identification of talent with the potential to fill key positions (Collings, 2014a; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). According to McDonnell *et al.* (2011), organisations with a more formal and structured approach to TM are more likely to have a TP. Hartmann, Feisel, and Schober (2010) contend that larger companies appear to have more structured approaches towards the establishment of TPs.

A diversity of TPs as a result of employee segmentation is acknowledged (McDonnell *et al.*, 2011; Tansley & Tietze, 2013). The established TPs can be based on several factors such as performance and potential, job family, role size, risk profile, compensation level, or depth of experience (Day & O'Connor, 2017). People who are placed within one TP can have various abilities (Beheshtifar & Nekoie-Moghadam, 2011; Jooss, Burbach & Ruël, 2016, 2017b) and various TPs can exist within one organisation, for example, ‘rising stars’, ‘emerging leaders’, ‘executives’, or ‘local talent’, depending on the stage in the talent pipeline (Björkman *et al.*, 2013).

Firms may decide to communicate to their employees whether they are considered talent or pivotal talent (Björkman *et al.*, 2017; Meyers, De Boeck & Dries, 2017). According to Björkman *et al.* (2013), a transparent process which includes the communication of an employee’s status is a clear signal to the workforce that they are of value to the company which in return results in higher commitment to the organisation.

Perceived talent identification is positively linked to perceived organisational support (King, 2016). Björkman *et al.* (2013) argue that inclusion into a TP will make employees feel valued and more motivated because the employer demonstrates their commitment by investing time and resources. Moreover, Khoreva and Vaiman (2015) find that employees who perceive they have been identified as talent are more willing and more likely to actually participate in leadership development. On the other hand, Swailes and Blackburn (2016) assert that it is also crucial to analyse the reaction of the employees who were not considered as part of a TP. There is a particular threat that those employees may feel depressed or consider the decision as unfair (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013; Swailes & Blackburn, 2016).

In order to identify and manage the various types of talent more efficiently, technology can be implemented. The role of technology as identification support is explained in the following section.

### **2.3.3 Technology as Identification Support**

In the hospitality industry, information technology is widely applied as part of daily operations (Davidson, McPhail & Barry, 2011; Lashley & Rowson, 2005; Law, Buhalis & Cobanoglu, 2014). In recent years, the HR function has changed significantly with major innovations and active use of information technology (Lin, 2011; Parry, 2011). The hospitality industry traditionally focused on low-tech methods for TM (Dickson & Nusair, 2010). However, engaging in technology does eventually reduce the administrative tasks carried out by people, allowing HR staff to spend more time on strategic TM (DiPietro & Wang, 2010). Currently, both the industry and academics lack an understanding of the role of technology in TM, and as such, the identification and

retention of pivotal talent remains difficult (D'Annunzio-Green, 2008; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Wiblen, 2016).

In order to improve their level of innovation in HR, many organisations introduced HRIS as part of a broader organisational system, commonly referred to as 'enterprise resource planning' (Dery, Hall, Wailes & Wiblen, 2013; Dickson & Nusair, 2010). According to Lederer (1984), HRIS have been implemented since the 1960s. This was a major innovation step, since all HR processes include information that needs to be systematically processed (Macky, 2015). HRIS were generally implemented for the purpose of automating activities with the major benefit being access to information (Ngai & Wat, 2006), while only a few firms used it for strategic purposes (Ball, 2001; Burbach & Dundon, 2005, 2009). However, those HRIS are nowadays outdated and no longer sufficient to co-operate with the digital environment, and sometimes not even compatible (Olsen, Pollak, Dutta, Gabu & Edwards, 2012). Therefore, Shermon (2015) suggests a contemporary cloud-enabled platform which is built around the concept of simplification. Spitzer (2014) agrees that many organisations lack the systems needed to support a digital TM process. In addition, acceptance of information technology systems and willingness to innovate remain key challenges for organisations (Burbach & Royle, 2014; Davis, 1989; Williams, Rana & Dwivedi, 2015).

Nevertheless, electronic HRM (e-HRM) which describes the use of information technology applications and web-based channels for HR has been introduced in some organisations (Lin, 2011; Parry, 2011). According to Goldstein (2014), the next development stage is an extensive use of the fast-evolving digital technologies. While talent has adapted and actively uses digital technologies, organisations are lagging behind in the application (Deloitte, 2010; Spitzer, 2014). Digital natives have different expectations to most of the workforce and expect complete transparency and 24/7 access

to information (Goldstein, 2014). Employees connect through social media, via mobile devices, and through gamification (Fetzer, McNamara & Geimer, 2017; Stanton, 2015).

According to Beygelman (2014), valuable information in regards to TM can be gathered from the digital footprint of employees. An example of this would be the flight risk, that is, how likely an employee may leave a firm. Organisations should establish a flexible information technology architecture and support mobile and social media integration (Spitzer, Vernet, Soderstrom & Nambiar, 2013). An even further, future-oriented stage of development is smart-HRM which focuses on complete compatibility of all devices, big data analytics, the Internet of Things, and digital wearables (Jooss & Burbach, 2017a; Strohmeier, Piazza, Majstorovic & Schreiner, 2016).

Few firms have best practices for the digitalisation of TM (Spitzer, 2014). In the hospitality industry, Marriott International, for example, uses a gamification-based strategy to attract talent. In 2011, they developed a game called My Marriott Hotel in which gamers manage a virtual hotel (Marriott International, 2011). Starwood Hotels and Resorts, on the other hand, developed a pilot e-mentoring programme in 2006 (Simmonds & Zammit Lupi, 2010).

Owing to current technologies and availability of data, HR metrics and analytics receive increased attention by both scholars and practitioners. These are highly relevant to TM as they allow data mining to identify key talent (Fink & Sturman, 2017). The following sections therefore focus on the emerging concepts of HR metrics and analytics.

### **2.3.3.1 Human Resource Metrics**

HR metrics can be defined as ‘the application of a methodology and integrated process for improving the quality of people-related decisions for the purpose of improving individual and/or organisational performance’ (Bassi, 2011, p.16).

HR metrics were extensively discussed for the first time in the 1980s (Gabčanová, 2012). While the first step was to create definitions of basic metrics for compensation, staffing, and retention, HR metrics are nowadays also used for TM purposes in some firms (Bassi, 2011). Nevertheless, only a few authors (see, e.g. Douthitt & Mondore, 2013; Lawler, Levenson & Boudreau, 2004) have analysed HR metrics either from a purely theoretical perspective or by researching the use of HR metrics within firms.

Metrics elevate the status of HR within the firm as they are perceived as a tool to carry out evidence-based management (Murphy & Zandvakili, 2000). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2012) agrees that the use of HR metrics contributes to the long-term performance of a company. In addition, HR metrics help to demonstrate the value of the HR function (Crail, 2013). The availability of competitor data would allow for benchmarking, and give a better understanding and analysis of the data (Olsen *et al.*, 2012).

As a first attempt to systematically identify HR metrics, Beatty, Huselid, and Schneier (2003) developed the HR scorecard, which draws on the balanced scorecard originally developed by Kaplan and Norton in 1992 (Kaplan & Norton, 1993), and represents a frequently used innovative model. While the balanced scorecard comprises the four elements of finance, processes, customers, and employees (Kaplan & Norton, 1993, 2007), the HR scorecard includes competencies, deliverables, systems, and practices (Beatty *et al.*, 2003).

Fink and Sturman (2017) distinguish between efficiency, effectiveness, and impact metrics. Efficiency metrics focus on speed and ratios of resources to outcome, effectiveness metrics evaluate to what extent desired outcomes are achieved, and impact metrics measure HR practices against business outcomes (Fink & Sturman, 2017). Jacobsen (2013) states that HR metrics have been employed in various TM related areas,

such as recruitment (e.g. job interviews to job offer ratio, yield ratio, referral rates, and quality of hire), retention (e.g. retention rate of critical employees, high/low performer ratio, and resignation rates by department), compensation (e.g. appraisal rating to salary ratio and recognition reach), culture and diversity (e.g. strength of company values, employee happiness, and average workforce age), and productivity (e.g. HR to staff ratio).

For the purpose of talent identification, metrics are mostly used as part of a TMS which allows for employees to be ranked and categorised based on metrics (Wiblen *et al.*, 2012). Metrics further ought to predict and assess current and future levels of competencies, and therefore, support the identification of talent (Gayeski, 2015). Having identified core HR metrics and competencies, the next section focuses on the interpretation and analysis of them – further described as HR analytics.

### **2.3.3.2 Human Resource Analytics**

High performing companies tend to have a specific function within their HR department responsible for HR analytics (Falletta, 2013). Generally, these areas include only a few staff members; recent research shows that 62 per cent of companies have five or less people working in that function, and 92 per cent of companies have 12 or less people. In addition, a close co-operation with the information technology and finance departments is necessary (Bassi, 2011).

Research by Falletta (2013) shows that HR analytics are widely viewed by organisations as a tool to provide input to the HR strategy and facilitate its implementation (50%), while some companies argue that HR analytics are only involved in the implementation of the strategy (30%). Very few companies state that analytics play a leading role (14%) or no role at all (6%).

DiBernardino (2011) contends that there are numerous ways to implement the use of HR analytics and research. An overview of common HR analytics in practice (rated on a five-point scale, five being most appropriate) is provided in Table 2.8.

**Table 2.8: Human Resource Analytics in Practice**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Tool</b>	<b>Mean</b>
1	Organisational surveys	4.15
2	Employee/talent profiling	3.64
3	HR metrics	3.63
4	Partnerships or external research centres	3.60
5	HR scorecards and dashboards	3.57
6	Workforce forecasting	3.55
7	Ad hoc HRIS data mining and analysis	3.50
8	HR benchmarking	3.27
9	Training and HR programme evaluation	3.27
10	Labour market and TPs	3.23

Source: *Amended from Falletta (2013)*

A note of caution is provided by Davenport, Harris, and Shapiro (2010) who assert that using inappropriate analytics or over relying on a small number of metrics may not lead to pivotal talent identification. Overall, there is little knowledge on the extent to which MNCs use technology, metrics, and analytics for the identification of talent (Stone & Dulebohn, 2013; Wiblen *et al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, this current study concludes that a scientific approach to decision-making in TM (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005b) through the use of data analytics presents a logical framework to enhance talent decisions, identify key talent, and allocate staff to TPs (Fink & Sturman, 2017; Wiblen, 2016; Wiblen, Grant & Dery, 2010).

This section illustrated that choosing the right technology, metrics, and analytics is a vital step alongside the selection of appropriate criteria and tools. In addition, organisations must review the available staffing options to identify pivotal talent.



### **2.3.4 Staffing Options**

Hospitality corporations offer a variety of types of employment, such as full- or part-time positions, internships, and trainee programmes (Deery & Jago, 2015). Expatriates and graduates are detailed in the following sections, both of which appear to be key target groups as part of a broader GTM strategy (Collings, 2014a; Hayman & Lorman, 2004).

#### **2.3.4.1 Expatriates as Global Leaders**

Expatriation is seen as a central theme in the GTM literature (Welch & Björkman, 2015). According to Collings (2014a), there are three main staffing options in the GTM context: parent-country nationals, host-country nationals, and inpatriates. All three are variations of expatriation. Traditionally, expatriation was by far the most used type of international assignment (Festing *et al.*, 2013a; Meyskens, Von Glinow, Werther & Clarke, 2009). Expatriates are people who work in a country different to their citizenship, for example, parent-country or third-country nationals working in a foreign subsidiary (Collings, 2014a). The scenario of inpatriates occurs when host-country nationals are transferred from a subsidiary to the HQ of a parent-country (Harvey, Speier & Novicevic, 2000; Harzing, Pudelko & Reiche, 2016; Reiche, 2011). Furthermore, a new group of expatriates called ‘foreign executives in local organisations’ is becoming significantly more important in countries such as China and India, where Western leaders have been hired for executive positions at the HQ in Asia (Arp, 2012; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015). Finally, self-initiated expatriates are a critical component of global talent, and therefore, organisations must ensure an integration of this population in their GTM strategy (Vaiman, Haslberger & Vance, 2015).

According to Farndale, Pai, Scullion, and Sparrow (2014), there are two concepts that explain the use of expatriates: contingency and psychological contract. Following the contingency approach (Fiedler, 1967, 1972; Hill, 1969), the aim of an organisation is to grow their business and move key talent to facilitate expansion. This is referred to as an ‘outside-in’ method (Farndale *et al.*, 2014). The best fit and thus best performance can be achieved when a consistency between the talent, job demand and the working environment can be achieved (Boyatzis, 1982). On the other hand, the psychological contract approach is an ‘inside-out’ method: an internally driven GTM strategy is ensuring that the needs of the talent are met, which also results in an engaged and committed workforce (Farndale *et al.*, 2014; Khoreva, Vaiman & Van Zalk, 2017).

Nowadays, various alternative international assignments are applied (Collings, 2014a). According to Collings (2014a), the most common types are permanent transfers, international business transfers, commuter, rotational assignments, and short- or long-term assignments. Short-term assignments are transfers for less than one year, for example, task forces. Long-term assignments are generally between three and five years (Collings, 2014a).

There are several benefits of international assignments (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Tarique & Schuler, 2018). First, individual benefits include personal and career development, the ability to follow family members, and more challenging work (Farndale *et al.*, 2014). Second, Collings (2014a) adds that expatriation is an opportunity for companies to identify and develop pivotal talent as they get exposed to a broad knowledge exchange and culturally intense experiences. When dealing with the challenges of living in a foreign country, talent grows personally and develops cross-cultural understanding. Third, a highly valuable international network can be established (Collings, 2014a). Further organisational benefits are to control and coordinate, address lack of skills,

maintain trust, serve as representatives, and respond to talent demands (Farndale *et al.*, 2014). While the current study acknowledges those benefits, it is important to also discuss the challenges faced by organisations (Cerdin & Brewster, 2014; Collings, Scullion & Morley, 2007).

First, the management of the relationship between expatriates and locals is a key challenge (Creelman, 2014). Second, the cost of an assignment and the decision as to whether programmes should be standardised (i.e. globalised) or flexible (i.e. local) must be discussed (Farndale *et al.*, 2014). Third, organisations must manage challenges faced by individual expatriates such as family difficulties, cultural adjustment, or a loss of networks in their home country (Farndale *et al.*, 2014). The latter is described as the ‘out-of-sight, out-of-mind’ phenomenon (Shen & Hall, 2009). Fourth, a knowing-doing gap exists in many organisations (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). In sum, talent identification and staffing decisions must be addressed within the context of the organisational strategy, processes, and culture (D’Annunzio-Green, 2018a).

In addition to expatriates, graduates are a key group of talent within a firm (Hayman & Lorman, 2004). The role of graduates as future leaders in organisations is further examined in the next section.

#### **2.3.4.2 Graduates as Future Leaders**

Due to the rapid expansion of the hospitality industry, there is also a significant growth in undergraduate and graduate hospitality programmes (Han & Yoon, 2015; Johanson *et al.*, 2010). As the HR field has evolved significantly over the past ten years (Tracey, 2014), graduate recruitment has also become more widely discussed in the literature (Connor & Shaw, 2008; McDermott, Mangan & O’Connor, 2006). In the hospitality industry, graduate leadership programmes (GLPs) have increased in

popularity as a means of identifying and developing graduates as future leaders within an organisation (Scott, 2014; Scott & Revis, 2008).

A GLP is a formal fast-track development programme that aims to develop recent graduates to reach a management position within a short period of time (Hayman & Lorman, 2004; King, 2016). It is vital that management trainees have the opportunity to effectively develop their skills (Baum, 1990). The selection process appears to be tougher than for ordinary positions (Hayman & Lorman, 2004; Jooss & Burbach, 2016a). Not only must potential candidates have the necessary education and experience, but they must also have a wide range of employability skills such as willingness to learn, commitment, reliability, motivation, and effective communication (Scott, 2014; Weber *et al.*, 2013). Due to increased competition and globalisation, the development of future leaders is core to the success of hospitality organisations (Ashton & Morton, 2005; Littlejohn & Watson, 2004).

The number of graduates entering the workforce with a GLP has fluctuated over the years (Connor & Shaw, 2008; Jooss & Burbach, 2016a). Hayman and Lorman (2004) argue that graduates who participated in a GLP experience a significantly faster career progression. In addition, successful graduates can transfer knowledge both intentionally and informally to peers, and positively influence workgroup behaviours and practices (Goldman, Wesner, Plack, Manikoth & Haywood, 2014). On the contrary, McDermott *et al.* (2006) state that GLPs do not necessarily lead to a higher job satisfaction among graduates. On a different note, GLPs give graduates security not only because they have been classified as talent but also because there is a clear objective, that is, to retain the graduate within the firm (McDermott *et al.*, 2006). This sense of security is particularly appreciated by the Generation Y and Millennial graduates entering the organisation (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008).

GLPs are a substantial investment in the first instance and there are considerable challenges during the implementation of a GLP, in particular for a MNC (Connor & Shaw, 2008). Raybould and Wilkins (2005) argue that in order to be challenged, it is important that firms balance operational and strategic tasks for the graduates, and that they offer a competitive salary and other incentives. In addition, engagement and mentoring are two key elements for graduates during their first year at the new organisation (Scott, 2014; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008). Furthermore, it is important to clearly communicate the objectives and the benefits of the GLP to the graduates (McDermott *et al.*, 2006). In order to adapt the learning style and expectations to the new graduates, Shaw and Fairhurst (2008) suggest to utilise the latest technology and provide constant feedback.

MNCs generally tend to develop different strategies for different subsidiaries (Meyer & Estrin, 2014). According to Connor and Shaw (2008), tensions between HQ and subsidiaries in relation to graduate schemes often occur. While a global strategy for future leaders or graduate identification is developed at the HQ of a firm, subsidiary practices may vary considerably (Meyer & Estrin, 2014). The aspect of global implementation of the talent identification process is further explored in the next section.

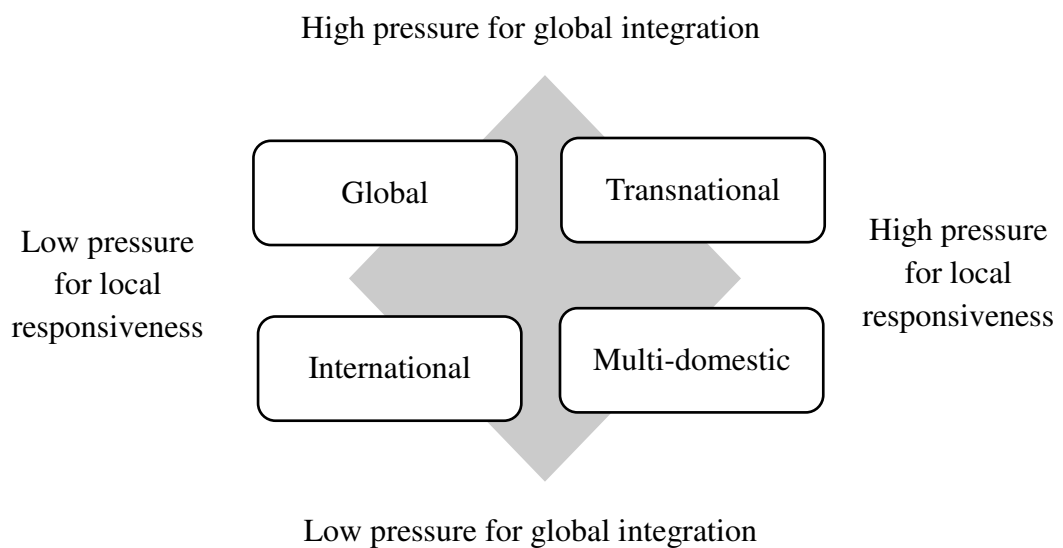
## **2.4 Global Implementation**

As the fourth RQ investigates the implementation of the talent identification process across regions and business units (i.e. hotels), this section presents international operating strategies of MNCs.

In the 1950s, internationalisation started in the hospitality industry with American organisations offering ‘elite tourism’ in Europe, followed by mass tourism and packages in the 1960s (Brida, Driha, Ramón-Rodríguez & Scuderi, 2015). Due to globalisation,

there has been a significant rise of MNCs (Yaprak, Shichun & Cavusgil, 2011). While most senior managers (86%) acknowledge the significant importance of effective international management, only few (7%) of them believe that their concept is actually effective enough (Smith & Victorson, 2012). Four dominant types of MNCs have been discussed in the literature (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Kostova, Nell & Hoenen, 2017) and are summarised in Figure 2.3.

**Figure 2.3: Four Types of Multinational Corporations**



Source: *Amended from* Bartlett and Goshal (1989)

Similarly, Perlmutter (1969) identifies three different internationalisation strategies of MNCs: ethnocentric/global, geocentric/transnational, and polycentric/multi-domestic. A global strategy implies an exportive HRM system and a centralisation approach; a transnational strategy signifies an integrative HRM system and a coordination approach; and a multi-domestic strategy refers to an adaptive HRM system with a decentralisation approach (Farndale & Pauuwe, 2005).

The HR department has experienced a notable change towards globalisation within the last two decades (Alagaraja, 2013). Affordability, knowledge transfer, and a philosophy of centralisation have been identified as the key enablers for global HRM (Brewster *et al.*, 2005). Strategic decisions made by a MNC always have an effect on GTM within all operating countries (Welch & Björkman, 2015). Global services and information exchange, as well as global business processes must also be implemented across all operating countries (Gakovic & Yardley, 2007).

According to King (2015), four key actors in the implementation of GTM can be identified: (1) leadership and top management, (2) supervisors and management, (3) TP of employees, and (4) HR managers and talent managers. Once the sole responsibility of HR, multiple actors are now involved in the GTM process (Deloitte, 2017). The support of top management appears to be critical for the success of a GTM implementation (McDermott, Conway, Rousseau & Flood, 2013; Stahl *et al.*, 2012). In addition, line managers and supervisors are increasingly involved and responsible for the implementation of TM practices (Cappelli, 2013; Gooderham, Morley, Parry & Stavrou, 2015; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). D'Annunzio-Green and Teare (2018) contend that line managers provide a key communication link in TM, ensure well-being of employees, spot talent on a daily basis, and are the closest leadership contact for most employees. Moreover, Yamao, Cieri, and Hutchings (2009) argue that an effective HR department is crucial for successful workforce management. HR and talent managers facilitate TM practices at a business unit level and are responsible for the measurement and reporting of the talent outcome (King, 2015). Finally, employees are the central actor of the talent identification process and their talent experience may considerably impact its success (Collings, 2014b). Table 2.9 presents an overview of the primary scope and key activities of the four principal actors.

**Table 2.9: Actors of the Global Talent System**

Actor	Primary Scope	Key Activities
Leadership and top management	Talent strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define and communicate the strategy</li> <li>• Represent the firm's offer: 'talent deal'</li> <li>• Establish a talent climate</li> <li>• Express the value of talent to the business</li> </ul>
Supervisors and managers	Talent practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage talent on a daily basis</li> <li>• Deliver the 'talent deal'</li> <li>• Manage and support expatriate talent</li> </ul>
TP of employees	Talent experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceive talent identification</li> <li>• Develop expectations</li> <li>• Respond with attitudes and behaviours</li> <li>• Make career investment and decisions</li> <li>• Contribute sustained high performance</li> </ul>
HR and talent managers	Talent systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate the interactivity of key actors</li> <li>• Monitor talent policies and practices</li> <li>• Provide coaching and guidance</li> <li>• Measure and report talent outcomes</li> </ul>

Source: *Amended from King (2015)*

According to Smith and Victorson (2012), the main challenge remains the decision as to whether to follow a global or local implementation strategy. Colman and Grøgaard (2013) state that there is a significant difference in the control and coordination between companies that follow a global strategy and firms that follow a local strategy.

Brewster *et al.* (2005) argue that the right balance between global integration and local differentiation is a major success factor. This depends heavily on the local market embeddedness and the international embeddedness (Yaprak *et al.*, 2011). The next sections discuss both global and local approaches.



### 2.4.1 Global Approach

According to Brewster *et al.* (2005), a global strategy is vital to develop a globalised HR function. Many MNCs acquire other organisations in order to expand internationally (Patel, 2012; Vidalon & Thomas, 2015). An acquisition allows companies to have immediate access to resources as well as distribution and networking systems (Colman & Grøgaard, 2013). The success of MNCs using a global strategy has often been explained by adapting a resource-based view (RBV) (Huselid & Becker, 2011; Jiang, Takeuchi & Lepak, 2013; Sparrow & Makram, 2015).

The RBV is an economic perspective which implies that a firm's main competitive advantage is the use of their internal resources and capabilities (Kaufman, 2015). This view has been a central research focus since the 1980s (see, e.g. Barney, 1991; Hart, 1995; Peteraf, 1993; Wernerfelt, 1984, 1995). Organisations have the ability and strength to access and acquire resources and use them to create value (Yaprak *et al.*, 2011). Resources that are developed over time and that are inimitable by other firms create a sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). While initial research focused solely on the acquisition of resources, the development, combination, and effective deployment of resources is also critical (Colbert, 2004). From a HR perspective, the knowledge, skills, and behaviour of employees are key capabilities that are developed over time (Colbert, 2004). MNCs that follow a GTM approach achieve value through rigorous integration of all activities and resources across all units (Colman & Grøgaard, 2013). Local companies can then continue to use their existing competitive advantage and complement them with local resources. In most cases there is a top-down and centralised decision-making system in place (Vestring, Rouse & Rovit, 2004).

The corporate culture of a company significantly impacts the GTM strategies, structures, and processes. According to Yaprak *et al.* (2011), a strong corporate culture has a major influence on the TM process even within a foreign country, whereas a weak corporate culture is not dominating in a foreign country where other norms and values might be more accepted. Vestring *et al.* (2004) add that this comprehensive integration creates one single organisation with common standards. Nevertheless, local sensitivity is key to do successful business abroad (Brewster *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, the next session details the local approach to do business.

#### **2.4.2 Local Approach**

As a MNC, it is vital to manage the balance between global integration and local autonomy (Brewster, Mayrhofer & Smale, 2016). Colman and Grøgaard (2013) describe two elements that must be followed after an acquisition in a foreign country: task and sociocultural integration. HQ and subsidiaries must be combined, which means an integration of processes and structures as well as the consideration of institutional, legal, and cultural aspects (Colman & Grøgaard, 2013; Vaiman & Brewster, 2015). In addition, human dynamics must be considered and employees' dedication is vital (Saunders, Altinay & Riordan, 2009). Patel (2012) adds that differences in size, scope, resources, and personalities cannot be underestimated in the GTM process.

According to the study findings of Kaasa, Vadi, and Varblane (2014), Hofstede's (1983, 1984) cultural dimensions (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, and masculinity/femininity) are a clear indicator of differences between not only countries, but even regions. Therefore, effective cross-cultural management, which considers the context operating in, is crucial in GTM (Collings, Scullion & Vaiman, 2011; Holden & Vaiman, 2013; Kaasa *et al.*, 2014).

A local approach follows a selective integration, where global integration is a slower process and only some areas might be considered (Vestring *et al.*, 2004). When providing local subsidiaries with an integration vacuum, which allows them to take initiative and develop the best practices specific for their needs, the company might identify an unexpected bottom-up integration (Colman & Grøgaard, 2013). According to Coulson-Thomas (2013), those bottom-up initiatives are vital for a successful implementation of an overall strategy. Many companies are integrating inadequately or too fast and suggest at the same time a more selective approach (Patel, 2012; Vestring *et al.*, 2004).

Although the topic has been discussed for more than a decade now, limited knowledge is available as to how MNCs implement their GTM strategy, and more specifically their talent identification process and what kind of practices they use (Collings *et al.*, 2009a). Iles *et al.* (2010b) argue that institutionalism impacts TM practices. Drawing from institutional theory, all organisations must closely consider their operating environment when deciding on a strategy for international business (Caballero & Soto-Oñate, 2015; Delmestri, 2008; Farndale, Brewster & Poutsma, 2008; Phillips & Tracey, 2009).

Iles *et al.* (2010b) identify three key drivers for TM practices: coercive, normative, and mimetic. Mimetic is following the theory of 'TM as a management fashion' and includes companies that imitate others because they believe it could be a positive trend or simply as a result of uncertainty. A normative approach towards TM is followed if a company focuses on adapting to the professional norms that emerge as a result of studies conducted by institutions such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. A coercive approach includes the alignment and consideration of institutional forces and HQ decisions that are followed (Iles *et al.*, 2010b).

In this study, the focus is placed on the coercive approach as it investigates the implementation and alignment of the talent identification process across regions and business units (i.e. hotels).

## **2.5 Summary**

This chapter provided a review of the existing literature on GTM with a focus on the talent identification process in MNCs. This review presented the concepts of talent, TM, and GTM. Subsequently, both inclusive and exclusive approaches to TM were discussed and the phases of a GTM construct were outlined. The following sections focused on the identification process including criteria, tools, technology as identification support, and staffing options. The studies presented thus far provide evidence that contemporary organisations view talent as a key priority on their agenda. The review concluded with a discussion of the implementation of a GTM construct. The next chapter provides the theoretical foundation of the study.

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**CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

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### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides the theoretical foundation of the study. Several authors have identified a lack of theoretical development and integrational systems in the TM field (see, e.g. Collings *et al.*, 2009b; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). As shown in Table 1.1, considerable research gaps exist and there is a clear knowledge gap of how companies, and in particular MNCs identify talent (Jooss & Burbach, 2016c; McDonnell *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, more research is needed to identify and analyse the processes and systems in place to successfully determine and develop the pivotal talent of an organisation (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2010). This chapter begins with an overview of theoretical perspectives on talent.

### **3.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Talent**

Currently, no single theory or research design that captures the scope of the entire TM construct exists (Collings, Mellahi & Cascio, 2017; Dries, Cotton, Bagdadli & Oliveira, 2014). Therefore, TM has often been described as a phenomenon (Hambrick, 2007). The current study follows an informed eclecticism approach (Barker, Nancarrow & Spackman, 2001), that is, the researcher draws from several theories as opposed to choosing a single theory. Drawing from HC and SC theories, this study focuses on the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs. As the study further investigates how relationships and networks impact the identification of pivotal talent, AT and SNT were deemed most appropriate to examine these dynamics. Although the key focus of this study is on these four theories, it must be acknowledged that several other micro and macro factors could also be investigated (see, e.g. Khilji *et al.*, 2015; Vaiman, Sparrow, Schuler & Collings, 2018) and other theories such as contingency theory, institutional theory, learning theory, and social exchange theory may have relevance in a TM context (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017).

Table 3.1 displays existing theoretical perspectives on talent including the stream of the literature, the operationalisation of talent, the main criteria, and the principal contribution. Depending on the applied literature stream and the operationalisation of talent, the main criterion to identify talent varies (Dries, 2013b). This current study applies a HRM perspective, and hence, operationalises talent as capital (i.e. HC and SC).

**Table 3.1: Theoretical Perspectives on Talent**

<b>Literature Stream</b>	<b>Operationalisation of Talent</b>	<b>Main Criterion</b>	<b>Principal Contribution</b>
HRM	Talent as capital	Contribution to the organisation	Links individual talent to organisational context
Industrial and organisational psychology	Talent as individual difference	Predictive validity	Long research tradition in personnel selection, promotion systems, and performance appraisal
Educational psychology	Talent as giftedness	Domain-specific excellence	Strong (causal) theoretical frameworks
Vocational psychology	Talent as identity	Self-concept	Recognition of the dynamic nature of talent as a construct over the course of a person's life
Positive psychology	Talent as strength	Self-actualisation	Treats positive outliers as research subjects of choice, rather than measurement error
Social psychology	Talent as the perception of talent	Rater accuracy	Brings in an element of social perception – i.e. talent that is not acknowledged does not 'exist'

Source: Dries (2013b)

The importance of capital for the economic growth of an organisation has been discussed for many centuries (Burton-Jones & Spender, 2011). While economists often refer to traditional forms of capital (i.e. financial and physical capital), intellectual capital is an additional and intangible form of capital that helps to explain economic contribution (Blair, 2011). The measurement of intellectual capital is difficult due to its heterogeneous

and dynamic nature (Burton-Jones & Spender, 2011). While Dean and Kretschmer (2007) contend that intellectual capital is only metaphorically ‘capital’, Lewin (2011) asserts that the concept of capital is valid for all resources. Youndt, Subramaniam, and Snell (2004, p.337) define intellectual capital as ‘the sum of all knowledge an organization is able to leverage in the process of conducting business to gain competitive advantage.’ However, the terminology used to describe intellectual capital varies among scholars (i.e. human, social, political, cultural, structural, and organisational capital) (Farndale *et al.*, 2010; Harvey & Novicevic, 2004; Ng, Tan & Ang, 2011).

Burton-Jones and Spender (2011) highlight HC and SC as the two dominant forms of intellectual capital in contemporary organisations. HC refers to ‘the value-generating potential of employee knowledge, skills and abilities’ (Collings, 2014a, p.256). Similarly, the World Economic Forum (2017, p.3) defines HC as ‘the knowledge and skills that people possess that enable them to create value in the global economic system.’ SC can be defined as ‘access to and use of resources embedded in social networks’ (Lin, 1999, p.30).

While cultural capital is a central theme in sociology (see, e.g. Bourdieu, 1986), there is marginal reference made in the literature on capital in organisations. Similarly, the term political capital was introduced as an enhancement of HC and SC. Political capital, however, has received limited attention in the organisational studies literature. In an organisational context, political capital is defined as ‘the ability to use power or authority and gain the support of constituents in a socially effective way’, while cultural capital is described as ‘acceptance and social inclusiveness due to having tacit knowledge of how the organization operates’ (Harvey & Novicevic, 2004, p.1177). Structural capital or organisational capital derives from investment in systems, processes, and brands (Burton-Jones & Spender, 2011) as well as ‘institutionalized knowledge and codified



experience stored in databases, routines, patents, manuals, structures, and the like' (Youndt *et al.*, 2004, p.338). Talent has been viewed as capital by various authors (see, e.g. Cappelli, 2008a; Morley, Scullion, Collings & Schuler, 2015). Corresponding with Burton-Jones and Spender (2011), Collings (2014a) asserts that talent decisions should be based on HC and SC – the approach that is also applied in this study. Ultimately, all the other aforementioned forms of capital (i.e. structural, political, and cultural) are developed when HC and SC is in place. The concept of HC is reviewed in the next section.

### **3.2.1 Human Capital Theory**

Both HC and SC are interrelated and interdependent key forms of capital (Boxall, 2011; Nahapiet, 2011). However, HC is viewed as the 'linchpin' for other forms of intellectual capital including SC (Burton-Jones & Spender, 2011, p.3). An individual's HC can be defined as 'the knowledge, skills, and abilities embodied in a person' (Dokko & Jiang, 2017, p.117).

While an in-depth investigation into the historical roots of HC is not part of this thesis (see, e.g. Kiker, 1966; Sweetland, 1996), this study will provide a brief summary of the concept. The earliest links between capital and people were established by economists such as William Petty (1691), Adam Smith (1776), William Farr (1853), and Ernst Engel (1883) (Burton-Jones & Spender, 2011; Kiker, 1966). In 1890, Marshall (1961, p.491) stated that 'the most valuable of all capital is that invested in human beings.'

According to Teixeira (2014), interest in HC research increased in the 1940s and early 1950s (see, e.g. Fisher, 1946; Friedman, 1953; Harrod, 1943; Knight, 1941; Spengler, 1950). HC theory was formally established in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Blaug, 1976; Burton-Jones & Spender, 2011). Research conducted by Abramowitz

(1956), Mincer (1958), Schultz (1961), Denison (1962), and Becker (1964) focuses on HC in relation to economic growth, the labour market, and education.

HC has been viewed as an essential component of an organisation's business strategy for many decades (Wright, Coff & Moliterno, 2014). The theoretical foundation of HC theory has been laid by the RBV (see also section 2.4.1) (Allen & Wright, 2007). While initial strategic management frameworks focused on external factors (e.g. Porter's (1980) competitive strategies), research moved to a more internal focus in the 1980s with the RBV – a concept which evaluates an organisation's internal resources (Allen & Wright, 2007). Barney (1991) argues that an organisation's unique and valuable resources contribute to sustained competitive advantage. Several researchers have used the RBV in a TM context (see, e.g. Bhatnagar, 2007; Höglund, 2012; Lewis & Heckman, 2006).

While widely accepted and often used as a guiding paradigm in strategic HRM research (Wright, Dunford & Snell, 2001), the RBV has been criticised for the lack of definition around the boundaries and context (Priem & Butler, 2001). Priem and Butler (2001, p.32) assert that 'relative to other strategy theories [...] little effort to establish the appropriate context for the RBV has been apparent.' HC theory, on the other hand, takes contextual arguments into consideration referring most frequently to contingencies or the idea of 'fit' when determining its value (Allen & Wright, 2007).

Empirical research shows that HC contributes to an organisation's performance (Crook, Todd, Combs, Woehr & Ketchen, 2011). Hence, HC is a valuable asset (Nahapiet, 2011). Becker (1964, 1975, 1993) distinguishes between general and specific HC. General HC refers to knowledge, skills, and abilities that are valuable for all organisations, whereas specific HC is only useful in a particular context or firm (Dokko & Jiang, 2017). In addition, Krogh and Wallin (2011) differentiate between firm-, industry-, and individual-specific HC. Research illustrates that firm-specific HC has a

considerably higher impact on performance than individual-specific HC (Groysberg, 2010; Huckman & Pisano, 2006).

While the core dimensions of HC are often described as knowledge, skills, abilities, education, and experience, little is known about the individual characteristics of the construct (Collings, 2014a; Wright *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, Ployhart and Moliterno (2011) and Ployhart and Cragun (2017) suggest that additional factors such as personality, motivation, and values should be included. In an organisational context, HC is operationalised as talent (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Therefore, identifying and managing talent is essential to maximise HC. Having reviewed the concept of HC, the next section details the key components of the SC theory.

### **3.2.2 Social Capital Theory**

The intangible concept of SC evolved in the 1980s and 1990s (Burton-Jones & Spender, 2011). Portes (1998) views Bourdieu's (1986) analysis as the first systematic approach towards SC. Bourdieu (1986, p.248) defines SC as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.' Based on earlier research by Adler and Kwon (2002) and Leana and Pil (2006), a more recent definition is provided by Dokko and Jiang (2017, p.120) who view SC as 'the resources available to individuals as a result of their positions in the social structure or the quantity and quality of their social relations.' Hence, SC may be used as an access mode to information and assets (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2012). Moreover, SC can be viewed as a support network that individuals can consult (Lin, 1999). As many organisations restructure themselves from inflexible, hierarchical systems towards a more team-based configuration and social entities, the importance of SC will likely increase (Hollenbeck

& Jamieson, 2015; Kehoe, Rosikiewicz & Tzabbar, 2017). Finally, SC can also be seen as a tool to control resources and influence decisions (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2012). For instance, SC may benefit an employee in respect to talent identification and career development (Gubbins & Garavan, 2016).

Nahapiet and Goshal (1998) further differentiate between three forms of SC: structural (i.e. number and strength of connections), relational (i.e. aspect of trust), and cognitive (i.e. shared goals, norms, and values). Inkpen and Tsang (2005) review two streams of analysis. Social network theorists (Burt, 1997; Useem & Karabel, 1986) view SC as an individual asset, while other scholars (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993) regard SC as a public good. Individual SC ‘originating from an individual’s network of relationships’ must be distinguished from organisational SC ‘derived from an organization’s network of relationships’ (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005, p.151). For this current study, SC is viewed as an individual attribute. Whether individual SC is an essential attribute to be identified as talent or whether it impacts talent decisions in the case study organisations is examined as part of this study.

In addition to HC and SC, the study draws from AT (see, e.g. Bendickson *et al.*, 2016; Eisenhardt, 1989; Mitnick, 1973, 1982; Ross, 1973) and SNT (see, e.g. Borgatti & Halgin, 2011; Kadushin, 2012; Milgram, 1967; Whelan, 2011) as it also explores the extent to which agency relationships and social networks impact the established talent identification process. Although SC is closely linked to the aspects of relationships and social networks, these concepts must be clearly distinguished as SC can be conveyed only if the established ties are beneficial (Kwon & Adler, 2014). The concept of AT is further explained in the next section.

### 3.2.3 Agency Theory

AT is a framework for analysing the processes and outcomes of an agent-principal relationship (Schneider, 2008). The principal delegates work to the agent (Podrug, Filipovic & Milic, 2010). While studies have traditionally included shareholder and chief executive officer (CEO) relationships, several authors suggest expanding the theory to other groups, for example, managers at a corporate level as principals and employees at a business unit level as agencies (Bendickson *et al.*, 2016; McGuire, 1988). The focus of AT is the potential problem between the principal and the agent who have different interests (Bendickson *et al.*, 2016; Eisenhardt, 1989). Other issues may be ‘moral hazards’ – a lack of effort on the part of the agent, or ‘adverse selection’ – the misinterpretation of ability by the agent (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.59). In addition, the principal and the agent have different access to information and a different propensity towards risk (Podrug *et al.*, 2010).

Although agency concepts have always been applied in organisations (Mitnick, 1982), AT was initially proposed in the 1970s by two independently working authors – Ross (1973) and Mitnick (1973). While Ross (1973) examined the economic perspective with a focus on the compensation issue, Mitnick (1973) argued that society establishes institutions that form around agents to address the issues that may arise (Mitnick, 2013). Therefore, Mitnick (1973, 1975) was the first author to explicitly apply AT to social institutions.

AT is founded on seven major assumptions: self-interest, goal conflict, bounded rationality, information asymmetry, pre-eminence of efficiency, risk aversion, and information as a commodity (Eisenhardt, 1989). Furthermore, Mitnick (1982) argues that agency relationships can be characterised by the level of consent between the principal and the agent, the source of specification of the agent’s acts (either the agent or the

principal), and the level of discretion of the agent. In addition, Mitnick (1982, p.445) distinguishes between two broad types of relationships: ‘formal occupational’ and ‘consistent structural agency.’ While ‘formal occupational’ implies the existence of a recognised position or profession, ‘consistent structural agency’ is an informally recognised relationship where the agent acts in a consistent manner (Mitnick, 1982).

AT has further developed along two streams: a positivist view and a principal-agent view (Jensen, 1983). Positivist researchers have almost entirely focused on the relationship between owners and managers, with a particular focus on governance mechanisms (Bendickson *et al.*, 2016; Eisenhardt, 1989). Principal-agent researchers open the theory to other groups, such as employers and employees, and the focus is on identifying the optimal contract and measurable outcomes (Eisenhardt, 1989). In today’s global economy, particularly in the context of a MNC, there are increased complexities to a number of agency relationships (Bendickson *et al.*, 2016).

Few authors have linked AT with TM (see, e.g. Björkman, Barner-Rasmussen & Li, 2004; Contractor & Kundu, 1998; Du, Deloof & Jorissen, 2015; Fayezi, O’Loughlin & Zutshi, 2012; Mellahi & Collings, 2010; Zhao & Du, 2011). Mellahi and Collings (2010) argue that the dissemination of information during the TM process plays a crucial role in overcoming agency conflicts. Moreover, Cappelli and Keller (2014) state that subunits may not want to share their talent and therefore do not contribute to global succession planning. In addition, bounded rationality and information asymmetries may lead to marginalisation of some talent groups, and thus can have a considerable impact on the talent identification process (Cappelli & Keller, 2014). Finally, Gong (2003) applies AT to identify cultural distance between HQ and subsidiaries, which may affect the likelihood to be identified as pivotal talent. The current study focuses on relationships between employees (agents) and managers (principals) at various business units as well

as the relationships between the business units, regional offices, and HQ. It explores the potential impact of these relationships on the talent identification process. To conclude, AT allows a realistic and empirically observable perspective on the issue of co-operative effort (Eisenhardt, 1989).

In combination with AT, the current study applies SNT as recommended by several authors (see, e.g. Bendickson *et al.*, 2016; Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). As contemporary organisations display an increased internal collaboration through flexible and global teams as well as strong engagement with external stakeholders, a network perspective is required (Mockaitis *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the next section reviews the key components of SNT.

#### **3.2.4 Social Network Theory**

Bendickson *et al.* (2016) assert that a contemporary approach towards AT is needed, which does not only look at relationships, but also includes the consideration of networks of individuals, work units, and organisations (Brass *et al.*, 2004; Whelan, 2011). SNT describes social structures and the interaction between various actors in the network (Breiger, 2004; Milgram, 1967), as well as the flow of resources between people, groups, and organisations (Scott, 2000).

According to Knoke (2004), five categories classify the relational contents that are analysed when applying SNT: resource exchanges, information transmissions, power relations, boundary penetrations (i.e. alliances with common goals), and sentimental attachments (i.e. personal relationships). It examines social relationships using nodes and ties (Granovetter, 1973). Nodes are individual actors within a network and ties are relationships they have with each other (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011; Granovetter, 1983). Ties can be strong or weak and of different nature, for example, ties based on

communication, formality, affection, work flow, or proximity (Katz, Lazer, Arrow & Contractor, 2004).

According to Kadushin (2012), three different networks can be distinguished: ego-centric, socio-centric, and open networks. Ego-centric networks are connected with one single node; socio-centric networks are closed networks by default; open-system networks have no clearly determined boundaries (Kadushin, 2012). For this research, the author considers the case study organisations as open networks. Brass *et al.* (2004) distinguish between inter-personal, inter-unit, and inter-organisational networks. Wellman (1988) identifies five core principles of the network approach: people's behaviour is best predicted by examining their relationships rather than attributes or characteristics; the focus of the analysis should always be the relationships rather than the units; samples are defined relationally rather than categorically; understanding of a social system requires an analysis of multiple relationships rather than simple dyadic ties; and building blocks of organisations are overlapping networks rather than discrete groups.

SNT emphasises the use of 'networks as cognitive structures' (collaborative thinking among members of a network and thus increase of the HC) and 'networks as opportunity structures' (facilitate and constrain actions, such as the talent identification process) (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005, p.419). Networks as cognitive structures are utilised by organisations in coalition building, task forces, and committees (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005). Networks as opportunity structures focus on the relational aspects of phenomena (Hollenbeck & Jamieson, 2015). For the purpose of this study, focus is placed on the relational component of networks and its impact on the talent identification process. Studies provide evidence that pivotal talent differs from other employees by intentionally building and maintaining personal networks (Cross & Thomas, 2009; Ibarra & Hunter, 2007; Kelley & Caplan, 1993). As employees with robust networks are able to influence



stakeholders (Kehoe *et al.*, 2017; Lermusiaux, 2006), Whelan (2010) contends that ties and relationships between individuals might be more important than individual HC attributes of talent. Kilduff and Tsai (2003) further argue that actors in central positions in a network benefit from a greater flow of information than actors in a peripheral position. Employees can increase their visibility by being in a central position or by seeking exposure close to central locations (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2010). Social and geographical distance from business units to HQ has been identified as a key factor that hinders the identification of pivotal talent (Mellahi & Collings, 2010; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009).

This network approach explains not only the value for the talent, but also the value that it may create for others and the impact of loss (Ulrich, 2016). Networks are employed for TM practices, such as international transfers and referrals which can provide several advantages, for instance, an improved reach to talent that the organisation would like to attract and the ability to engage with passive talent (Brass *et al.*, 2004; Lermusiaux, 2006). Consequently, the efficiency of the talent identification process can be maximised.

While networks allow cognitive and opportunity structures in TM, it has also been noted that the social network approach must be considered in conjunction with other methods for the talent identification process (Whelan, 2011). Due to the limited research of social networks in HR (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003), a better predictor of talent – a network approach focusing on relationships or assessments that focus on individual knowledge, skills, and achievements – has yet to be established (Whelan, 2011).

The next section presents the conceptual framework of the study which is based on an extensive literature review (Chapter Two) and the theories chosen as part of an informed eclecticism approach (Chapter Three).

### 3.3 Conceptual Framework

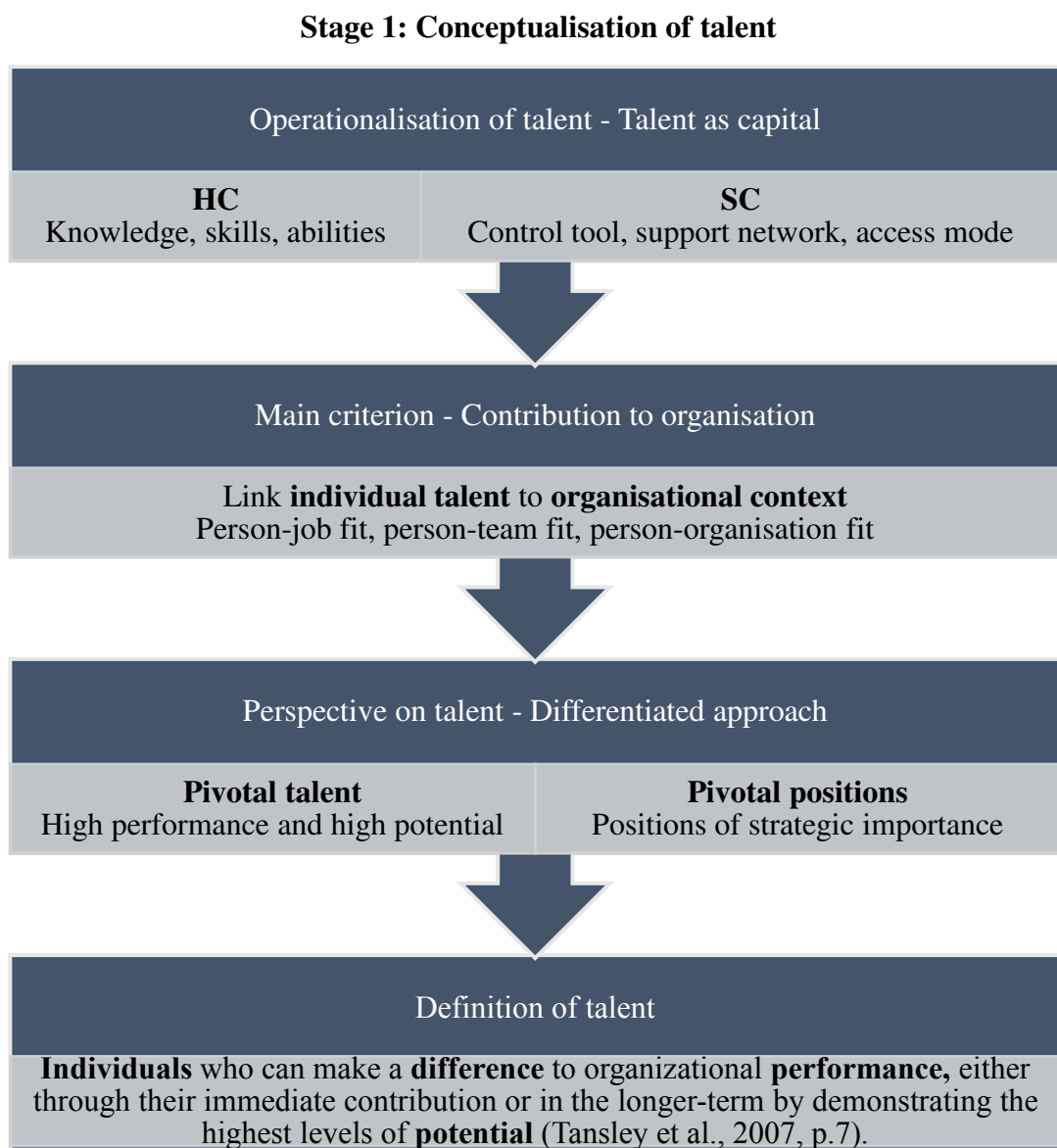
The conceptual framework of the study is presented in Figure 3.1. It consists of two stages: the conceptualisation of talent and the talent identification process. As outlined in the first stage, the current study conceptualises talent as HC (knowledge, skills, and abilities) (Collings, 2014a) and SC (control tool, support network, and access mode) (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2012). The study links individual talent to the organisational context (Dries, 2013b), and therefore, the person-job fit, the person-team fit, and the person-organisation fit are acknowledged in the framework (Anderson *et al.*, 2004). Following a differentiated approach, this study focuses on the identification of pivotal talent and pivotal positions (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Finally, the adopted definition of talent in this current study is outlined.

The second stage presents four phases of the talent identification process: conceptualisation of talent, identification practices, global implementation, and evaluation of the talent identification outcome. The GTM strategic framework proposed by King (2015) illustrates that the conceptualisation of talent is the responsibility of the leadership team in an organisation, while specific practices (e.g. criteria and tools) may be developed at a regional or business unit level by HR and talent managers. These are then implemented by the line managers at each business unit (Francis & Baum, 2018; Stahl *et al.*, 2012). Finally, the evaluation of the talent outcome is a crucial step led by the leadership team in co-operation with the HR and talent managers (King, 2015; Sparrow & Makram, 2015).

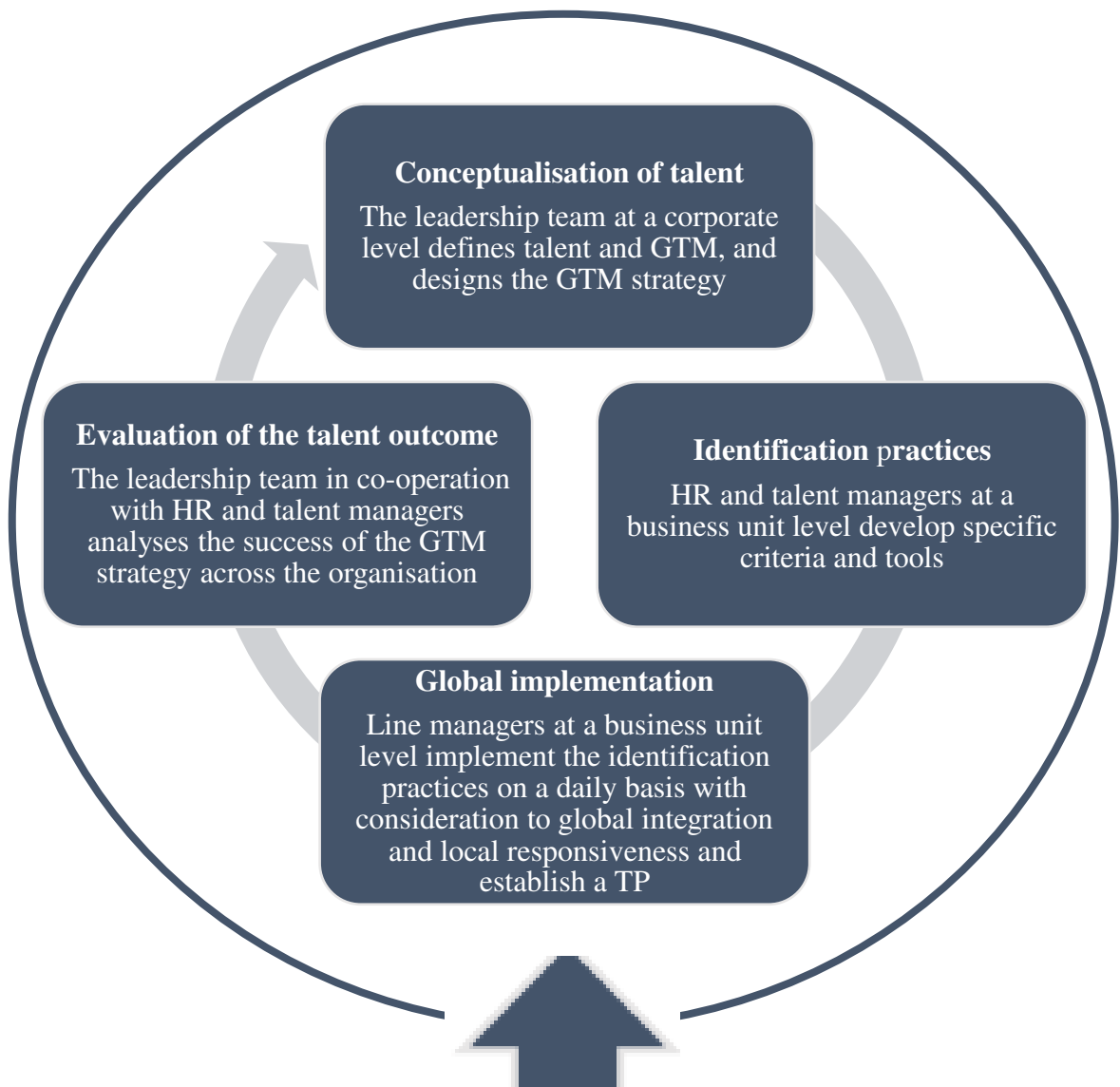
Drawing from AT and SNT, the framework also illustrates the potential impact of both agency relationships and social networks on the TM construct. Having different TM actors in an organisation (i.e. leadership team, HR and talent managers, operations managers, and TP) adds to the complexity of managing talent and may give rise to

challenges such as self-interest, goal conflict, bounded rationality, information asymmetry, pre-eminence of efficiency, risk aversion, and information as a commodity (Eisenhardt, 1989). As little research on these effects exist to date (Whelan, 2011), the framework focuses on the few potential impact factors that have been established in TM studies (see, e.g. Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Gong, 2003; Hollenbeck & Jamieson, 2015; Mellahi & Collings, 2010; Mäkelä *et al.*, 2010).

**Figure 3.1: Conceptual Framework**



## Stage 2: Talent identification process



### Potential impact of relationships and social networks on the talent identification process

- Networks as cognitive structures – collaborative thinking
- Pivotal talent is likely to have stronger networks
- Networks as opportunity structures – facilitate or restrain actions
- Dissemination of information across the organisation
- Self-interest: willingness to share talent across the organisation
- Social, cultural, and geographical distance to HQ
- Visibility in a network

Source: Author

### **3.4 Summary**

This chapter provided the theoretical foundation of the study. The chapter illustrated that talent as capital is the dominant perspective on talent within the HR literature. HC and SC theories were elected to conceptualise talent. In addition, the study draws from AT and SNT to explore the potential impact of relationships and networks on the talent identification process. The framework represented in Figure 3.1 summarised the conceptual approach of the study. More research is required to clarify the concept of TM and the role of HC and SC as well as relationships and networks as part of the talent identification process. The next chapter presents the methodology of the study.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY**

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## **4.1 Introduction**

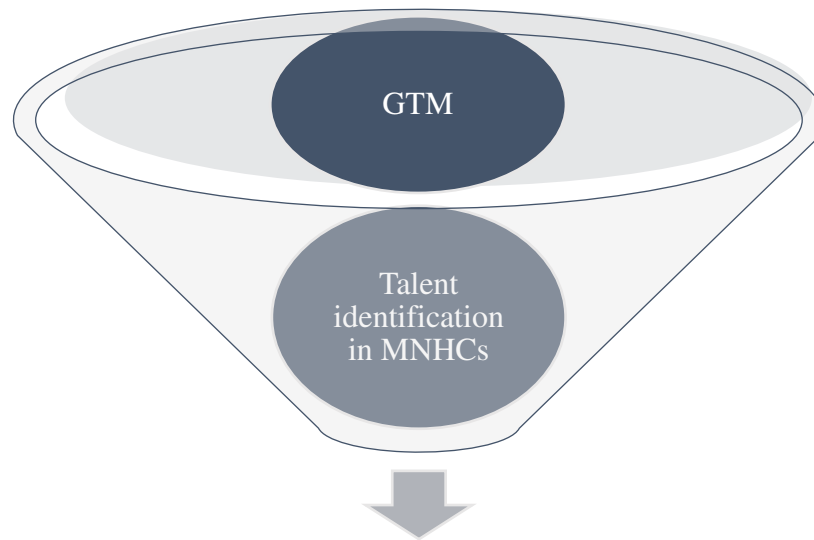
The central purpose of this chapter is to defend the chosen research methodology and to demonstrate how the research was accomplished (Berg & Lune, 2017). This chapter begins with a discussion of the study aim and RQs in the context of the current literature. Following this, the philosophical assumptions and the interpretive framework are explained. Next, the research process, design, and ethical considerations are discussed, followed by an explanation of the data analysis. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the quality of research and limitations.

## **4.2 Research Aim and Questions**

Research in strategic HRM has gained significant momentum in recent years (Harness, 2009). Similarly, research in the hospitality industry has made major progress in the last decades (Rivera & Pizam, 2015). Despite a notable advancement of TM research (Vaiman & Collings, 2013), there is considerable scope for greater clarity, conceptualisation, and theorisation of GTM, as well as a need for more comprehensive research designs (Festing *et al.*, 2013b; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, there is little evidence of how organisations identify talent in practice (Festing *et al.*, 2013b; McDonnell *et al.*, 2011). This study, therefore, aims to explore and understand the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs.

The study encompasses four RQs to address the overarching research aim. The focus is placed on four areas: (1) the conceptualisation of pivotal talent, (2) the formulation of strategies to identify pivotal talent, (3) criteria to identify pivotal talent, and (4) the implementation of the talent identification process across regions and business units (i.e. hotels). Each RQ is presented in detail in the following sections. To conclude this introductory section, the conceptual funnel is presented in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1: Conceptual Funnel**



*Research aim:*

*To explore and understand the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs*

Source: Author

#### **4.2.1 Conceptualisation of Pivotal Talent**

*RQ 1: How do MNHCs conceptualise pivotal talent?*

This RQ focuses on the definition and impact of pivotal talent, and the role of TM in the participating MNHCs. While no universal definition of talent and TM exists, the boundaries of TM need to be refined (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). The first objective is to investigate whether a formal definition of talent within the case study MNHCs exists and to what extent it is communicated across the organisation. This is a critical objective as the literature shows that most definitions are specific to an organisation and/or industry (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013; Tansley *et al.*, 2007). The second objective is to interpret how participants view talent, by comparing global and regional views on the definition and impact of talent. Dries *et al.* (2014) contend that there is very limited data available on how talent is being defined across cultures and how this impacts HR practices in



MNCs. The terms talent and pivotal talent, and other terms such as top talent (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007; Stanton, 2015; Stephens, 2013), key talent (McDonnell *et al.*, 2010; McNulty, De Cieri & Hutchings, 2009), high potentials (Church & Rotolo, 2013; Silzer & Church, 2009a), and pivotal positions or roles (Collings *et al.*, 2009a; Seopa, Wöcke & Leeds, 2015) need to be distinguished. The third objective is to ascertain potential discrepancies in how the construct of TM is viewed across regions by various actors of the TM system (i.e. top management, HR and talent managers, and operational managers) (King, 2015).

#### **4.2.2 Strategies for the Identification of Pivotal Talent**

*RQ 2: What strategies do MNHCs use to identify pivotal talent?*

This RQ aims to identify the formalised strategies and the philosophical approach towards the identification of talent. The first objective is to appraise the overall TM approach of the organisation, that is, the application of an inclusive or exclusive strategy (McDonnell *et al.*, 2011). The strategy may focus on internal development of talent or external talent sourcing (Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Wiblen *et al.*, 2012). The link of the chosen approach to the HR and business strategies (Collings *et al.*, 2009a; Sparrow *et al.*, 2013) is also examined. The second objective is to assess the process of how TM strategies are developed. Depending on the chosen business model of the MNHCs (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989), TM strategies and processes may be a HQ-driven scheme with limited input from individual hotels or a business unit project with individual properties developing their own strategies or a variation of these. The third objective is to examine to what extent, if at all, organisations use different strategies to identify pivotal talent for individual departments or distinct levels within the organisational hierarchy (McDonnell *et al.*, 2015).

### **4.2.3 Criteria for the Identification of Pivotal Talent**

*RQ 3: What criteria do MNHCs apply to identify pivotal talent?*

The study applies a systematic approach (i.e. strategic, integrated, and proactive) to talent identification (Mellahi & Collings, 2010; Wiblen, 2016), and as a result evaluates critically the reliability and validity (Silzer & Church, 2009b) of the criteria applied in the participating MNHCs. This RQ analyses the subjective and objective criteria used to classify pivotal talent. The first objective is to examine the basis of identification and assessment of talent, and the development of a formal criteria framework within organisations. The second objective is to identify tools, methods, and systems that organisations apply to assess criteria and review talent, which may include assessments (Church & Rotolo, 2013) and review meetings (Ammon & Falvey, 2016). The role of technology such as e-HRM, the HRIS, or the TMS (Wiblen *et al.*, 2012) as part of the identification process is examined.

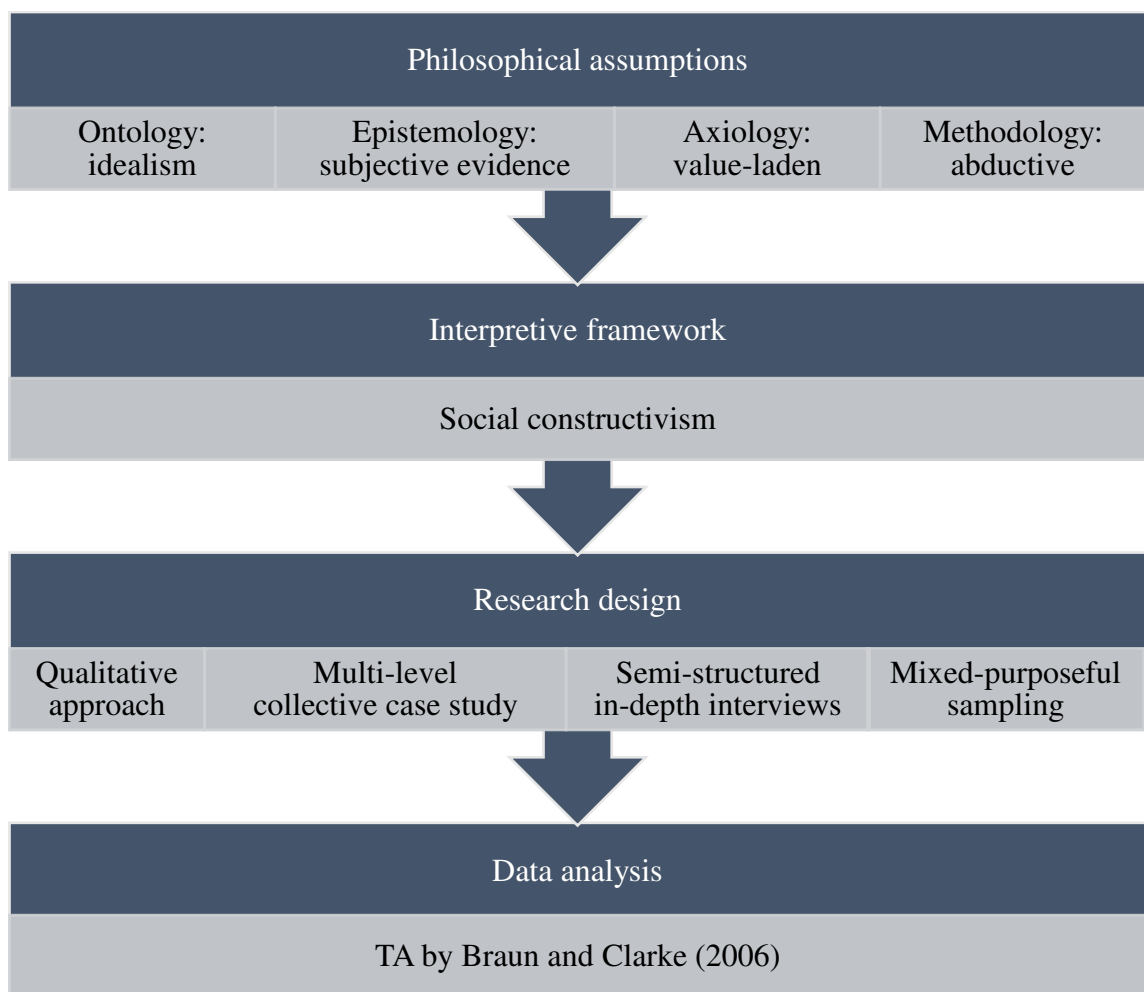
### **4.2.4 Global Implementation of the Talent Identification Process**

*RQ 4: How effective are MNHCs in implementing their talent identification process?*

This RQ focuses on the implementation of the talent identification process across the organisations (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013; Sparrow *et al.*, 2013). The first objective is to examine the degree of alignment of the process across regions and business units. The second objective is to validate the effectiveness of MNHCs in identifying pivotal talent (Collings, 2014b; Sparrow & Makram, 2015; Thunnissen, 2016). The third objective is to evaluate the degree of alignment (Stahl *et al.*, 2012) of the talent identification process to the overall GTM strategy.

Having reviewed the research aim and the four RQs, Figure 4.2 presents the methodological construct of the study encompassing the philosophical assumptions, interpretive framework, research design, and data analysis. For this study, a qualitative research approach with a multi-level collective case study was selected. The following sections examine each of the elements of the construct beginning with the philosophical assumptions of this study.

**Figure 4.2: Methodological Construct**



Source: Author

### 4.3 Philosophical Assumptions

How researchers carry out research depends on a number of factors including their philosophical assumptions (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape, 2014). The four broad philosophical assumptions that can be applied in research (i.e. ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological beliefs), their descriptions, and the chosen approaches for this current study are presented in Table 4.1 and further explained in the next sections.

**Table 4.1: Philosophical Assumptions in Research**

<b>Assumption</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Chosen Approach</b>
Ontological beliefs	The nature of reality	Idealism
Epistemological beliefs	How reality is known	Subjective evidence
Axiological beliefs	The role of values	Value-laden research
Methodological beliefs	Approach to inquiry	Abductive research

Source: *Amended from* Creswell and Poth (2018)

#### 4.3.1 Ontological Beliefs

According to Grix (2002), ontology is the starting point of all research and it impacts further methodological decisions. Ontology describes the researcher's view of the world and the nature of social reality, the units involved and their interaction (Blaikie, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mason, 2018). It discusses whether an independent social reality exists and whether there is a shared social reality or multiple, context-specific realities (Ormston *et al.*, 2014). Two main types of ontological beliefs must be distinguished: idealism (also known as constructionism) and realism (also referred to as objectivism) (Bryman, 2016). The realism perspective is based on the underlying beliefs that an independent reality exists (Blaikie, 2007).

The current study follows the idealism perspective which assumes that no independent reality exists and that reality is created by society (Bryman, 2016). Thus, the external world is simply appearances (Creswell & Poth, 2018). More specifically, this study follows the subtle or contextual idealism (as opposed to radical idealism) (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997; Ormston *et al.*, 2014). In subtle idealism, ‘the social world is made up of representations constructed and shared by people in particular contexts’ (Ormston *et al.*, 2014, p.5). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), this implies that the researcher also reports different views as themes emerge in the findings.

#### **4.3.2 Epistemological Beliefs**

Epistemological beliefs explain the researcher’s view of science and nature of knowledge (Blaikie, 2007; Hathaway, 1995) and discuss how knowledge claims can be justified (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mason, 2018). They answer the question of what forms the basis of knowledge (Ormston *et al.*, 2014). As part of this qualitative study, subjective evidence was obtained from participants and the researcher relied on their perceptions. As the study examined a real-life scenario – the talent identification process in the case study organisations – it was necessary to conduct the study in the field and get first-hand information (Wolcott, 2008). The researcher attempted to minimise the distance between himself and the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1988).

#### **4.3.3 Axiological Beliefs**

Axiological beliefs encompass the role of value in the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Following a social constructivism view, values are honoured and negotiated among individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the researcher acknowledges that the

current study is value-laden, openly discusses values, and includes his interpretations in conjunction with the interpretations of the participants. A balanced representation of views is assured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

#### **4.3.4 Methodological Beliefs**

Methodological beliefs raise questions about the process of research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Blaikie (2007) identifies four main strategies to develop knowledge: inductive (from specific to general statements), deductive (from general to specific statements), retroductive (the use of reason and imagination to create a model), and abductive. This current study applies an abductive strategy which uses social actors in every day conceptualisations to develop social scientific concepts or theories (Ong, 2012). While inductive and deductive strategies are linear approaches, abductive is a much more complex process (Blaikie, 2007).

An abductive research strategy is unique to qualitative inquiry (Ormston *et al.*, 2014). It describes social life in terms of social actors' motives and their understanding of the society (Blaikie, 2007). Abductive research discovers every day concepts and motives using participants' language and meanings (first-order concepts); a technical account is then abducted from the lay accounts using the categories defined by the researcher (second-hand concepts) (Ormston *et al.*, 2014). As TM is a phenomenon which includes several distinct actors in an organisation (i.e. leadership and top management, supervisors and management, TP of employees, and HR and talent managers) (King, 2015), it is vital to examine their understanding of the talent identification process. An abductive research strategy aims to develop a theory or model, which can also be described as a bottom-up approach, rather than to test a theory (Ong, 2012). The current study approaches the research as an 'expert' having relevant knowledge in the form of

concepts, existing theories, and findings from previous studies (Blaikie, 2007, p.11). ‘Research on people’ is conducted by describing a case in which the researched organisations are respondents (Blaikie, 2007, p.12). Having reviewed the philosophical assumptions of this study, the interpretive framework which guides this research is presented in the next section.

#### **4.4 Interpretive Framework**

In qualitative research, the philosophical assumptions described in the previous section are key premises folded into interpretive frameworks (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Interpretive frameworks can be paradigms or theories and theoretical orientations that guide the research practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The current study applies the interpretive framework of social constructivism. Social constructivism was chosen as the interpretive framework as it explains human behaviours in the context of social constructs (Jackson & Sorenson, 2006). Furthermore, it is strongly aligned to the previously outlined philosophical assumptions.

Social constructivism has gained a significant presence in social science (Young & Collin, 2004). In the literature, the terms social constructivism and social constructionism have been used interchangeably (Andrews, 2012). Social constructivism is also often described as interpretivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mertens, 2015). Interpretivists argue that social science researchers aim to understand people through empathy, shared experience, and culture (Hammersley, 2013). It is built on the view that social science is fundamentally different from natural science (Bryman, 2016). According to Hammersley (2013), the key difference to natural science is that people actively interpret and try to make sense of their environment.

While being a related movement to interpretivism, social constructivism emphasises that knowledge is actively ‘constructed’ by society (Ormston *et al.*, 2014). Human beings have evolved the capacity of interpreting and constructing reality (Patton, 2015). Knowledge is constructed by the interactions of individuals within society (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Schwandt, 2003). Social constructivism describes the outcome of people making sense of their encounters with the physical world and other people, and consequently, actors conceptualise and interpret their actions, situations, and experiences (Lodico *et al.*, 2010; Risse, 2007). The focus is on human awareness and consciousness (Jackson & Sorenson, 2006). This is particularly important when making decisions about people in an organisation. Talent identification in a MNC is a complex process which includes several stakeholders across various levels and regions. These stakeholders try to conceptualise talent and design a process of identifying talent based on their knowledge and within their social construct. Having identified the interpretive framework, the next section reviews the research process of the study.

#### **4.5 Research Process**

According to Blumberg, Cooper, and Schindler (2011), the research plan can be divided into three stages: research planning, data gathering, and analysis, interpretation, and reporting. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) determine five phases during the research process: (1) the researcher as a multicultural subject (research traditions, conceptions, and ethics of research), (2) theoretical paradigms and perspectives, (3) research strategies, (4) methods of collection and analysis, and (5) the art, practices, and politics of interpretation and evaluation. The broad stages of this research following the guidelines by Blumberg *et al.* (2011) are outlined in Table 4.2.



**Table 4.2: Broad Stages of the Research Process**

Year	Focus Areas
1	Research planning – secondary research <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1st draft of literature review (Chapter Two), theoretical foundation (Chapter Three), and methodology (Chapter Four)</li><li>• Research proposal to organisations</li></ul>
2	Data gathering – primary research <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with participants</li><li>• Transcription of all interviews</li><li>• Set up of QDAS</li></ul>
3	Analysis, interpretation, and reporting <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analysis using QDAS and creation of findings</li><li>• 2nd draft of literature review (Chapter Two), theoretical foundation (Chapter Three), and methodology (Chapter Four)</li><li>• 1st and 2nd drafts of introduction (Chapter One), findings (Chapter Five), discussion (Chapter Six), and conclusion and recommendations (Chapter Seven)</li><li>• Development of abstract, list of references, and appendices</li><li>• Final version of all chapters</li><li>• Proofreading and layout amendments</li></ul>

Source: Author

As shown in Table 4.2 the current study followed the classic approach of conducting initial secondary research followed by primary research. Secondary research refers to data gathered from an existing source (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Academic databases accessed through the Institute have been used to collect (peer-reviewed) journal articles. The most frequently used databases were Business Source Complete, Emerald Management, Science Direct, and Scopus, as they provided access to the key journals in the field of TM. McDonnell *et al.*'s (2017) systematic literature review identified several key journals in the field of TM. Table 4.3 presents the journals with three or more TM publications. Out of the ten journals included, six focus on HR, three on management, and one on hospitality management (special issue on TM in 2008).

**Table 4.3: Key Journals in the Field of Talent Management**

<b>Journal Name</b>	<b>Articles</b>
The International Journal of Human Resource Management	15
Journal of World Business	9
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	8
Harvard Business Review	6
Human Resource Development International	6
Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources	5
Human Resource Management	4
MIT Sloan Management Review	4
Advances in Developing Human Resources	3
Personnel Review	3

Source: McDonnell *et al.* (2017)

After profound secondary research, primary research was carried out. The research design and analysis of the primary research are explained in the following sections.

## **4.6 Research Design**

A research design provides a framework for collecting data (Bryman, 2016). This section presents the chosen qualitative research – a case study approach to inquiry – as well as the data collection methods and sampling strategies.

### **4.6.1 Qualitative Research**

This research adopts a qualitative research which is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) that applies a set of interpretive activities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research is defined as follows:

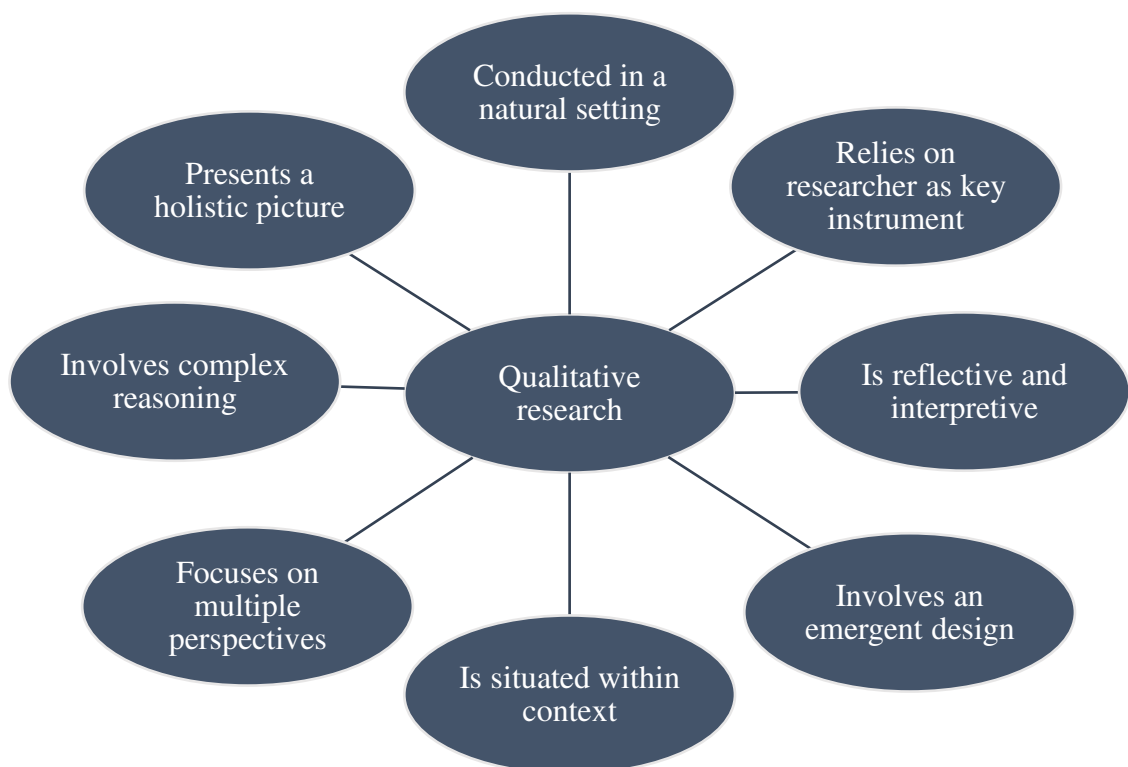
An inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological approach to inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture; analyses words; reports detailed views of participants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.326).

According to Ormston *et al.* (2014), the development of early ideas linked to qualitative research can be attributed to Immanuel Kant who published the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. Kant argued that human interpretations and understanding are essential elements of knowledge (Ormston *et al.*, 2014). This current research takes place in the natural world, focuses on contexts, and is emergent, evolving, and fundamentally interpretive (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In this qualitative study, the aim was to provide an in-depth understanding of the social world (Ormston *et al.*, 2014) which includes the consideration of values and norms (Kiessling & Harvey, 2005). The research was based on the belief that understanding social knowledge is a legitimate scientific process (Lodico *et al.*, 2010).

The chosen approach corresponds with Kiessling and Harvey's (2005) argument that strategic HRM research needs to move away from predominantly quantitative studies. This is necessary to capture the complexity of global phenomena such as TM that encompass diverse cultures, institutions, social structures, and governmental regulations. Qualitative research aims to explore diversity rather than to quantify elements (Kumar, 2014). Although the recent nature of the TM field calls for qualitative research, McDonnell *et al.* (2017) finds that 56 per cent of all empirically-based papers apply some quantitative data. Similarly, Rivera and Pizam (2015) illustrate that the vast majority of articles in the hospitality industry rely on quantitative approaches, while some apply a mixed method approach (Chu, 2014). Concerns were expressed by various scholars (see, e.g. Mayer, 2015; Tucker, 2005; Welbourne, 2012) who assert that quantitative research may not always provide answers and a better understanding of the research problem. On the contrary, the richness and volume of qualitative studies have often been emphasised (Ormston *et al.*, 2014).

The current study examines the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs across various regions and levels. Studying such a complex process in a social context requires a holistic view which a qualitative approach can offer. In sum, Figure 4.3 presents the characteristics of qualitative research which have also been applied in this current study.

**Figure 4.3: Characteristics of Qualitative Research**



Source: *Amended from* Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016)

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), five qualitative approaches to inquiry exist: narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory, ethnographic research, and case study research. A case study approach to inquiry was selected for this research, as the study explores the identification process of pivotal talent in different MNHCs with the purpose of developing an in-depth understanding of the chosen organisations (i.e. cases). The case study approach and the unit of analysis are further explained in the next section.

#### **4.6.2 Case Study Research and Unit of Analysis**

Case study research is often applied as part of a qualitative approach across disciplines (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to Stake (2005, p.444), ‘a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry.’ A basic case study entails a detailed and intensive analysis of a particular case, a term, which is most commonly used when referring to locations, communities, or organisations (Bryman, 2016; Stake, 2005) in a contemporary setting (Yin, 2014). Kumar (2014) argues that a case may extend to an individual, group, episode, or event in a specific setting. The current case is embedded in specific contexts or backgrounds (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Stake, 2005), namely, MNCs in the hospitality industry.

Case study researchers embrace the complexity of human beings and collect data from multiple sources (Lodico *et al.*, 2010). The researcher of this current study relied considerably on subjective evidence, such as descriptions, interpretations, opinions, and feelings of the participants (Stake, 2005). In order to present a more objective view, triangulation was widely applied in this case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This concept is further explained in section 4.10.1.

The case study approach allowed an in-depth understanding of the organisations, the talent identification process, and its interactional dynamics (Kumar, 2014). The case studies were bound in time and place, and a variety of data collection methods were applied (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 2005). They led to conclusions about the overall meaning of talent and the identification process, which can be referred to as ‘general lessons’ (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.98), ‘patterns’ and ‘explanations’ (Yin, 2014, p.45), and ‘assertions’ (Stake, 2005, p.10). For this current study, case study research is defined as follows:

A qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.96).

To explore and understand the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs, the researcher chose a collective case study, which has also been referred to as multiple or comparative case study in the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This approach helped to understand both uniquely individual aspects to the cases as well as their commonalities (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Lodico *et al.*, 2010). A collective case study allowed the researcher to compare the cases and reveal otherwise impossible generalisable conclusions (Liebersson, 2000; May, 2011). This current case study is both of an exploratory (collecting data and searching for patterns) and a descriptive (considering possible theories to frame the research) nature (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Yin, 2014).

Finally, the need to identify the unit of analysis as part of the case study has widely been recognised (Silverman, 2017; Yin, 2014). The unit of analysis can be defined as ‘the level of inquiry on which the study will focus’ (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p.78). For this current study, the unit of analysis has been defined as the organisation with the purpose of elucidating the identification process for pivotal talent. Having identified a collective case study approach, the following section details the data collection methods for each case.

#### **4.6.3 Data Collection Methods**

Qualitative research is characterised by naturalistic and flexible methods of data collection, and usually does not implement a standardised research instrument (Lodico *et al.*, 2010). Initial research ideas are open-ended and the focus is on the participant’s perspectives (Bryman, 2016). As part of this collective case study, two qualitative data

collection methods were applied. Individual interviews were selected as the main data collection method. Additionally, official organisational documents were shared by the HQs of the three participating MNHCs.

Essentially a ‘person-to-person interaction’, interviews are a commonly applied method in qualitative research (Kumar, 2014, p.176). A research interview is a professional conversation between the researcher and the interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The current study conducted individual in-depth interviews to gather rich data (Bryman, 2016) and detailed responses (Lodico *et al.*, 2010). Semi-structured interviews involved several predetermined questions surrounding the research topic (Berg & Lune, 2017). While semi-structured interviews allowed a considerable degree of latitude for the participants (Bell, 2014), they still provided a greater structure than unstructured interviews (May, 2011). However, the interviews were shaped by how the interviewees framed the topic under investigation and what they considered important (Bryman, 2016). Equally, while some questions were planned in a systematic and consistent order (see Appendix G), the researcher asked follow-up questions for clarification and elaboration (Berg & Lune, 2017; Lodico *et al.*, 2010). The current study used interviews to attempt to understand the talent identification process from the participant’s point of view (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Therefore, responses were not simply ‘accurate’ or ‘distorted’, but were interpretations of individuals trying to understand the process (May, 2011, p.159). The interviews conducted provided depth and explored complex beliefs, knowledge, and processes, which is a key advantage over quantitative methods (Lodico *et al.*, 2010). However, the interviews were time-consuming and were a subjective research technique (Bell, 2014). Overall, the interviews were social encounters, and therefore, the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee was a key component (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; May, 2011).

In addition to the interviews, the corporate HR departments of the MNHCs provided confidential organisational documents. Researchers often supplement interviews with gathering and analysing documents, which assist in developing an understanding of the organisation (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For this current study, the documents were used to compare and confirm participants' responses and views. A summary of the shared documents can be found in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4: Organisational Documents**

<b>American Hotel Group</b>	<b>APAC Hotel Group</b>	<b>EMEA Hotel Group</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate values</li> <li>• Leadership competency framework</li> <li>• Performance management framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisational chart HR</li> <li>• Leadership competency framework</li> <li>• Functional competency framework</li> <li>• Performance-potential grid</li> <li>• Criteria for up-and-coming leaders programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisational chart HR</li> <li>• Leadership competency framework</li> <li>• Recruitment guide</li> <li>• Behavioural interview guide</li> <li>• Performance management guide</li> <li>• Leadership programmes guide</li> <li>• Talent review guide</li> <li>• Succession management guide</li> <li>• Potential rating form</li> <li>• Flight risk form</li> <li>• Knowledge transfer form</li> <li>• Performance-potential grid</li> </ul>

Source: Author

Having presented the research design, the following section outlines what sampling strategies were applied to identify the participating case study organisations and the interviewees.

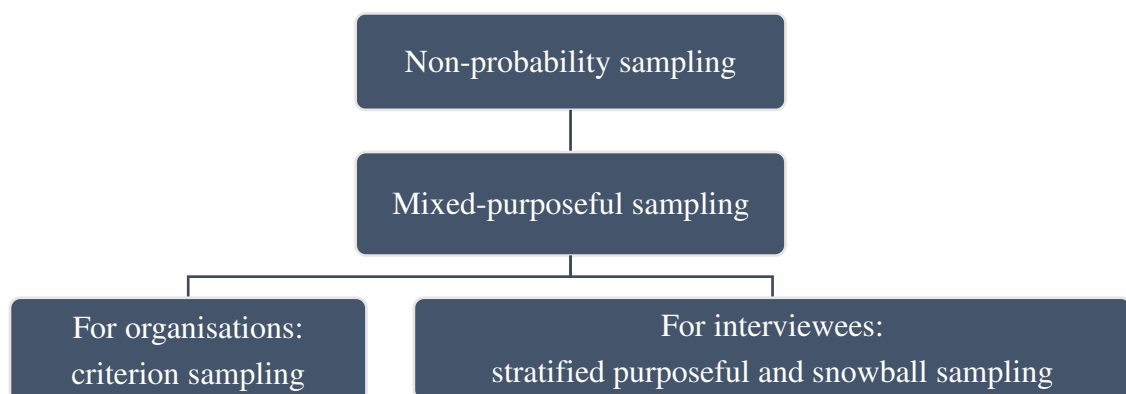


#### 4.6.4 Sampling Strategies

A sample can be defined as a ‘subset of a population’ (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.197). Samples are used to make inferences about a larger population based on the findings from a smaller group (Berg & Lune, 2017). A population is ‘a body or collection of items under consideration for statistical purposes’ (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.197). The population of this current study is the hospitality industry, particularly MNHCs that operate in the luxury hotel market.

According to Berg and Lune (2017), the two most common forms of sampling are probability and non-probability sampling. On the one hand, probability sampling (also called random sampling) uses a sample that mathematically represents the population, and thus the sample is selected by chance (Battaglia, 2008). On the other hand, non-probability sampling (also referred to as non-random sampling) uses subjective methods to decide on the inclusion in a sample (Berg & Lune, 2017). While probability sampling is frequently used in quantitative studies, it is inappropriate in qualitative research in which researchers try to understand complex topics related to human behaviour (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, some interviewees are more suitable to participate in the research based on their insights, background, or position (Marshall, 1996). The sampling strategies applied in this study are illustrated in Figure 4.4 and further explained below.

**Figure 4.4: Applied Sampling Strategies**



Source: Author

In order to select the participating organisations, the researcher applied criterion sampling, a form of purposeful sampling (Silverman, 2017). Its main objective is to create a sample that can be considered representative of the population (Battaglia, 2008; Berg & Lune, 2017; Kumar, 2014). Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to choose a case because it fulfils a set of criteria (Patton, 2015; Silverman, 2014). As case study research is time and place bound, the researcher set the final sample size to three organisations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The objective was to have one organisation from each of the following three regions: the Americas, APAC, and EMEA.

This current study reviewed the *Top 30 World Luxury Index* of the most sought-after luxury hotel brands in 2014, which included both luxury and upper upscale brands (Digital Luxury Group & Laaroussi, 2014). These brands were managed by 18 MNHCs. These MNHCs formed the population of the study (see Table 4.5). While 13 MNHCs are only represented by one brand, five MNHCs have a portfolio of two or more brands. The population included organisations from nine countries: eight MNHCs from the Americas (USA (6) and Canada (2)), six MNHCs from APAC (Hong Kong (4), Singapore, and Taiwan), and four MNHCs from EMEA (France, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and UK).

**Table 4.5: Overview of Sample Population**

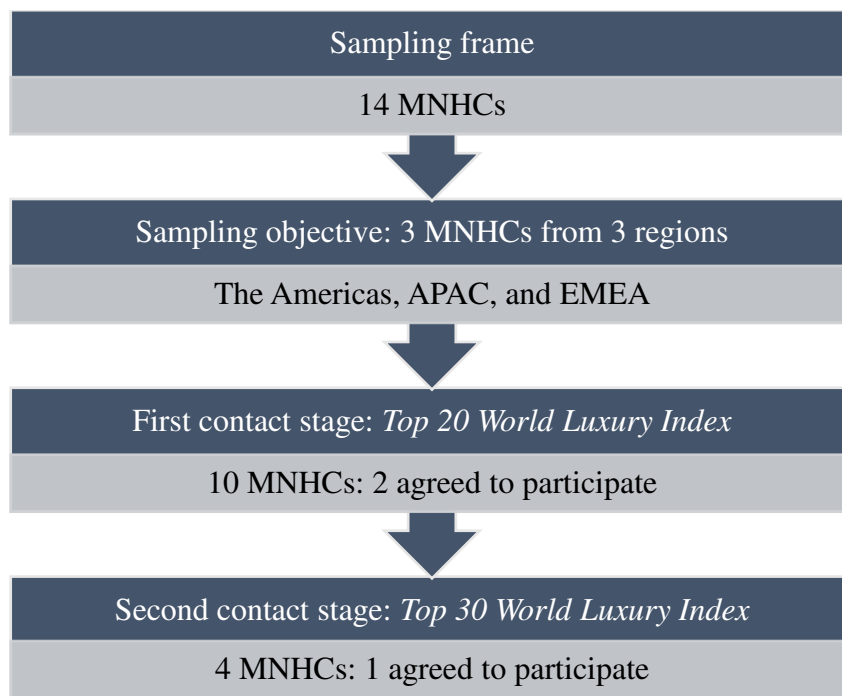
<b>Hotel Corporation</b>	<b>Brand(s)</b>
AccorHotels Group	Sofitel
Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts	Banyan Tree
Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts	Four Seasons
FRHI Hotels and Resorts	Fairmont, Swissotel
Hilton	Hilton, Embassy Suites, Conrad, Waldorf Astoria
Hyatt Hotels Corporation	Hyatt, Hyatt Regency, Grand Hyatt, Park Hyatt
InterContinental Hotels Group	InterContinental
Jumeirah Hotel Group	Jumeirah
Kempinski Hotels	Kempinski
Langham Hospitality Group	Langham
Loews Hotels	Loews Hotels
Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group	Mandarin Oriental
Marriott International	Ritz-Carlton, Renaissance, JW Marriott
Regent Hotels and Resorts	Regent
Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts	Shangri-La
Starwood Hotels and Resorts	Sheraton, Westin, St. Regis, Le Méridien
The Peninsula Hotels	Peninsula
Wyndham Worldwide	Wyndham

Source: *Amended from* Digital Luxury Group and Laaroussi (2014)

The study applied the following criteria to identify the case study organisations:

(1) a global presence (defined as operating across continents) in order to compare practices across regions, (2) a portfolio of at least one luxury brand, as these hotels have the highest standards of service which requires skilled talent (Tungate, 2009; Walls *et al.*, 2011), and (3) more than ten hotels, as larger organisations tend to have more TM structures and practices in place (McDonnell *et al.*, 2010). This resulted in a sampling frame of 14 MNHCs. Next, two contact stages were applied in this research. The first stage focused on the organisations in the *Top 20 World Luxury Index*. This was then broadened to the companies in the *Top 30 World Luxury Index* in the second stage. The explicit contact process of the sampling frame is illustrated in Figure 4.5.

**Figure 4.5: Contact Process of Sampling Frame**



Source: Author

Following a LinkedIn search, the researcher identified key people for the study, such as Heads of HR and Heads of TM (Europe or global) in the 14 MNHCs. The researcher then contacted these people via email to propose the research and offered a phone or Skype conversation to introduce the project in more detail. The initial contact email is presented in Appendix D. While phone and Skype conversations took place with eight MNHCs, three of these agreed to participate in this research.

The participating MNHCs are headquartered in the Americas, APAC, and EMEA, and thus, are referred to in the following as American Hotel Group, APAC Hotel Group, and EMEA Hotel Group. The initial contact was established with the heads of HR, EMEA at American Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group. At APAC Hotel Group, the first contact was made with the HR coordinator, EMEA, who then forwarded the request to the head of TM, global.

In the ensuing Skype conversations, it was assured that the participating organisations had a TM process in place. Following this, the researcher sent an outline of the study to the MNHCs as presented in Appendix E. The participation agreement process is outlined in Table 4.6.

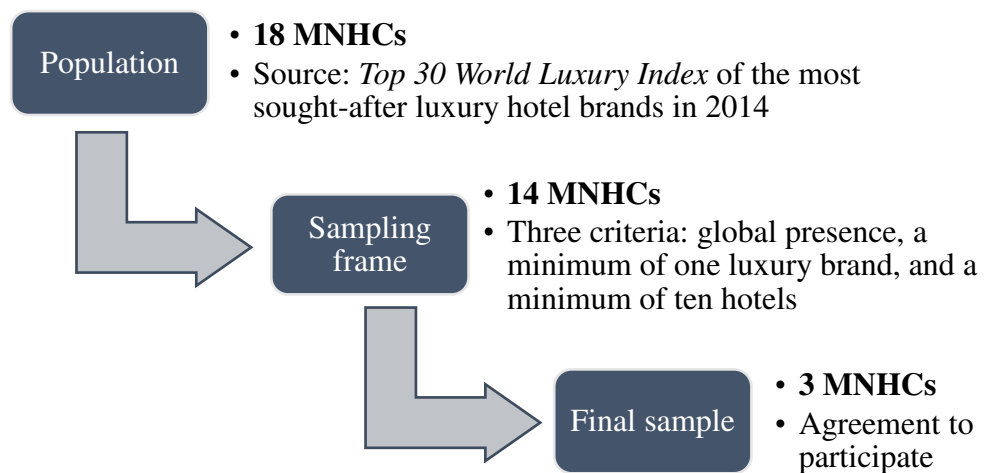
**Table 4.6: Participation Agreement Process**

Stage	MNHC 1	MNHC 2	MNHC 3
Initial email contact	05 June 2016	20 May 2016	16 September 2016
Confirmation of interest	06 June 2016	06 June 2016	21 September 2016
Skype conversation	14 June 2016	15 June 2016	27 September 2016
Final confirmation	15 June 2016	28 June 2016	10 October 2016

Source: Author

Figure 4.6 provides a summary of this section with a sampling funnel. The funnel encompasses three stages: population, sampling frame, and final sample.

**Figure 4.6: Sampling Funnel**



Source: Author

In order to select the interviewees, this current study applied two strategies: stratified purposeful sampling and snowball sampling, both of which are forms of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015). Stratified purposeful sampling illustrates subgroups, which facilitate comparison (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In case study research, many

selected cases are well-populated, and therefore, must be sampled (Stake, 2005). This study distinguished between two levels (i.e. business unit and corporate) and two functions (i.e. operations and HR). For each organisation, the objective was to include managers from both levels and functions from all three regions (i.e. the Americas, APAC, and EMEA).

Having established these subgroups, the head of HR, EMEA (American Hotel Group) and the heads of TM, global (APAC Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group) acted as gatekeepers by approving the research and assuring access to interviewees in the organisation (Creswell, 2014). Provided with the functions and levels as outlined above, they selected managers which they deemed appropriate (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) based on their position, location, and, availability (snowball or referral sampling). This resulted in a total of 73 interviewees.

At a corporate level, interviewees were heads of HR or TM, group talent or learning and development (L&D) managers, and heads of operations. At a business unit level, the selected interviewees held leading operational positions, such as GMs, hotel managers, rooms-division directors, and F&B directors, as well as important HR roles, for instance, HR directors and talent or L&D managers. Table 4.7 presents an overview of interviewees' positions in the three MNHCs. Further details about the interviewees are provided in Appendix F and divided into three groups based on their hotel groups (Tables F.1, F.2, and F.3 representing American Hotel Group, APAC Hotel Group, and EMEA Hotel Group, respectively). Having reviewed both the sampling strategies for organisations and interviewees, the next section explains the data collection process.

**Table 4.7: Overview of Interviewees' Positions**

<b>American Hotel Group</b>	<b>APAC Hotel Group</b>	<b>EMEA Hotel Group</b>
<i>Corporate level</i>		
3 Heads of HR 4 Regional Heads of HR 1 Head of TM	1 Chief HR Officer 2 Heads of HR 1 Head of TM 1 Group L&D Manager 3 Heads of Operations	1 Head of TM 1 Group Talent Manager
<i>Business unit level</i>		
8 Cluster HR Directors 1 HR Director 1 Cluster GM 4 GMs 3 Hotel Managers 2 Rooms-Division Directors 1 F&B Director 1 F&B Manager 1 Front Office Manager	5 HR Directors 1 L&D Director 2 L&D Managers 4 GMs 3 Hotel Managers 2 F&B Directors	1 Regional Head of HR 1 Regional Head of TM 1 Talent Manager 6 HR Directors 1 HR Manager 1 Cluster GM 4 GMs 1 Hotel Manager
<i>Total number of interviews</i>		
30	25	18

Source: Author

#### **4.7 Data Collection Process**

This section encompasses the interview protocol, pilot study, and interview format. All three are vital components of the data collection process to ensure the quality of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

##### **4.7.1 Interview Protocol**

The design and use of an interview protocol aids researchers to guide the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview protocol (see Appendix G) was sent in advance to the participants. It included the research topic and 23 interview questions

which, in turn, were designed to address the four RQs. The RQs were developed as part of the literature review and considered the research gaps identified (see Table 1.1).

Six major areas were discerned: introduction to HR, introduction to talent, talent strategies, talent criteria, talent tools and systems, and global TM implementation. The introductory sections on HR and talent allowed the researcher to understand the structure and corporate culture of the organisations. In addition, these two sections engaged with the first RQ of the study: How do MNHCs conceptualise pivotal talent? The following section focused on the second RQ: What strategies do MNHCs use to identify pivotal talent? Questions were formulated around the development and implementation of TM strategies. The next two sections addressed the third RQ: What criteria do MNHCs apply to identify pivotal talent? Interviewees were asked on what basis they are identifying talent at various levels in the organisation. Moreover, interviewees explained the tools and systems applied as part of the identification process. The last section captured the fourth RQ: How effective are MNHCs in implementing their talent identification process? While the interview protocol was sent to all participants to familiarise themselves with the research topic, the questions served as a guideline and an emphasis was placed on specific areas depending on the role of the participant during the interview. For example, in respect to the fourth RQ, global implementation strategies were discussed in more detail at a corporate level, while local influencing factors were examined at a business unit level.

#### **4.7.2 Pilot Study**

A pilot study allows researchers to refine the interview protocol prior to conducting research with the final sample, review the interviewing style, and test the equipment (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018). One MNHC from the



sampling frame participated in the pilot study with two interviews. The first interview was conducted with the head of TM, Europe at a corporate level on 01 August 2016. The second interview was completed at a business unit level with a GM in the Republic of Ireland on 04 August 2016. Both interviews were conducted via Skype.

#### **4.7.3 Interview Format**

It is vital to set the initial interview stage with open communication (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). All interviewees were initially contacted by email with an invitation to participate in the study and an information sheet was attached to the email (see Appendix H). At the beginning of each interview, the purpose of the study and the interview structure were explained. All participants had been informed that the interviews would be recorded for the purpose of analyses, but that their responses would be treated confidentially and anonymously.

The interviews took place over a period of six months from 03 August 2016 to 08 February 2017. The duration of the interviews varied between 20 and 121 minutes with an average of 51 minutes. A total of 63 hours were recorded. Interviews with American Hotel Group were conducted in August and September 2016, interviews with APAC Hotel Group took place between September and November 2016, and interviews with EMEA Hotel Group were completed between November 2016 and February 2017. All interviews at a HQ level were conducted face-to-face (F2F) as were some interviews at regional offices and at a business unit level. When completing F2F interviews, it is important to obtain a distraction-free place (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews were conducted in reserved meeting rooms, private offices, or quiet public areas at the premises. Of the 73 interviews completed, 36 (49%) were conducted F2F, 32 (44%) via Skype, and five (7%) via phone. The F2F and Skype interviews allowed the researcher to

have engaging conversations and react to non-verbal cues. In case were F2F and Skype interviews were not available, phone interviews were conducted. These were shorter on average and deemed less effective as the researcher had to rely solely on verbal communication. All interviews followed an adequate recording procedure (Creswell & Poth, 2018) using an Olympus voice recorder (WS-852). Having presented the interview format, the following section explains the ethical considerations of the study.

#### **4.8 Ethical Considerations**

Researchers need to consider ethical issues that may arise in their study (Silverman, 2017). Ethical issues may occur at any stage of the study: prior to conducting the study, at the beginning of the study, during the data collection, when analysing data, or when writing the report (Creswell, 2014). Ethics is the study of ‘right behaviour’ and it addresses moral principles, norms, and standards of behaviour that guide the research (Blumberg *et al.*, 2011; Mason, 2018).

To conform to the Institute’s ethics procedure, the study was proposed to and approved by the ethics committee at DIT (Dublin Institute of Technology, 2017). The committee is guided in its work by the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the Irish Universities Association Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland. The former establishes the principles of reliability of quality research, honesty, respect, and accountability (European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities, 2017). Similarly, the latter specifies eight basic principles: honesty, reliability, objectivity, impartiality and independence, open communication, duty of care, fairness, and responsibility for future science generations (Irish Universities Association, 2012).

Prior to conducting the study, the three participating MNHCs were selected without any personally vested interest (Creswell, 2014). Engagement in research with the organisations and selected participants was approved by the gatekeepers of the study. A consent form was signed by each of the three gatekeepers representing their organisation (see Appendix I). The purpose of the consent form was to develop mutual trust by assuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity (Silverman, 2014). Additionally, a confidentiality agreement was signed with American Hotel Group; consent forms were signed with all participants at EMEA Hotel Group as requested by the organisation, and authorship for publication was negotiated (Blumberg *et al.*, 2011; Creswell, 2014).

At the beginning of the study, it is important to communicate a value proposition stating the benefits of the study to the participating MNHCs (Punch, 2005). The purpose of the study, that is, the investigation of the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs as part of the Doctor of Philosophy programme at DIT, was clearly articulated (Sarantakos, 2012). The research includes a collective case study, and thus allows the organisations to compare with other MNHCs as well as to revise their own identification process. An improved identification process leads to a better TP, which ultimately can result in a competitive advantage for the organisations (Bharwani & Butt, 2012; Bratton & Waton, 2018).

As part of the analysis, potential imbalance was respected and no critical information was disclosed (Creswell, 2014). The researcher avoided bias, that is, a deliberate attempt to hide findings or highlight results disproportionately (Kumar, 2014). As part of the analysis all information provided was treated confidentially, individual responses, names, and companies were anonymised, and information that could harm participants was covered. Adhering to the reference handbook and the ethics code of DIT,

all information was provided with a reference to avoid plagiarism (Dublin Institute of Technology, 2017; Lawlor & Gorham, 2017). While all interviews were recorded, audio files and all further data including the transcripts were stored on a designated account on an encrypted personal computer within the Institute's system, which is exclusively accessible by the researcher and the supervisory team. Transcripts were kept separate from personal information and a hard copy was stored in the locked personal drawer of the researcher at the Institute.

Finally, findings were made available to participating organisations in report form. The results were reported in a clear, straightforward language. To protect the participants, anonymous codes were applied when reference was made to individuals or organisations. The codes used for the three organisations identify the location of the HQs of the MNHC: American Hotel Group (A), APAC Hotel Group (B), and EMEA Hotel Group (C). The anonymous codes applied for the individual participants identify the organisation and the order in which the interviews were conducted, for example, A1 stands for the first participant at American Hotel Group, B2 refers to the second participant at APAC Hotel Group, and C3 relates to the third participant at EMEA Hotel Group. While the results were used for academic publications, data was not duplicated in the individual publications and ownership was assured (Creswell, 2014).

To summarise, it is evident that ethical considerations must be considered throughout the entire research process: prior to conducting the study, at the beginning of the study, during the data collection, when analysing data, and when writing the report. The next section details the management, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

#### **4.9 Data Analysis**

Data analysis encompasses organising the gathered data for analysis, reducing data into themes, and representing findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research data is detailed, rich, and complex, and therefore, the analysis is multifaceted (Ormston *et al.*, 2014). A variety of analytical strategies for qualitative research have been discussed in the literature (Madison, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 1990, 1994). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), these include writing and reflecting on field notes, creating codes and categories which can be linked to theories and framework, and displaying and reporting findings.

Following a collective case study approach to inquiry, the analysis included a description of the three cases and their context. A within-case analysis (which includes the identification of themes) and a cross-case analysis (which illustrates the similarities and differences between the cases) were conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a last step, assertions and generalisations are made (Yin, 2014). Therefore, TA was deemed appropriate, because it allows both a rich description of the entire data set and a more nuanced approach of a specific area of interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

TA is a method to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme captures principal factors in relation to the research aim and RQs (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Two main types of TA must be distinguished, namely, inductive and theoretical TA. An inductive TA is a bottom-up approach where themes are strongly linked to the data and may bear little relationship with the research aim; a theoretical TA tends to be driven by the researcher's theoretical and analytical interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this research, a theoretical TA was followed.

The analysis was completed with the support of NVivo, a QDAS. Saldaña (2016) argues that NVivo assists the researcher in undertaking the analysis by deploying the computer's capacity to manage data, recording, sorting, matching and linking. Similarly, Bazeley and Jackson (2013) identify several key benefits of using a QDAS: manage data to organise and keep track, manage ideas to organise the conceptual knowledge, query data by asking simple and complex questions, visualise data, and report from the data by using content of the qualitative data.

The study follows the six phases of TA by Braun and Clarke (2006), which include the familiarisation with data, generation of initial codes, search for themes, review of themes, definition of themes, and write up of the report. Each phase is further explained in detail in the next sections.

#### **4.9.1 Familiarising with Data**

The first phase of TA is the familiarisation of the data. This included the listening of the recordings, transcribing, repeated reading of the data, and taking notes of initial ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and the audio files were transferred and saved on the encrypted personal computer. The current study chose a denaturalised transcription style which does not include false starts, stutters, pauses, or non-verbal communication (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). The denaturalised transcription style does not change the content, but rather clarifies the meaning (Oliver *et al.*, 2005). In addition to the transcripts, the handwritten notes that were taken during the interviews were revised and additional comments were made for clarification purposes. As a last step of this phase, all audio files, full transcripts, and organisational documents were uploaded to NVivo. The software allowed to create folders and subfolders for each organisation and individual participants, and audio files,

transcripts, and official documents were linked (Saldaña, 2016). As a result of the familiarisation process, a coding framework including the four RQs was established. The framework encompasses seven broad colour-coded areas (see Appendix J, Figure J.1).

#### **4.9.2 Generating Initial Codes**

The second phase includes the generation of initial codes (Saldaña, 2016). Data relevant to each code was selected. Codes identify a feature of the data that appears to be interesting (Bazeley, 2013; Richards, 2009).

A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldaña, 2016, p.4).

It has been recommended to code as many potential patterns as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and to compare codes with other researchers, for instance, the supervisory team, to increase the reliability of the research (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). For this study, open coding using the conceptual and coding framework as a broad guideline was applied, which generated a total of 200 codes in this phase of the analysis (see Appendix J, Table J.1). This initial coding was viewed as a ‘start list’ (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p.58), which allowed the researcher to organise extracts and break down the transcripts for further analysis. Each code was assigned one of the seven colours from the coding framework.

#### **4.9.3 Searching for Themes**

The third phase involves the collating of codes into potential themes (see Appendix J, Table J.2) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes are referred to as ‘issues’ (Stake, 1995, p.16) and ‘categories’ (Saldaña, 2016, p.10).

This phase re-focuses the analysis at the broader level to create themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher considers how various codes are linked and how they may connect to an overarching theme (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ormston *et al.* (2014) assert that being open to emerging themes and theories is essential during the analysis stage. Both semantic and latent themes were identified. Semantic themes are developed at an explicit or surface level of meaning, latent themes start to identify and examine underlying ideas, theories, and assumptions which involves interpretive work and not just descriptive progression (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### **4.9.4 Reviewing Themes**

During this fourth phase, two levels of reviewing and refining themes are applied: first, all coded data extracts are reviewed, which includes splitting, combining, and discarding themes; second, a similar process for the complete dataset is applied and the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set is reviewed (see Appendix J, Table J.3) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). NVivo allows to track and illustrate those changes (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). A codebook, that is, a list of codes for each phase, is available for download in NVivo (see Appendix J) (Saldaña, 2016). According to Saldaña (2016), maintaining the codebook is a valuable analysis technique to revise and reconsider individual codes. Within each code, key points of discussion are identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### **4.9.5 Defining Themes**

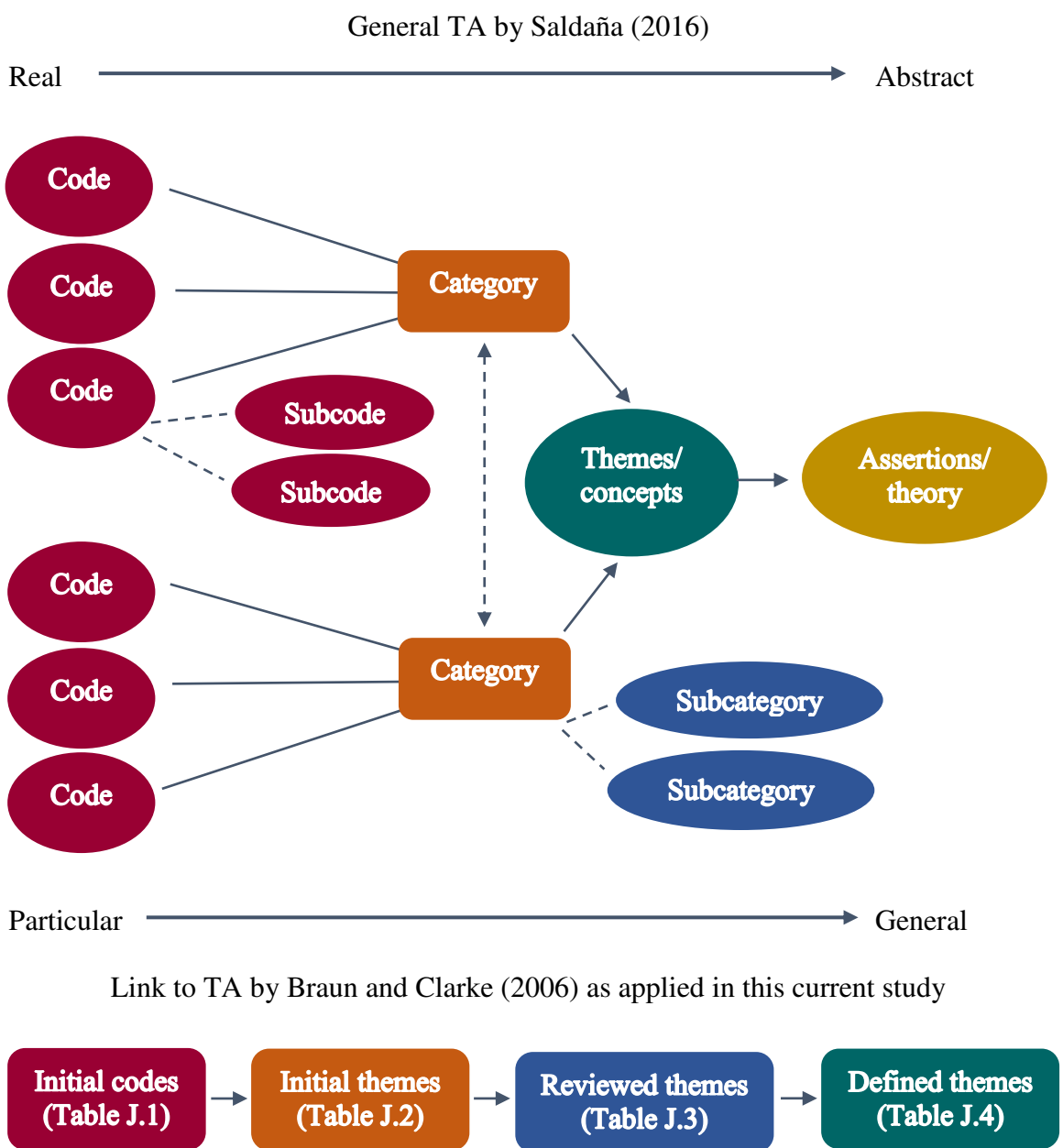
The fifth phase focuses on the ongoing analysis of the themes to generate clear definitions and names for each overarching theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006) or in Stake's (1995, p.74) words, 'categorical aggregation' (see Appendix J, Table J.4). The researcher



identifies the essence of what each theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A holistic analysis, that is, the examination of the entire case, is applied (Yin, 2014).

In sum, it is important to note that a set of fully worked out themes was developed whereby the researcher is positioned as active in the research process. Thus, themes do not ‘emerge’ without participation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Figure 4.7 presents the analytical process of how themes were defined.

**Figure 4.7: Analytical Process**



Source: Author

#### **4.9.6 Writing Report**

The last phase of the TA includes the writing of the thesis and the final analysis of specific aspects. When writing the thesis, extracts and quotes from individual codes can be used and themes ought to be related back to the literature (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The researcher develops assertions by interpreting and linking the data to constructs in the literature and theories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The findings are presented in context with the research aim to explore and understand the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs. Finally, the quality of research must be evaluated which is further explained in the next section.

#### **4.10 Evaluation of the Quality of Research**

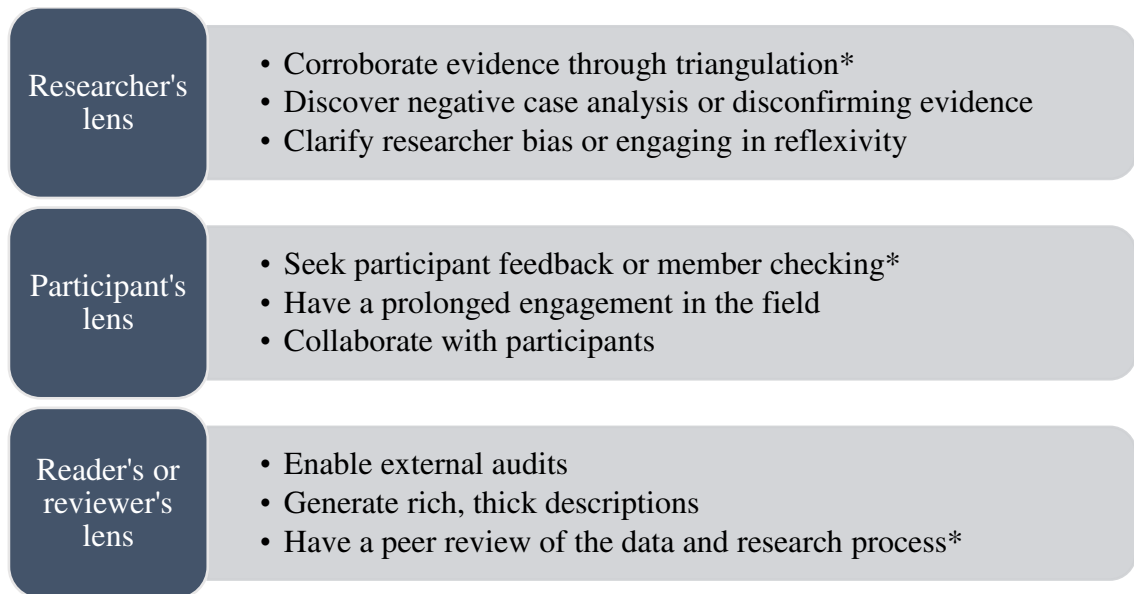
The evaluation of the quality of research is a critical step of the research process (Bell, 2014). Flick (2014, p.480) states that ‘the problem of how to assess qualitative research has not yet been solved.’ Various perspectives and terms have been introduced in the literature to describe the quality of research (see, e.g. Angen, 2000; Eisner, 1991; Lather, 1991, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Whittemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001). LeCompte and Goetz (1982) refer to the terms internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.300) discuss the concept of trustworthiness and include the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as the ‘naturalist’s equivalents’ for internal validation, external validation, reliability, and objectivity. Following Creswell and Poth’s (2018) approach to standards of evaluation, this current study distinguishes between the two broad concepts of validation and reliability.

#### **4.10.1 Validation**

Validity displays whether an instrument measures or describes what it is supposed to do (Bell, 2014). Some researchers distinguish between internal validity (credibility) and external validity (transferability) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). Credibility refers to the truth of the data, whether the research is believable or not (Kumar, 2014). This includes the confirmation of the findings from participants (Silverman, 2014) and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability refers to the degree to which findings can be generalised (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). However, in qualitative research, focus is placed on depth as opposed to breadth which is the preoccupation in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While it has often been argued that case study research, in particular, small-scale, single cases, cannot be generalised (Blaikie, 2007), a key strength of case studies is such depth, through interpretation and a deep understanding of context, processes, and outcomes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The research provides a holistic perspective by including three MNHCs from distinctive regions and a range of HR and operations managers at business unit and corporate levels.

Validation is a process to assess the ‘accuracy’ of findings and it can be distinguished between nine validation strategies that are frequently used in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.259). They can be grouped in three clusters depending on the lens that the strategy represents: researcher’s lens, participant’s lens, and reader’s or reviewer’s lens (Creswell, 2016). A summary of the strategies is provided in Figure 4.8. The main validation strategies applied in this study are marked with an asterisk (\*) and further discussed below.

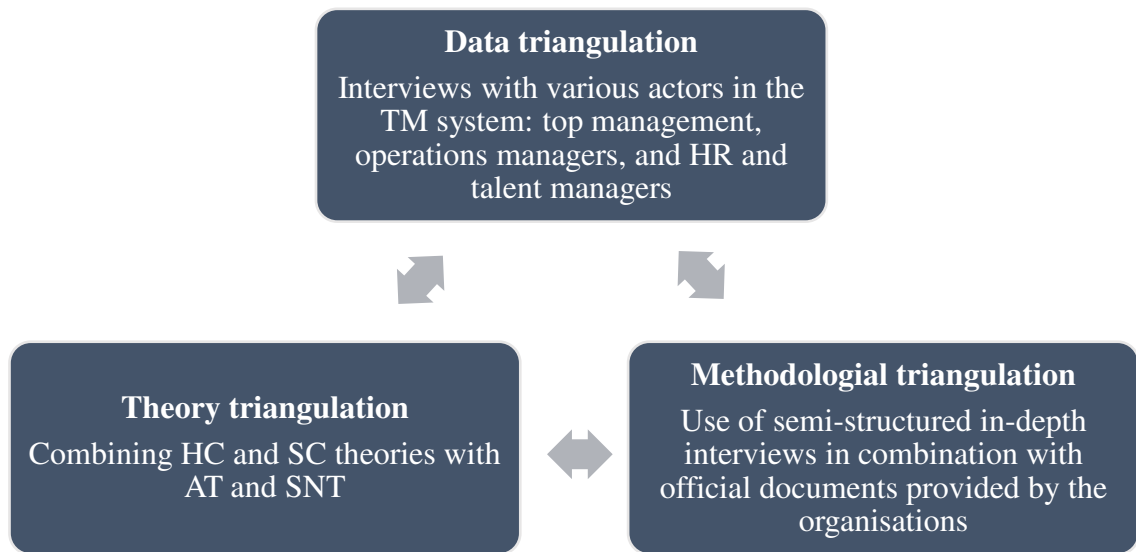
**Figure 4.8: Validation Strategies in Qualitative Research**



Source: *Amended from* Creswell and Poth (2018)

The first validation strategy applied in this study is triangulation. Triangulation uses multiple data sources and seeks convergence, corroboration, and correspondence of the findings (Bazeley, 2013; Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989; Kiessling & Harvey, 2005). Stake (2005, p.454) defines triangulation as ‘a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation.’ Collective case study research allows for many sources to be applied and thus strengthens the research (Yin, 2014). Every source reveals slightly different facets of the social reality (Berg & Lune, 2017). Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) distinguish four types of triangulation: data, investigator, theory, and methodological. The triangulation applied in this study is summarised in Figure 4.9.

**Figure 4.9: Applied Research Triangulation**



Source: Author

The second validation strategy applied in this study is participant feedback. Participants can play a vital role in the validation process (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). They can be solicited to evaluate the credibility of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.314), it is ‘the most critical technique for establishing credibility.’ The key gatekeepers, the head of HR, EMEA at American Hotel Group, and the heads of TM, global at APAC Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group, were asked to review the rough drafts of the findings. Instead of referring to transcripts or raw data, the researcher presented the developed key themes to the gatekeepers.

The third validation strategy implemented in the current study is peer review. When following the peer review or debrief strategy, the researcher seeks an external view by an experienced expert in the field of study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This person acts as a ‘devil’s advocate’ by asking questions about the method, meaning, and interpretation of the research. For this study, the external examiner, Anthony McDonnell, Professor of Management at the University College Cork, Cork, Ireland, provided invaluable advice on the framework, method, developed themes, and analysis of the research. He is an

experienced scholar in the field of TM and published research which, among others, focused on the identification of talent in MNCs (see, e.g. McDonnell *et al.*, 2015; McDonnell *et al.*, 2011; McDonnell *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, he was identified as a suitable person to assist in the validation process. In addition to validation, reliability is a key approach to standards of evaluation.

#### **4.10.2 Reliability**

Reliability refers to ‘the degree to which the findings of a study are independent of accidental circumstance of their production’ (Silverman, 2014, p.83). If a research tool is consistent and stable, it is described as reliable (Kumar, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) also determine the consistency and stability of a study and refer to the concept as dependability. To demonstrate a transparent process, they suggest an audit trail, which entails the record keeping during all stages of the research process. This includes the accessibility to the rationale formulation, sampling procedure, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, and data analysis decisions (Bryman, 2016). Reliability examines the replicability of the study and the ability to achieve the same results and interpretations in other settings (Silverman, 2014).

Finally, it is important to establish a common platform for coding and develop a preliminary code list which is shared with other researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the generated codes and themes were shared and discussed with the lead supervisor of the study as well as with the QDAS coach. Following the inter-coder agreement process, the codebook was revised (Saldaña, 2016).

While both the validation and reliability strategies contribute to the quality of the research, it must be acknowledged that there are also some methodological limitations which are presented in the following section.

#### **4.11 Limitations**

All research projects have limitations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Patton (2002, p.223) asserts that ‘there are no perfect research designs. There are always trade-offs.’ This section acknowledges limitations regarding the sampling strategy and the approach to inquiry.

First, following a process of snowball sampling, the researcher relied on the judgement of the gatekeepers to identify suitable participants. To address this limitation, the gatekeepers were provided with a framework of who was deemed appropriate based on their position and location.

Second, qualitative research has been criticised for being too subjective and difficult to replicate as the researcher impacts the interaction with the participants and the interpretation of the data (Bryman, 2016). Concerns regarding case study research that uses selective reporting exist. To overcome these concerns, a transparent and rigorous process was implemented. The sampling procedure was presented in section 4.6.4 and the QDAS includes all recordings and full transcripts, which allows an independent observer to trace back the steps in the research to the individual phases of the analysis process.

Third, the generalisation and theorisation of case study research has been questioned in the literature (Bell, 2014). Many scholars argue, however, that the intent of qualitative research is not to generalise findings, but to provide a description and analysis of the case under investigation (see, e.g. Creswell, 2014; Gibbs, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Mason, 2018). Therefore, particularity rather than generalisability is the crucial factor (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). Moreover, selecting various cases across different sites, as applied in this research, can considerably strengthen the basis of generalisation (Blaikie, 2007).

#### **4.12 Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the chosen methodology of this research. Aligned with the philosophical beliefs, social constructivism is applied as the interpretive framework. This qualitative research follows a multi-level collective case study approach to inquiry which includes semi-structured in-depth interviews. To identify the participants of the study, non-probability, mixed-purposeful sampling was implemented. Finally, the data collection process, ethical considerations, TA, and the evaluation of the quality of research were presented. The chapter concluded with limitations of the chosen research methodology.



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## **CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS**

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## **5.1 Introduction**

Following the six stages of TA by Braun and Clarke (2006), this chapter presents the research findings of the study. The findings are supported by quotes and excerpts from the interviews. A within-case analysis (i.e. the identification of themes) and a cross-case analysis (i.e. similarities and differences) were conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The chapter begins with a brief overview of the research participants.

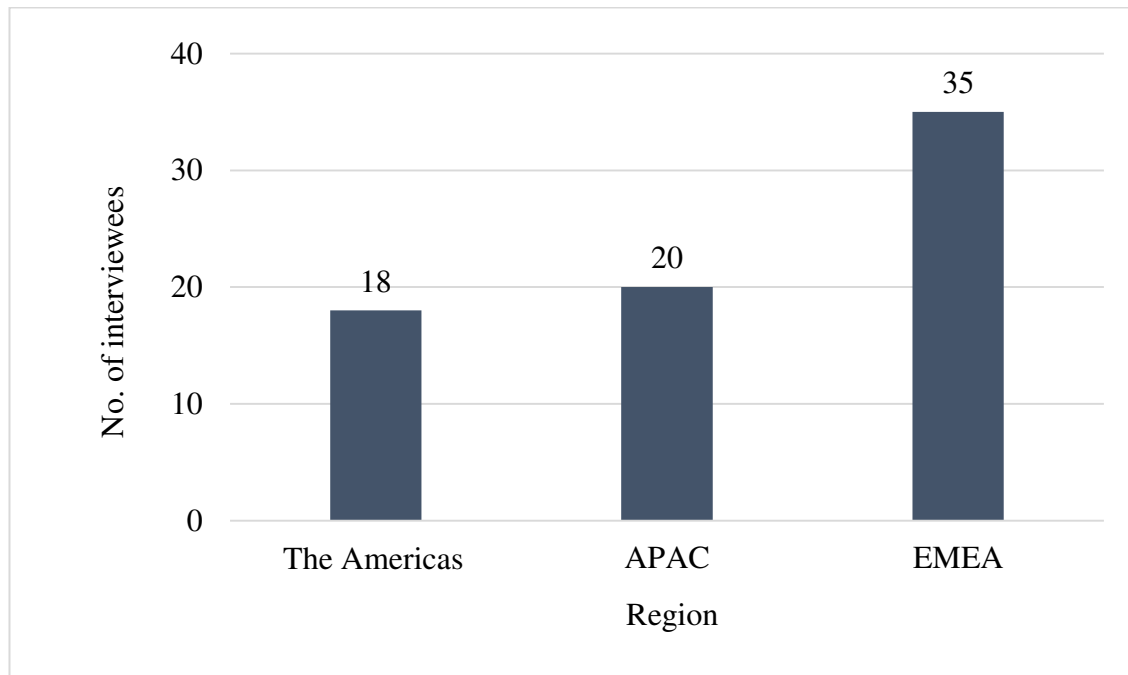
## **5.2 Participants**

This section provides a summary of the research participants. Due to confidentiality, the names of the organisations, interviewees, or any explicit information, for example, specific locations or programmes, which may reveal the identities of the MNHCs has been altered. A unique name followed by a corresponding code was given to each organisation based on their HQ location: American Hotel Group (A), APAC Hotel Group (B), and EMEA Hotel Group (C). All three MNHCs are globally operating organisations. American Hotel Group operates in over 50 countries, APAC Hotel Group in more than 20 countries, and EMEA Hotel Group in more than ten countries.

A total of 73 interviews were conducted and each person was assigned an individual code which provided information about their position, organisation, and the order in which the interviews were conducted: for example, Head of HR A1, Hotel Manager B2, and Regional Head of TM C3. A1 stands for the first participant at American Hotel Group, B2 refers to the second participant at APAC Hotel Group, and C3 relates to the third participant at EMEA Hotel Group.

The interviewees were based in 15 countries: 35 (48%) in EMEA (France, Germany, Kuwait, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, UAE, and UK), 20 (27%) in APAC (Australia, China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Thailand), and 18 (25%) in the Americas (USA and Brazil). Figure 5.1 illustrates the interviewees by region.

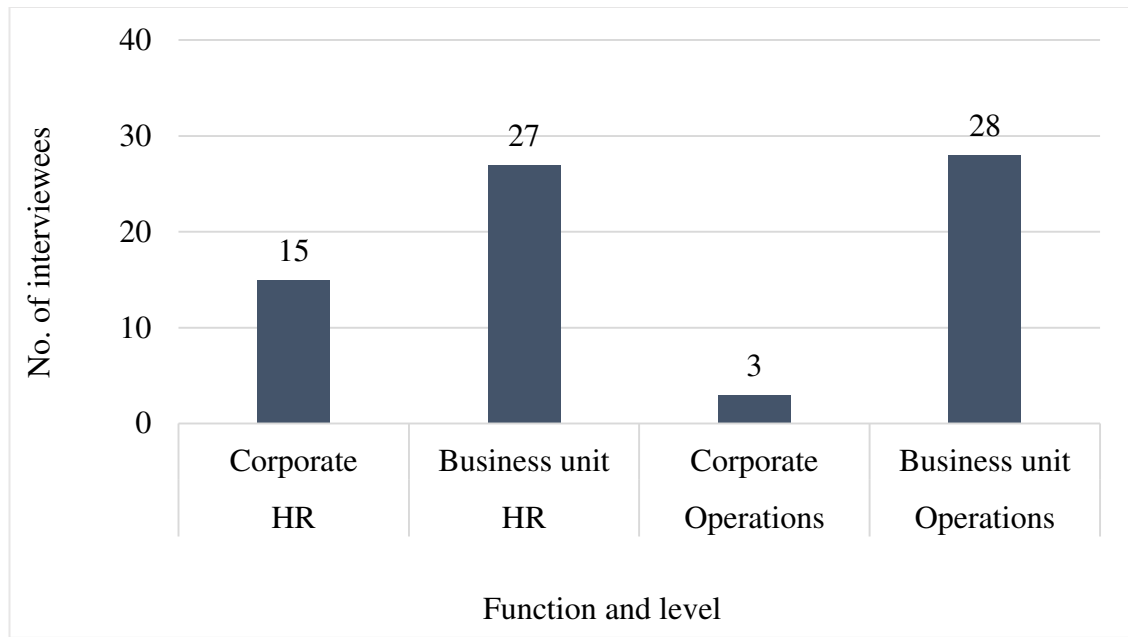
**Figure 5.1: Interviewees by Region**



Source: Author

Interviews were conducted with 55 managers at a business unit level (75%) and 18 managers at a corporate level (25%). While 31 interviews were completed with operations managers (42%), a further 42 interviewees represented the HR function (58%). Figure 5.2 illustrates the interviewees by function and level.

**Figure 5.2: Interviewees by Function and Level**



Source: Author

Having provided an overview of the research participants, the findings are presented under seven developed themes: business strategy, GTM strategy, talent identification criteria, tools, incentives, global implementation impact factors, and the evaluation of the talent identification process (see Appendix J, Table J.4).

### **5.3 Business Strategy**

Following the NVivo analysis, this section presents the impact of the business strategy on TM including the role of HR and corporate culture (see Appendix J, Table J.3). The main impact factor discussed by interviewees is the company's growth. Expanding the business and opening new hotels requires an adequate and prepared workforce. Cluster HR Director A19 asserts that 'the most important thing when I am going to open a hotel is, I have enough [American Hotel Group] talent to open it.' Similarly, Hotel Manager B20 contends that 'ensuring that these openings which will

come have sufficient fuel, sufficient resources to fill them with life' is a key priority.

According to Cluster GM C8, a pool of prepared talent is essential for openings:

I think the priority will be to get senior people in place for our new hotels because when we opened hotels [in the past], not all of them were successful, because we did not have the talent ready, and because we did not have the processes ready to do so.

Closely linked to the business strategy, the role of HR and the role of corporate culture are presented in the following sections.

### **5.3.1 The Role of Human Resources**

At all three MNHCs, TM operates as a function within HR. At American Hotel Group, the HR division consists of three broad areas: TM, L&D, and compensation (Head of HR A1). The Regional Head of HR A2 details:

One could argue human resources are responsible for talent management. You might meet an organisation that uses the word talent management for everything they do. Here for us, I would say it is maybe too broad. For me, it does not make a difference what you call this baby (laughs). I think it is more about doing it well. If you use talent management as a broad term to describe everything HR does [...], I would rather focus.

The Head of HR A22 identifies a variety of roles of the HR function, such as 'protecting and enhancing the culture', 'supporting leaders and developing leaders for future growth', 'recruiting talent into the organisation', and 'protecting the company' by following regulations and acting with integrity. The Regional Head of HR A2 emphasises the balance between people's and business needs, and Cluster HR Director A10 distinguishes between the function and the purpose of HR. Head of HR A1 further differentiates between an actual and a desired role:

The desired role is all about creating a great culture that then results in an amazing employment brand that creates the kind of loyalty from existing employees, but also the envy of people from the outside that would like to work for the organisation. [...] Unfortunately, the actual role is that whatever is desired is only 30 per cent of what they are really focusing on because a lot of them are bogged down with administration, payroll, and labour legislation. I think as an organisation, we are just trying to bring that shift in so they can really focus on the things that matter.

At APAC Hotel Group, one area under the HR umbrella, that is, organisational development, combines TM and L&D (Head of TM B3). HR was viewed as a functionary role as well as a counsellor, advisor, and business partner (L&D Director B1; HR Director B10; Group L&D Manager B16). Chief HR Officer B17 emphasises the importance of ‘connectivity with the business’ and ‘responding to the business and hopefully being proactive.’

Finally, HR at EMEA Hotel Group operates within two broad areas: TM and organisational development (Group Talent Manager C16). The Head of TM C15 describes the role of HR at EMEA Hotel Group as ‘in the transition of being a true partner’ to the business:

Why am I saying transition? Because we have been working for the last couple of years on trying to move from the ‘hire and fire’ company or department to what is the human capital. It is an asset that we have. How can we improve the human capability so that we can be different to other companies?

### 5.3.2 The Role of Corporate Culture

In addition to HR, TM is impacted by the corporate culture which may include values and guiding principles. Table 5.1 shows the official corporate culture construct of the three MNHCs. Details on the individual elements cannot be provided to protect the identity of the organisations.

**Table 5.1: Corporate Culture Construct**

American Hotel Group	APAC Hotel Group	EMEA Hotel Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 goal</li> <li>• 1 purpose</li> <li>• 3 overarching concepts</li> <li>• 5 values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 mission</li> <li>• 7 guiding principles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 vision</li> <li>• 3 overarching concepts</li> <li>• 5 guiding principles</li> </ul>

Source: Author

At American Hotel Group, ‘preserving’ the ‘strong culture’ (Head of HR A9; Cluster HR Director A19) is of the highest importance, and all talent must ‘understand the purpose’ of the organisation (Head of HR A1). HR Director A21 contends:

I think now more than ever our talent needs to align with people who have the desire to work in a company whose purpose is defined and that it parallels with their purpose; otherwise it is not going to be successful.

At APAC Hotel Group, the guiding principles are similar to a ‘golden rule’ (F&B Director B2) and are the ‘foundation’ of the culture (HR Director B10). The Head of TM B3 explains:

We do not call them values, we call them guiding principles. The guiding principles are around the way we work with the customer, the way we work with each other, the way we work with the environment, the shareholders, the business, and within the law.

However, Head of Operations B6 views the organisation as a ‘very decentralised company’, and GM B15 points out that ‘hotels almost independently have their own culture’ which may be very ‘very different.’

At EMEA Hotel Group, people referred to a culture of ‘continuous growth’ and a ‘culture of excellence, a culture of no mediocrity’ (GM C13) as well as a ‘family-oriented’ (HR Director C6) and ‘performance management’ culture (HR Manager C7). Cluster GM C8 argues:

I think that the company is a bit different. What exists in [X] where most of our owned properties are and outside of [X] – it is a bit fragmented to be honest. I think everyone is trying very hard to make it more homogenous and we are getting there. [...] I think it is hard to describe one kind of [EMEA Hotel Group] culture.

Having reviewed the first theme, business strategy, the next sections detail the GTM strategy developed in the three MNHCs.

## **5.4 Global Talent Management Strategy**

This section focuses on findings in relation to the first and second RQs. Specifically, how do MNHCs conceptualise pivotal talent and what strategies do MNHCs use to identify pivotal talent? Based on the interview data, results are presented under four themes: TM leadership team, approach to TM, definition of pivotal talent, and critical positions (see Appendix J, Table J.3).

### **5.4.1 Talent Management Leadership Team**

All three organisations have a senior TM leadership team, that is, employees who significantly impact the development, implementation, and evaluation of TM processes.

At American Hotel Group, the leadership team consists of seven people (i.e. Chief HR Officer, Head of TM, Head of L&D, Head of Compensation, and Heads of HR for the Americas, APAC, and EMEA). The Head of TM is responsible for the TM process and seeks input from this team (Head of TM A20). At a corporate level, talent acquisition and talent and culture managers further support the TM function (Head of TM A20). On a regional level, the Head of HR A1 pinpoints the importance of all cluster HR directors:

They do not report to us. They report to their area vice president who looks after operations in their area, but they are our biggest influencers. So anything we want to get done from a HR perspective, the first step is to get our area HR directors on board and then get them to influence the hotels to get things done.

At APAC Hotel Group, the small corporate team encompasses five key members (i.e. Chief HR Officer, Head of TM, and three Heads of HR for the Americas, APAC, and EMEA) (Chief HR Officer B17).

At EMEA Hotel Group, the team consists of four main senior people (i.e. Chief HR Officer and Heads of HR, TM, and Organisational Development). At a corporate level, the TM team further consists of performance management, talent acquisition, and



national support managers (Group Talent Manager C16). Having introduced the TM leadership teams in the three MNHCs, the next section presents the approach to TM.

#### **5.4.2 Approach to Talent Management**

The importance of talent identification is recognised by all organisations. Regional Head of HR A11 emphasises that ‘talent management needs to be given time.’ TM is one of the four key pillars in 2017 at American Hotel Group (Cluster HR Director A4), and talent is viewed as ‘the most important asset in the service delivery for guests’ and ‘certainly the largest costs’ (Head of HR B11). Head of TM A20 further adds that employees are ‘the face of the organisation’, and GM C13 explains:

This is a beautiful building with beautiful marble and beautiful clean windows, but without the right people in it, it is just a museum. You lose the body and soul of the hotel, and it can be a cancer if you do not have the right people in the hotel.

The three organisations perceive TM as the identification, development, and retention of talent. This may include identifying and assessing critical positions, performance management, succession planning, and building a talent pipeline (Heads of HR A1 and A22; Heads of TM B3 and C15). Hotel Manager B20 and Head of HR B22 further emphasise that TM begins with the initial interaction between a potential employee and the organisation, and the Head of Operations B18 argues that it includes everything from ‘hiring to termination’ (laughs).

The approach towards TM differs between the three MNHCs. At American Hotel Group, the TM strategy was described as ‘bringing the right people into the organisation’ (Head of HR A22), identifying top leaders for the future, recruiting from hotel schools, and developing diverse global leaders (Cluster HR Director A19). The Head of TM A20 argues that ‘all talent gets development’ and the ‘purpose is the right fit for person and organisation.’ A focus is placed on internal talent identification and development (Cluster

HR Directors A10 and A15; Head of TM A20). The Head of HR A9 contends that the group is known for ‘grooming from within, not acquiring the best from outside.’ Head of HR A1 supports this approach arguing that hiring from outside, for example, for a GM position, is very expensive, and external talent may not represent the culture. However, the Head of TM A20 states that for the highest corporate positions (vice presidents and above), consideration will be given to both external and internal candidates.

At a lower level, generic coaching and learning is applied, while the TM process is more structured at a higher level (i.e. heads of departments and above) (Head of HR A1; Cluster GM A3). GM A29 argues that there is ‘no formality’ at a hotel level and Hotel Manager A7 asserts that TM ‘depends on the property.’ Overall, it is perceived as a ‘more informal than formal’ approach as ‘managers have the final choice, judgement, and discretion’ (Head of TM A20). Although strategic priorities are developed by the HQ, each region is able to implement distinctive action plans and initiatives (Regional Head of HR A8; Head of HR A9). GM A13 asserts that it would be ‘a mistake to centralise everything.’ On the other hand, Regional Head of HR A26 is in favour of more centralisation to assure accountability: ‘Leaders in our organisation think that kind of stuff [TM practices] is happening, but it is not.’ This is supported by Cluster HR Director A28 who suggests closer co-operation:

We have got HR in all hotels, so in all hotels we do recruitment separately. [American Hotel Group] is at the moment big time in creating synergies, creating cluster offices, not only to save costs necessarily, but also to manage it in the same matter for a group of properties.

At APAC Hotel Group, a long-term TM strategy is applied (Chief HR Officer B17). The Chief HR Officer B17 explains:

[We] have a view that any investment we make, any deal that we do is a long-term deal. We tend to view our culture and our people in the same way in that when we are bringing talent on board that we take a long-term view about that person. [...] We spend quite a lot of time in the talent due diligence stage where you look at a person trying to understand whether they fit our culture.

The strategy is ‘to be defined in many ways’ (Head of Operations B6). According to the Head of HR B11, the underlying TM strategy includes recruitment, L&D, and engagement while Head of HR B22 summarises it as the ‘right people at the right place at the right time.’ The general aim is internal development by ‘feeding from the bottom’ (Head of TM B3; F&B Director B13). However, external talent is often recruited at an executive committee level (Hotel Managers B9 and B20), and GM B23 asserts that he hires more talent ‘because the internal succession plan does not allow or provide the talent.’ Similarly, the Head of Operations B4 contends:

I think we are employing talent to a large degree. Some people are late bloomers, they get excited about what they see and the company they are working for, and then they kind of come out of their routine [...], but primarily, I believe, we employ talent.

F&B Director B13 recognises that you must hire external talent if it is not available internally but also highlights possible tensions between employees and an external managerial candidate if he or she does not have the necessary requirements. This was supported by HR Director B19 and GM B21 who prefer to ‘take more risks’ and promote internally. Head of TM B3 further provides insight to an alternative approach of letting current employees go and then hiring them back at a later stage:

I know when I was starting in the industry, if you have left, you were blackened, and you would never go back to work in that company, whereas I think that is out of date. If you leave as a supervisor, you could well come back as a restaurant manager three years later and probably be a better restaurant manager because you have had different experiences and you got a different view point.

APAC Hotel Group operates decentrally and was described as ‘not the most structured company’ which reinforces people to make decisions (Chief HR Officer B17). In regard to the TM process, Chief HR Officer B17 refers to ‘half a glass full of systems and processes’ and ‘half a glass empty’, which allows people to be innovative and creative. HR Director B12 highlights the importance of ‘adaptability:’

We do not have a book like certain organisations, where there is a huge volume, when you say, ‘Open up third book, fourth page, second paragraph, last sentence.’ We do not have that, and that is not who we are.

On the other hand, HR Director B10 urges:

I think it can become too convenient to say, ‘Oh well, [hotel X] is a little different than [hotel Y], so I am going to have a different type of talent management evaluation. That is a very dangerous road to go down. What your assessment is has to have a greater continuity from a global standpoint, then [otherwise] you are not setting people up for success.

Although the core process is perceived as the same across the organisation (L&D Director B1; Hotel Manager B7) and ‘no cookie-cutter principles’ are desired (Hotel Manager B9; GM B14), a few interviewees suggest a more formalised approach (GM B14; Hotel Manager B20). Hotel Manager B20 perceives the TM process as operated by ‘three HR companies under one corporate umbrella’, and suggests more ‘interconnecting parts’ between regions. Furthermore, Head of HR B22 argues that they ‘need to adapt’ current practices and be more ‘future focused:’

I think we just need to be much more forward thinking, and for some individuals it might be a scary thought, but it is better to be sort of honest and say, ‘Okay, you know, we are not there yet. How are we getting there? We need to do that right now.’ So I think we just need to accelerate what we do.

At EMEA Hotel Group, the priority is to create a ‘high performance culture’ (Regional Head of TM C3; HR Director C14). The strategy was described as ‘attracting the best, developing the best, and retaining the best’ (Head of TM C15).

Future focus is placed on internal identification (Head of TM C15) which was embraced by HR Director C6 who proposes to take more risks and promote internally. As of now, the organisation relies on external talent. The Head of TM C15 states:

A lot of people tend to come and leave, and we buy talents from outside. It is kind of like we are a stop for talent. You go to [company X] and you get all the knowledge. We buy you and you get a bit more. You stay with us for two, three, or four years, and then you go and be bigger in [company X] again.

The organisation operates centrally (GM C17) and processes are designed by the HQ to ensure a ‘unique’ approach (Group Talent Manager C16). Although there is a guide available on how to use the TM processes and tools (HR Director C14; Group Talent Manager C16), business units only implement parts of the corporate TM process (HR Director C18). HR Director C14 details that ‘everyone is doing something, but it is not a stream line process.’ Similarly, Regional Head of TM C3 demands more ‘accountability’ to ensure the active and full engagement with the TM process. Having reviewed the approach currently applied at the three MNHCs, the next section details how this construct was developed.

#### **5.4.2.1 Development of Approach**

At American Hotel Group, the discussion around TM started approximately in 2010 (Head of HR A9). The organisation decided to focus on a ‘top talent’ process which encompasses approximately ten per cent of the workforce. Head of HR A9 states:

What we did not want to do at that time was develop a talent management programme for every level of talent at [American Hotel Group] because then there was a whole debate about ‘why do you only focus on top talent?’

The TM leadership team spent time with the CEO to discuss the purpose of the organisation, interviewed leaders in the group to review what makes a leader successful, and developed the current competency framework which focuses on modern leadership (Regional Head of HR A2; HR Director A21). The Head of HR A1 explains:

If we want to be the kind of learning organisation our CEO wants us to be where we keep evolving and where we become a very different type of company [...]. Our chairman described it once, he said he would love to have a hybrid of Google and Starbucks. So he said, ‘I want to have people that get up in the morning and are hungry for a challenge to try out different things, and I want this combined with a deep sense of purpose that people buy into what you do as a company which is more than just selling hotel rooms.’

Cluster HR Director A19 strongly supports this approach and criticises:

I think our CEO has this very clear, but unfortunately not all the leaders in the company have the same vision. [Our CEO] has a very clear vision about that, but in the second level in the organisation, there are plenty of old-fashioned hoteliers and until they do not change their mind, we will not change. But we are working on developing those next leaders who will change that.

At APAC Hotel Group, the current TM approach was developed in 2007 as a response to the ‘aggressive view on development’ (Chief HR Officer B17). The Head of TM B3 led the initiative of establishing a competency framework based on the 67 competencies developed by Lombardo and Eichinger (2004) (L&D Manager B8). The relevance of each competence for the organisation was discussed with the management team at all business units which resulted in the current competency framework (Head of TM B3).

At EMEA Hotel Group, the executive team requested the development of a TM process in 2014 (Regional Head of HR C5). The group worked with external consultants to conduct a benchmark study with high-performing organisations and to receive a list of 240 competencies. These were then refined by applying focus groups with key stakeholders (Regional Head of TM C3).

Having reviewed the overall approach to TM and its development, the next sections review key TM strategies. The first strategy presented is the concept of workforce segmentation.

#### **5.4.2.2 Segmentation of Workforce**

American Hotel Group applies a segmentation strategy ‘for the benefit of the company and the benefit of the individual’ (Head of TM A20). According to Head of TM A20, the group is proposing distinctive processes and tools for seven different segments of the workforce (i.e. at a corporate level: critical roles, vice presidents, managers and

directors, and professional individual contributors; at a business unit level: GMs and executive members, management, and non-management):

Talent management for us is about segmenting our talent because not everybody is the same. We have different people at different stages in their career who would benefit from different types of development and career management. [...] It sometimes has a bit of a bad name. We never did forced ranking. I think for us, the talent segmentation is just purely based on the conversations that we have with the employee and the capabilities that the employee has.

At APAC Hotel Group, the same tools are applied across the workforce and Head of HR B11 states that they are ‘not that sophisticated’ (laughs). Nevertheless, ‘different buckets of talent’ are identified (Head of Operations B18) and focused development is in place (Head of TM B3). A particular segment is a group of ‘cultural exchange ambassadors’ which are high performing, but do not necessarily have the ability or desire to grow further. These ambassadors are corporate culture experts and used for hotel openings to ‘help bring the DNA in’ (Head of TM B3; Head of HR B22). Finally, Head of HR B11 reinforces the notion of ‘managing at an individual level’, referring to Accenture’s (2015, p.3) ‘workforce of one.’

At EMEA Hotel Group, the same tools are applied across the workforce, but investment is significantly higher for pivotal talent, that is, approximately 70 per cent of the resources (Head of TM C15). In addition to segmentation, up-and-coming talent is also seen as a strategic focus at two of the case study organisations as illustrated in the next section.

#### **5.4.2.3 Up-and-Coming Talent**

Up-and-coming talent was announced as a strategic focus at American Hotel Group and APAC Hotel Group in 2016 (Regional Head of HR A26; Chief HR Officer B17). At both organisations, the CEO requested to focus on lower levels. At American Hotel Group, focus was placed on assistant managers and heads of departments. The

objective was to identify the ‘best and brightest’ under 35 years of age (Regional Head of HR A26). Similarly, APAC Hotel Group reviewed talent that could be potential GMs. The key target groups were supervisors and junior managers. This talent was ‘likely to be under 35’, showed learning agility, possessed high language capabilities, exceeded expectations, and had a high potential rating (Head of TM B3). These employees are ‘still a bit raw, but you can see a spark in them’ (Chief HR Officer B17), and are therefore kept ‘on the radar screen.’ Following this exercise, the 48 shortlisted employees will be nurtured and fast tracked if possible (Head of HR B22). This strategic focus is embraced by the Head of Operations B6 who states that it is important to ‘strengthen talent sourcing from the base.’

Finding up-and-coming talent and experienced talent requires a portfolio of sourcing channels. The main channels used in the three case study organisations are detailed in the next section.

#### **5.4.2.4 Sourcing Channels**

A variety of sourcing channels were identified at all the organisations, such as the talent acquisition system (TAS) and TMS, organisational intranet, referrals, corporate website, career fairs, campus recruitment, television programmes, social media networks (i.e. LinkedIn, Xing, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), and various online job portals (i.e. Catererglobal, Gumtree, Hotelcareer, and Indeed). The extent to which business units engage with individual channels differs. HR Director B10 appreciates this flexibility:

I always do sourcing and recruiting. I am a big fisherman, and it is exactly like fishing. I may be trout fishing in West Virginia and I might be in Scotland trout fishing, the same exact trout, and I am going to be very, very different in my approach towards the outcome. While the sourcing is very different, you have to maintain the discipline of not compromising what the talent standards are.



Moreover, Regional Head of HR A26 places focus on the role of the recruiter:

The other thing that we are very in need of are real recruiters. The staffing function or employment function in a hotel is generally somebody coming right out of school and there is no real programme to teach them how to recruit. My feeling is that a recruiting or staffing position is a sales person and it is not an administrative position.

Furthermore, talent identification outside of the hospitality industry was discussed among interviewees. Head of HR A22 and Cluster GM C8 argue that it is ‘possible’, but difficult. In those cases, a ‘legitimate expectation’ exists to familiarise with hotel operations (Head of TM A20). Hotel Manager B20 asserts that firms must show flexibility and recruit from other industries, for instance, the retail sector. According to interviewees, other functions that can be filled with talent from outside the industry are sales and marketing (GM B15; HR Director C10). To conclude, the Head of HR Operations B6 contends:

When you look at the more senior positions in the organisation, let us say chief executive level, today in the hospitality industry you rarely find hospitality. You find finance background, to some extent, marketing, to some extent cross-industry in terms of banks, finance, which bring a fresh and new approach from today for the senior leaders.

#### **5.4.3 Definition of Pivotal Talent**

Having presented the overarching approach to GTM, this section focuses on the definition of pivotal talent. Findings show that no formal definition of talent or pivotal talent exists across all organisations. American Hotel Group discusses ‘top talent’, though not necessarily as a subset of talent. Employees with high performance and high potential are referred to as ‘top talent’ (Head of HR A9). Moreover, employees who have a high impact on business results and are difficult to replace are viewed as vital (Regional Head of HR A2). Regional Head of HR A2 contends:

I think talent is broad, right? We talk about our talent in terms of those individuals who are top talent. [...] I think it is all about nomenclature. [...] We do not say, 'Top talent is a subset of talent.' We just say that there is a top talent group.

Across business units, all employees are referred to as 'associates' in EMEA and APAC, while the term 'colleagues' is more dominant in the Americas (Regional Head of HR A11). Cluster HR Director A10 states, 'I do not think we use those terms [referring to pivotal talent], but we do prioritise.' No consensus was reached on whether all employees should be considered talent. Cluster HR Director A17 asserts:

I think we got a variety of definitions. Some are old and some are changing, and we have not quite clarified exactly the terminology and the key ingredients, and I think that inconsistency is one of the things that is troubling for me. [...] I think from a technical point, we have not necessarily clarified that. I think from an overall attitudinal, behavioural leadership style competence definition, I am quite clear on what we are trying to achieve.

At APAC Hotel Group, all employees are considered talent without having 'an official party line' or 'an official sentence or definition' (L&D Director B1; Head of HR B22). From a corporate perspective, pivotal talent is colleagues with high performance and high potential as well as employees who are cultural exchange ambassadors (Head of TM B3). At a business unit level a range of views was found. For instance, GM B23 states:

To me everyone is talent. Everyone has to be talent. I would not be a good manager saying, 'I do not hire talent' because if I want to be working for the best, I need to work with the best, and I am only as good as my weakest link.

On the contrary, F&B Director B13 argues:

You cannot build a team out of 11 star players. It would be a cut-throat environment. I do not think everybody is talent, but I think everybody has an important role to play within the organisation, and I think everybody contributes. It is still a place where you are expected to perform better than in any other property.

Other pivotal talent factors mentioned by interviewees at a business unit level were growth potential, leadership, and fast trackers (F&B Directors B2 and B13; GM B23). Furthermore, Hotel Manager B20 views pivotal talent as an employee who has a niche talent:

Something that others do not necessarily have or something that the market would demand. We have a colleague who has a certain characteristic. He is very charismatic, which maybe you would not find too much here, and that is obviously gold dust on the market, so that is huge talent in my eyes for this market.

At a corporate level in EMEA Hotel Group, talent is defined as employees who demonstrate ‘performance that adds values to the business and potential to grow’, and pivotal talent receives a high performing and high potential rating (Head of TM C15). Potential to go further has been linked to ‘high potentials’ among several interviewees at a business unit level (GM C13; HR Director C14).

Overall, the notion of high performance and high potential dominates the approach to defining pivotal talent among the three MNHCs. This illustrates a strong link to the concept of talent as capital (i.e. HC and SC) for which the main criterion is the contribution to the organisation. In addition to pivotal talent, the organisations engage with the concept of critical positions to some extent which is presented in the next section.

#### **5.4.4 Critical Positions**

Although no official list of critical positions or roles exists at any of the three MNHCs, GMs are viewed as critical positions in all the organisations. Head of HR A1 illustrates:

You go to Starbucks, and in Starbucks the most critical role is the site inspector, the guy who goes and finds the places where they are going to put a Starbucks. You go to Disney, the most critical role in Disney is the street sweeper because he is the guy out there who sees everything, who is in touch with everybody. For us it is the general manager, the unit manager in a hotel.

GMs ensure the right culture at a business unit, know the brand, and are in high demand for hotel openings (Heads of HR A1, A22, and B11; Head of Operations B18; Group Talent Manager C16). The GM ‘sets the tone of how the team is managed’ (Cluster GM C8).

At a corporate level, American Hotel Group ‘experimented’ with a list of 14 critical roles at a senior corporate level (Head of TM A20). At the most senior level, Chief HR Officer B17 points out that the CEO, chief financial officer, and chief HR officer are now often described as ‘the holy trinity’ of an organisation. EMEA Hotel Group officially defines critical roles as roles that (1) have the highest impact on strategy and execution, (2) create the greatest competitive advantage, (3) have a disproportionate importance to the ability to execute business strategy, and (4) are difficult to hire because of short supply in the external market (Talent Review Guide).

At a business unit level, further critical positions mentioned were ‘everyone managing people’ (reference in particular to finance, revenue, and HR) and positions that are ‘difficult to fill’ (Cluster HR Director A15; HR Director A21). Specialised functions, such as revenue and IT, were also mentioned (Heads of HR A9 and B22). At APAC Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group, reference was also made to all heads of departments and above, who have direct responsibility over a department, division or hotel (Hotel Manager B7; GM B21; HR Director C10). HR Director B12 asserts:

I think if you have a strong executive committee, it is like a cabinet or congress working with the president. [...] We are all equally important, but I am a firm believer that we really have three main players amongst that senior team, which is the general manager, the hotel or resident manager, and the director of human resources. They have to be very much on the same page.

Although the overall focus of critical positions was on managerial and senior corporate levels, some interviewees referred to positions at a lower level, such as stewards, staff canteen chef, and concierge (Head of Operations B4; GM B14). GM B14 concludes:

If you were to ask me to write down the 50 people that I think I would take with me on Noah's Ark flood scene, it would be very cross-sectional. You would be quite surprised with some of the people that are in there.

Having introduced the broad GTM strategy, the next section focuses on the findings related to the third RQ, that is, what criteria do MNHCs apply to identify pivotal talent?

### **5.5 Talent Identification Criteria**

The results of this section are presented under seven broad criteria: competency framework, intellectual abilities, education, experience, performance, potential, and readiness (see Appendix J, Table J.3). These are all components related to the concept of talent as capital (i.e. HC and SC). It is important to always consider a combination of criteria to evaluate talent and not rely on a single metric (Cluster HR Director A10). Some emphasis is placed on the competency framework as it is the basis for the identification of talent in all participating MNHCs.

Since this research applies a systematic approach to TM (Mellahi & Collings, 2010; Wiblen, 2016), it focuses on measurable criteria. However, the researcher recognises that various interviewees take an intuitive approach by identifying an 'X-factor' or relying on gut feeling (Cluster GM A3; Front Office Manager A5; GMs A14, B15, and B23; Cluster HR Director A28; Head of Operations B4; Head of TM C15). Concerns about this approach have been expressed by Head of HR A1:

I know a few people that are very good with gut feeling and they are very good in assessing people, and they keep on hiring people that are like them because you have a natural bias and you are looking for people that are similar to you.<sup>1</sup> [...] So yes, they select great people, but they select people for themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> This has been described as the *similarity-attraction effect*. People tend to be attracted to others who are similar to themselves (Montoya & Horton, 2012).

In addition to gut feeling, chemistry was mentioned (HR Director B12; GM C13). Cluster HR Director A17 prefers observations when working with people as opposed to only objective criteria. Similarly, Hotel Manager B20 does not believe that there is a set of criteria and emphasises the influence of individual preferences. Particularly for external recruitment, the Head of Operations B4 further claims:

I do not think that you can capture that to a large degree in a formula. To a large degree it is gut feeling when you employ people. [...] Like a blind date. Are you objective when you leave the blind date and say, 'Well, this is somebody I want to spend more time with' or 'This was the first and last time I met this person?'

### 5.5.1 Competency Framework

Results show that all three MNHCs have developed an official competency framework (see Table 5.2). The competency framework plays a vital role in the talent identification process as it is adopted as a central guideline for discussions and assessments.

**Table 5.2: Competency Frameworks**

<b>American Hotel Group</b>	<b>APAC Hotel Group</b>	<b>EMEA Hotel Group</b>
1 leadership profile	4 clusters: purpose, process, people, personal	3 clusters: values, customers, innovation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 competencies (supervisors and above)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 core competencies (everyone)</li> <li>• 6-10 leadership competencies (supervisors and above)</li> <li>• Functional competencies (position-specific)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 competencies (line employees and supervisors)</li> <li>• 9 competencies (all managers)</li> </ul>

Source: Author

At American Hotel Group, the five behavioural competencies are based on what people can observe (Cluster HR Director A19). The leadership profile is applied to all supervisors and above. Line employees are evaluated on the basis of the values of the organisation (Head of HR A1). The Head of HR A1 justifies this simple model:

A competency framework that you usually see these days with 15 competencies is just not sustainable. [...] 99 per cent of organisations put together a generic competency framework. They do not necessarily connect leadership with where they want to go as an organisation.

APAC Hotel Group applies a more complex competency model. The model is made up of three elements: core, leadership, and functional competencies. Competencies are divided into four clusters: purpose, process, people, and personal. The seven core competencies apply to everyone in the organisation. Moreover, six to ten leadership competencies are added for supervisors and above gradually according to their position.

The Head of TM B3 explains:

Now we have quite a lot – people can have 13, 14 competencies, while some other groups might have five or six competencies, so we have quite a fairly complex system, but the reason I like that is that if somebody is not so good in giving feedback, it makes them much more focused.

In addition, functional competencies, which are assigned to every position, focus on resource management and technical skills. For example, a hotel manager must develop functional competencies in all major areas of the hotel, such as operations management, HR, sales and marketing, finance, and engineering (Functional Competency Framework).

At EMEA Hotel Group, the competency framework is applied across all levels of the organisation and encompasses three clusters: values-based, customer-focused, and innovative colleagues. Within each cluster, three competencies are identified. Since 33 per cent of the competencies focus on the culture of the organisation, the framework is perceived as ‘unique’ for the organisation (HR Director C11; Group Talent Manager C16).

Similar to APAC Hotel Group, the number of competencies increases according to the hierarchical level in the organisation: six for employees and supervisors and nine for all managers. Concerns about the current model were expressed by Group Talent Manager C16:

We are looking at re-editing our competencies, to be honest. [...] Some of the headings say something, but when you read deep inside the description, you will be like, 'Oh no, this is not what I thought.' [...] We are looking at changing them to make them more applicable to everybody.

Overall, most factors of the competency frameworks in the three MNHCs relate to HC factors. Core competencies are linked to attitudes and behaviours; leadership competencies refer to skills such as communication, problem-solving, and decision-making; and functional competencies encompass knowledge and technical skills of a specific position. However, the official frameworks of the three MNHCs also implicitly provide evidence of SC referring to the importance of social relations. In addition to the official competency framework, reference was made to other HC factors, such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes and behaviours (see Appendix J, Table J.2).

Knowledge encompasses local knowledge, business acumen, and an understanding of luxury. Talent must develop local leadership and gain a cultural understanding (Cluster HR Director A19). According to Regional Head of HR C5, local knowledge can be a competitive advantage:

In [city X] in particular, we are a very good picking ground for companies that are opening [there] and they need local knowledge – EMEA Hotel Group is a great place. If I think of [hotel Y] opening, [they] tried very hard to get some of our senior team [...] because they knew we knew [city X] inside out whether that was legal, risk management, human resources, finance.

Business acumen, which refers to an understanding of the business world, is vital as it relates to the 'commercial aspect of running the business with a profit' (Cluster GM C8). This includes an understanding of luxury and the service delivery in such an environment (L&D Manager B8). Talent must show attention to detail and have an



anticipatory skill set, for example, anticipating the guests' needs (HR Director B10; GM C9). In the high-end luxury market, this may also include a certain 'polish' or 'elegance' from people (Hotel Manager B20).

In addition to knowledge, a variety of skills were mentioned by the interviewees. These are presented below in four groups: communication, critical thinking, resource management, and technical skills.

Communication skills are crucial to 'interact with guests' (HR Director C18). They allow employees to 'get in touch' (Front Office Manager A5) and 'connect' with customers (Hotel Manager A24). At a higher level in the organisation, these skills are important to convey information in meetings and presentations (GM B15). In addition, they are required for upselling, for example, as a sales manager, front office manager, or F&B manager (Rooms-Division Director A12; Regional Head of HR A26; L&D Director B1). Moreover, language skills are desired by all MNHCs with English and the local language being mandatory and an additional language preferred. Languages in high demand are French, German, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, and Arabic. GM B14 points out that there are 'not many people who speak Arabic, but they are maybe expanding more rapidly than anyone else at the moment.' Similarly, when operating in China, it is crucial to speak Mandarin or an appropriate Chinese dialect at a higher level to communicate with owners (GM C9). The difficulty in finding talent with the required language skills has been detailed by the Head of Operations B6:

For my region, it was particularly challenging in the last six, seven, eight years because internally we had very little linguistic capability available. [...] So these linguistic challenges needed to be attributed to and resourced accordingly, mostly externally over the last five years.

Critical thinking skills include strategic thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, organisation, innovation, and entrepreneurial skills. Particularly for heads of departments and above, decision-making skills are crucial (GM A23). According to HR

Director A21, it is important to have a ‘very holistic, big picture view’ of a role. This may include ‘foresight’ (GM B21), and the consideration of ‘different solutions’ (Regional Head of HR A26). HR Director A21 asserts:

When making decisions or leading [a] team, it is not just about this project that they have in front of them. [It is] talking about how this project is going to impact them two years from now, next year, and also [looking] at other departments.

In addition, being stable and structured (Cluster HR Director A6) as well as being innovative and creative (Cluster GM A3; Head of Operations B4) are both characteristics of talent. L&D Director B1 explains:

I like to think that we have a great mix of go-getters, incredibly bright and creative people that are not afraid of change, and then we also have some others that are trying to hold us steady in a sense so we do not lose our identity. [...] When you have a great balance, my God, it really helps.

Three out of nine competencies applied in the framework at EMEA Hotel Group are designed around innovation, which shows the importance of this factor. Interviewees further referred to thinking ‘outside the box’ (Hotel Manager A16; HR Director C18), being ‘entrepreneurial’ (Cluster GM A3) and ‘visionary’ (Rooms-Division Director A25), presenting ‘fresh ideas’ (Regional Head of HR A2), and ‘creativity’ (GM B21).

Resource management skills encompass financial and asset management skills. Financial skills are deemed critical for managerial positions. Interviewees discussed the ability to deliver and drive through results (Head of TM B3; Hotel Manager C12) and the ability to increase revenue by effectively analysing statistics and seeking opportunities for profit (GM B21). In addition, Head of Operations B6 contends that at a corporate level, asset management becomes more important in the future. He refers to existing MNHCs and the major recent acquisitions in the industry:

Those conglomerates are forming ever more quickly with an ever greater emphasis on the value of these assets today in the market place as an investment. The more emphasis and the more centralisation we find in the investment community to own these assets, the more sophisticated will the leadership of these assets have to become as well. [...] That automatically pushes a whole new skill set of business leadership in the coming years, be it general manager, be it area vice president, be it executive vice president, we have to pay tribute to those fast-changing paradigms.

Finally, no consensus was reached among interviewees as to how important technical skills are to be identified as pivotal talent. Regional Head of HR A26 argues that talent must be ‘technical-savvy’ and HR Director B24 sees ‘technical know-how’ as an important factor. Various interviewees emphasise that technical skills can be taught at any level in the operations (Hotel Manager A16; Rooms-Division Director A25; HR Directors B12 and B24). The Head of HR A22 states:

We always struggle with making sure that leaders are identifying our talent consistently and in some respect what I mean by that is: We have a tendency at [American Hotel Group] to identify talent based on skills: ‘Can they run a front office, can they run a housekeeping department?’ [...] versus starting with, ‘Do they have the right values that we are looking for?’

On the other hand, GM C17 would like to focus more on technical skills:

Shape the future of talent management? Maybe we have to start teaching people how to serve tea and coffee. [...] I think there will need to be a focus on the core skills of being a hotelier, or a restaurant or F&B or front office personnel, and that we cannot always focus on everyone being the manager, that is tricky.

The third component, in addition to knowledge and skills, is the attitude and behaviour of employees. The following paragraphs incorporate the attitudes and behaviours required to be considered pivotal talent and focuses on the demonstration of core values, personal attributes, and interpersonal qualities. It is evident from the data analysis that social competence (attitudes and behaviours) is a crucial identification criterion reflected by the number of references made to this factor among participants (see Appendix J, Table J.2).

While reference is often made to the official competency framework or set of values, the demonstration of some values is explicitly pointed out by various interviewees at all participating MNHCs. Some of these values include care, empathy, integrity, and

humility. Particularly at American Hotel Group, care and empathy are embraced and measured through a care index at a managerial level. The Head of HR A22 explains:

It really starts with, do I care for you and can I develop trust with you, or do I make you feel like you are a number and an undervalued person? I think that is a huge element that goes throughout our leadership around the world, that notion of demonstrating care and demonstrating that you are part of the organisation.

In addition to care, integrity, which includes the identification of ethical and trustworthy leaders and corporate citizens (Head of HR A22), is an essential value in all organisations. Moreover, the demonstration of humility is emphasised at APAC Hotel Group. Young talent must stay humble and earn respect from both managers and customers (Cluster HR Director A10; F&B Director B13). Head of HR B22 further details that Asian humility may appear unnatural for American employees, but they must still have a sense of humility and humbleness. Chief HR Officer B17 justifies:

I think an underlying attribute or value that we would like is humility. [...] It is certainly not the loudest that gets their way, it is the person that navigates through the culture, who is humble in the way they do things. [...] Our colleagues, when they serve guests, are humble; when they do so, they are not subservient, but they are humble, and they respect the guest, and that is a key part of who we are.

In addition to the demonstration of values, personal attributes were frequently mentioned by interviewees. A positive (Cluster HR Director A4; Cluster GM C8) and proactive (HR Director A21; GM C2) attitude is a key characteristic of talent. GM B23 emphasises, 'I hire by smile' and the Head of TM C15 details:

I see it in some hotels, but in [EMEA Hotel Group] it is kind of part of the DNA. If you walk as a guest, the majority of colleagues, 90 per cent, will say, 'Good morning' and approach you and see if they can help you.

Furthermore, pivotal talent has a degree of maturity, can manage his/her talent, understands his/her career prospects, and shows a sense of independence (Cluster HR Director A6; HR Director C11; GM C13). According to GM B15, an elevated level of maturity is crucial to be identified as pivotal talent:

My training manager in this hotel is 23 years of age – really? The guy has not even finished puberty and he is orientating these colleagues who join the brand. [He] has no life experience. Now, he is a good person, but he needs to be developed, he is not the training manager. [...] I had somebody's father die today, and I do not think this guy at this young age is going to be able to deal with all the emotional things and see it with confidence and real depth.

Further personal attributes required are a global mindset, flexibility, and agility.

As part of a MNHC, local managers must become international and global managers (Cluster HR Director A19) and international experience is always preferred (Head of Operations B6). Having the flexibility and agility to adapt to diverse cultures, teams, locations, and business situations is vital (Heads of HR A1 and A9; Chief HR Officer B17; GMs B21 and C2; Regional Head of HR C5). Finally, a few interviewees referred to an appropriate appearance (F&B Director A18; Cluster HR Directors A4 and A28; Head of Operations B18). While Hotel Manager B20 acknowledges that employees must be able to present themselves and be well groomed, particularly for guest-facing roles, it is not perceived as a critical factor:

Look for certain elegance and polish in a person – that, I am not so much concerned about. I think it is something that we can always teach. We can always put somebody in a nice suit, put a nice tie on, and wear makeup. I think these are secondary matters, for me at least.

Interpersonal qualities include customer focus, 'going the extra mile', teamwork, people management, and leadership. Customer focus encompasses a wide range of characteristics such as being a 'perfect host' (GM A29), empathising with guests (Cluster HR Director A28), being willing to serve and delight guests (HR Director B24; GM C17), and building customer relationships (Cluster GM C8; Head of TM C15). In addition, 'going the extra mile' by working hard and taking on additional projects is a valuable characteristic (Cluster GM A3; Hotel Managers A7 and A24; GM C17). A sense of team building and strong teamwork through collaboration and engagement within a team are essential to provide the highest level of customer service (Cluster HR Director A6; Rooms-Division Director A25; Head of Operations B6; GM C2; Cluster GM C8; HR

Director C10). This shows that HC components such as customer focus and teamwork are the linchpin of SC (i.e. the development of quantity and quality of social relations).

People management and leadership were stated as one of the most crucial factors to be considered pivotal talent in all three MNHCs. Interviewees also referred to ‘social skills’, ‘interpersonal skills’, and ‘interpersonal savvy’ (Front Office Manager A5; GM A29; Head of TM B3; HR Manager C7). Leaders develop, advise, inspire, and influence people, as well as demonstrate confidence (Cluster HR Director A10; GM A13; Hotel Managers A16 and A24; HR Director B12; Talent Manager C4). Cluster HR Director A19 explains their current leadership challenge within the organisation:

Nowadays we are still struggling with the leadership that we are having in the company. [...] In a world where we look for somebody who is able to inspire. I do not need to know how to clean a towel to inspire a team of laundry. I need to know how my team [will be able to] deliver a service with excellence and passion. This is something that unfortunately the hotel schools did not really achieve yet, and [...] unfortunately in [American Hotel Group] we have plenty of these leaders.

In a similar vein, the Head of Operations B4 explains the concept of leadership stating that strong leadership is a rare talent, and requires somebody who will improve and inspire:

Somebody told me once, ‘As a leader, you do not need to know how to scramble eggs, you just need to hire the best possible chef, need to give them the tools and need to motivate them. The rest, the person will do, and the guest will determine how successful you are.’

Having reviewed the competency approach of the three MNHCs which provided evidence of HC and SC components, the next three sections illustrate three further criteria to identify talent: intellectual abilities, education, and experience – all of which foster the development of HC and SC.

### **5.5.2 Intellectual Abilities**

As the NVivo analysis shows, broad intellectual abilities are only mentioned by some interviewees (see Appendix J, Table J.3). They refer to ‘numerical ability’ (Head of HR A1), ‘innate ability’ (HR Director A21), and ‘capability’ (Head of HR A22; Regional Head of HR C5; HR Director C18). A focus was placed on emotional intelligence, which was crucial for many interviewees (Head of Operations B6; Regional Head of HR C5). Emotional intelligence allows talent to connect with guests (Cluster GM A3; GM B23; HR Director C14). GM A13 refers to an ‘emotion-based talent’ and L&D Manager B25 contends that organisations must understand employees’ emotions to make appropriate talent decisions.

### **5.5.3 Education**

Limited reference was made to the role of education by the participants (see Appendix J, Table J.3). Interviewees generally view education as beneficial for talent identification and higher education will increase the chances to be considered for a position (L&D Manager B8). HR Directors B12 and B24 emphasise the importance of education in senior roles, and the Head of Operations B6 views talent as somebody with a ‘great scholarly and educational background.’ A subtler view was expressed by Cluster GM A3 who argues:

I think you do not need a master’s degree to become a general manager or very tough business education. I think if you want to continue after and go into the regional office or corporate office, you probably benefit a lot if you have your master’s degree in economics or hotel management. [...] I think especially at the hotel level, those with the masters’ degrees, I think, they are not desirable.

#### **5.5.4 Experience**

At a higher level in the organisation, previous experience in a similar role is desired (Cluster HR Director A10; Regional Head of HR A26; HR Director C10). Moreover, a minimum of six to 12 months of experience is requested for GLPs (Regional Head of HR A11; Head of TM B3). Experience is particularly important when working in some Southeast Asian countries, such as China and South Korea where seniority is much respected (Cluster HR Director A10). Experience may also affect promotions; for instance, in France, employees sometimes receive promotions according to seniority (Cluster HR Director A30). Furthermore, pre-opening experience is a valuable factor when being considered for a position in a new hotel (Cluster GM C8). Experience in various consecutive settings provides a proven track record (GM B14). F&B Director B13 further explains:

I would seek people who also have stamina, meaning, not the jumpers – three months here, six months there. Those people I would not hire because they are just going to occupy a position for three months and they are going to get bored and then move on, so I would never hire the jumpers.

In addition to the aforementioned criteria, performance is a critical factor to identify talent in the three MNHCs. The concept of performance and its components are presented in the next section.

#### **5.5.5 Performance**

Based on the data analysis, it is evident that performance is a key criterion to identify talent as it is discussed by all participants across the three MNHCs. Table 5.3 summarises criteria used to determine performance mentioned by the interviewees. They are grouped into four clusters: organisational competencies, KPIs, specific-measurable-achievable-realistic-timely (SMART) objectives, and accomplishments. Hence, demonstrating HC and SC contributes to high performance.



**Table 5.3: Criteria for Identification of Performance**

American Hotel Group	APAC Hotel Group	EMEA Hotel Group
<i>Organisational competencies</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate the leadership profile</li> <li>• Leadership framework</li> <li>• Strategic outlook</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver against competencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competency framework</li> <li>• Innovators</li> <li>• Influencers</li> </ul>
<i>KPIs</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financials</li> <li>• Turnover rates</li> <li>• Guest service</li> <li>• Guest satisfaction</li> <li>• Net promoter scores<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Leadership index</li> <li>• Engagement score</li> <li>• Employee satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financials</li> <li>• Productivity</li> <li>• Service standards</li> <li>• Quality measures</li> <li>• Turnover rates</li> <li>• Inspection scores</li> <li>• Guest satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financials</li> <li>• Revenue contributor</li> <li>• Earnings</li> <li>• Key business indicators</li> <li>• Accuracy of forecasts</li> <li>• Turnover rates</li> <li>• Excellent service</li> <li>• Customer satisfaction</li> </ul>
<i>SMART objectives</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve personal goals</li> <li>• Exceed goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personalised goals</li> <li>• SMART business goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual personal objectives</li> <li>• Personal goals</li> </ul>
<i>Accomplishments</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training record</li> <li>• Online training</li> <li>• Exposure to courses</li> <li>• Achievements</li> <li>• Accomplishments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn a new training technique</li> <li>• Attend programmes and courses</li> <li>• Consider training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects</li> <li>• Cross-training</li> <li>• Courses</li> </ul>

Source: Author

The official approach by the three MNHCs focuses on their competency framework, KPIs, and individual objectives. At American Hotel Group, high performance means exceeding expectations regarding their KPIs and demonstrating their leadership

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<sup>2</sup> Customers may act as ‘promoters’, meaning that they are likely to recommend an organisation to someone else. The *net promoter score* is calculated by ‘subtracting the percentage of customers who say they are unlikely to make a recommendation from the percentage who say they are extremely likely to do so’ (Reichheld, 2003, p.52).

profile (Regional Head of HR A2; Head of TM A20). Head of HR A1 summarises the approach as follows:

I think the hospitality is part of it, but today a GM has to be able to manage a business. [...] I think if I look at it from a HR perspective, I think leadership is very important for me and somebody who understands the purpose of [American Hotel Group], who can live the values. Now for me, I wish that one day we would fire somebody over that even though he delivers results. That would be a strong statement.

Similarly, Cluster HR Director A17 advocates for a stronger focus on leadership and criticises the over-reliance on KPIs:

How often do we go into the hotel and talk about the general managers' behaviour and performance? It does not happen. General managers are evaluated on the economics of the hotel, and generally speaking, it is unfair on a lot of people who are just wonderful leaders.

At APAC Hotel Group, competencies and KPIs (or alternatively, individual objectives) hold an equal weight of importance. All KPIs are cascaded down the hierarchy and each objective is personalised (L&D Director B1; HR Director B10). Hotel Manager B9 comments on the importance of KPIs:

At the end of the day, I believe it is all about results (laughs), and as a good manager, you are there to create results. There are certain results where you say, 'Hey, there are certain reasons why they have not worked because of market conditions, *et cetera*', but at the end of the day, performance is mainly measured in results.

Furthermore, GM B23 suggests the reconsideration of the weighting of criteria:

What I criticise with that system would be that in years where you make your numbers, you look like a hero, and in years where you do not make your numbers, you look very average. [...] I think that consideration should be given to the weighting of competencies versus KPIs depending on your level. I would support that a general manager has to have 50 per cent weighting on financial goals. Does the executive housekeeper or the restaurant manager need to have a 50 per cent weighting on KPIs? No, I prefer for them to be a good leader.

At EMEA Hotel Group, the performance of line employees is measured 100 per cent on competencies, while it is a combination of competencies (40%) and KPIs (60%) for managers (Head of TM C15). The official weighting of criteria for identification of performance is summarised in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4: Official Weighting of Criteria for Identification of Performance**

<b>American Hotel Group</b>	<b>APAC Hotel Group</b>	<b>EMEA Hotel Group</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Competency framework</li><li>• KPIs (no weighting)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Competency framework (50%)</li><li>• KPIs or individual objectives (50%)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Competency framework (100% for line employees and supervisors; 40% for managers)</li><li>• KPIs or individual objectives (60% for managers)</li></ul>

Source: Author

Having reviewed performance as a key criterion to identify pivotal talent, the next section examines the role of potential.

### **5.5.6 Potential**

While there exists no official universal list of criteria to identify potential at American Hotel Group, APAC Hotel Group developed a list of criteria to identify ‘rising stars.’ EMEA Hotel Group created a set of criteria for the identification of potential. A general emphasis is placed on the ability to grow into a higher level across all organisations by further developing HC and SC.

Table 5.5 presents the official criteria provided by the HQs, which are marked with an asterisk (\*), and additional factors mentioned by interviewees. Based on the data analysis, they are grouped into four emerging clusters: drive, cultural fit, learning agility, and mobility. While drive (attitudes and behaviour) as well as learning agility and mobility (abilities) are components of HC, cultural fit includes both HC and SC factors. For instance, demonstrating an organisation’s values and guiding principles is a HC component (attitudes and behaviour). Interacting comfortably and building networks, on the other hand, leads to the development of social relations (i.e. SC).

**Table 5.5: Criteria for Identification of Potential**

American Hotel Group	APAC Hotel Group	EMEA Hotel Group
<i>Drive</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest, passion, enthusiasm, energy, desire</li> <li>• Initiative, proactivity, self-starter, self-driven, take on more responsibilities, take on special projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passion, hunger, enthusiasm, energy, desire</li> <li>• Initiative, career-driven, drive, seek exposure, do more, engagement</li> <li>• Drive for results*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation*, passion</li> </ul>
<i>Cultural fit</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstration of values, observation of an employees' behaviour</li> <li>• Demonstration of the leadership profile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to corporate mission and vision</li> <li>• Highly rated on organisational competencies, two or more languages*, build teams, build networks, problem-solving skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sincere desire to develop the organisation</li> <li>• Guiding principles</li> <li>• Leadership*, comfortable interaction with senior team*, holistic company perspective*, innovative ideas</li> </ul>
<i>Learning agility</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning agility, ability to learn, curiosity</li> <li>• Ability to adapt, agility</li> <li>• Ability to work in various positions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of learning agility*, develop self and learn on the fly*</li> <li>• Adjust quickly to new circumstances*</li> <li>• Ability to take on new roles*, ability to manage various roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning agility*, interest in learning*, learning, growth mindset</li> </ul>
<i>Mobility</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobility</li> <li>• Move internationally</li> <li>• Flexibility with respect to location</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being mobile</li> <li>• Willingness to move internationally*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobility</li> <li>• Flexibility with respect to location*</li> </ul>

N.B.: The criteria marked with an asterisk (\*) are part of the documented lists provided by the HQs at the case study organisations.

Source: Author

The first cluster, drive, encompasses the elements of dedication (i.e. interest, passion, enthusiasm, energy, desire, hunger, and motivation), initiative (i.e. proactivity, self-starter, self-driven, take on more responsibilities and projects, career-driven, seek exposure, do more, and engagement) and results orientation (i.e. drive for results). Although passion is stated most frequently in all MNHCs, F&B Director B13 evaluates:

Everybody these days talks about passion but I think passion is an overrated thing. I think desire is a much more important thing, the desire to do every day well. [...] I want to know every day a bit more or I want to do every day a great job.

Hotel Manager A24 argues that individuals with drive would like to grow themselves and the organisation. The Head of TM C15 is particularly interested in whether they demonstrate motivation to move into a job that might be different to their current position, and thus, are willing to move beyond their comfort zone. According to Hotel Manager B9, it is regarded as a privilege to work in the luxury hospitality sector in Asia, and thus, employees show elevated levels of drive. By comparison, in the USA, hospitality jobs at a lower level, in particular, have a poor reputation, and therefore, motivation among employees tends to be lower. To identify potential, GM B15 shares management books with employees. He asserts that employees who engage with the books tend to have a higher level of drive and interest in growing into a managerial position.

I give them books, you know, small books like *My Iceberg Is Melting*, *Who Moved My Cheese*, and *The One Minute Manager*. You are giving them those books and they are talking about it, whereas other ones are just putting them in their bag and leaving them there and hoping you will never ask a question about them.

Hotel Manager A24 contends that it is not the organisation that selects talent, but it is the talent that chooses the organisation by demonstrating drive. Cluster HR Director A17 describes it as a 'reciprocal relationship', that is, a mutual commitment, and the Head of TM A20 further explains:

The one thing we say here is that there is a joined responsibility between manager and colleague or employee, and a big chunk of it is employee driven. [...] There is a fair amount of a burden on the shoulders of the colleague to kind of advance their career and advance themselves if they choose to.

The importance of the second cluster, cultural fit, to identify potential has been identified by the three MNHCs. Cultural fit refers to a fit to the organisational culture as well as a fit to the local environment of the hotel property (Head of HR A1; GM A14; L&D Manager B8; Hotel Manager C12). Cultural fit is assured through the competency framework. Employees who embrace the organisational culture by following the company's purpose, values, and brand standards have a much higher chance to be identified as pivotal talent (HR Director B10; Head of Operations B18).

This cluster encompasses commitment to the organisation (i.e. commitment towards the corporate mission and vision, and a sincere desire to develop the organisation), demonstration of core values (i.e. observation of an employee's behaviour and practice guiding principles), and demonstration of leadership competencies (i.e. demonstration of leadership profile, two or more languages, building teams and networks, problem-solving, comfortable interaction with senior team, holistic company view, and introduce innovative ideas). The Head of HR B11 explains the importance of commitment:

I think the more you move into the service sector, and the more you move into luxury certainly, becoming part of the fabric of the organisation to deliver on the organisation's mission and vision and goals [is necessary]. Those who are motivated to do that, need to be identified.

Moreover, all MNHCs argue that the representation of corporate culture (including values, principles, mission, and vision) is vital. HR Director C6 asserts that all employees must believe in the same principles, and Hotel Manager B9 contends that shared values are the decisive factor as to whether an employee will be able to grow within the company:

I think that the consistent approach is that there must be a specific leadership profile and that [a] leader must adhere to the [APAC Hotel Group] values. Those values are core principles, who we are and what our DNA is. [...] I think at the end of the day, right, when you look at the end-product of who is a GM, it is someone that possesses the [APAC Hotel Group] culture, possesses the [company] values.

L&D Manager B8 emphasises the importance of the person-organisation fit (cultural fit) since APAC Hotel Group has a very strong Asian influence, which the organisation considers as a key brand differentiator. To ensure this fit, all MNHCs focus on their leadership competencies that represent the culture of the organisation.

The third cluster, learning agility, includes self-development (i.e. ability to learn, curiosity, learn on the fly, interest in learning, and growth mindset), adaptability (i.e. ability to adapt, agility, and adjust quickly to new circumstances), and fungibility (i.e. ability to work in various positions, take on new roles, and manage various roles). The concept of learning agility is addressed by senior HR leaders at the regional or global HQ at American Hotel Group and APAC Hotel Group. Particularly at American Hotel Group, HR leaders across the operating regions indicated learning agility as a determinant factor. Head of HR A1 explains that learning agility is a critical ability as part of the new direction of the organisation:

Our CEO wants us to keep on evolving. [...] The future is about a very different, agile company. [...] The way we are going to look like in a couple of years, people are going to talk about us like, '[American Hotel Group] is a learning organisation, they have evolved, and they are agile.'

According to HR Director A21, learning agility is important in all levels of the organisation, and employees must demonstrate their ability to learn from experience:

Even in our supervisory positions, right, you can tell us about your ability to learn. You can give us examples of how, you know, what you have achieved, and, you know, what change[s] have you [made], what experience, have you been able to adapt to those experiences?

Furthermore, fungibility, that is, the ability to work in a range of positions, emerges as a valuable factor in several interviews (Hotel Manager A16; Cluster HR Director A19; HR Director B12; Head of Operations B18).

According to all MNHCs, mobility – the fourth cluster of potential – is viewed as a critical factor in identifying potential in employees. This cluster includes the ability to move, the willingness to move, and openness. At the HQ level, discussion around global pivotal talent will focus on individuals with high potential that are internationally mobile (Head of TM B3). Talent Manager C4 concurs that management trainees ought to be internationally mobile. Moreover, international mobility has been set as a requirement for graduate trainees (Head of TM B3) and for up-and-coming talent (Chief HR Officer B17). Similarly, the Head of TM A20 asserts:

It is kind of an expectation now at certain levels if you are going to move up in the organisation, we are going to put you in a different country, role, or brand at least, and that may require you to actually leave where you are and move somewhere else.

Mobility is applied in all organisations and used to spread the ‘corporate culture DNA’ (Cluster HR Director A19). However, it appears to be a key challenge, in particular, at APAC Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group, which are smaller companies with a limited number of properties in each country. HR Director B19 contends that employees must be willing to move around and argues that it seems to reduce their potential if they do not have an international perspective. The Head of TM B3 argues that there is a lack of internationally mobile talent as opposed to a lack of people. Results further show that employees have clear preferences, and thus limited flexibility, towards some locations, which Hotel Manager B20 describes as:

A lot of colleagues are not flexible. [...] Within our [company’s] destinations, there are a lot of areas where people do not want to go. [...] Of course, on a curriculum vitae it would be great to see [cities X, Y, and Z] which is like the A-tier. [...] But where will the growth be coming from in the future? [...] We have a lot of talent who are very picky and I think it holds them back.

According to Cluster HR Director A19, a context-driven, case-by-case strategy needs to be implemented. He argues that mobility is very important in a country with several hotels. However, in Saudi Arabia, France, and India, locals are recruited to work



in their own country. Hence, mobility is not a priority in these countries. In addition to location preferences, individual circumstances significantly affect the level of mobility. Therefore, there appears to be a critical view on the concept and validity of mobility as a criterion to identify potential. Group L&D Manager B16 states that there are also high potentials with limited mobility, which has been supported by the contention of the Regional Head of HR C5:

People talk about mobility all the time and everybody being mobile. Everybody is not mobile, and that is a complete fallacy, I think you are at a certain stage in your life and it suits you personally to be mobile, but once you got perhaps a family or a spouse who also got a great job and you got children in school, mobility is much more challenging.

In addition to performance and potential, a readiness level for talent is assigned by the three MNHCs for internal recruitment. How readiness can be assessed is illustrated in the following section.

### **5.5.7 Readiness**

Readiness is based on HC components such as knowledge or functional competencies needed to work in a specific position. At American Hotel Group, executive committee members and hotel managers receive a readiness level to be a GM depending on the completion of a variety of knowledge-based tasks and tests (Head of HR A1). The Head of HR A1 explains:

For example, I will tell them, '[...] you have to sit down with your GM and your director of finance and read a management agreement. You must have gone with your GM to an owners meeting. You should have done a monthly review with your director of finance.'

At APAC Hotel Group, focus is placed on a GM's functional competencies and a development centre for hotel managers which provides measures on the readiness of hotel managers to become GMs. The Head of Operations B18 explains the different perceptions on readiness in APAC Hotel Group:

What is interesting is, we have a lot of hotel managers that are not ready and they think they are ready. [...] It is a big struggle in our group because there are such different expectations of a GM versus a hotel manager. [...] Really, the GM becomes the strategist and he is really setting the business plan and objectives and ensuring that they are all delivering at all levels. It is a huge jump, so there are a lot of hotel managers who are not ready for that role.

At EMEA Hotel Group, no official readiness criteria are in place and managers use the job description with a focus on technical skills as a guideline to evaluate the readiness (Talent Manager C4; HR Director C14). Regional Head of TM C3 admits:

Where I think [the competency framework] needs improvement is a competence audit of what are the technical competencies required for an executive. [...] That is not in place. [...] The manager would do the checklist with you and you still have a gap analysis, but we are not even that far progressed.

This section reviewed talent identification criteria applied in the case study organisations under seven broad criteria: competency framework, intellectual abilities, education, experience, performance, potential, and readiness. The following section presents tools to assess the criteria identified.

## **5.6 Talent Identification Tools**

This section reviews the tools applied by the three MNHCs to identify pivotal talent. Based on the interview data, findings are presented under five broad areas: talent reviews, conversations, assessments, documentation, and software support (see Appendix J, Table J.3). Table 5.6 provides an overview of the key tools that were implemented by the three MNHCs to identify pivotal talent.

**Table 5.6: Key Identification Tools**

American Hotel Group	APAC Hotel Group	EMEA Hotel Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talent review meeting with performance and potential calibration based on leadership profile and KPIs</li> <li>• Manual nine-box grid placement</li> <li>• In development: Talent scenarios</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance appraisal based on competency framework and KPIs</li> <li>• Potential evaluation by individual managers</li> <li>• Computerised nine-box grid placement</li> <li>• ‘Succession planning meeting’ (talent review meeting) and assignment of readiness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance appraisal based on competency framework and KPIs</li> <li>• Succession planning task: Potential evaluation based on ten-question assessment</li> <li>• Computerised nine-box grid placement</li> <li>• In development: Talent review meeting</li> </ul>

Source: Author

### 5.6.1 Talent Reviews

Based on the data analysis, talent reviews were recognised as a critical tool to identify talent in the three MNHCs as shown in the number of references made to this tool among participants (see Appendix J, Table J.3).

At American Hotel Group, talent reviews with calibration take place at hotel (monthly, quarterly, or biannually), regional (biannually), and global (annually) levels. The discussion is based on the leadership profile and KPIs. At the business unit level, the GM chairs a meeting with his subordinates, the executive committee, and discusses the performance and potential of heads of departments. In addition, some individuals at a lower level are also assessed during the talent review if they had been recommended by managers prior to the meeting (Regional Head of HR A2). At a regional level, the vice presidents of HR and operations, and area HR directors discuss GMs and future GMs. Finally, for the global talent review, the HR and operations leadership teams discuss area HR directors, GMs, and future GMs (Head of HR A1). As a result of these calibration

sessions, employees will be manually placed in a standard nine-box grid with the two axes indicating performance and potential (Head of TM A20).

The organisation also experimented with taking away the nine-box grid and relying solely on calibration settings with talent scenarios (Head of HR A1). The Head of TM A20 illustrates their co-operation with the Neuroscience Institute in New York:

They are basically trying to come up with a variety of alternatives to the nine box because the nine box is basically two dimensional and people are not two dimensional. [...] So this guy came up with those scenarios of talent. There are nine scenarios, so I am like, 'It is the nine box all over again.' But you know, it is an intent.

At APAC Hotel Group, 'succession planning meetings' (talent reviews) take place at a hotel level informally (biannually or annually), with the GM and the executive committee discussing 'high potentials' and heads of departments. Following this, a formal regional succession planning meeting takes place annually at the various hotel properties with the GM, the HR director at the property, the regional vice president of HR, and the regional vice president of operations, focusing on the executive committee and high potentials (Head of TM B3). Finally, a global succession planning meeting takes place with the vice presidents of HR and operations of all regions, the head of TM, the chief HR officer, and the CEO to discuss the company-wide global talent. According to the Head of TM B3, all current employees at heads of departments level or higher, regardless of their position in the nine-box grid, are to be discussed and assigned a readiness level. However, the Head of HR B11 criticises that it is a 'one-time exercise per year' in addition to the lack of calibration during the meetings:

We calibrate, sort of (laughs), for general managers and people who are moving into hotel manager positions, but it is not a real calibration. What we should do at a hotel level, there should be a calibration, I think, across the organisation. [...] There should be someone else who that person interacts with [...] because it is one thing for a manager to rate you today, but if you have a recency<sup>3</sup> or halo<sup>4</sup>, or any of those traits of a rater, then you rate unfairly or overinflated. [...] Somebody might have had a conversation with them that unveils something about that talent that the rater may not have known, and so that is why I think calibration of rating is very important for an organisation for long-term identification of talent.

At EMEA Hotel Group, talent reviews started in December 2016 at the highest corporate level with the CEO, chief operating officer, chief HR officer, and heads of HR, TM, and operations discussing the ‘top 25’ people for GM or hotel manager positions (Head of TM C15). According to the Head of TM C15, talent reviews in the future will be completed three to four times per year and cascaded down to a business unit level where the GM and the executive committee will discuss talent. Employees will be plotted in a nine-box grid which includes four broad areas: future leaders, emerging talent, valued performer/expert resource, and urgent development (Talent Review Guide).

Contrary to talent reviews which are employed for internal talent identification, interviews are predominantly used for external recruitment. The following section details how interviews are applied in the three case study organisations.

### **5.6.2 Interviews**

All three MNHCs conduct interviews for external talent identification. At American Hotel Group, interviews are mainly guided by the values of the organisation, and organised by each business unit (Regional Head of HR A8). The interviews focus on whether an individual embraces the company’s culture and is able to connect with the

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<sup>3</sup> A *recency effect* ‘occurs when a rater gives greater weight to recent events when appraising an individual’s performance’ (Mathis & Jackson, 2008, p.349).

<sup>4</sup> A *halo effect* ‘occurs when a rater scores an employee high on all job criteria because of performance in one area’ (Mathis & Jackson, 2008, p.350).

brand (GM A13). Interviews may take place with HR, superiors, and the GM (Cluster HR Director A28). The Regional Head of HR A11 concludes:

We are still developing our recruitment process. We are trying to [develop] our recruitment questions for leaders around those five leadership qualities, and for everyone [else], the questions are more formulated around the values, beliefs, and purpose of the company.

APAC Hotel Group developed a HC-focused, behaviour-based interview guide which is linked to the competency framework. The involvement of managers in the interviewing process varies from interviewing ‘not necessarily everyone’ (F&B Director B2) or ‘everyone who is in guest contact’ (GM B23) to ‘all’ employees (GM B21).

EMEA Hotel Group established a similar process with a behavioural interview guide. However, HR Manager C7 states that questions were developed at a business unit level. The Regional Head of TM C3 further notes that the guide is not yet linked to the current competencies:

What happened was the competencies got changed, and because there was a pressure to get this performance management system out, they were shooed into that. Now everyone perceives the competencies – if they can think about them – as part of the appraisal and performance management. They do not think about it in terms of recruitment and selection.

The findings of the study showed that interviews are often conducted in combination with assessments. The various assessments for internal and external talent identification are reviewed in the next section.

### **5.6.3 Assessments**

Based on the interview data, the three MNHCs use four key assessment tools to identify talent: performance appraisals and assessment of potential, psychometric testing, 360-degree feedback, and assessment centres. Each of these tools is further examined below.

American Hotel Group officially replaced performance appraisals with continuous conversations in 2015 (Head of TM A20). Employees were ‘completing the forms just for the sake of it’ and the process ‘became too formalised’ (F&B Director A18). Moreover, the Head of TM A20 asserts that at large business units, ‘there is no way one manager can do a quality review of 100 people.’ The Head of HR A1 justifies:

I think in the past it used to be a one to five. I think nowadays it is more organic. [...] Whether we are going to go back to a one to five, I am not sure. We took it off at the moment because we felt that the conversations were more about the score than the actual competencies. We said we would rather [...] make it more qualitative than actually do an assessment.

At APAC Hotel Group, a formal performance appraisal using a five-point scale takes place twice a year for all levels (Hotel Manager B7). It was tracked online for supervisors and above with a completion rate of 95 per cent in 2015 (Head of TM B3). The appraisal is completed by the superior (F&B Director B2). The Head of TM B3 contends that they ‘spent the first few years getting the level of completion up’ and now they are ‘digging much deeper into quality.’ While some interviewees referred to a ‘great’ performance management system (L&D Director B1), several issues with the appraisal system were also mentioned. First, some managers may not have the courage to provide honest feedback (HR Director B5) or intentionally rate employees lower because they do not want to lose their best talent which questions the openness of the social network within the organisation (GM B14). GM B15 criticises:

I am not sure reviews [appraisals] are the right thing anymore. I think it is about development. I think the word annual review sucks. I think in two or three years most companies will step away from annual reviews and talk about development. [...] I mean I read all the managers’ reviews, that is for sure, and I disagree with 90 per cent of them. [...] The colleagues had the most amazing year last year, they are the best colleagues ever, they perform amazingly, the bell curve<sup>5</sup> was not a curve – it was just that amazing [sarcastic].

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<sup>5</sup> The *bell curve* is a graphical representation of a model of distribution which peaks about the mean (bell shaped). It is known mathematically as the Gaussian curve (Fendler & Muzaffar, 2008).

Second, no merit-based increase structure is implemented, and therefore, there is a tendency towards rating everybody the same (Head of HR B11). Third, business units in the Americas interpret the rating scale differently to EMEA or APAC properties in that scoring a three (competent) is viewed as a bad result. Thus, many managers rate their employees with a four or a five (L&D Manager B8), and the bell curve 'is skewed a bit to the right' (Head of HR B11). Moreover, managers in the Americas struggle to assess the competency of humility (L&D Manager B8). Finally, HR Director B24 admits that some talent decisions are not based on the appraisal. Instead, HR Director B24 relies on valuable social relations within the business unit (i.e. SC) which are used as a control tool and access mode to information:

We do not really go through all the performance appraisals of everybody. We have had a full year of observing our managers, we know damn well who should be on that list or not, and that is because we work very closely with them.

At EMEA Hotel Group, a formal performance appraisal with a rating scale from one to five is completed twice a year (GM C2; HR Director C10). First, a self-evaluation takes place followed by an assessment by the superior (HR Manager C7). Like the APAC Hotel Group, some issues were raised. According to the Regional Head of TM C3, the completion rate in 2015 was 75 per cent and appraisals were often completed with 'one liners' or 'dots so that they can move forward' to the next section. In addition, the accuracy of rating was mentioned as an ongoing issue. HR Director C18 criticises extremely high ratings during both the self-evaluation and the assessment by the superior. Similarly, the Regional Head of TM C3 states:

If you go around and ask anyone what kind of ratios a bell curve was, they probably would not know. We have worked exceptionally hard in the past to demonstrate why it is important to have this bell curve because that distribution of performance should match reality.



Finally, potential is discussed and evaluated by the three MNHCs based on the criteria illustrated in section 5.5.6. While American Hotel Group and APAC Hotel Group do not implement any tools, EMEA Hotel Group developed a ten-question assessment as an optional tool; depending on the number of positive responses, a rating (low, medium, or high potential) is calculated (Potential Rating Form).

In addition to performance appraisal and assessments of potential, all three organisations introduced some psychometrics as part of their GTM process. While reference was made to a variety of tests (see Appendix J, Table J.1), they are not viewed as a key tool of the identification process in the three MNHCs. Table 5.7 presents an overview of the applied psychometric tests.

**Table 5.7: Psychometric Testing**

<b>American Hotel Group</b>	<b>APAC Hotel Group</b>	<b>EMEA Hotel Group</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caliper Profile by Caliper Corporation</li> <li>• DISC by DISC Profile</li> <li>• Myer-Briggs Type Indicator by The Myer-Briggs-Foundation</li> <li>• Situational Leadership by The Ken Blanchard Companies</li> <li>• ASSESS by Outmatch</li> <li>• In development: Culture-Fit Assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PDI Assessment by Korn Ferry</li> <li>• 20/20 Skills by Aethos Consulting Group</li> <li>• People Answers by Infor PeopleAnswers Talent Science</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 Factor Questionnaire Plus by Psychtech International</li> <li>• Personality and Preference Inventory by Cubiks Group</li> <li>• Hogan Personality Inventory by Hogan Assessment Systems</li> </ul>

Source: Author

American Hotel Group applies psychometric testing to a limited extent for both recruitment of external (e.g. ASSESS) or internal (e.g. Caliper Profile) talent. The Head of HR A1 states:

Psychometric is something that [we] have never been big on. I started to work with psychometrics first time about 15 years ago and at that time people got very nervous [here], and I even remember, I was told that I should not use it. Since then we have evolved. We have been using it mainly for graduate school recruitment, where we do not have a lot of time to interview students. [...] We also use psychometrics when we look at outside general managers or hotel managers just to get to know them a little better and help us to ask the right questions.

Moreover, the organisation is currently developing a culture-fit assessment which will be used globally for recruitment (Head of HR A1). While it will not be based on disqualification, the test will give an indication on what to address in further conversations (Head of HR A1).

APAC Hotel Group uses People Answers as an indicative psychometric test for external supervisory recruitment in operations departments in EMEA and the Americas. This online tool is weighted against the organisational competencies and assessed against the star performers in the company (L&D Manager B8; Head of HR B22). Moreover, F&B Director B13 and GM B15 referred to the 20/20 skills test which they apply for external recruitment of all positions at their business units. Additionally, the PDI Assessment is applied globally for external recruitment of two levels: middle level leaders (i.e. executive committee) and business unit leaders (i.e. GMs and corporate roles) (Head of HR B22). It is a third-party assessment and participants spend two days in simulation to run a company (L&D Manager B8).

At EMEA Hotel Group, 15 Factor Questionnaire Plus for GMs and corporate managers and Hogan Personality Inventory for managers at a business unit are optional indicative tests applied globally (Recruitment Guide). Personality and Preference Inventory is used at a regional level for some managerial roles (Regional Head of HR C5). The Head of TM C15 points out the objectivity of psychometric tests and the correlation between high scores and success in the organisation. GM C17 presents a subtler view:

Should we psychoanalyse and get people to draw yellow dots and squares, all this sort of stuff, to serve a nice cup of coffee? Maybe not. Should we do it at a senior level? Yeah, maybe. We do not want to employ some mad men. There is a place for everything.

Similar to psychometric testing, 360-degree feedback was only seen as an additional support tool for the identification of talent across the three case study organisations. While a 360-degree approach was applied at various business units at the interview stage including interviewers from various departments and levels, there is only a limited use of formal 360-degree assessments for internal talent identification. American Hotel Group uses a customised 360 Survey by Talent Quest and the Leadership Impact assessment by Human Synergistics International for senior management (Cluster HR Director A10). At EMEA Hotel Group, Hay Group's Emotional and Social Competency Inventory is applied for senior positions. No reference to a 360-degree assessment to identify talent was made by APAC Hotel Group. The lack of such a holistic assessment provides further support to the importance of employee-manager relationships in the evaluation process.

As a further assessment method, assessment centres were introduced. At American Hotel Group, assessment centres are implemented to a limited extent and are generally organised by each business unit. These assessment centres may include shadowing teams (Cluster HR Director A28) and exercises or discussions (Regional Head of HR A11). At APAC Hotel Group, an executive development assessment centre was implemented as a corporate strategy to assess hotel managers against GM competencies with a focus on leadership skills and business acumen (Chief HR Officer B17). The assessment centre is facilitated by an external company, Human Scope, which conducts assessments based on a fictitious organisation including simulations and the submission of reports (Head of HR B22). According to the Head of Operations B18, results show a significant gap between the existing hotel manager competencies and the requested

competencies for a GM position. In the future, the assessment centre will be expanded to the level of heads of departments (Chief HR Officer B17). At EMEA Hotel Group, an assessment centre was initially introduced in 2017 for selected junior positions and management trainees in Europe (Regional Head of HR C5).

Having reviewed four key assessment tools to identify talent in the three MNHCs (performance appraisals and assessment of potential, psychometric testing, 360-degree feedback, and assessment centres), the next section explains the role of additional documentation.

#### **5.6.4 Documentation**

Very limited reference was made to additional documentation (see Appendix J, Table J.3). Documentation, such as a curriculum vitae, is only considered to be a supporting factor during the talent identification process. A curriculum vitae was described as ‘a piece of paper’ (Front Office Manager A5), ‘an old thing’ (Hotel Manager B20), and ‘not as important’ (HR Director B12). The Head of Operations B18 argues that a curriculum vitae with several positions in a similar environment, such as having held various positions within the luxury hospitality setting, highlights success. The Head of Operations B4, on the other hand, questions the reliability of curricula:

The curriculum vitae – you know, in today’s world they are so creatively written, and they are almost marketing tools that are customised almost to the position that somebody is applying for, so how much can you trust a resume?

While there is a limited use of additional documentation, the three MNHCs introduced a variety of TM software which are presented in the next section.

### 5.6.5 Software Support

All three MNHCs implemented both a TAS and TMS to support the identification and management of talent. An overview of the applied systems is provided in Table 5.8.

**Table 5.8: Talent Software Systems**

American Hotel Group	APAC Hotel Group	EMEA Hotel Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TAS: Taleo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TAS: PageUp</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TAS: Taleo</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TMS (within the USA): TalentHub</li> <li>• TMS (outside the USA): Oracle PeopleSoft</li> <li>• At proposal stage (global): Workday</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TMS: SAP SuccessFactors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TMS: SumTotal</li> </ul>

Source: Author

At American Hotel Group, TalentHub is implemented as the TMS within the USA while Oracle PeopleSoft is applied outside the USA. This results in two separated online networks of organisational talent. Both systems are mostly used as a database that produces reports (Head of TM A20). The Regional Head of HR A2 explains:

The HR team still has to enter the operation in the tool. The tool does not actually identify [talent] for us; we have to actually enter data into the tool. [...] For us the digital part is just a method of tracking, but the talent management process is personal. [...] A system is critical, for sure, but I would never base a decision only on what is in the system. We use the system as a helper and then dig deeper, and look at it case by case.

Interviewees perceive the systems as not very user-friendly and outdated (Regional Head of HR A8; Cluster HR Directors A15, A17, and A30). Overall, the systems are not used very well, and data is incomplete (Head of TM A20). Moreover, it is pointed out that many employees in the hospitality industry try to avoid computers and systems (GM A23; Cluster HR Director A28) which are described as very ‘cumbersome’ (Head of HR A1).

The organisation is currently preparing a proposal to adopt a new system, Workday, which will then replace the current two systems and operate on a global basis (Head of HR A1). The investment in a new TMS is justified by speed, efficiency, quality of data, elimination of errors, and the ability to invest time in more strategic functions (Head of TM A20).

At APAC Hotel Group, the main TMS in place is SAP SuccessFactors. The system tracks supervisors and above, while TM for line employees is still a paper-based process. (F&B Director B13; GM B23). Since 2017, management trainees are also tracked in the system (Head of HR B22). Although there is no global HRIS in place, the TMS was introduced globally (Head of HR B11). While the system is recognised as a capable system by various interviewees (Group L&D Manager B16; Hotel Manager B20), several challenges were mentioned. The Head of HR B11 reinforces a more active use of the TMS:

We have some systems in place, but [their purpose] is to store the information, access the information, have the information, but then, I do not think we do a good job of that next step and really using it on an ongoing basis. There is still too much manual. [...] We have so many more opportunities that we are more robust and do it on a global perspective versus a regional perspective.

Moreover, the correct input of information was seen as a critical factor, and the Head of TM B3 admits that they are struggling to 'keep the data up to date.' The quality of data determines the quality of the outcome, or in L&D Manager B8's words, 'garbage in, garbage out.' Similarly, Hotel Manager B20 explains:

I would assume, I should not, 80 per cent is not complete or people do not use it. [...] Of course, if 80 per cent, or a good chunk, is not fully completed, then you are going to struggle because you do not know that person's interest or where they want to go.

Overall, it was concluded that the TMS is not used to its full potential yet (L&D Manager B8), and not all interviewees were convinced of the use of TMS to identify talent. The Head of Operations B4 argues:

I am not sure what systems you are referring to because we are in a people business and I have not had a computer hiring someone for me, so there is always a human element in the employment. I really believe in the human touch.

At EMEA Hotel Group, SumTotal is implemented as the global TMS for all employees. Group Talent Manager C16 emphasises the potential of the system:

The capability of the system is so good. It is very simple. It is not complicated. You can run reports. You can see where you are, and how you can use the data in order to facilitate the talent review and the discussion you have. The only thing that we need to do is give a bit of awareness about the system. The system is very new.

The challenges faced by the organisation are similar to the other MNHCs, for instance, loss of data, and incorrect or incomplete input of information (Regional Head of HR C5). In addition, technological issues (i.e. internet bandwidth and login) were mentioned by Cluster GM C8. All three MNHCs use the system as a support tool to retrieve reports and perform a basic analysis of the workforce with past data. Currently, the organisations are not engaging with predictive analytics (Regional Head of HR A2; Chief HR Officer B17; Head of HR B22; Head of TM C15).

This section presented the talent identification tools applied in the three case study organisations under five broad areas: talent reviews, conversations, assessments, documentation, and software support. In addition, several talent identification initiatives were developed in the three MNHCs.

## **5.7 Talent Identification Initiatives**

Based on the interview data, it appears that there are three key talent identification initiatives within the MNHCs, specifically, TPs, succession planning, and programmes (see Appendix J, Table J.3). Findings show that TPs, which are presented in the following section, are the most widely applied initiative to support the identification of talent.

### 5.7.1 Talent Pools

All three MNHCs implemented TPs to a varying degree. The chosen approaches are outlined in Table 5.9 and further explained below.

**Table 5.9: Talent Pools**

American Hotel Group	APAC Hotel Group	EMEA Hotel Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the Americas: position-specific for assistant heads of departments and above</li> <li>• In EMEA and APAC: five categories for top talent:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Future strategic leaders</li> <li>- Functional experts</li> <li>- Subject matter experts</li> <li>- Emerging talent</li> <li>- Well placed talent</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Position-specific for assistant heads of departments and above in three categories:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ready now</li> <li>- Ready in one to two years</li> <li>- Ready in three to five years</li> </ul> </li> <li>• A fourth category for leavers (people who left the company voluntarily)</li> <li>• In development: local pools at a business unit level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Position-specific for most directors and GMs</li> </ul>

Source: Author

As American Hotel Group uses two TMS, there are two official approaches. In the Americas region, TPs are centrally managed and have been created for positions at an assistant manager’s level and above. The Head of HR A22 explains:

We have talent pools for all functions, and almost every position has a talent pool. So, if you are looking for a front office manager, assistant front office manager, sales manager, HR manager, there is a pool available.

On the contrary, in the APAC and EMEA regions, five broader categories have been developed and TPs have not been established for all functions. TPs are also centrally managed. The Regional Head of HR A2 argues:



Not according to function, this is something that we would maybe [pause]. I do not know if you want to formalise something like that, to say, 'This is a talent pool for front office', you know, not departmental related. [...] We do have talent pools for certain levels.

The Head of HR A9 explains the five different categories: Future strategic leaders are employees who are very likely to take on a 'broader role' across departments or functions within the next two to five years. Talent in this TP has 'proven strong leadership capabilities' and may be future GMs or area vice presidents. Functional experts are also capable to grow, but will remain within the current function. Subject matter experts are people who have a 'very specific knowledge' about a certain area or system and show leadership, for example, certain information technology specialists. Emerging talent includes all new members of staff that are coming into the organisation and those that have been identified as 'possessing potential and qualities for leadership capabilities.' They are new in their roles, typically in their twenties, and they may be part of any of the three above-mentioned categories in the future. Finally, well placed talent is a TP for individuals who are key leaders in the organisation and critical in the position they are in, but 'do not have the aspiration to change' (Regional Head of HR A2; Head of HR A9). For both approaches, employees with high performance and employees with medium performance and high potential are considered pivotal talent and part of a TP (Head of TM A20).

APAC Hotel Group has developed four categories whereby within each of them, several position-specific TPs exist. TPs are centrally managed and used to have an overview of who is ready for a certain position at a specific point in time. The three main categories are 'ready now talent', 'ready in one to two years', and 'ready in three to five years' which will be agreed on during their succession planning meeting. The Head of TM B3 explains:

The way we do the talent pools: It is divided into sort of four areas, and when we get to the end of the year and we are reviewing this or through the succession planning meetings that we have, we say, 'Who is ready for another move?' And they could be sitting here or here [anywhere in the nine-box grid]. In the system [...] I could actually see if they are ready now, or one to two years, or three to five years.

A fourth TP category is called 'leavers' and refers to talent that has voluntarily left and that the company would like to rehire in the future. The position-specific TPs have been developed for the levels of heads of departments and above. In addition, APAC Hotel Group is currently considering the establishment of local TPs within a business unit (Head of TM B3).

EMEA Hotel Group has established position-specific TPs which are decentralised to a considerable extent (Group Talent Manager C16). EMEA Hotel Group has TPs for most executive committee roles, the hotel manager, and the GM. In addition, there are a few TPs for certain manager and assistant manager positions (Head of TM C15). The Head of TM C15 explains their composition of TPs:

We started that last year and we are doing it this year a bit more, the identification of people, of talent pools for different potential in the key critical positions [directors and above]. [...] We tell people what are the critical roles and how can we make sure that we assign or define or agree on who are the people who are ready to be in this particular role.

The inclusion decision is made at a business unit level. TPs can be named and added by each property. Managers at the various hotels can nominate employees and ask their HR director to submit a request for either inclusion into an existing TP or the establishment of a new TP and subsequently leading to the inclusion. The head office will then approve the request. The inclusion criteria are defined by the subsidiary business unit and are not standardised across the properties. The Regional Head of TM C3 concludes:

There has been some effort from the group and corporate side to ask the HR directors at every unit to identify their talent and put them in talent pools, and that is using the talent management system. It has not really been done to a robust effect; some people probably have, some have not – there was not much communication, and again, when you get caught up in the day-to-day, you may not do it, and there is no consequence. [...] And then alongside that, what happens with those people once we put them in there? There is not a process.

### **5.7.2 Succession Planning**

In addition to TPs, the three MNHCs implemented succession planning to some extent. At American Hotel Group, succession planning is managed regionally by the Head of HR of each region, with a focus on regional or global roles, and a limited use of business unit level succession planning (Head of TM A20). The Head of HR A1 explains:

I do some succession planning, but very little. I do, for example, succession planning when I know you are earmarked to go to [X], and I could use [Y] to replace you in [Z]. So I would go maybe two steps, but not more. So that succession I would do, and I would look in new hotels. But usually there is so much change there that becoming too sophisticated does not make sense because otherwise I will be every day spending an hour updating our succession planning.

In addition, succession planning is done by the Head of TM A20 for the 14 identified critical roles at a corporate level using a PowerPoint presentation which states the roles and the people who have expressed their interest. At a business unit level, succession planning is done informally without necessarily keeping track of it (HR Director A21; GM A29). Cluster HR Director A28 further notes that the extent to which the business unit engages in succession planning depends on the fluctuation at the property. If there is high competition, a back-up plan will be required, whereas if the workforce is stable, succession planning will not be required (Cluster HR Director A28).

At APAC Hotel Group, potential successors are discussed during the ‘succession planning meeting’ (talent review) (Head of HR B22). The holistic overview of succession planning is managed by the Head of TM B3. Succession planning at a business unit level takes place informally (GM B21). L&D Manager B8 contends that there is ‘room for opportunity’ on a more local level, and GM B15 further asserts:

It is not very formal. We have succession planning, but nothing comes with it. [...] It should be very clear, and it should be mapped out for the colleagues to understand who can move where, why, what, when.

At EMEA Hotel Group, successors are identified by business units and registered as part of a succession planning task (Head of TM C15). According to the Group Talent Manager C16, focus was placed on GMs, hotel managers, and directors in 2016 and a total of approximately 800 successors were identified (Group Talent Manager C16). The succession planning task must be completed for all directors and above, with a performance rating of three or higher, all home country nationals with a performance rating of three or higher, and junior managers that are identified as high potentials (Group Talent Manager C16). Several interviewees suggest that this activity should include other managers and supervisors (GM C2; Regional Head of TM C3). While some properties identified successors for up to three levels (GM C13), other participants at a business unit level stated the initiative is not carried out at a hotel level (HR Director C18). HR Director C18 reviews:

When I first joined, I think it was the sales director who had resigned, and they were struggling in the peak season to find another person within the same market, and the first question was: Who is his successor? And apparently here, I found out, it is not happening.

Having presented TPs and succession planning as key talent initiatives in the three MNHCs, a range of talent programmes were also introduced as an additional initiative. These talent programmes are explained in the next section.

### 5.7.3 Talent Programmes

This section presents programmes that support the identification of pivotal talent. An overview of the programmes offered by the three MNHCs is provided in Table 5.10.

**Table 5.10: Talent Programmes**

<b>American Hotel Group</b>	<b>APAC Hotel Group</b>	<b>EMEA Hotel Group</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate management trainee programme</li> <li>• Supervisor development programme</li> <li>• Future GM programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate management trainee programme</li> <li>• Supervisor and junior manager development programme</li> <li>• Heads of departments and young executive committee members development programme</li> <li>• Master of Business Administration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National management trainee programme</li> <li>• Corporate high potential programme</li> <li>• Supervisor development programme</li> <li>• National leaders programme</li> </ul>

Source: Author

At American Hotel Group, focus is placed on a management trainee programme and a future GM programme. The future GM programme is an intensive course at the HQ of the organisation to build and identify ‘ready now talent’ (Head of HR A1). The management trainee programme is a 12- to 18-month long programme offered in various departments. Requirements for applicants are: a relevant degree, minimum 12 months of experience, English and the local language, and mobility (Regional Head of HR A11). The Regional Head of HR A2 emphasises the importance of demonstrating talent throughout the programme:

I think talent only happens if you actually are talent. You may come in as a corporate leadership trainee, but if you are not performing, or you do not show that you have got high potential, then you are not a talent, I mean, you are not considered a ‘top talent.’ I think it is something that has to be proven with time. There is some science to it. You do not just automatically get put on a list, so it is not just by title that you automatically become a ‘top talent.’

Although the participants are considered potential ‘next generation leaders’ (Head of TM A20), the identification of pivotal talent remains difficult because there appears to be a lack of tracking throughout the organisation. The Head of HR A22 explains:

With our corporate trainees, what we found is that we would hire people off campus and put them through this rigorous training programme, and then we would just lose track of them. So we are trying to experience now, if these are our future strategic leaders, how can we assess them, maybe not one year, but two years in.

APAC Hotel Group has three programmes for internal talent identification and development and one management trainee programme which encompasses predominantly external applicants (Head of TM B3). The management trainee programme is a 12- to 18-month long structured programme in rooms-division, F&B, or spa, and designed for future ‘global talent’ who fulfil the same criteria as in American Hotel Group (Head of TM B3). According to the Head of Operations B18, these programmes enable the highlighting of talent during the process. Similarly, Hotel Manager B20 asserts that ‘somebody will maybe even see a bigger spark’ during a programme. With the exception of the company-sponsored Master of Business Administration (for which a medium or high performance and potential rating is required), there is no explicit link between the programmes and TM strategies (Head of TM B3; Group L&D Manager B16). The Head of HR B11 explains:

It is not like we look into the segmented population of high performers and medium performers, and we say, ‘Okay, you should go to this programme because you are a high potential.’ It is not that formal.

EMEA Hotel Group focuses on four programmes, of which two are for external talent (national management trainee programme and national leaders programme) and two are for internal talent (supervisor development programme and high potential programme). The programmes for external talent are designed to identify and develop home country nationals as young talent or key leaders (Regional Head of TM C3; HR

Director C18). The goal is to identify home country GMs for the future throughout the talent programmes (Group Talent Manager C16). The high potential programme was initially introduced in Europe and then replicated in other regions (Regional Head of HR C5). Employees must have two years of work experience within the organisation and a performance rating of three or higher. GM C13 asserts:

There is an official programme in place. [...] It is a proven form and a recognised process. [...] Everybody has a similar programme just with different labels as part of that organic succession planning where cream is rising to the top.

Having reviewed three types of talent initiatives applied in the case study organisations (i.e. TPs, succession planning, and talent programmes), the next section focuses on the global implementation of the GTM strategy.

## **5.8 Global Implementation Impact Factors**

Several factors that impact the talent identification process were mentioned by interviewees including: relationships and networks, communication of TM, supply and demand of talent, and TM culture (see Appendix J, Table J.3). This section is linked to the fourth RQ, that is, how effective are MNHCs in implementing their talent identification process? The focus will be placed on the first impact factor as the research aims to analyse how agency relationships and social networks impact the talent identification process in MNHCs. Nevertheless, the other themes are also relevant and summarised in the subsequent sections.

### **5.8.1 Relationships and Networks**

Results of this study show that formal and informal agency relationships and social networks impact the talent identification process. Table 5.11 presents the main relationships and networks discussed among interviewees which are further reviewed

below. As it will become apparent, the level of interaction and networking within business units and between business unit and corporate levels, in particular, impact the degree of engagement with the talent identification process.

**Table 5.11: Relationships and Networks**

<b>Internal</b>	<b>External</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colleagues</li> <li>• Senior management</li> <li>• Individual business units</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hotel schools</li> <li>• Owners</li> <li>• Governments</li> <li>• Unions</li> <li>• Communities</li> </ul>

Source: Author

Interviewees at a business unit level in the three MNHCs discuss the role of colleagues as part of the talent identification process. To be considered pivotal talent, it is not sufficient to be an individual with high capabilities, but it is critical to maintain positive relationships with colleagues. Pivotal talent must act as a ‘talent builder’ (HR Director C10), that is, being able to ‘create other talent’ and teams (Hotel Manager A16; Cluster HR Director A19), develop others (Cluster HR Director A10), provide a successor (HR Director C11), and demonstrate the ability to connect with others (Regional Head of HR A2; GM A13). According to Hotel Manager A24, knowing employees from all departments is a significant advantage. This shows that the network position within a team may have a positive impact on the identification of talent. Employees who actively connect with others are much more likely to be viewed as pivotal talent than a member of staff that is ‘laid back’ and does not want to be involved (GM A14). Moreover, individuals who are able to connect to and engage with other departments are also highly important (GMs C2 and C13; Hotel Manager C12).



Talent decisions are also impacted by senior management and the relationships that (future) talent has with them. According to HR Director C14, TM needs a higher management ‘sponsorship’, that is, strong support from a superior in the organisation. Cluster GM C8 provides further evidence of the importance of agency relationships by asserting that TM depends more on ‘individuals governing the processes than on structures or systems.’ Hotel Manager A7 contends:

I will be very honest with you. The main reason why I have been able to grow very fast is that I have the support of two or three very senior management people [in the group]. I did my internship at [hotel X]. I did some small projects for the general manager and area vice president there. He liked me a lot.

Regional Head of HR C5 explains that talent must follow great leaders in the organisation, and this is supported by Rooms-Division Director A25 who states that those relationships can have positive impacts and exposure to senior management may be the ‘final touch’ to become a GM. However, the network approach was criticised by Cluster GM C8:

I think in the past the way the number twos, the hotel managers and potential future GMs, were promoted and sometimes even hired was really a network of people that maybe the GM felt comfortable with. [...] You had, in my opinion, in [HQ city] previously a bit of a kind of incertitude sounds a bit strong, it was just a question of the same people on the merry-go-round changing horses.

Although HQ attempts to communicate that every employee has ‘more than one manager’ to rely on (Head of TM A20), talent appears to depend on the dedication of superiors at a business unit level to implement processes and models (Cluster GM A3; GM A29). Leaders tend to lack focus on talent processes because they are generalists and not talent managers (Head of HR A22; Regional Head of TM C3). As a result, the extent to which business units engage with TM and talent identification varies considerably (GM A29). Moreover, some hotels compete with other hotels in the group (F&B Director B13) and are afraid of losing talent (GM A29). This shows that there exist multiple closed talent

networks within the organisation. Nevertheless, Head of Operations B6 purports that through an informal network and the ‘spirit of community’, talent is made known across the organisation.

According to interviewees, personal relationships are critical. Although organisations now apply more systems (GM A14), informal communication about talent dominates (GM A23; F&B Directors B2 and B13; Talent Manager C4). Someone may be selected because he or she is well connected (Head of TM A20) or ‘has pleased’ somebody in the past (Cluster GM C8). Cluster HR Director A10 refers to the Chinese concept of *guanxi*<sup>6</sup>, and Cluster HR Director A28 describes a scenario of filling a managerial position:

Everybody knows, ‘Okay, new position.’ I can post it. If I want it, I can go and apply. What actually happens is that for general managers, as well as for leadership committee [members], people are calling: ‘Do you know somebody?’ ‘I know a general manager.’ At the end, you depend on your general manager being well connected in the company.

In addition, ‘being in the right place’ that ‘gives you visibility’ is critical (Cluster HR Director A17), in particular, at American Hotel Group as the two TMS are not connected (Head of TM A20). At EMEA Hotel Group, GM C13 agrees that employees ‘must be visible.’ A mentor seems to increase the visibility of talent across the organisation (GM A14; HR Director A21; Regional Head of HR A26). Visibility is also impacted by the type of a business unit. According to Cluster GM C8, properties that are further away from HQ have less resources for TM available. On the other hand, some business units are also considered flagship properties (Rooms-Division Director A25;

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<sup>6</sup> The Chinese word *guanxi* refers to relationships that individuals build with each other. These may then have impacts on organisational decisions. Similar concepts exist in other cultures, such as *wasta* (Arab world), *jeitinho* (Brazil), *svyazi* (Russia), and *pulling strings* (UK) (Smith, Torres, Leong, Budhwar, Achoui & Lebedeva, 2012).

Hotel Manager B20) where talent is more visible. Other hotels benefit from their size and closeness to HQ. Rooms-Division Director A25 explains:

I think when you come to a hotel like this, of this calibre, we are the [largest hotel in the group], there is kind of an expectation: ‘You are going out as a general manager.’ [...] If you come here, it is like the Harvard University of hotels and if you do a good job over here, then you get recognised for that. They [corporate leaders] do not really mention it, but it is kind of known in the industry and kind of known in [the hotel group].

While Cluster HR Director A17 suggests a closer network amongst the TM leadership team to assure consistency, Cluster HR Director A28 and Regional Head of HR A26 call for a more transparent and formal system:

My concern is that I think we misquote by not doing a more comprehensive 360° assessment on these folks because oftentimes people get promoted and because of their reputation or who they know or where they have worked, and if they worked in a big hotel that has exposure to corporate à la [hotel X]. I think it is really based on who you know and some of your reputation.

Personal relationships and networks are also used for external talent identification at a business unit level (Regional Head of HR C5). Recruiters often use their own personal network (GM B21), in particular, in cities where ‘[everybody] knows each other’ (Cluster HR Director A6) or in locations with several hotels of the group (Cluster HR Director A30). F&B Director B13 explains:

I have a lot of very good relationships with colleagues. I have people coming from Holland, from France, through connections. If they are highly recommended by their chef, and the chefs I know personally, then with those people we do our best to hire them because they come with luggage, a certain accreditation by somebody that I respect and know very well.

According to Regional Head of TM C3, SC in terms of valuable networks is also a consideration in evaluating potential talent:

How are you – as someone who is a talent – helping to network so that you have got a pipeline of colleagues that you can attract via LinkedIn or through exposing universities? For example, our executive chef, I would see him as talent because he is fantastic with networks. If he would have more time, I am sure he could do all his recruitment for his kitchen.

In addition to personal networks, all three MNHCs have developed a network of co-operating hotel schools at a regional level, from which the organisations recruit up-and-coming talent, in particular, for their management trainee programme (Rooms-Division Director A25; Head of HR B22; HR Director C14). The majority of partners are located in Switzerland, but strong co-operation also exists with institutions in Australia, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland, the UAE, the UK, and the USA. Head of TM B3 contends that Swiss partners deliver high language capabilities, life experience, and a global spread. The Head of HR B22 further argues:

Switzerland has always had historically a phenomenal reputation for the hospitality, hotel, and tourism schools, and I think part of that is this legacy. Each hotel as well builds their own relationships.

In addition, the individual business units at the three MNHCs work with locally established networks of hotel schools (Cluster HR Director A10; Head of TM B3; Cluster GM C8). At EMEA Hotel Group, a similar process is followed and HR Director C6 details the development of their partnerships:

I think the people that we have used in the past from those schools [...] have been really good. So if it works out well for one candidate, we want to use them again. I think having a good relationship with the university first of all. So the actual tutor, or heads of departments, whether they have any connection with the university as well, or they used to go to that university.

This section demonstrated so far that colleagues, senior management, individual business units, and hotel schools are key TM stakeholders in an organisation's social network. At business unit and country levels at all three MNHCs, reference was additionally made to other stakeholders such as owners, governments, unions, and communities. GM B14 explains that the organisation typically makes decisions 'with shareholders in mind.' Head of Operations B6 asserts that if a particular managing partner owns a business unit, the company may require talent with a 'proven track record of

complicated ownership environments.’ Owners also impact the resources available for TM practices and may decide for or against particular systems or tools (Regional Head of TM C3; Regional Head of HR C5; Cluster GM C8; GM C9).

Similarly, unions influence the talent identification process as existing processes can only be adapted to a limited extent (L&D Manager B8). Strong union and legal environments may impact discussions on talent as ‘one wrong word of delivery can cost you hundreds of thousands’ (Head of Operations B6). Unions can create ‘uneven playing fields’ (Head of Operations B4) and Hotel Manager B9 explains:

Sometimes we have great talent in line colleagues, but because they are in the union, they do not even want to become a manager because financially they are much better off remaining a waiter or a housekeeper.

Having an extensive and valuable social network (which leads to SC) and the ability to liaise between employers and unions is therefore regarded as an important criterion of pivotal talent (Hotel Manager A24).

In addition to owners and unions, close relationships with the government and city can be ‘an asset to the hotel’, and therefore impact a talent decision (Cluster HR Director A10). Head of TM A20 details that American Hotel Group is looking for talent that has a leadership role in the group, but also in their community. Hotel Manager A24 further illustrates that the GM focuses on ‘city relations, political relations, industry stuff outside of the hotel’ while the hotel manager operates the business unit. HR Director A21 justifies:

You need to have the person who not only understands hotel operations, but must have a great relationship with the city, and must have a great relationship with the surrounding areas. [...] If our general manager is not able to build relationships, keep and maintain relationships with the industry, the tourism industry, with the restaurant association, with certain political organisations, then I do not know how we would be successful.

## 5.8.2 Communication of Talent Management

Communication seems to be a key challenge at all three MNHCs. This includes aspects such as having a more transparent TM process, exchanging information while considering data protection, and employing the right language and translation service if required (Regional Heads of HR A2, A8, and C3; GMs A13 and B15; Cluster HR Director A30; HR Director C18).

At American Hotel Group, communication of TM ‘widely varies and is probably the biggest downfall’ (Head of TM A20). While the group avoids scripting people (i.e. a limited use of standardised language) (Head of HR A9; Head of TM A20), a more transparent approach was requested by several interviewees (Front Office Manager A5; Cluster HR Director A28). Head of TM A20 details:

I think our challenge is less about the actual tools. It is more about a) using them the way they are supposed to be, and b) doing the communication piece. When I do not communicate, when I do not know where I stand in my development and my aspirations, I just kind of waffle around.

While senior managers are made aware of top talent at a corporate level, it is not broadly made known to other employees (Head of HR A22). Moreover, Front Office Manager A5 argues that the information exchange about the approach to talent identification ‘stops at a certain level.’

Similarly, GM B21 at APAC Hotel Group believes that the firm ‘does not talk enough about talent’ in their region. GM B15 points out that it is critical to share criteria of what is expected from pivotal talent. While having a robust process in place, knowing and using the available tools properly is a major challenge (Head of HR B22).

At EMEA Hotel Group, interviewees request more open and frequent conversations (Regional Head of TM C3). Regional Head of HR C5 argues:

Sometimes there could be decisions made that the candidate is going to move to here, and I sit and laugh, and I think, ‘Good luck because that person is not going anywhere.’ You have to involve – you cannot make decisions about people’s lives without having a discussion with them.

In addition to TM communication, supply and demand of talent impact the talent identification process. Therefore, the roles of talent shortage, team fit, and expatriates are presented in the next section.

### **5.8.3 Supply and Demand of Talent**

An overall talent shortage is recognised by the three MNHCs both at corporate and business unit levels (Cluster HR Directors A19 and A28; GMs A29 and B23; HR Director B10; Regional Head of HR C5). Reference was made to the ‘war for talent’ in America (Hotel Manager B9) and APAC (Head of HR A9). Because of a poor industry image (GM B14; Hotel Manager B20), talent is not attracted to the hotel sector (Hotel Manager A7). The strength of both the brand awareness and image is a further factor that impacts the supply (Hotel Managers B7 and B9; L&D Manager B8; GM C17). In addition, immigration and labour laws limit the employment possibilities (Head of HR A9; Cluster HR Director A17; GM C9). Organisations must have the necessary resources and a ‘critical mass’ to identify talent within the group (Hotel Manager B20; Head of Operations B18).

Individual organisations and properties differ by volume, size, and type of workforce, and therefore, the talent demand may vary (Hotel Manager B7; GM B15). While a person-organisation fit is critical (Head of TM A20), talent identification also involves considering the person-team fit, that is, a talent’s compatibility with colleagues (GM C13). Hence, talent managers must review a team’s capabilities which will impact the demand for talent in a business unit. As ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’ (Head of HR B11), the competencies available in a team must be evaluated against the competencies offered by a (potential) pivotal talent (GM A14; Cluster HR Director A19; HR Director C6; HR Manager C7). F&B Director B13 illustrates:

Right now we are looking for a junior sous chef, and I had a very good guy, but his personality was exactly the same as the person he was going to report to. In French, we would say, two roosters, and that would never work. I am not going to hire that person because I think that would create conflict within the kitchen.

Finally, the demand for expatriates as pivotal talent was discussed by American Hotel Group and APAC Hotel Group. According to the Head of TM A20, there is an expectation for those in positions at the highest corporate level to have international experience. Head of HR A22 argues that expatriates are also in demand and an increasing trend for certain critical positions, such as executive chefs, finance directors, and sales and marketing directors. Some owners specifically want expatriates managing their property (Regional Head of HR A11). Business units employ expatriates, in particular, for GM, hotel manager, and F&B roles (Hotel Manager A16; Cluster HR Director A19). Similarly, Head of Operations B4 asserts that most senior managers, executive chefs, and spa employees are expatriates (Head of Operations B4). On the contrary, Head of HR A9 asserts:

Today countries are becoming much more local and they are really looking much more at hiring local talent. The expatriates population is decreasing, companies are not looking for expatriates. What we are focusing on is developing Chinese general managers and Japanese general managers.

This was supported by several interviewees who view expatriates as a decreasing trend (Hotel Manager A16; Cluster HR Director A19). There appears to be a tendency to employ more locals at all levels (F&B Director A18). For instance, in China, a shift of thinking is recognised among owners who now prefer to have local managers in their business units (Cluster HR Director A15). Locals know the customers and competitors and have better media relations (HR Director B19). Moreover, they give an organisation more stability (F&B Director B13). Regional Head of HR A11 sums up:

Twenty years ago, the strategy was to have expatriates. Today, more and more, in fact, the strategy is to have locals appear as much as possible, but never refuse someone because he or she is an expatriate. But there are places where we cannot get a visa, or it is too expensive to have an expatriate in that city.



Having discussed the supply and demand of talent as a vital global implementation impact factor, the following section examines the influence of TM culture.

#### **5.8.4 Talent Management Culture**

Although national culture does not appear to have a major impact on the implementation of the core talent identification process (Regional Head of HR A11), several country-specific factors may influence tactics and incentives around talent identification. Findings show that a universal approach that disregards national culture is not recommended. However, contextual factors, such as national culture, only have a minor effect on the core corporate process and were not the key focus of this current study. The Head of HR A22 explains:

I think primarily people have to understand the culture at [American Hotel Group]. I think we have to respect and embrace the national culture and not discard it because it is important. When people join [American Hotel Group], they need to know what is expected of them and what behaviours we are looking for and with that we want to celebrate Brazil, or we want to celebrate Canadian culture, and Canadian ways of doing things, but ultimately people need to bring that in the organisation and then obviously apply that to how [American Hotel Group] expects them to behave.

There are several other contextual factors: (1) the cognitive, functional, and social competences differ in each country; for example, American Hotel Group found a significant lack of leadership skills in Latin America (Cluster HR Director A19) and APAC Hotel Group found a lack of language skills in China (Head of HR B22). (2) The economic situation in a country has an impact on supply and demand of talent. For instance, a growing Chinese economy and strong competition leads to a high demand for talent in China (Cluster HR Director A10). (3) Institutional barriers influence some talent decisions; for example, there are significant union environments in the USA (Head of

Operations B6) and the Chinese Hukou<sup>7</sup> system restricts mobility within the country (Head of HR A9). (4) The reputation of the organisations and the image of the hospitality industry differ among the countries. While employees in Thailand show grace and pride in the opportunity to work in a luxury hotel (Head of Operations B4), the hotel industry is not seen as very attractive in the USA (HR Director B10). An overview of contextual factors is provided in Table 5.12. This includes statements from interviewees organised by country reference. However, it is important to note that whether national culture shapes the identification process of pivotal talent is beyond the scope of the research.

**Table 5.12: Talent Identification Impact Factors by Country**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Impact Factors with Reference Codes</b>
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengths are decision-making skills and commitment (A17)</li> <li>• Lack wider sense of international hospitality in Perth (A17)</li> <li>• Perth is a very isolated city (A18)</li> </ul>
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees are very emotional and need time to adapt (A13)</li> <li>• A low level of knowledge requires that the basics are taught (A16)</li> <li>• Poor communication skills (Portuguese and English) (A19)</li> <li>• Lack of leadership (A19)</li> <li>• Focus on people from the Union of South American Nations (A19)</li> </ul>
Cambodia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very sensitive people, personal engagement is very important (A15)</li> </ul>
China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘War for talent’, high competition, high turnover (A8)</li> <li>• Focus on fast tracking of middle management (A8)</li> <li>• Focus on local talent and local GMs, no demand for expatriates (A9)</li> <li>• Mobility within China is restricted due to Hukou system (A9)</li> <li>• High number of new hotel openings, need for GMs (A10)</li> <li>• Scarcity of labour, internships are very popular (A10)</li> <li>• Hotel owners prefer local employees (A15)</li> <li>• Employees prefer a rigorous process and science over art (A20)</li> <li>• Rapid growth in China, lack of talent (B16)</li> <li>• Demand for Russian or German speaking talent in Sanya (B22)</li> <li>• Many Chinese executives envisage a career in China (C8)</li> </ul>

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<sup>7</sup> The *Hukou system* is a Chinese household registration system which was established in the 1950s. It categorises ‘Chinese citizens into two groups: urban-hukou and non-urban-hukou holders and provides the two groups with different rights and entitlements’ (Zhang, Nyland & Zhu, 2010, pp.377-378).

<b>Country</b>	<b>Impact Factors with Reference Codes</b>
China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on students from local hotel schools (C8)</li> <li>• Recruitment from close provinces to be close to parents' home (C8)</li> <li>• Relationships with owners are crucial (experience and language) (C9)</li> <li>• Employees prefer a formal style (e.g. performance appraisals) (C11)</li> </ul>
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• French employees need time to adapt (A13)</li> <li>• Recruitment focus on natives who want to work in France (A19)</li> <li>• Employees have a sense of ownership of their job or position (A30)</li> </ul>
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on leadership trainees in F&amp;B division (A28)</li> <li>• Talent shortage in various areas, especially chefs (A28)</li> <li>• Scarcity of talent (A29)</li> <li>• Preference for fast and efficient processes (A29)</li> <li>• Apprenticeship approach is regarded as effective (B8)</li> <li>• Low level of international mobility among Germans (C7)</li> <li>• Apprentices tend to have a high level of knowledge and skills (C7)</li> </ul>
Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees show less desire to move and prefer stability (B13)</li> <li>• Challenge of attracting young generations to join the industry (B19)</li> <li>• Employees are very organised, but sometimes miss the 'spark' (B20)</li> </ul>
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment focus on natives who want to work in India (A11)</li> </ul>
Indonesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees have a natural 'spark', but lack organisational skills (B20)</li> </ul>
Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on local talent, no demand for expatriates (A2)</li> <li>• Employees prefer science over art (A20)</li> <li>• Finding extrovert leaders is a key challenge (B15)</li> </ul>
Kuwait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small hospitality industry, and thus, little local talent (C10)</li> <li>• No higher education programmes specialised in hospitality (C10)</li> </ul>
Macau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High competition from existing casinos and new openings (B3)</li> <li>• Extremely high labour shortage (B5)</li> <li>• Need for talent with English, Mandarin, and/or Cantonese skills (B5)</li> <li>• Government provides foreign labour quota to protect locals (B5)</li> </ul>
Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers are great hoteliers with a focus on guest experience (A19)</li> <li>• Managers lack leadership and financial skills (A19)</li> <li>• Successful in developing local managers into global managers (A19)</li> </ul>
Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entry-level hotel positions are not seen as reputable jobs (A7)</li> <li>• More hotel openings and stand-alone businesses in Moscow (A7)</li> <li>• Expectation of a formal process (A7)</li> <li>• Listening is an important factor (A29)</li> </ul>
Saudi Arabia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment focus on natives willing to work in Saudi Arabia (A19)</li> <li>• Government quota of local people employed (A19)</li> <li>• High competition and 'war for talent' (A19)</li> <li>• Recruitment of women is more difficult due to laws and culture (C2)</li> </ul>

<b>Country</b>	<b>Impact Factors with Reference Codes</b>
South Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seniority and experience are very important factors (A10)</li> </ul>
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seasonality impacts the identification process (C1)</li> </ul>
Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hotel owners generally prefer local employees (A15)</li> <li>• GM, executive chef, and F&amp;B director tend to be expatriates (A15)</li> <li>• Very sensitive people, personal engagement is very important (A15)</li> <li>• Employees have a passion for hospitality (B4)</li> <li>• Grace and pride in the opportunity to work in a luxury hotel (B4)</li> </ul>
Turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require staff that understand the country and culture (B6)</li> </ul>
UAE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High competition, attractive place to work (B16)</li> <li>• Challenging to find talent who want to work outside the UAE (C8)</li> <li>• Identification of talent through a network of people (C8)</li> <li>• Close co-operation with hotel schools (C10)</li> <li>• Availability of high calibre graduates (C10)</li> <li>• Strong brand in the market helps to attract employees (C15)</li> <li>• UAE nationals are not as attracted to the hospitality industry (C18)</li> </ul>
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry has a poor reputation among the British (B2)</li> </ul>
USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laissez-faire attitude of employees (New Orleans) (A24)</li> <li>• High competition and lack of talent (Austin) (A26)</li> <li>• Significant union environments (B6)</li> <li>• Americans view their work as a 'job' as opposed to 'career' (B7)</li> <li>• Very weak workforce (Boston) (B7)</li> <li>• TP is lacking in key skills (Washington) (B8)</li> <li>• American employees prefer to stay in the USA (B9)</li> <li>• Employees have more than one employment, viewed as a 'job' (B9)</li> <li>• Lack of awareness of international luxury hospitality (B9)</li> <li>• Many unionised hotels (New York and Washington) (B10)</li> <li>• Industry is not seen as attractive, lack of talent (Washington) (B10)</li> </ul>

Source: Author

Having discussed the business and GTM strategies as well as the criteria, tools, and initiatives to identify talent, this section focused on the global implementation of the construct. It is evident that several factors such as relationships and networks, communication of TM, supply and demand of talent, and TM culture impact the process to varying degrees. The following section presents the final developed theme, namely, the evaluation of the talent identification process.

## 5.9 Evaluation of the Talent Identification Process

Several methods to evaluate the quality of the talent identification process were mentioned by the interviewees. Based on the NVivo analysis (see Appendix J, Table J.3), Table 5.13 presents 15 factors mentioned by various interviewees across the three MNHCs. They are grouped under three broad clusters: talent pipeline, feedback, and KPIs. Nevertheless, the findings show that there is an overall lack of emphasis on the evaluation of the talent identification process. Reference was made to general feedback and having talent available. In contrast, little evidence exists on the actual use of specific indicators and measures of success in any of the three MNHCs (see Appendix J, Table J.3).

**Table 5.13: Measures of Effectiveness of the Talent Identification Process**

<b>Cluster</b>	<b>Factors</b>
Talent pipeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal versus external hire ratio</li> <li>• Number of available talent and gaps</li> <li>• Number of management trainees</li> <li>• Number of referrals</li> <li>• Number of transfers and lateral moves</li> <li>• Number of successors</li> <li>• Turnover and retention rate</li> </ul>
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement survey</li> <li>• External forums</li> <li>• Observations by managers</li> </ul>
KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial performance</li> <li>• Customer satisfaction index</li> <li>• Leadership index</li> <li>• Number of hotel openings</li> <li>• Recruitment cost</li> </ul>

Source: Author

### 5.9.1 Talent Pipeline

According to the three MNHCs, an extensive internal talent pipeline is the principal criterion to evaluate the talent identification process (Heads of HR A1 and A22; Head of Operations B18; Regional Head of HR C5). Head of HR A9 further points out that ‘you should be able to retain your top talent’ and GM B14 emphasises the importance of measuring turnover at a managerial level. In addition, the number of internal promotions and lateral moves was frequently mentioned by interviewees (Regional Head of HR A2; Cluster HR Director A17; L&D Manager B8; HR Directors C11 and C14). Cluster GM A3 explains:

We always prefer to promote from within because that is, of course, great success, and it is a good motivator for other employees to see that we do this. If we do not think we have the potential in-house, then we go outside, but we try to avoid this as much as possible. If we cannot find someone inside [the hotel property], then, of course, we search within the company – within [American Hotel Group] globally, and only then we go outside.

At American Hotel Group, ‘no formal system [is] in place to evaluate whether the strategies are working’ (Regional Head of HR A11) and no direct correlations between GTM strategies and organisational performance are made (Head of HR A9). However, data shows that almost 90 per cent of GMs were recruited internally, one or two successors are available for every GM position, and the retention rate of GMs is close to 100 per cent (August 2016) (Head of HR A1; Regional Head of HR A11). In addition, Regional Head of HR A8 evaluates ‘manpower needs against the current pools.’ Rooms-Division Director A25 asserts that many employees are ‘ready to be moving up’, and Cluster GM A3 purports:

We have a lot of people in our management committees and we cannot give them the opportunities yet, so you have to be really careful who you hire and who you put into a programme. Who has the potential to grow? What do you promise? I think at the moment we have a lot of people that are ready for the next steps, but we cannot give it to them. [...] There are only so many general managers that we can actually place.

APAC Hotel Group did not provide any internal versus external hire ratios. However, Hotel Manager B20 contends that the company must ‘hire externally at the executive committee level across the company.’ GM B15 further details:

For me the goal would be in five years not to have external promotions. Unless it would be a specialised job, I think the job should go within. But I think just now, for the next three to five years, we are going to be doing that because we do not have the depth yet.

At EMEA Hotel Group, 40 per cent are internal promotions while 60 per cent are external hires across the organisation (March 2017) (Head of TM C15). While HR Director C14 does ‘not see it as difficult’ to find talent, the Regional Head of HR C5 concludes:

We have significant talent gaps for both GMs and our initial start-up for executive team members, and talent gaps in terms of we do not have enough number twos who are ready for a GM role to work with an owner in a remote destination.

Updated information (May 2017) shows that 60 per cent is internally developed talent, while 40 per cent is external talent. At a GM level, 67 per cent is internal talent and 33 per cent is external talent. The GM retention rate is 68 per cent at EMEA Hotel Group (Group Talent Manager C16).

In addition to the aforementioned measures related to the talent pipeline, feedback is also seen as a valuable method to evaluate the talent identification process. The next section examines how feedback is gathered in the three MNHCs.

### **5.9.2 Feedback**

Feedback can be gathered during daily operations ‘spending time on the floor’ (Hotel Manager A7) and ‘watching it and observing in action’ (Hotel Manager A24). The Regional Head of HR A2 points out that ‘you have to ask the people.’

In addition, all three MNHCs conduct an engagement survey across all business units which provides engagement scores for the organisation, business unit, and individual departments. At American Hotel Group, the survey is conducted once a year in co-operation with Gallup, a research-based management consulting company (Hotel Manager A16; F&B Director A18). According to the Head of HR A9, ‘individuals who are in [a] ‘top talent’ pool typically have a higher engagement score than those who are not.’ At APAC Hotel Group, a survey is completed every 18 months in consultation with Willis Tower Watson, an advisory firm (Head of Operations B4; Head of HR B11). The Head of HR B11 further suggests the implementation of ‘a poll survey that represents more recent points in time.’ At EMEA Hotel Group, the engagement survey is completed in partnership with Aon Hewitt, a HR consulting company, every two years in addition to a shorter poll survey every year (Talent Manager C4). Furthermore, external forums, such as Glassdoor or SurveyMonkey, allow them to track comments made in regard to TM (Head of TM A20; HR Director B10).

In addition to talent pipeline measures and feedback, the three case study organisations referred to KPIs to evaluate the talent identification process. The role of KPIs is further reviewed in the next section.

### **5.9.3 Key Performance Indicators**

KPIs that provide insight into the effectiveness of the talent identification process include the financial performance, number of hotel openings, recruitment cost, leadership index, and customer index (Regional Head of HR A11; Head of TM A20). These KPIs should then be evaluated in context (Head of Operations B6) and benchmarked against industry averages (F&B Director B2). While the three organisations use HC and SC factors to identify talent, no direct link between their contribution and organisational



outcomes is made in the three MNHCs. Head of TM A20 asserts that there must be a measurable link between talent pipeline and KPIs which appears to be an ongoing challenge:

The leadership index has shown pretty dramatic growth over the last two, three years. Our financial performance, or earnings before interest, taxes, and amortisation, or net promoter score has not, so that has been just mediocre. So I want to be provocative in our talent reviews. People are like, 'I have got so many people who are the far right of the box [high performance and high potential]', and I am like, 'Hello? Everything is awful. How can you have that many people on the right side of the box when we are not performing well?'

## **5.10 Summary**

This chapter illustrated the findings of the study, with comparative tables employed to summarise the different approaches by the three MNHCs. The results were presented under seven developed themes: business strategy, GTM strategy, talent identification criteria, talent identification tools, talent identification initiatives, global implementation impact factors, and the evaluation of the talent identification process. These findings are interpreted and discussed in the following chapter.

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## **CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION**

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## **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the discussion of the research findings that have been described in the previous chapter. It reviews the four RQs of the study and sets the results in the context of the existing literature. In order to address the research aim to explore and understand the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs, the study evaluates (1) the conceptualisation of pivotal talent, (2) the formulation of strategies to identify pivotal talent, (3) criteria to identify pivotal talent, and (4) the implementation of the talent identification process across regions and business units (i.e. hotels). The chapter begins with the presentation of the talent identification model which was developed.

## **6.2 Talent Identification Model**

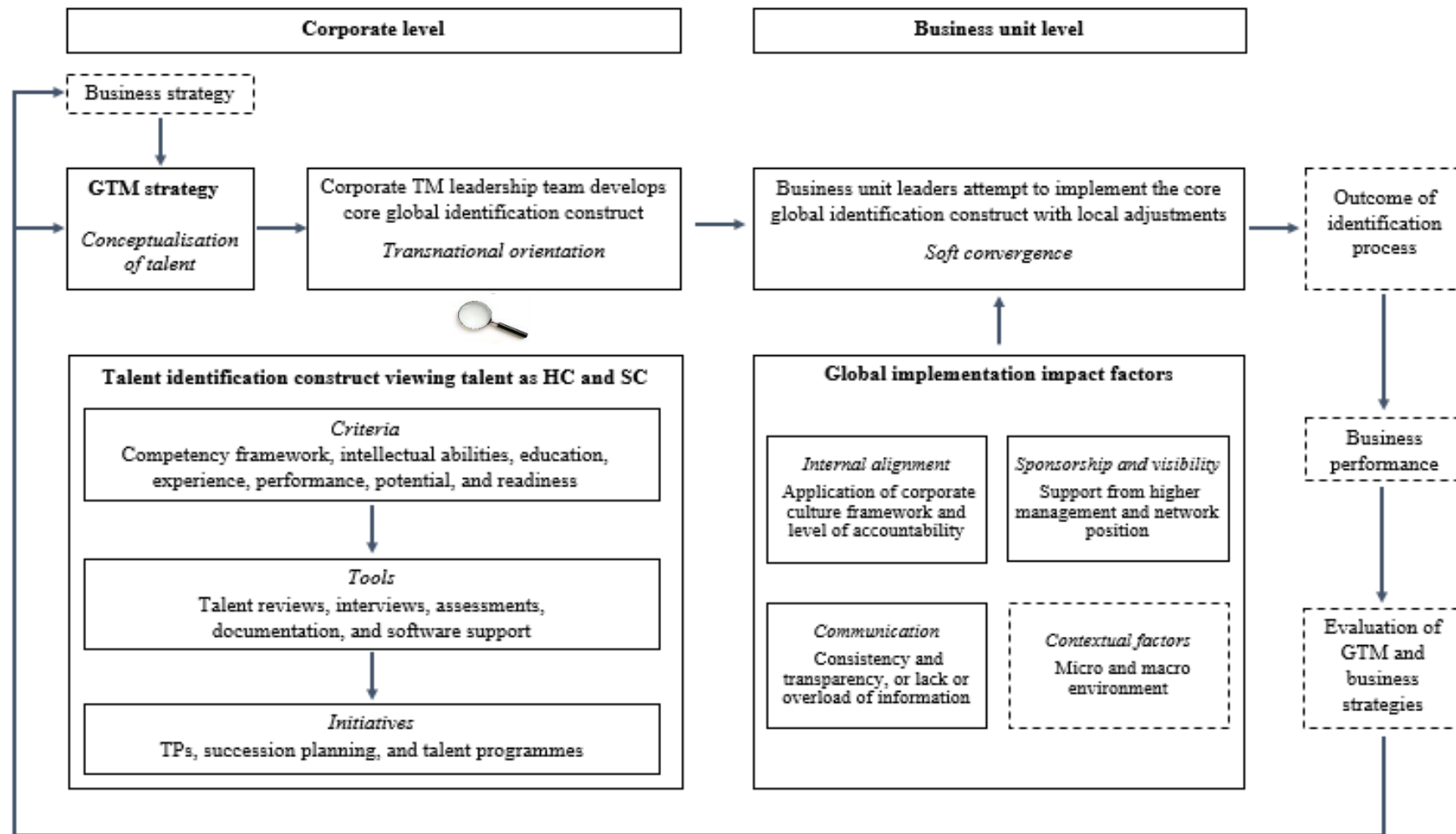
As a result of the TA, this study proposes the talent identification model presented in Figure 6.1. The model is based on the findings of this study (Chapter Five). It presents a dynamic view on the identification process including two main levels: corporate and business unit. The model includes several factors: core factors which were investigated as part of the research aim and other related factors. Although the latter was not the focus of this current study, these factors emerged during the interviews and were seen to be linked to the talent identification process. Core factors are presented with solid borders whereas related factors are displayed with dashed borders. Individual factors are discussed as part of the four RQs in the following sections of this chapter.

At a corporate level, the overall business strategy appears to impact the GTM strategy. Based on the conceptualisation of talent (RQ 1) and the established GTM strategies (RQ 2), the corporate TM leadership team develops a core global identification construct for pivotal talent viewing talent as capital (i.e. HC and SC). The construct is presented as a sequential process which includes three key components: criteria, tools,

and initiatives (RQ 3). First, the criteria to identify pivotal talent are defined. The current research showed that a competency framework, intellectual abilities, education, experience, performance, potential, and readiness are key components. Second, the three MNHCs integrate those criteria in their talent tools which include talent reviews, interviews, assessments, documentation, and software support. Third, the three MNHCs apply talent initiatives such as TPs, succession planning, and talent programmes to make further decisions on pivotal talent.

Corporate leaders in the case study organisations follow a transnational orientation while business unit leaders attempt to implement the global identification construct with local adjustments (i.e. soft convergence). The global implementation of the process (RQ 4) and the various impact factors which must be considered during the implementation of the GTM strategy and the identification process are outlined. As a result, differences and discrepancies between practices at corporate and business unit levels exist. The model in Figure 6.1 presents four global implementation impact factors: (1) internal alignment encompassing the application of the corporate culture framework and the level of accountability at a business unit, (2) sponsorship and visibility referring to higher management support and the position in a network, (3) communication as a key obstacle in the three MNHCs, and (4) contextual factors including both micro and macro components. Finally, the talent outcome and its impact on the overall business performance must be measured including an evaluation of the GTM and business strategies. Based on this evaluation, the two strategies may be adapted to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the current process.

**Figure 6.1: Talent Identification Model**



Source: Author

## **6.3 Conceptualisation of Pivotal Talent**

*RQ 1: How do MNHCs conceptualise pivotal talent?*

This introductory section explores the TM construct with a focus on three objectives: (1) to investigate whether a formal definition of talent exists among the MNHCs and to what extent this definition is communicated across the business units of the organisations, (2) to interpret how participants view talent by comparing global and regional views, and (3) to ascertain potential discrepancies in the ways various actors of the TM system across levels view the TM construct (King, 2015).

### **6.3.1 Defining Talent**

Findings reveal that no formal definition of talent or TM exists in the three MNHCs which corresponds with the lack of clarity in the literature (see, e.g. Dries, 2013a; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Schiemann, 2014). Lewis and Heckman (2006) contend that there are three streams of TM definitions: the first group view TM as a combination of standard HR practices, the second category focuses on the creation of TPs, and the third cluster centres around the management of talent which includes the identification of top and poor performers. The lack of a formal definition leads to various interpretations in the three MNHCs which include all of the three above-stated streams.

At a corporate level, defining talent was often perceived as nomenclature and the process and practices involved were deemed more important. This supports findings by Ross (2013) who contends that defining talent may suppress TM, and thus, the focus should be on 'how' talent could be leveraged. In contrast, Sonnenberg *et al.* (2014) assert that a lack of clarity in the definition leads to misperceptions between employees and the company and it creates ambiguity among employees regarding their talent status and level of performance or potential. In addition, a lack of clarity around the definition might also

suggest a lack of a clear strategy and the development of criteria may be questioned if there is no agreed understanding of what talent means. Therefore, Sonnenberg *et al.* (2014) urge for a consistent message across the organisation.

At the corporate level, the ‘subject approach’ towards talent (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013), that is, talent as people (employees, high performers, and high potentials) was prevalent in the three MNHCs. In line with Tansley *et al.* (2007), an immediate contribution through high performance or in the longer-term by showing high potential was a key factor of their understanding of talent. All three MNHCs focus their TM efforts on the identification of pivotal talent, that is, a small, variable percentage of the workforce that demonstrates the highest performance and/or potential. This reinforces the notion of talent as capital (Farndale *et al.*, 2010).

Sonnenberg *et al.* (2014) contend that organisations differ in their approaches to communicating talent terminology. While applied at a corporate level, sharing explicit talent terminology (e.g. ‘top talent’ and ‘rising stars’) with the business unit level was not a standard practice in the MNHCs. It seems that organisations are reluctant to communicate these terms to avoid an exclusive perspective on the TM approach. Interviewees across levels and organisations stated the concern of inclusivity of all employees. This confirms that most organisations implement the ‘phenomenon of TM secrecy’ meaning that they are not openly communicating talent decisions which may lead to pivotal talent leaving the organisation (Meyers *et al.*, 2017, p.185).

As a result of the lack of a formal definition and the secrecy around terminologies, there is a disjuncture between corporate and business unit levels in the three MNHCs. At a business unit level, interviewees shared their own understanding of what they regard as talent. The majority of interviewees at this level viewed talent as characteristics of people, thus, applying the ‘object approach’ towards talent (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013). A

few of those interviewees related talent to individual differences, giftedness, or strength. Others referred to a niche skill relevant to the business unit.

While Collings and Mellahi (2009) refer to the systematic identification of key positions as a core component of TM, no official list of pivotal roles exists in any of the three MNHCs. Nevertheless, it was evident that the participating organisations focus implicitly on certain roles, most notably the GMs of their business units, as they can directly impact the performance of the hotel. This position requires autonomous decision-making, creates value by considerably enhancing revenue, and represents a significant investment by the organisation, which mirrors Huselid *et al.*'s (2005, p.2) view of 'A positions.' Generally, less than 15 per cent of the roles in an organisation are considered pivotal roles (Becker & Huselid, 2010). Drawing from SNT, the current study also suggests that GMs take on a central role in the organisational network as they act as a liaison between a business unit and the corporate office. Previous research by Mintzberg (2007) has already demonstrated the important role of managers as a liaison. Hence, GMs are essential for transmitting information and assuring the alignment with corporate goals and a consistent implementation of the corporate culture (Knoke, 2004).

While talent is viewed differently at corporate and business unit levels, no considerable difference was identified at a corporate level across the operating regions within each MNHC. Hence, corporate leaders intend to have a global view on talent.

### **6.3.2 Global View on Talent**

TM operates under the HR umbrella in the three MNHCs. The corresponding TM leadership teams consist of four to seven senior leaders in each of the organisations. In American Hotel Group and APAC Hotel Group, this includes the heads of HR for each region. Having a global network of closely co-operating leaders who are involved in the



TM decision process allows the dissemination of information across regions at a corporate level in the MNHCs, and therefore, also more consistency and effectiveness in the process (Mellahi & Collings, 2010). Thus, the network is used as an ‘opportunity structure’ to facilitate the TM process (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005). The study suggests that a close co-operation at a corporate level, involving operational and HR leaders from all regions promotes a more committed approach towards talent. However, MNHCs must ensure that communication is also cascaded down to the employees at business unit level in order to have a consistent approach across the organisation and TM engagement by all employees.

The global view on talent at a corporate level which includes a transnational orientation (i.e. high pressure for global integration and high pressure for local responsiveness) is further reinforced by a strong corporate culture construct which guides the TM philosophy. While it is not explicitly stated in a definition of talent, the TM construct is built around the organisational culture. Interviewees at a corporate level detailed that all GTM strategies must be aligned with the purpose and values of the organisation. This supports previous research by Pfeffer (2001) who argues that talent must be defined taking into consideration the corporate culture of the firm. While national culture is evidently important during the implementation stage as shown in section 5.8.4, findings from this study suggest that a strong organisational culture is the overarching factor when conceptualising talent in the three MNHCs. The strategies used for the identification of pivotal talent in the participating organisations are discussed in the following section.

## **6.4 Strategies for the Identification of Pivotal Talent**

*RQ 2: What strategies do MNHCs use to identify pivotal talent?*

In this section, the strategies to identify pivotal talent in MNHCs are discussed. A focus is placed on three objectives: (1) to appraise the overall TM approach of the MNHCs, (2) to assess the process of how TM strategies are developed, and (3) to examine the use of different strategies to identify pivotal talent for individual departments or distinct levels.

### **6.4.1 Approach to Talent Management**

Data presented in Chapter Five shows that the three MNHCs operate an exclusive approach towards talent (i.e. key focus on high performers and high potentials), although the key decision makers in these organisations purport to advocate for an inclusive approach. While all employees are provided with general development opportunities, a strategic focus is placed on a small group of pivotal talent, which displays high performance and/or high potential. The mechanisms and criteria employed in the identification process are discussed in section 6.5 below. More specifically, the organisations appear to follow an exclusive developable approach (Meyers & Van Woerkom, 2014). Both corporate and business unit leaders at the three organisations believe that employees can advance their competencies through L&D. The organisations therefore also focus on the development of employees with a ‘spark’ or ‘high potential’ to grow into a leading role in the future. This contradicts McCarney and Worman’s (2010) observation of a shift from exclusive to inclusive approaches of TM.

According to Dries (2013b, p.279), the investment of ‘disproportionate resources’ is a tell-tale sign of an exclusive approach. Findings show that the three MNHCs invest considerably more resources in pivotal talent than in the remainder of their employees.

However, no forced ranking system (Blume, Baldwin & Rubin, 2009) or specific percentiles for pivotal talent (Silzer & Dowell, 2009b) are implemented in the three MNHCs. Dries (2013b) estimates that less than ten per cent of employees are considered pivotal talent when following an exclusive approach. This percentage is mirrored in the MNHCs, based on comments made by interviewees at regional office and HQ levels. As financial resources and time are limited in most organisations (Cappelli, 2008b), it is arguably more cost effective to focus all attention on a select few. From a strategic perspective, a higher impact on business performance and return on investment can be expected by this group (Dries, 2013b).

The interview data reveals that the three MNHCs have either consciously or unconsciously implemented what Collings (2017, p.299) refers to as ‘workforce differentiation’, in other words, the organisations have identified different TPs and treat the members of these TPs in different ways. The interviews with key decision makers in the three MNHCs also affirmed that the firms are consistent in their differentiated treatment of these TPs across all levels and regions of the organisation. Only few examples of divergence of this approach managing their TPs could be observed. The development and use of TPs are examined in greater detail in section 6.5.2. While all organisations are structured along formal hierarchical levels, only American Hotel Group which represents the largest organisation in the sample proposes different TM tools and processes depending on the level of an employee in the organisation. An informal approach towards workforce differentiation (Huselid & Becker, 2011) seems to be applied by all organisations during the talent identification stage. For instance, depending on the level and position in the organisation, the recruitment and selection process may vary, for example, distinct sourcing channels and criteria are applied. This is only

formalised to a very limited extent in that a particular competency set is aligned to each role and/or level.

It was also evident that the core talent strategy is built upon the notion of ‘global talent’ which mirrors research by Farndale *et al.* (2010, p.163) who announce the ‘emergence of a common global talent pool’ in MNCs. The idea of a global TP has come into view as a result of a world-wide talent shortage (Preece, Iles & Jones, 2013) and an increasingly global competition to find, attract, and retain talent (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). The demand for global talent in the hospitality industry is exacerbated by the very nature of the industry. The hospitality sector is an international service industry, which is experiencing considerable growth and a rapid expansion of large corporations across the globe, including the three participants in this study, combined with a comparatively high labour turnover in the sector. Therefore, finding the talent that can fill the pivotal positions in these corporations is vital for their success. Previous research by Cappelli (2008b) propounds the view of ‘talent on demand’ as a key strategic approach, which includes detailed forecasting and a strong link to and alignment with the business strategy of an organisation (Burbach & Royle, 2010). As part of the broader business strategy, all major MNHCs, including those that participated in this research, detail their plans for expansion and future openings, and consequently, this creates a significant demand for global talent.

Specifically, the organisations focus their efforts on the identification of pivotal talent that is internal to the organisations. This corresponds with Lepak and Snell’s (2007) view of a commitment-based HR for core employees (i.e. high strategic value and high uniqueness). Therefore, Hamori, Bonet, and Cappelli’s (2011) observation of a decrease in the importance of internal development in organisations could not be confirmed by this research. In practice, however, the MNHCs rely on both internal and external

identification to varying degrees depending on the availability of talent at a particular time (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2010).

The study further highlights that the size of an organisation impacts the strategic approach (i.e. internal or external talent focus). Leaders at HQs as well as some business unit managers of the three MNHCs suggest that a critical mass of business units, and thus employees, is needed to effectively manage an internal talent identification process. The lack of a critical mass was also perceived as a key barrier to effective TM in earlier research by Blass (2009) and it is evident that larger organisations can invest more resources in a TM process (McDonnell *et al.*, 2010). In many ways, however, this is of course a virtuous cycle in that more investment in TM will ultimately lead to increased business performance and growth, which thus can generate a critical mass. Furthermore, a higher level of maturity and a higher degree of internationalisation (Pepermans *et al.*, 2003) appear to be linked to a more developed and structured approach towards pivotal talent in the case study MNHCs. For instance, American Hotel Group is present in more than 50 countries and is the largest as well as the longest established organisation in the sample. They also demonstrate the most developed TM processes and the highest internal recruitment of pivotal talent. Although APAC Hotel Group is also well established, findings show that they lack a critical mass of hotels. As a result, they need to rely to a greater extent on the external global TP to identify pivotal talent than their competitors. EMEA Hotel Group appears to be still at an early stage of their TM development, and therefore, the internal identification of talent is limited. Inevitably, external identification of talent also plays a crucial role in their TM strategy.

Senior staff at American Hotel Group and APAC Hotel Group suggest they place a strategic importance upon the identification of up-and-coming talent, that is, individuals that they envisage to be the future leaders of the organisation, which is echoed by Ashton

and Morton (2005). In contrast to their senior leaders' claims, the HR and talent managers in this study appear to possess limited information regarding potential up-and-coming talent. To overcome this challenge, Lorsch and Clark (2008) propound that talent managers should devote more time to identifying and managing this group of employees. Findings from this research on the conceptualisation of pivotal talent and strategic priorities suggest that up-and-coming talent is not (yet) seen as pivotal talent in these MNHCs, which contradicts findings by Hayman and Lorman (2004) who view this group as a core TM focus.

Another cohort of talent that is particular to MNCs are expatriates; and most MNHCs would use expatriates to drive and manage the rapid expansion of these corporations. Causin, Ayoun, and Moreo (2011) predict an even more important role for expatriates in the hospitality industry in the future as MNHCs continue to internationalise. In the TM and international HRM literature, expatriation is a central theme (see, e.g. Collings *et al.*, 2009b; McNulty & De Cieri, 2013; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009). However, the MNHCs in this research appear to have adopted a somewhat critical view on the use of expatriates. For example, the HR and operational leaders at the three MNHCs intend to employ more local people in key roles which shows the shift from global (ethnocentric) organisations towards more transnational (geocentric) companies. While some of the leaders in these MNHCs still believe that expatriates – particularly pivotal talent who have been deployed to facilitate expansion (Farndale *et al.*, 2014) – are vital for the success of the company, others describe a shift of focus from expatriates to local talent. In reality, however, many of the pivotal roles in the three MNHCs in regions such as Asia, the Middle East, or South America are still filled with expatriates from Europe or North America. Thus, the understanding of the role of expatriates and the nature of the organisation (global versus transnational) must be questioned. It is evident that there is a

gap between the desired and actual role of locals and expatriates in the MNHCs. Having discussed the approach to TM chosen by the three MNHCs, the next section reviews critically the development of the TM strategies.

#### **6.4.2 Development of Strategies**

The process of how TM strategies are developed depends highly on the business model chosen by an organisation. The three MNHCs believe that their employees are a valuable asset and key component of their value proposition. Understanding how value is created in an organisation is an essential first step of the development process (Teece, 2010). Drawing from HC and SC theories, the strategies are focused around ‘people’ and how the company can foster the growth and contribution of their HC and SC. This has been recognised as paramount in the service-based hotel industry (Bharwani & Talib, 2017), and even more so in recent years during which MNHCs, including the three organisations of this current study, have expanded their operations globally with several new business units which require the appropriate people to manage the increasingly complex operations. At the same time, this growth offers more opportunities to invest resources in TM processes.

Following the definition of Bartlett and Goshal (1989), the three MNHCs operate as a transnational/geocentric organisation, that is, with a high pressure for global integration as well as a high pressure for local responsiveness. The three MNHCs employ a corporate-driven approach towards their development of TM strategies. No examples of reverse diffusion (Chiang, Lemański & Birtch, 2017) of the identification process of pivotal TM were derived from the conducted interviews. This echoes Collings, Morley, and Gunnigle (2008) who propound that MNCs favour more centralised TM strategies.

While parts of the TM construct (e.g. the TM strategy for graduates) are still developed at a regional level, all MNHCs shift towards a more centralised, global approach at all levels. The respective TM leadership teams at the MNHCs develop TM strategies collaboratively, and thus, acts as a ‘network of cognitive structures’ (collaborative thinking among members of a network) (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005, p.420). Those decisions are then cascaded down the various levels of the case study MHNCs. The degree of alignment between corporate and business unit levels depends on the consistent communication of TM practices by the local gatekeeper which key decision makers at a corporate level described as the cluster HR directors (American Hotel Group) and GMs (all MNHCs). In addition, contextual factors may impact some talent practices at a business unit level. However, this was not regarded as a prevalent phenomenon for the identification of pivotal talent. Rather, corporate leaders at the three MNHCs see a need for a consistent global process for this specific key group of the workforce.

While American Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group focused on co-operation among the corporate leaders, APAC Hotel Group involved all business units in the development of the TM strategy through collaborative workshops at the various hotels with the management team. According to Scullion and Starkley (2000), this (partially) decentralised structure provides an informal control system, which ultimately leads to a more effective implementation of the TM approach. Involving stakeholders in the development of TM strategies can decrease barriers to change and increase buy-in and commitment from managers (Burbach & Royle, 2010).

It seems paramount that once strategies have been developed and priorities have been set, organisations ought to develop specific criteria for the identification of talent. The criteria applied by the three participating MNHCs are discussed in the following section.



## **6.5 Criteria for the Identification of Pivotal Talent**

*RQ 3: What criteria do MNHCs apply to identify pivotal talent?*

This section reviews criteria for the identification of pivotal talent with a focus on two objectives: (1) to examine the basis of identification and assessment of talent, and (2) to identify tools, methods, and systems that MNHCs employ to assess criteria and to review talent.

### **6.5.1 The Foundations of Identifying and Assessing Talent**

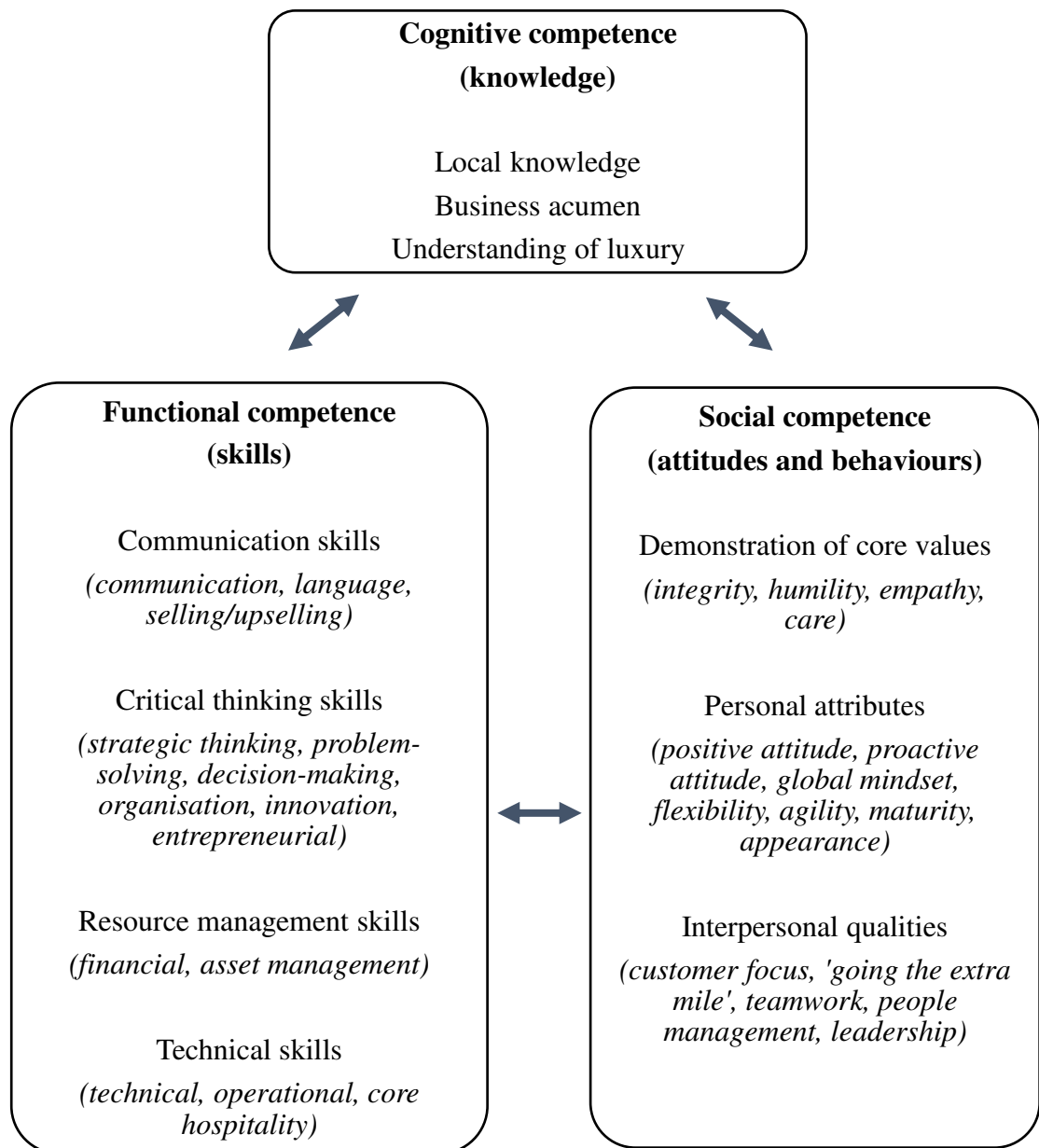
The results reveal that an intuitive or individualised approach to identifying and assessing talent, as opposed to a formalised structure, is most common among the operational leaders at a business unit level. When following an intuitive approach, leaders rely on experience and gut feeling (Wiblen, 2016), while the ‘X-factor’ or specific competencies are the focus of an individualised approach (Dries, 2013b, p.280). The HR leaders at business unit and corporate levels seem to favour a more formalised approach to assessing talent. The corporate HR and TM leadership teams, in particular, appear to subscribe to a systematic approach (Mellahi & Collings, 2010), which consists of a strategic, integrated, and proactive view of identifying talent.

Based on the analysis of the data in Chapter Five, the talent identification and assessment criteria applied by the three organisations can be grouped into seven areas all of which are key components of HC or SC: competency framework, intellectual abilities, education, experience, performance, potential, and readiness. Findings reveal that at the core of the talent identification process is a competency framework established in each of the MNHCs. The three competency frameworks are used for internal and external talent identification as part of the resourcing process or the performance management process. As a result of the TA and an extensive review of the literature in Chapter Two, a

comprehensive competency framework for talent identification in MNHCs was developed (see Figure 6.2).

The competency framework builds on Le Deist and Winterton's (2005) model which encompasses three clusters: cognitive competence (knowledge), functional competence (skills), and social competence (attitudes and behaviours). The three components of the model are key factors that lead to the accumulation of HC, which has been defined as 'the knowledge, skills, and abilities embodied in a person' (Dokko & Jiang, 2017, p.117). Based on the current study and the completed NVivo data analysis, ten dimensions and a total of 30 competencies were developed by the researcher (Jooss & Burbach, 2017b). Cognitive competence includes the dimensions of local knowledge, business acumen, and understanding of luxury. Functional competence incorporates the dimensions of communication skills, critical thinking skills, resource management skills, and technical skills. Finally, social competence consists of three dimensions, namely, demonstration of core values, personal attributes, and interpersonal qualities.

**Figure 6.2: Competency Framework for Talent Identification**



Source: Author

Although interviewees referred to competencies from all three clusters, the preponderance of interview responses fall into the social competence cluster. This confirms earlier findings by Tas, LaBrecque, and Clayton (1996) who argue that interpersonal and leadership competencies are most important for management positions in hotel organisations. Similarly, Christou and Eaton (2000) assert that soft skills related

to guests and employees are critical in the hospitality industry. The existence of networks among employees did not emerge as a stand-alone criterion for pivotal talent identification. However, reference to building relationships and developing connections as part of a broader set of competences including teamwork, people management, and leadership was made by interviewees at business unit and corporate levels. Corporate HR leaders emphasised that pivotal talent builds and maintains networks to improve daily operations as well as to increase their strategic leverage and liaise with internal and external departments, organisations, and institutions. This shows that pivotal talent uses their social competence which is part of the HC to develop their SC which has been defined as ‘the quantity and quality of their social relations’ (Dokko & Jiang, 2017, p.120).

Contrary to Chung Herrera *et al.* (2003) who consider self-management as the most essential competence, the results of this current study show that both HR and operations leaders at a corporate level are more concerned about the impact of talent on guests and colleagues. They view leadership skills and the ability to inspire as a key differentiator among talent. In addition, the demonstration of core values (e.g. integrity, humility, empathy, and care) was seen as critical by corporate HR leaders at the three organisations. With the exception of Staton-Reynolds, Ryan, and Scott-Halsell (2009) who view integrity as a vital competence, there seems to exist little evidence in the literature concerning the impact of organisational core values on a competency framework. However, at American Hotel Group, the competency framework was closely aligned with the company’s purpose, and APAC Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group also aimed to align it to the culture of the organisation. This raises the key question whether organisations should use general or customised competency frameworks for talent identification and the degree to which they should do so. Based on the case study

organisations, it appears that organisations tend to seek general competency frameworks for guidance which are then adapted to fit the culture of the organisation.

Functional competence was frequently mentioned among interviewees at both business unit and corporate levels across the three MNHCs. Although talent is expected to display skills such as communication, critical thinking, and resource management particularly at a managerial level (Bharwani & Talib, 2017), these are not viewed as the main foci for talent identification in the participating MNHCs. Furthermore, none of the interviewees considered technical skills critical in the identification of key talent, which supports findings by Tsai, Goh, Huffman, and Wu (2006).

Cognitive competence refers to knowledge of the employees. HR leaders at a corporate level appeared to place an emphasis on local knowledge. As Li and Scullion (2010, p.195) note: local knowledge differs from corporate knowledge and ‘is highly tacit, undiffused, and fast-changing.’ Corresponding with Bharwani and Talib (2017), business and industry expertise was seen as critical by key decision makers. Operational leaders at a business unit level further emphasised the importance of understanding the concept of luxury to anticipate customers’ needs.

The competency framework introduced above represents an overview of the constituent individual competencies that comprise the talent construct. It must be acknowledged that some corporate HR leaders were discussing general intellectual abilities. In addition, several operational leaders (i.e. hotel managers, GMs, and heads of operations) referred to emotional intelligence as a significant impact factor.

This study adapted Le Deist and Winterton’s (2005) competency approach which views intellectual abilities as a foundation that leads to the development of competencies. Therefore, forms of intelligence were not included in the framework presented in Figure 6.2. Moreover, meta-competence which facilitates learning (Winterton, Le Deist &

Stringfellow, 2006) was not included in the framework, as interviewees discussed learning agility as a key component of the assessment of potential as opposed to an evaluation of competencies (see Table 6.1).

In addition to individual competencies, operational leaders also emphasised the importance of team fit particularly at a business unit level. Team fit can be critical in jobs where a collective effort is required of a group of employees (Creelman & Kaiser, 2009), which is evidently the case in a hotel operation. In a similar vein, Pizam and Shani (2009) find that a high degree of collaboration among employees is essential to provide efficient service in a hotel. However, a fundamental shift from individual work towards team- or project-based organisations has been recognised across all industries and sectors (Burch & Anderson, 2004) and not just the hotel industry. Thus, it seems self-evident that managers, when making talent decisions, ought to assemble a team of individuals with complementary competencies to maximise its potential (Kehoe *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, it is important to consider both the competencies of an individual and the existing competencies in a group. If the departments in hotels and the hotels themselves are viewed as a network of individual actors, it seems inevitable that the potential impact of a person joining an existing team ought to be assessed ahead of time.

To summarise the competency approach, the significance of assessing individuals' competencies as well as the importance of complementary competencies of team members must be recognised. The established competency framework in Figure 6.2 presents the critical competencies required in the three MNHCs. The findings show that cognitive, functional, and social competences must be developed to be considered pivotal talent. Commensurate with the necessity to assess individual key competencies in the internal talent identification process is the evaluation of both an individual's performance and potential. Therefore, in order to be considered pivotal talent, employees should

demonstrate high levels of both performance and potential. Based on the data analysis of this current research, a performance-potential typology was developed by the researcher. The typology which is presented in Table 6.1 consists of four clusters for both performance and potential. Each cluster encompasses several indicators which are further explained below.

**Table 6.1: Performance-Potential Typology**

<b>Talent Identification</b>	
<i>Performance</i>	
Organisational competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive competencies</li> <li>• Functional competencies</li> <li>• Social competencies</li> </ul>
KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer satisfaction metrics</li> <li>• Financial metrics</li> <li>• HR metrics</li> <li>• Productivity metrics</li> <li>• Quality metrics</li> </ul>
SMART objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate goals</li> <li>• Functional and team goals</li> <li>• Individual goals</li> </ul>
Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of projects</li> <li>• Exposure to other departments</li> <li>• Recognitions and awards</li> <li>• Training record</li> </ul>
<i>Potential</i>	
Drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedication</li> <li>• Initiative</li> <li>• Results orientation</li> </ul>
Cultural fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to the organisation</li> <li>• Demonstration of core values</li> <li>• Demonstration of leadership competencies</li> </ul>
Learning agility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-development</li> <li>• Adaptability</li> <li>• Fungibility</li> </ul>
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to move</li> <li>• Willingness to move</li> <li>• Openness</li> </ul>

Source: Author

Performance, according to this research, consists of four clusters of criteria: organisational competencies, KPIs, SMART objectives, and accomplishments (see Table 6.1). The first and second clusters, organisational competencies and KPIs, are part of the formal evaluation and assessment of performance in all three organisations. Competencies (see, e.g. Berger, 2004; Ross, 2013) and KPIs (see, e.g. Kaplan & Norton, 2007; Stahl *et al.*, 2012) have been reviewed extensively in the extant literature. The previous section discussed the cognitive, functional, and social competences that are summarised in the competency framework (see Figure 6.2). APAC Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group use a formal appraisal of competencies which result in a final score. In contrast, American Hotel Group applies a competency framework without the use of explicit measures. Instead, they seem to focus on frequent conversations between employees and managers. This could indicate a shift towards a more continuous performance management system and engagement (Gruman & Saks, 2011) in that organisation. According to Cascio and Aguinis (2008), the evaluation of individual characteristics to predict an individual's performance is reflective of staffing models in many organisations. The use of organisational competency frameworks was saluted across all participating organisations. Findings show that the competency frameworks are applied as central guidelines for talent discussions and assessments.

However, the three MNHCs have different views on what role KPIs should play in the assessment. Particularly for line managers, KPIs are a key factor of the performance evaluation. However, this has been criticised by some operational managers as the regional and global economic situations considerably impact the annual KPI results. In a similar vein, Murphy (2008) suggests that the overall link between job performance and performance rating is weak. As a result, corporate leaders in the MNHCs stress a balanced consideration of both competencies and KPIs as part of the talent identification process.



Cascio and Aguinis (2008, p.148) further propose the measurement of ‘*in situ* performance’, which considers the contextual effects that may impact the performance result.

The KPIs employed in the MNHCs involve metrics that are related to customer satisfaction, financial performance, HR (leadership and engagement indexes), productivity, and quality. Corresponding with Huang, Chu, and Wang (2007), the MNHCs contend that all non-financial metrics can ultimately be linked to financial results. As individual performance depends considerably on the performance of other colleagues, there ought to be a strong link between individual, team, and organisational performance (Salas, Burke & Fowlkes, 2006). The three MNHCs follow this approach by developing KPIs at a corporate level which are then cascaded down to the business units. Setting specific and challenging goals allows organisations to measure an individual’s performance (Locke & Latham, 2006). Thus, employees will know what is expected of them, what their current level of performance is and whether they exceed, meet, or elude expectations (Cascio, 2012). The metrics that the three MNHCs have implemented across their business units represent three of the four factors of Kaplan and Norton’s (1992) balanced scorecard: financials, customers, and internal processes. While still seen as a crucial component of the TM strategy of the organisations, the fourth factor, innovation and learning, does not appear to represent an explicit KPI for talent identification. However, it must be noted that innovation is a key component of the organisations’ competency frameworks, and that learning is an essential criterion for high potential both according to the literature (see, e.g. Dries, Vantilborgh & Pepermans, 2012b) and in the three MNHCs.

The third and fourth clusters of the performance-potential typology in Table 6.1, SMART objectives and accomplishments, relate to initiatives that are applied at a business unit level, but do not form part of the formal KPI assessment in the three MNHCs. It appears that large MNHCs must follow a company-wide construct of criteria (i.e. competency framework and official KPI set) to be able to compare talent across the organisations (Burbach & Royle, 2010). However, treating employees as individuals as part of that talent identification process was emphasised among participants, which also finds support in the literature (Thompson, Russo, Rueff, Stringer, Fyock & Finney, 2013). Using individual, team, and corporate SMART objectives and accomplishments (i.e. completion of projects, exposure to other departments, recognitions and awards, and training record) may be viewed as an early attempt to customise the talent identification process and develop a ‘workforce of one’ which means managing talent at an individual level (Cantrell & Smith, 2010, p.1).

While the performance construct is fairly well defined in the three organisations, it is evident that there exists a lack of familiarity with the encompassing aspects of what potential represents. With the exception of some corporate HR leaders, interviewees present vague descriptions of the concept of potential. At a business unit level, in particular, managers frequently equate potential with performance, which confirms the apparent incertitude in the literature concerning the delimitation between the assessment criteria for performance and for potential (Dries & Pepermans, 2012; Jooss *et al.*, in review). This further supports Pepermans *et al.*’s (2003) call for a clear demarcation of the two concepts. The data ascertains that APAC Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group have established a formal definition of potential. These two MNHCs conceptualise potential by focusing on the ability to move into a higher or more complex position in the future, which corroborates Silzer and Church’s (2009a) assertion that most organisations

define potential by role, level, or breadth. Based on the interview data, it has become apparent that a long-term, future perspective must be embedded in the evaluation of potential. In the three case study MNHCs, a corporate definition and understanding of potential is not automatically reflected at a business unit level which demonstrates the importance of communication of TM concepts and practices across the organisations.

Although APAC Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group developed a list of criteria to assess potential at the corporate level, a broad variety of similar and additional indicators was mentioned by the various interviewees in these organisations. These indicators were grouped around four clusters: drive, cultural fit, learning agility, and mobility (see Table 6.1). These differ, in part, from the four clusters proposed by Dries and Pepermans (2012). The first and third clusters of criteria, drive and learning agility, seem to be factors that were also extensively discussed within other models (see, e.g. Dries & Pepermans, 2012; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000; Silzer & Church, 2009b; Spreitzer *et al.*, 1997). While analytical skills and emergent leadership, the other two clusters advanced by Dries and Pepermans (2012), are relevant here, they did not emerge as clusters in their own right in this research. However, cultural fit and mobility materialised as two additional paramount clusters in these findings (Jooss *et al.*, in review). Analytical and leadership skills and their components were discussed by interviewees in the context of competencies that fit the culture of the organisation. Senior HR leaders at a corporate level view an alignment with the corporate culture as more important than individual attitudes and behaviours that may not be compatible with the corporate culture.

When discussing potential with the interviewees, drive (i.e. a proactive attitude) appeared as a foundational cluster, which confirms previous research that presents dedication as a crucial criterion in considering talent for a higher or more complex role

(Deal, Stawiski, Graves, Gentry, Weber & Ruderman, 2013; Silzer & Church, 2009a). Thus, one needs to be seen to display drive to stand a chance of being viewed ultimately as a high potential. Senior business unit leaders (i.e. hotel managers, GMs, and HR directors) expect talent to express their interest in growing with the organisation. Similarly, HR leaders at a corporate level referred to a shared responsibility between employees and employers. Organisations must provide a TM construct with opportunities for growth but employees also must actively manage their career.

The second foundational cluster, cultural fit, includes commitment to the organisation, demonstration of core values, and demonstration of leadership competencies. This finding lends support to Hollenbeck, McCall, and Sulzer's (2006) argument that leadership potential models should consider elements, such as organisational culture, national culture, and a leader-organisation fit. This current study argues that the notion of organisational commitment calls for special attention, as there exists a decreasing commitment to specific organisations (Collings *et al.*, 2009b). Conversely, increasing commitment will reduce the labour turnover and will alleviate or at least limit an organisation's need to partake in the global 'war for talent.' Sharing the same values and behaviours, and thus achieving a person-organisation fit (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013; Shen & Hall, 2009) appears to be a critical factor for interviewees in all three organisations. High potential talent will be the future leaders in those organisations who must act as role models for other employees. Based on the data analysis of the assessment tools, it seems common practice that MNHCs with strong corporate cultures espouse criteria around cultural fit in their talent evaluation. Tools such as behaviour-based interviews are framed around the values and competencies of the three MNHCs. In addition, the organisations aim to identify a cultural match with psychometric testing (see Table 5.7).

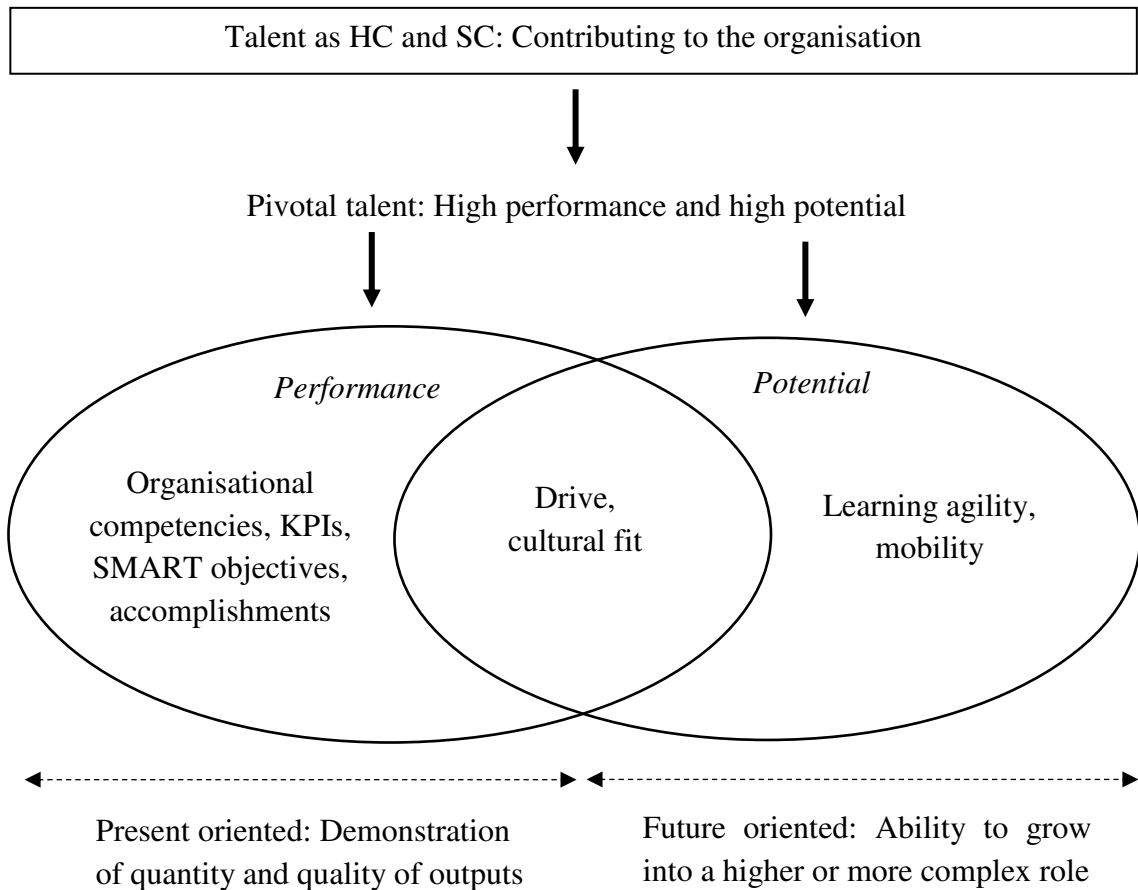
The importance of the third cluster, learning agility, which is a frequently used concept in the literature (Briscoe & Hall, 1999; Dries *et al.*, 2012b; Guangrong, De Meuse & King Yii, 2013), was also reflected in this research. In fact, all three organisations associated high potentials with high learners. The MNHCs in this research assert that individuals must display more cognitive, functional, and social competencies (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005) in order to be considered high potentials. Thus, the evidence highlights the longitudinal dimension of potential. In other words, potential ought to be assessed within the context of a talent's current and future development trajectory, which, inherently, makes the talent identification process more complex.

The concept of mobility forms the fourth cluster. It comprises the ability to move, the willingness to move, and openness. While mobility has not been discussed extensively in other models of potential, it is an essential element for MNHCs. Particularly, at a corporate level, mobility is expected from their global talent. Corporate leaders require their key talent to be willing to move across countries and regions (Gannon, Roper & Doherty, 2015; Stahl *et al.*, 2012), and they are expected to have been exposed to other cultures. This is somewhat contradictory with the intention to employ more local employees across the MNHCs (see section 5.8.3). Although not all interviewees at a business unit level alluded to this identification factor, it is evident from this research that a global perspective decisively enhances an employee's potential rating.

Both foundational dimensions, drive and cultural fit, are also evaluated as part of the performance construct, in particular, when assessing social competencies. In contrast, the third and fourth dimensions of potential, learning agility and mobility can be viewed as growth dimensions which are only considered for the assessment of potential and not for performance reviews.

Based on the interview data, Figure 6.3 presents a performance-potential model, which illustrates the extent of conflation of the two components in the context of MNHCs.

**Figure 6.3: Performance-Potential Model**



Source: Author

In sum, the competency framework, the performance-potential typology, and the performance-potential model developed here present an overview of the basis of identification of talent in the participating organisations. They contribute to the body of knowledge on talent identification by clarifying what determines performance (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017; Wiblen *et al.*, 2012) and potential (Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Dries & Pepermans, 2012), and illustrating what attributes are needed for pivotal talent (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013). Organisations can use these findings to evaluate their identification criteria, establish a more holistic view on pivotal talent, and ultimately

make better talent decisions. Following the identification criteria, the tools and initiatives applied as part of the talent identification process by the MNHCs are discussed.

### **6.5.2 Tools and Initiatives**

The organisations in this research employ a broad range of tools and initiatives in the TM process. Tools assess employees at a specific point in time, whereas initiatives are longitudinal in nature and are aimed at identifying and managing talent. The various tools used by the corporations can be grouped into five areas: talent reviews, interviews, assessments, documentation, and software support. The initiatives are TPs, succession planning, and talent programmes (see Appendix J, Table J.3). At a business unit level, a mix of those tools and initiatives are applied to varying degrees depending on the engagement with the TM process by the GMs and HR directors at the business unit level who act as gatekeepers of the transfer of corporate business practices. The tools applied as part of the talent identification process at a business unit level do not appear to be formalised at any of the MNHCs. This local approach concerning the choice of tools allows the organisations to take into consideration contextual factors such as cultural differences, the market (e.g. supply and demand), and the characteristics of the property (e.g. size, scope, available resources and networks, and personalities) (Patel, 2012). From a social network perspective, it must be noted that many local leaders in this study use their personal relationships (Knoke, 2004) as a recruitment tool and rely on referrals rather than formal assessment tools (e.g. psychometric tests) for general selection.

In contrast, a formal process, which is managed by corporate HR and talent managers, has been introduced to identify pivotal talent across business units. The core elements of this process are talent review meetings and the development of TPs. American Hotel Group and APAC Hotel Group developed talent reviews at business unit,

regional, and global levels while EMEA Hotel Group introduced a global talent review in 2016. Talent reviews aid the identification of pivotal talent by discussing top performers, strength of talent, future roles, and action plans (Ammon & Falvey, 2016; Barnett & Davis, 2008). Although the discussions with operational and HR leaders are based on the established performance and potential guidelines, the active calibration of talent and/or talent scores among all managers remains a key challenge. Talent reviews are often just a presentation of previously made evaluations by individual managers instead of discussion meetings. Organisations must understand the value of calibrating talent scores among multiple managers and engage in more meaningful conversations with their talent, which would lead to a ‘more realistic depiction of individuals’ performance and potential’ (Ruppe, 2006, p.42). As a result of the talent reviews, employees at the three MNHCs are placed in a traditional nine-box grid (see section 5.6.1). The reliability of a linear, two-dimensional nine-box grid has been questioned in the literature (see, e.g. Clutterbuck, 2012) and also by some corporate HR leaders in this research, particularly at American Hotel Group. However, it is evident that they perceive to be a lack of viable alternatives, and therefore, the nine-box grid is still widely applied across all participating MNHCs. While two of the corporate HR leaders at American Hotel Group refer to talent scenarios as a potential alternative, Clutterbuck (2012) suggests illustrating an individual’s position as a circle which may overlap several boxes. From a practical perspective, this would considerably increase the complexity of managing talent.

In addition to talent reviews, all three organisations developed several TPs with the main aim of establishing an internal talent pipeline (Jooss, Burbach & Ruël, in review). According to Collings (2014b), one of the core principles of TM is that companies espouse a healthy growth and advancement of its people by demonstrating commitment



to human potential in the long-term. Results of the current study also show that corporate leaders group employees into distinct TPs, which by their nature provide an insight into the talent that is included in that TP; for example, the TP referred to as ‘future strategic leaders’ by American Hotel Group comprises individuals that would match a specific set of criteria and that are predesignated for leading roles in that organisation.

Apart from one TP (‘leavers’ at APAC Hotel Group), all TPs are designed for the internal workforce (see Table 5.9). This provides support to Tansley and Tietze’s (2013) concept of an internal staged talent advancement system, otherwise referred to as talent pipeline (Hagel, 2012; Stewart, 2016). While this is a less formalised process at American Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group, APAC Hotel Group formalised these stages by attaching a readiness level (i.e. number of years) to each TP. It is important to note that readiness does not equalise potential in this organisation, as someone may receive a high potential assessment but a readiness level of three to five years (as opposed to ‘ready now’, or ‘ready in one to two years’). This current study also finds support in the literature for the use of external TPs. Maintaining a close relationship with talent that voluntarily left the organisation allows companies to considerably broaden their TP (Bughin, Chui & Manyika, 2010).

The results of this study highlight the importance of TPs at a managerial level. With the exception of the ‘emerging talent’ TP at American Hotel Group, line employees are not considered for the TP practice. The rationale for this approach stated by senior HR leaders is the high level of turnover at a line employee level and the fact that this group encompasses the largest group of the workforce make it challenging to manage TPs at all levels. Hence, a more selective approach is applied.

This finding lends further support to Collings and Mellahi (2009) who argue that TM should focus on strategic positions, that is, managers and not necessarily line managers that can make a direct impact on organisational performance (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007). These strategic positions ought to be filled with talent – people who are high performers and/or high potentials (Collings *et al.*, 2009a; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Huselid *et al.*, 2005). This is also the approach followed by the case study organisations, which focus on developing TPs for managerial positions with a strategic impact.

The data reveals that all participating organisations introduced position-specific TPs for their senior management roles at a business unit level. American Hotel Group further developed five broader categories of talent, which confirms Tansley and Tietze's (2013) observation of a diversity of TPs even within an individual organisation. TPs seem to be preferred over succession planning at a business unit level across the organisations as it is too time-consuming to maintain and update succession plans for each person. This approach coincides with Boudreau and Ramstad's (2005b, 2007) view that flexibility is best obtained by using TPs as opposed to succession planning, considering the uncertain environment and the long time frame involved in developing these. However, HR functions must be able to balance short-term pressures to deliver results (Farndale *et al.*, 2010) and the long-term perspective on TPs. This is clearly difficult to achieve. Given the large number of TM interventions at each of the MNHCs it appears rather surprising that, at a corporate level, none of the corporations utilised TPs and succession planning appears to be the dominant practice for identifying successors for these critical roles. It seems that the lower number of employees at a corporate level makes succession planning a more manageable task compared to the business unit level.

Findings further indicate that TPs are managed centrally at global or regional levels at American Hotel Group and APAC Hotel Group. It appears that the management of TPs at local or cluster levels creates a challenge when attempting to identify a 'global talent pool' (Farndale *et al.*, 2010, p.163) of the entire organisation. However, according to Ready, Hill, and Conger (2008), local TPs embrace and leverage diversity, particularly in emerging markets. EMEA Hotel Group, on the other hand, decentralises their TPs and seems to struggle to maintain the control as business units make decisions on the inclusion of employees in TPs without necessarily using the corporate criteria.

The study shows that all three MNHCs have a process in place to identify talent for the respective TPs. At American Hotel Group and APAC Hotel Group, talent is included into a TP as a result of a nine-box grid assessment, which is an example of how a differentiation of the workforce can be applied in practice (Tarique & Schuler, 2014). Most resources will be invested in high performing-high potential talent. EMEA Hotel Group established a nomination process by which HR directors at a business unit can suggest employees which are then approved by the HQ.

While this current study acknowledges the existing processes, it is evident that all MNHCs lack clarity in expressing their criteria for inclusion in a TP. This seems inherently flawed as the identification of pivotal talent for TPs is the starting point of further critical talent decisions (Jooss *et al.*, in review; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017) such as promotions and development opportunities. Some of the criteria mentioned by the interviewees of this case study included the performance, potential, and readiness of an employee; however, the degree to which these are applied in a rigorous fashion and the individual factors making up those three clusters in the case study organisations remain unclear.

Overall, the three organisations face different challenges in their approach to managing TPs. American Hotel Group is a well-established corporation, which identifies most of their pivotal talent internally. The key challenge for this firm, it appears, is to find sufficient and appropriate vacancies for their talent, in which they invested a lot of time and money. In contrast, APAC Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group – the two smaller organisations in this case study – displayed a lack of breadth of talent within existing TPs. These two organisations continue to rely on employment of external talent. Despite some guidance from the respective HQs, the familiarity with and, thus, the use of TPs at a business unit level by both operational and HR managers was limited. Therefore, the effectiveness of TPs, that is, the ability to generate and ensure a sufficient breadth and depth of talent in these TPs is a key concern among participants of this study and academics alike (see e.g. Yarnall, 2011).

All participating organisations view their TMS as a support tool during the talent review and TP process. The systems (see Table 5.8) track information and provide reports that can be used to strengthen the discussion on pivotal talent. However, the various software are not utilised as analytical or predictive TM tools which confirms findings by Dickson and Nusair (2010) who find low-tech methods in TM within the hospitality industry. This seems to be an area of significant potential for future investment as a predictive TMS which includes careful forecasting (Nyberg *et al.*, 2017) may support the organisations to clearly outline existing talent gaps as well as future needs.

Previous research found that the willingness to innovate remains a key challenge in many organisations (see, e.g. Burbach & Royle, 2014). While the HR leaders in the MNHCs, particularly at a corporate level, are aware of the advantages and the potential of a good TMS, a lack of understanding and resistance to engage with it was found among operational leaders. Senior HR leaders also reported a flawed and incomplete

implementation process which makes the investment into a TMS a futile exercise. This inability to capitalise on the strategic potential of a TMS is not uncommon among MNCs (Burbach and Royle, 2010). To summarise, traditional tools dominate the talent processes at the three MNHCs. The following section considers how the talent concept, strategies, criteria, and tools and initiatives are implemented globally.

## **6.6 Global Implementation of the Talent Identification Process**

*RQ 4: How effective are MNHCs in implementing their talent identification process?*

This final RQ investigates the global implementation of the talent identification process across the organisations. The three objectives are: (1) to examine the degree of alignment of the process across regions and business units, (2) to validate the effectiveness of MNHCs in identifying talent, and (3) to evaluate the alignment of the talent identification process with the overall GTM strategy. In addition to the discussion of the internal alignment, two emerging topics are reviewed in this section: sponsorship and visibility. The former refers to higher management support while the latter investigates the extent to which people are identifiable in an organisation. This section concludes with a discussion on the key role of communication.

### **6.6.1 Internal Alignment**

Findings show that key talent strategies are mostly developed at a corporate level at the three MNHCs and then implemented across all business units. The process of the transfer of business practices from the home country to the host countries and subsidiaries (in this case hotels) of a MNC and the various factors that mediate this process are discussed extensively in the extant literature (see, e.g. Ahlvik & Björkman, 2015; Chiang

*et al.*, 2017; Welch & Björkman, 2015). There exist several different themes within this discourse. These range from a distinction between direct or indirect transfers (Liu, 2004), the reverse diffusion of HR practices (Edwards & Tempel, 2010), the hybridisation of HR practices (Chung, Sparrow & Bozkurt, 2014), and the process of alignment between corporate HQ and subsidiaries (Ahlvik, Smale & Sumelius, 2016). Furthermore, the debate on whether management processes are converging, diverging, or if a type of crossvergence is taking place is ongoing (see, e.g. Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2012; Brewster *et al.*, 2016; Brewster, Mayrhofer & Cooke, 2015; Guo, 2015).

From the perspective of the three case study MNHCs, the implementation of global standardisation of TM practices and policies with local adjustments takes place which Budhwar, Varma, and Patel (2016, p.323) describe as ‘soft convergence.’ The three organisations aim for a balance (Huo, Huang & Napier, 2002) between globalisation and localisation of their TM practices. In contrast to previous research which found mostly a divergence of TM practices across and within MNCs (Al Ariss & Sidani, 2016), senior HR leaders at the participating organisations urge for a consistent talent identification process to establish a global TP. While companies are often expected to adjust their practices to meet local expectations (Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014), HR directors at a business unit level shared the corporate view that standardised global criteria must be applied for the identification of pivotal talent. This appears to be particularly important as the organisations view pivotal talent as global talent which can manage operations in several business units and regions throughout their career. Therefore, it is not enough to fulfil the pivotal talent criteria of a particular business unit but the overall requirements from a corporate perspective.

At the three MNHCs, a corporate global leadership team designs a GTM strategy and the core talent identification process. The benefits of global HR teams are multifaceted, for example, the creation of a positive climate of diversity, enhanced coordination, increased interdependence among organisational units, global integration, and network development (Mockaitis *et al.*, 2018). A strong awareness of the corporate culture was identified at this level as all interviewees were familiar with the purpose, vision, values, and guiding principles of the organisations. Hence, the TM process was guided by the existing corporate culture at the three MNHCs. This confirms earlier research by Yaprak *et al.* (2011) who contend that organisational culture impacts the conceptualisations and strategies of organisations. The three MNHCs showed strong collaboration at a corporate HR level across their operating regions. For instance, the value of regular formal and informal meetings taking place within the organisations was pointed out by the HR leadership teams. However, a lack of formulated strategies or incompatible systems hinder a more effective alignment among all corporate leaders.

A more significant gap in talent identification practices was found between the corporate and business unit levels. Brewster *et al.* (2016) call for a greater understanding of when and why global practices may not be applicable or difficult to implement in various contexts. While the three MNHCs attempt to establish a more global resourcing strategy in the future, findings of this study show that recruitment and selection of employees for individual hotels are currently still driven by each business unit. On the other hand, the performance management construct in the three MNHCs is more aligned to the TM approach, though several issues were identified. At a business unit level in the three MNHCs, the TM process appears to be generally ‘ad hoc, unstructured and fragmented’, which has previously been highlighted by Jones *et al.* (2012, p.399). As no formal definition of talent exists in the three MNHCs, the conceptualisation of talent

varies considerably. At a corporate level, a broader, global perspective on pivotal talent is applied, whereas leaders at an individual hotel refer to talent with outstanding characteristics at their business unit. Furthermore, while TM at the corporate level is considered a key strategic priority, TM at the hotel level appears to translate merely into recruitment and selection and performance management activities by the GMs. Therefore, it appears that business unit leaders require more guidance by their HQs to develop a better understanding of the organisation's TM strategy and how it should be implemented at the business unit level.

While the adaptability of TM strategies is still seen as a critical factor among business unit leaders in the MNHCs, several interviewees across the three MNHCs prefer a slightly more formalised approach with streamlined processes, global standards, and accountability at a business unit level. In view of the interview responses received, it almost seems as if the TM construct as it is promulgated at the corporate level, was too complex to manage. It includes several actors (i.e. leadership and top management, supervisors and managers, TP of employees, and HR and talent managers) (King, 2015), various criteria and measures, and a variety of tools and initiatives. However, from a corporate point of view it is pertinent to hold these individual actors accountable in order to increase the alignment of the TM process to guarantee its effectiveness and to ensure its long-term success (Groves, 2007; Wright, Snell & Jacobsen, 2004). Preziosi (2008) suggests the use of an external TM audit to ensure accountability. In contrast, participants at the three MNHCs prefer an internal process led by corporate management. Overall, accountability was seen as an area for improvement in the three organisations and the majority of interviewees advocated for a more formalised TM approach.



In addition to the concept of accountability, sponsorship and visibility which are further reviewed in the next section, appear as two key components that ought to be considered as part of the global implementation.

### **6.6.2 Sponsorship and Visibility**

This section reviews the concept of sponsorship and visibility. Sponsorship refers to higher management support which may include campaigning for somebody, investing resources, and showing time commitment (Gakovic & Yardley, 2007). Findings of this current study show that this appears to have a positive impact on the likelihood to be identified as pivotal talent. Talent visibility, which can be increased through sponsorship, can be defined as ‘the extent to which talented people are easily, accurately and reliably identifiable’ in a MNC (Mellahi & Collings, 2010, p.147).

As the three MNHCs do not have a TM control process in place for the individual hotels, business units engage to varying degrees and in an inconsistent fashion with TM. According to Mellahi and Collings (2010), many organisations lack resources and incentives at a HQ level to monitor TM closely at each business unit, and hence, corporate leaders rely on the individual hotels to implement TM processes. At the case study organisations, it is evident that there is less engagement with talent processes at a business unit level. From the perspective of talent identification, senior management sponsorship is a critical factor. This confirms earlier findings by McDermott *et al.* (2013) who view management support as a decisive factor for the success of GTM implementation, while Burbach and Royle (2010) highlight the lack of senior management support as a main barrier to successful TM. Drawing from AT and SNT, talent must have a network of support managers both at business unit (e.g. superiors, HR director, or GM) and corporate (e.g. head of operations, head of talent, or head of HR) levels. Hotel managers, in

particular, rely on the good relationship with their superior, the GM. This confirms Hollenbeck and Jamieson's (2015) observation that employees with stronger networks are more likely to be identified as pivotal talent. A more subtle statement is made by Claussen, Grohsjean, Luger, and Probst (2014) who assert that networks impact the internal talent identification at a middle management level, but these networks have a less important role to play at a senior management level. Interviewees of this current study particularly referred to the importance of networks to be considered for GM and executive committee positions at a business unit level.

A further impact factor during the talent identification process is the concept of visibility (i.e. one's position in a network). It seems obvious that individuals must do everything they can in order to increase their visibility in a hotel, but even more so across business units, which in turn would improve their chances of being identified as talent. Interviewees at American Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group state that closeness (i.e. a strong link) of a business unit to the global HQ of the organisation helps to increase visibility and thus, chances to be identified as pivotal talent. This may also give rise to micro-politics which describes the use of power to influence talent decisions (Dörrenbächer & Geppert, 2006; Tansley *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, interviewees at EMEA Hotel Group point out that business units close to the HQ have more resources available than hotels that are in remote regions. Geographical distance not only prevents accurate talent judgements (Gong, 2003), but also limits the informal and formal interactions between employees at a business unit level and the corporate office (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2007). Business units in close distance to the HQ tend to have more contact with corporate leaders (Mellahi & Collings, 2010). At APAC Hotel Group, some interviewees at a business unit level further referred to flagship properties which are deemed more prestigious and attractive than others. Being employed at one of these

properties will clearly increase an individual's visibility, and ultimately, the chances of being identified as pivotal talent.

While talent strives for high visibility (Hausknecht, 2017), data of this current study shows that business unit managers are not always willing to share talent globally with other business units and the corporate office, which, one may argue, defeats the purpose of a global talent system. The business unit leaders in these MNHCs appear to evaluate the risk of losing pivotal talent and the impact on the performance of the business unit (Guthridge, Komm & Lawson, 2006). It is evident that there exists a goal incongruence in that corporate leaders plan to identify global talent, which may not necessarily be in the self-interest of a business unit (Cappelli, 2008b).

In order to establish a TM approach that is aligned across the operating regions and levels, consistent communication which supports the transfer of business practices appears to be vital. The next section will discuss the critical role of communication for the overall effectiveness of the TM approach.

### **6.6.3 Communication**

The lack of communication of the talent identification process from the corporate HQs to the business units has been identified as the most significant obstacle in the three MNHCs by corporate HR leaders as well as business unit managers. The participating organisations developed a talent identification process at a corporate level. This process is, to a large degree, aligned to the GTM strategy of the organisations, while the corporate culture serves as an 'overarching framework' for all business activities in these organisations (Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey, George & Nichols, 2014, p.1228). The closest link was identified at American Hotel Group, which designed their TM process around the organisation's purpose. A closer alignment at EMEA Hotel Group could be

achieved by having a stronger co-operation between the three key TM functions (i.e. performance management, talent acquisition, and national support managers). Moreover, a lack of alignment was identified in terms of the up-and-coming talent strategy. While this is a key interest of the CEO at American Hotel Group and APAC Hotel Group, the up-and-coming initiatives have not yet been fully included in the GTM construct.

While APAC Hotel Group has a relatively consistent TM approach across their business units, for instance, in assessing talent, American Hotel Group and EMEA Hotel Group do not seem to be able to communicate clearly their TM processes and procedures to their various business units. In fact, the interview data suggests that these two MNHCs shared very little information about talent identification with the individual hotels. Although the corporate office at EMEA Hotel Group developed an extensive amount of documentation with details about their TM process, this information appears not to have reached the business units. While an overload of information on a complex process may lead to frustration among line managers and talent at a business unit level (Morris & Oldroyd, 2017; Spira, 2011), local managers seem to experience the opposite. The extensive use of TM software to assist the MNHCs in managing the process would therefore be vital in ensuring a consistent and transparent approach towards TM communication across the entire corporations.

## **6.7 Summary**

This chapter presented the talent identification model and a critical discussion of the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs. The chapter was structured around the four RQs. It defined talent and presented a global view on talent. This section also highlighted the discrepancies around conceptualising talent between corporate and business unit levels in the three MNHCs. It then discussed the approach to TM,

development of strategies, and the differentiation of the workforce. The discussion showed that while there was a structured corporate approach towards GTM, processes at a business unit level were often ad hoc, unstructured, and fragmented. Following this, the basis of identification and assessment as well as tools and initiatives were analysed. Based on the findings of this current study, a competency framework and a performance-potential typology and model were developed. These criteria built the foundation for discussion in talent reviews and decisions on inclusion in TPs. The chapter concluded with three emerging aspects of the global implementation process: internal alignment, sponsorship and visibility, and communication. With respect to the internal alignment, the corporate TM leadership team at the three MNHCs developed a core global identification construct with a transnational orientation. Business unit leaders, on the other hand, attempted to implement the core global identification construct with local adjustments, and hence, soft convergence took place. In regard to sponsorship and visibility, findings showed that strong management support and a network position that provided high visibility enhanced an employee's identification as pivotal talent. Finally, a lack or overload of communication was identified as the biggest obstacle for an effective implementation of GTM strategies.

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## **CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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## 7.1 Introduction

The current study set out to explore and understand the pivotal talent identification process in MNHCs. Contemporary organisations view pivotal talent as a key asset that may ultimately form the basis of a sustainable people-based competitive advantage (Collings *et al.*, 2017; D'Annunzio-Green, 2018b). In order to maximise this asset, MNHCs ought to develop a strategic approach towards TM which must include the critical step of talent identification. Specifically, the research sought to address four RQs and during this process several other key themes emerged, for instance, the close link between HC and SC as well as the strong impact of AT and SNT on the identification process. The RQs of the study included:

*RQ 1: How do MNHCs conceptualise pivotal talent?*

*RQ 2: What strategies do MNHCs use to identify pivotal talent?*

*RQ 3: What criteria do MNHCs apply to identify pivotal talent?*

*RQ 4: How effective are MNHCs in implementing their talent identification process?*

The introductory chapter of this thesis outlined the rationale of the research and the drivers of the TM challenge. From an academic perspective, a lack of clarity, lack of conceptualisation, and lack of theorisation of the talent identification process and a significant lack of empirical evidence was identified (Festing *et al.*, 2013b; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). From a practitioner's perspective, an effective TM process is a critical factor in the success of hotel corporations. Hotel organisations frequently claim that pivotal talent is the key differentiator in the industry (Bharwani & Talib, 2017). However, most hotel companies continue to struggle to attract, identify, develop, and retain key talent in the fast expanding hospitality sector (Barron, 2008; D'Annunzio-Green & Teare, 2018). As this research has demonstrated in detail, the process of talent identification is complex,

and a holistic approach to identifying talent ought to be applied (D'Annunzio-Green, 2008). The current research addresses the described knowledge gaps and concerns by investigating the identification process of pivotal talent in three MNHCs.

From a conceptual perspective, this study contributes significantly to the body of knowledge on TM by developing a comprehensive view of the talent identification process. The interest in TM research has increased considerably in recent years and the advancement of the field continues (Vaiman & Collings, 2013). However, McDonnell *et al.* (2017) asserted that most studies discuss TM without considering the identification process of talent. This seems surprising as most other TM strategies such as development, retention, and deployment are based on the talent identification stage. Previous findings also suggested that organisations focus on individual TM practices rather than following a comprehensive TM framework (Collings, 2014b). In contrast, academics often concentrate on broader TM challenges faced by organisations instead of an in-depth analysis of individual TM practices (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). This research closes this gap by addressing the four aforementioned RQs, thereby enhancing the current understanding of TM, and more specifically, the talent identification process.

This concluding chapter provides a summary of the developed themes and the contributions of this research. The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the development of a deeper understanding of the talent identification process using an informed eclecticism approach. The study responds to the complex nature of TM with an analytical approach that combines HC and SC with AT and SNT. In adopting an interpretivist perspective in relation to TM, this research shows how organisations conceptualise talent as HC and SC, and the impact of relationships and networks on the established talent identification process. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and management practice and discusses the limitations of the research.



## 7.2 Developed Themes and Key Contributions

This section provides an overview of the developed themes with consideration given to the four RQs of the study including the empirical and theoretical contributions. It further reflects upon the contextual and methodological contributions of the research.

The first RQ focused on the conceptualisation of pivotal talent in MNHCs, as little is known about how talent is defined in practice (Meyers *et al.*, 2013). The researcher investigated whether a formal definition of talent existed within the MNHCs, interpreted how participants viewed talent, and ascertained potential discrepancies between corporate and business unit levels across regions. By doing so, this RQ addressed the existing gap in the definition of talent in practice, and the findings add to the limited knowledge of TM conceptualisation in organisations. Pivotal talent is predominantly viewed as high performing-high potential talent which can contribute considerably to the organisation. This provides further support to the school of thought of talent as capital (i.e. HC and SC) (Collings, 2014a). At a corporate level, an implicit mutual understanding of talent was evident. In contrast, business units shared their own interpretations of talent which showed discrepancies between the subsidiaries and the HQ. This contextualisation (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015) implies a multi-level approach to investigating talent. This current study contributes to the development of a broader, more nuanced approach to talent which will assist scholars to understand talent more comprehensively. It is evident from the findings of this study that the conceptualisation of talent needs to be further developed at a corporate level and cascaded down the various levels in the organisations.

In addition to pivotal talent, pivotal positions are a core element within the existing TM literature (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). In this current study, pivotal positions were defined as positions of strategic importance that can significantly impact the

organisational performance. The findings indicate that the participating organisations did not explicitly identify such roles, which showed an unexpected disconnect between the TM literature and the practice in the case study organisations. However, it is noteworthy that the data presented shows the critical role of a GM. GMs are responsible for a business unit and act as a liaison between the business unit and its employees and the corporate offices. Hence, they also act as local gatekeepers for TM practices (Rupidara & McGraw, 2011; Sparrow *et al.*, 2013). Given this central role, the identification, development, and retention of GMs is a key component of TM processes in the participating organisations.

The second RQ explored how the three organisations formulated their respective strategies to identify pivotal talent. The researcher addressed this RQ by appraising the overall TM approach of the case study firms, by assessing the process of how TM strategies were developed, and by examining the extent to which these organisations used different strategies to identify pivotal talent for individual departments or distinct levels within the organisations. In so doing, the researcher responded to the recurring question raised in the literature; namely, what strategies do firms use to identify talent (Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Wiblen *et al.*, 2012)? While there is ongoing debate in the literature as to whether organisations should follow an inclusive or exclusive approach towards talent identification (Dries, 2013b), the three organisations did not engage in such a discussion. The case study organisations applied a workforce differentiation strategy which included the development of various talent groups and a focus on high performing-high potential talent. This allowed the organisations to identify key people and invest the most resources into the development of their capabilities. Findings of this current study indicate that the theoretical debate should centre around the concept of workforce differentiation (Collings, 2017) and move away from attempting to categorise organisations into inclusive or exclusive boxes (Swales *et al.*, 2014).

In addition to the concept of workforce differentiation, this research reveals that corporate culture is a critical factor in the development of TM strategies. Yet, the role of a corporate culture framework is relatively unexplored in the TM literature. The research uncovers the way in which an approach that is framed around the corporate culture can foster commitment of all stakeholders and consistency of the TM process. This suggests that future TM debates ought to incorporate a discussion on corporate culture and supports earlier studies who request a contextual view on TM (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013b).

In addition, it appears that the literature has yet to establish how TM strategies can be linked to and aligned with business strategies (Collings *et al.*, 2009a; Sparrow *et al.*, 2013). This current research does not attempt an in-depth analysis of the business strategies of the participating organisations. However, the research demonstrated that the size of an organisation and the level of maturity and internationalisation impact the approach to talent as proposed by Pepermans *et al.* (2003). Data from this current study indicates that a critical mass of international business units and employees, as well as a higher level of maturity of the organisation facilitate an internal approach to talent. This is an area which remains significantly underdeveloped in the existing TM literature. These findings can be used as a starting point for theory building on the relationships between the aforementioned components (i.e. size, maturity, and internationalisation) and the TM strategies in organisations.

Findings from this study suggest that the organisations segment their workforce as part of their TM strategies into several key talent groups. These included high performing-high potential talent, expatriates, and up-and-coming talent. The current study contributes to the expatriate literature by highlighting a dichotomy within MNCs that appears to be a growing issue in certain regions such as the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America (Harry & Collings, 2006). Due to pressure from local governments (e.g. in

Macau) and the objective to foster local and regional development, MNCs attempt to develop more local senior managers. Simultaneously, the organisations expect global leaders to gain experience across regions. The increasing importance of up-and-coming talent for organisations, on the other hand, indicates that companies and the TM literature should not just focus on talent at a management level but broaden their view on talent. This is not a departure from the focus on pivotal talent but it rather reinforces the concept of a differentiation strategy. Considering the population of up-and-coming talent presents an opportunity to maximise capabilities at an early stage of their career, and hence, improve the effectiveness of the overall TM construct.

The third RQ focused on criteria to identify pivotal talent which, one might argue, are at the heart of the talent identification process. As part of this RQ, the researcher examined the basis of identification and assessment of talent, and identified tools (e.g. talent reviews), initiatives (e.g. TPs), and systems (e.g. TMS) that organisations applied to assess criteria and review talent. This RQ addressed the urgent need for clarification of HC attributes (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013) and factors determining performance and potential (Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Wiblen *et al.*, 2012). It responded to the significant lack of empirical data in the TM literature of how talent is identified in practice (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). Based on the data analysis, the criteria to identify talent can be clustered into seven broad areas: competency framework, intellectual abilities, education, experience, performance, potential, and readiness. The organisational cognitive, functional, and social competencies serve as an overarching framework which are used for both internal and external identification. Previous competency frameworks in the hospitality industry focused on specific positions in the workforce or were based on secondary research. In contrast, this current research contributes to the TM and the hospitality management literature by introducing an evidence-based competency

framework for pivotal talent (see Figure 6.2). While knowledge, skills, and attitudes and behaviours have been extensively discussed in the literature, it is the key role of core values which remains underdeveloped. The concept of cultural fit and demonstration of core values must be further reinforced as part of the 'TM in context' discussion. The findings in relation to the competency framework provide further evidence of talent as HC. Moreover, through the application of social competence (attitudes and behaviours), SC can be developed. Therefore, the study contributes to the HC and SC literature by reinforcing the notion of HC as a 'linchpin' to SC (Burton-Jones & Spender, 2011, p.3). In addition, it also allows organisations to review their talent indicators and take a more holistic view of pivotal talent.

In addition to the competency framework, the researcher developed a performance-potential typology (see Table 6.1). Organisations use the dimensions of performance and potential to identify their internal pivotal talent. While this has been found in many TM studies, the current research provides insights into the factors that constitute performance and potential. Silzer and Church (2009a) remarked the need for a broadly applicable and useful framework. The typology developed as part of this current study comprises four clusters of performance (organisational competencies, KPIs, SMART objectives, and accomplishments) and four clusters of potential (drive, cultural fit, learning agility, and mobility). The performance-potential model further illustrates the conflation of the two components and contributes to the literature by presenting foundational (drive and cultural fit), and growth (learning agility and mobility) dimensions of potential. The typology and model may assist organisations in pinpointing talent, broadening their talent search, segmenting their talent into different talent groups and consequently, improve their TPs.

Given the central role of talent reviews and TPs to identify talent, the lack of engagement in the TM literature with these tools is somewhat surprising. The current study provides insight into the structure and decision-making processes in talent reviews and explains the composition, inclusion criteria, and management of TPs in organisations. Talent reviews at various levels (i.e. business unit, regional, and global) allow organisations to establish a talent continuum. While calibration sessions attempt to identify talent objectively based on HC factors, agency relationships and social networks may impact the outcome of the talent review. Particularly in an informal setting and with a limited number of attendees, relationships appear to have a noteworthy influence on the outcome of talent reviews and the inclusion in TPs. Moreover, the diversity of established TPs lends further support to the theoretical concepts of workforce differentiation (Collings, 2017) and contextualisation (Vaiman *et al.*, 2017).

Furthermore, the study contributes to the TMS literature by presenting empirical data on the ongoing challenges (e.g. IT infrastructure and acceptance) of the organisations to implement effective TMS. Drawing from the technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989), the research discusses the perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and the attitude towards the TMS. The three organisations introduced TMS from leading technology firms but the engagement and the perceived usefulness, particularly at a business unit level, is very limited. The current study provides further evidence of the considerable gap between potential capabilities of a TMS and the actual application in organisations (Marler & Boudreau, 2017). TMS allow proactive workforce planning, identification of internal talent, and deployment of capabilities. However, organisations remain reluctant to implement advanced analytics. A closer link between scholars, IT providers, and organisations seems required to collaboratively identify a process of easing the transformation towards a beneficial use of a TMS.

The fourth RQ evaluated the implementation of the talent identification process across regions and business units (i.e. hotels). To address this RQ, the researcher examined the degree of alignment of the processes across regions and business units, validated the effectiveness of MNHCs in identifying pivotal talent, and evaluated the alignment of the talent identification process to the overall GTM strategy. This RQ responded to Sparrow *et al.*'s (2013) call for empirical evidence on the implementation of TM across departments and countries. The current study was conducted with three organisations from culturally diverse backgrounds (i.e. the Americas, APAC, and EMEA), and with participants in 15 countries. By applying a multi-level approach and exploring the 'black box' of business unit GTM systems (Tarique & Schuler, 2018, p.95), the current study contributes to the transfer of business practices literature. So far, a few studies have attempted to illustrate a GTM framework, however, they 'only implicitly include constructs at different levels of analysis' (Tarique & Schuler, 2018, p.79). The proposed multi-level model of the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs (see Figure 6.1) ought to be viewed as the basis for further theory building in GTM research. The model demonstrates how the talent identification process is implemented in a global organisation illustrating both the corporate and business unit levels.

Although a core talent identification construct exists for pivotal talent in the three case study organisations, there is little formality (i.e. a lack of procedures and processes) at a business unit level. While corporate leaders advocate for a transnational orientation, business units appear to follow a soft convergence of the talent construct. This reinforces the critical role of local gatekeepers and global teams to improve coordination and global integration (Mockaitis *et al.*, 2018). The research provides insights into the various global implementation impact factors (internal alignment, communication, sponsorship and visibility, and contextual factors). Strong internal alignment and communication led to a

more consistent approach to talent identification. In addition, several micro and macro factors (e.g. supply and demand of talent or national culture) influenced the GTM implementation. Finally, the considerable impact of relationships and networks was highlighted throughout the research as this study took an interpretive stance to investigating TM by drawing from AT and SNT. While a few scholars referred to both theories as part of their TM discussion, they had not yet been applied as part of a comprehensive talent identification study in MNCs. As a result of the lack of accountability and communication, sponsorship (i.e. higher management support) and visibility (i.e. the extent to which people are identifiable) emerged as crucial components of enhancing the identification process. Being in a central network position with several well-connected and influential colleagues can increase the likelihood to be identified as talent. It can be concluded that individual HC (i.e. knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes and behaviours) remains the dominant factors of the formal identification process. However, the model also illustrates that relationships and social networks play a critical role during the talent identification which may create individual SC (i.e. quantity and quality of relations). Future TM debates need to consider how talent is related to other stakeholders, as opposed to an isolated view on an individual talent. While this study is a starting point for further theory building on social networks, future TM research ought to consider in-depth social network analyses to get a better understanding of dynamics in the workforce.

From a contextual perspective, the industry focus is also valuable as it has received little attention by TM scholars to date. This is despite the significant impact of this sector on the global economy and despite the fact that it represents one of the fastest expanding industries with a concurrent high demand for talent (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2017). Existing publications in the hospitality sector focus on the



attraction and retention of talent as opposed to the identification stage (Horner, 2017). This study, therefore, aimed to fill this gap by conducting research in three MNHCs. Several authors have argued that employment practices in MNCs are subject to sectoral effects (Coiling & Clark, 2002; Royle, 2004, 2006). Given that this study only focuses on one sector, additional research will be required to substantiate this in relation to TM. TM is without doubt a critical success factor in hotel organisations which face increased competition to deliver high quality service and customer satisfaction. In an industry with a poor image and high turnover rates, identifying committed talent remains a key challenge (D'Annunzio-Green & Teare, 2018) and a critical business imperative.

From a methodological perspective, this research responds to the call for more comprehensive research designs (Festing *et al.*, 2013b; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013). While the purpose of the study was to explore and understand the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs, four RQs supported the research aim and presented a holistic view. Despite a notable advancement of TM research (Vaiman & Collings, 2013), there is considerable scope for greater clarity, conceptualisation, and theorisation of GTM. The research design is noteworthy for incorporating multiple respondents and cases, given the reliance on single respondents in much of the existing published research. A collective case study approach with three organisations and 73 interviews at both corporate and business unit levels provided an in-depth understanding of talent processes and dynamics. At a corporate level, interviewees were heads of HR or TM, group talent or L&D managers, and heads of operations. At a business unit level, the selected interviewees held leading operational positions, such as GMs, hotel managers, rooms-division directors, and F&B directors, as well as important HR roles, for instance, HR directors and talent or L&D managers. Following this, a within-case and cross-case analysis adopting the six phases of TA by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied. By conducting a multi-level

analysis, this study contributes to the call for more multi-dimensional research in the GTM context (Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015).

Several validation and reliability strategies were introduced to ensure the quality of the research. The three main validation strategies were triangulation, participant feedback, and peer review. Reliability was assured by keeping an audit trail of the research. Particularly at the analysis stage, NVivo, the QDAS, supported a transparent system and allowed to manage data effectively. By implementing these validation and reliability strategies, this research responds to McDonnell *et al.*'s (2017, p.121) call for increased empirical research, which makes 'significant inroads in terms of the quality, depth, and breadth' of the methodological construct. Having presented the developed themes and key contributions, the following section presents the implications for management practice.

### **7.3 Implications for Management Practice**

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the process involved in identifying pivotal talent. Reviewing the seven developed themes, several implications for management practice can be made. The developed themes were: (1) business strategy, (2) GTM strategy, (3) talent identification criteria, (4) talent identification tools, (5) talent identification initiatives, (6) global implementation impact factors, and (7) the evaluation of the talent identification process (see Appendix J, Table J.4). The talent identification model developed as part of this research encompasses those seven themes and is intended to be a guiding tool for organisations to view the talent identification process holistically.

The consideration of the following implications may allow organisations to increase the effectiveness of their talent identification process. This may result in a long-term positive impact on organisational performance and a sustainable people-based competitive advantage.

Contemporary organisations must understand their purpose and vision which ought to be reflected in the business and GTM strategies. The participating MNHCs are expanding considerably, and therefore must carefully plan their workforce to ensure a sustainable talent pipeline within the context of a global talent shortage in this and other industries. The essential value of talent identification for the success of an organisation must be recognised and, echoing senior leaders at the organisations, TM must be given time. Arguably, a strong organisational culture construct that values talent seems to be the foundation of all talent practices. There ought to be a talent culture that permeates the entire organisation.

A clearly defined GTM strategy engenders a more effective identification process. All organisations should respect culturally diverse settings at each business unit. However, as stated by HR leaders in this case study, a core TM process must be formulated and managed at a global level. Subsequently, this process needs to permeate through the organisation to the business units around the globe without any changes to the essence of the process. Particularly for MNHCs that operate in various regions, the concept of global talent cannot be underestimated. This research has shown that the impact of local adaptation or ‘gatekeeping’ is detrimental to the attainment of a GTM strategy and thus the business strategy. This necessitates a close co-operation between the business units, regions, and corporate HQ. Hence, a transparent process with frequent communication and an effective TMS is crucial. It is evident from this research that organisations ought to build the digital capacity to develop decision support systems and

HR analytics to identify and develop their talent and thus, capitalise on the vast potential benefits of TM. Yet, it appears that the firms in this study made only few attempts to move away from the traditional, descriptive approach to managing talent and they largely fail to take advantage of the potential of their TMS and e-HRM. This point has been made frequently in the extant e-HRM literature (Jooss & Burbach, 2017a).

A high degree of engagement with the TM process, however, is only possible with the human power to do so. While TM is the responsibility of everyone in the organisation, a dedicated global TM team (as operated to some degree in the case study organisations) is required to ensure an effective process and accountability, to communicate the benefits, and to conduct an in-depth analysis of the existing talent in the organisation.

Clear measurable criteria to identify talent are at the heart of the talent identification process. Referring to statements made by HR leaders in the MNHCs, organisations must ask themselves, ‘what makes good talent in our company?’ Rather than having a small group of HR leaders respond to this question, a discussion with operational leaders and the executive team should take place. As an outcome, an agreed talent definition with explicit characteristics must be developed. Currently, many organisations employ competency frameworks but their overall definition of talent as well as performance and potential criteria lack clarity. Unless these elements are stated without ambiguity, a consistent and transparent approach to talent identification remains difficult if not impossible to achieve. This research enhances our understanding of the criteria applied to identify talent and highlights the key components of the talent identification process. The study presents an unambiguous competency framework and a clear performance-potential model. These will assist practitioners in understanding and applying the concept of performance and potential more comprehensively and accurately as part of their talent identification process. Subsequently, a more objective assessment

can be carried out and improved decisions around talent can be made. A further implication of the findings is that both individual attributes of potential talent (i.e. HC and SC) as well as their relationships and networks should be taken into account when identifying talent.

The study highlights that the shortcomings of the talent identification process are not owing to the lack of tools available to the firms, but their apparent ineffective or inappropriate use of them. Moreover, some tools are not fully integrated into the talent identification process. Organisations ought to develop a strategy and framework outlining the various stages of the talent identification process and the corresponding tools available at each stage of the process. Furthermore, this research has shown that global HQ must hold business units accountable for the talent identification process to ensure continuous engagement with these tools.

The results of this research support the idea that talent initiatives (i.e. TPs, succession planning, and talent programmes) are critical components in identifying talent. Similar to the above suggestions regarding the use of talent tools, firms must encourage their business unit leaders to actively engage with the talent identification process and to take advantage of the various talent initiatives in order to create a breadth and depth of talent. While several programmes that aid the identification of talent exist in the case study organisations, their link to TM is not clearly evident. This would suggest that a slightly more structured approach to using talent initiatives may be required, which was highlighted by various stakeholders in this research.

There are various impact factors that need to be taken into consideration. The organisations face different supply and demand as well as cultural settings (i.e. contextual factors) across their business units. The research has shown that while acknowledging these differences, a core global talent system must be applied to achieve consistency.

Transparent communication and a strong internal alignment with a high level of accountability support a more consistent global talent approach. Moreover, MNHCs must understand the formal and informal networks existing within their organisation. Particularly the impact of sponsorship from managers and an individual's visibility across regions appear to enhance the identification of talent. Organisations should consider these dynamics when making talent decisions and implement a TM approach that attempts to minimise subjectivity in the identification process.

Finally, it is imperative that MNHCs evaluate the success of their GTM strategy implementation. There is a definite need for a more analytical approach to measuring the success of the talent practices in the firms. As indicated by some senior leaders in the case study organisations, talent dashboards which include regularly updated information must be developed to identify talent gaps and deploy available talent more efficiently. Clear and frequent communication across the entire organisation and cascaded down all levels must be provided. This reinforces transparency and accountability in relation to identifying talent, which appear to be the two key challenges for the participating organisations. Talent managers must establish a clear and concise framework for conceptualising and identifying talent that is easily understood by everyone in the organisation. An information overload by HQ makes operational managers reluctant to engage with TM practices. Similarly, too little information on the talent identification process leads to an inconsistent and ineffective approach to TM. Bridging the gap between the corporate TM vision and the reality at business unit level will considerably increase the validity and effectiveness of talent decisions.

While the current study provides a range of key contributions and valuable implications for management practice as outlined above, the limitations of the study must also be acknowledged.

## 7.4 Limitations of the Research

Research projects are not without their limitations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The findings of this study are subject to the following four limitations: the research topic, the theories applied, the sector, and the sample and its size.

This research focused specifically on the identification of pivotal talent, and thus only covers one stage of the GTM construct. The earlier phase of attraction as well as the following stages of development, retention, and deployment were not addressed. In order to effectively manage pivotal talent, organisations must consider all of the aforementioned stages.

Currently, no single theory that captures the scope of the entire TM construct exists (Dries *et al.*, 2014). This study conceptualised talent as HC and SC. Both HC (see, e.g. Bondarouk & Ruël, 2013; Sparrow & Makram, 2015) and SC (see, e.g. Collings, 2014a; Moeller, Maley, Harvey & Kiessling, 2016) find support among various TM scholars. However, other theories such as contingency theory (Garavan, 2012), institutional theory (Iles *et al.*, 2010b; Martin, Gollan & Grigg, 2011; Preece *et al.*, 2011; Tarique & Schuler, 2010), learning theory (Dries *et al.*, 2012b; Oltra & Vivas-López, 2013; Yoon & Lim, 2010), social exchange theory (Björkman *et al.*, 2013; Wang-Cowham, 2011), and brand equity and signalling theory (Wallace, Lings & Cameron, 2012) may have relevance in a TM context (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). Drawing from AT and SNT, this study addressed the role of relationships and social networks as part of the talent identification process. While other contextual factors were briefly reviewed (i.e. micro and macro factors), they were not the central focus of the research. Hence, no in-depth analysis of these concepts and related theories was carried out.

This study concentrated on the hospitality industry, more specifically on hotel corporations. Conclusions were drawn based on findings from three MNHCs. The generalisation and theorisation of case study research has been questioned in the literature (Bell, 2014). However, selecting various cases across different sites, as applied in this research, can considerably strengthen the basis of generalisation. While based on three MNHCs, the implications of the talent identification model developed here are not limited to the specific context of the hospitality industry.

In addition, the limitation of the sampling procedure and the final sample in this research must be noted. Following a process of snowball sampling, the researcher relied on the judgement of the gatekeepers of the study to identify suitable participants. To address this limitation and to avoid under- or over-representation of any groups, the gatekeepers were provided with a participant framework which distinguished between two levels (i.e. business unit and corporate) and two functions (i.e. operations and HR). Having established these subgroups, the gatekeepers enabled access to interviewees in the organisation. The final sample included 73 participants. While some of these participants could have been identified as pivotal talent by the MNHCs, it must be stressed that the primary concern of the study was the exploration of the talent identification process as delineated by operational and HR leaders. Thus, the study did not focus on how pivotal talent perceives the strategies, processes, and initiatives in place. It also did not evaluate the reaction of employees, who were not part of the pivotal talent group.

Overall, the above presented limitations mean that the research findings need to be interpreted within the context in which they are presented here and with a certain degree of caution. In order to validate findings and to develop a deeper understanding of the GTM concept, further research is needed. Therefore, the recommendations for future research are presented in the next section.



## **7.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

The current study may serve as a basis for future studies as it generates a series of research propositions. Since this research applied a collective case study approach with three organisations, the generalisability of the findings is limited (Bell, 2014). Thus, additional research involving other organisations in the hospitality sector and indeed other sectors is needed to corroborate the findings. Hence, future research may replicate the study in other corporations, use a different methodological approach, or investigate specific factors of the talent identification process or other elements of the TM process in detail.

This study proposes a model of the pivotal talent identification process in MNHCs viewing talent as capital. The framework was developed based on the findings from the three participating organisations. Therefore, future research ought to employ the model in various other industries. Although this study was conducted in the context of the tertiary (service) sector, the framework may also be applied in the secondary (manufacturing) and primary (raw materials) sectors.

This study focuses on the talent identification stage from the perspective of HR and operational managers. A natural progression of this research is to analyse the following TM stages, namely, development, retention, and deployment. Organisations must consider all stages to implement a comprehensive GTM construct (King, 2015). An analysis of those stages would also be valuable in assessing whether the GTM strategy is applied consistently. Moreover, it could be assessed whether decisions on development, retention, and deployment are a logical consequence of the talent identification process employed to make these decisions. Longitudinal studies would arguably provide a more holistic picture of the effectiveness of the developed constructs. These could include tracking the progress of high potentials over time to better understand how successful

such individuals are at different junctures in the future. In addition, the inclusion of other staff members (i.e. line employees) would be valuable in comparing their perceptions of the identification process and the TM system with the observations from the operational and HR managers (Khoreva *et al.*, 2017; Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2014). Organisations must ensure that employees view the TM construct that the firm implemented as a system that offers a ‘strategic climate for talent’ (King, 2017, p.301).

This research confirmed the important role of HC and SC at an individual level of analysis (Collings & Mellahi, 2013). In addition, the research demonstrated the considerable impact of relationships and networks on the talent identification process. Further research regarding the role of networks would be worthwhile. While this study focused on the talent identification process, future research may focus on an in-depth organisational network analysis. If the debate on social networks and its impact on TM is to be moved forward, a better understanding of the two concepts which emerged as part of this research – sponsorship and visibility – ought to be developed.

The lack of empirical research across industries remains (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). While this study presents insights from three MNHCs, more information on how other organisations define talent and what strategies are implemented must be gathered (Thunnissen, Boselie & Fruytier, 2013a). Further research is needed to determine the strategic TM priorities of organisations. In recent years, the pool of up-and-coming talent has appeared to play a vital role of the TM strategy in firms. Currently, the participating organisations do not fully integrate this group in their core TM construct. Further research may explore this integration process. From a strategic perspective, a necessary critical mass of business units to provide an effective internal talent identification process is an intriguing concept to be explored in future studies. An interesting avenue to address this

topic may be to assess the impact of the degree of internationalisation or the maturity of the organisation on the establishment of a critical mass.

Clear criteria are crucial especially when organisations aim to identify talent consistently. This study provides a competency framework for MNHCs as well as a performance-potential model. Both elements must be tested in other organisations to evaluate their validity. The current study is a useful starting point to investigate the measurement of competency frameworks in organisations. A potential area for future research may be an investigation of the nature of these frameworks. They may be dynamic and therefore, evolving and changing, or relatively static once they have been implemented in an organisation. Future research should examine the demonstration of core values as a critical component of the competency framework for talent identification. An additional avenue of further research may involve the consideration of the extent to which the different performance and potential factors are innate or nurtured (Boyatzis & Saatcioglu, 2008; Collings & Mellahi, 2013). More research concerning the operational and strategic steps involved in the talent review and TP process as well as the roles and responsibilities of different actors (e.g. corporate talent managers, business unit HR managers, and operational managers) is also needed.

## **7.6 Summary**

This final chapter presented the developed themes within the context of the four RQs as well as the conceptual, empirical, theoretical, contextual, and methodological contributions of the research. Following this, it discussed the implications for management practice and the limitations of the study. The chapter concluded with the recommendations for future research.

## 7.7 Epilogue

Considering the high relevance of TM in recent years, this study questioned how talent is identified in MNCs. The author formulated the research aim to explore and understand the identification process of pivotal talent in MNHCs. Particularly in the hospitality industry, delivering high quality service is paramount (Crick & Spencer, 2011; Johanson *et al.*, 2010). This can only be achieved with the right talent in the right roles at the right time. When implemented effectively, talent identification as part of a broader TM construct offers significant benefits at various levels and ultimately is a key factor in sustaining and improving the service-profit chain (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser & Schlesinger, 2008). A clear and transparent TM strategy and the identification of best-fit talent as well as clearly laid out career paths will arguably lead to employees that are more motivated and more committed. Furthermore, it can be posited that increasing employee satisfaction will translate into a higher quality of service provided by these employees, which, in turn, will bring about improved customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and, as a consequence, greater profitability. Talent processes can even contribute at a societal level with strengthened competitive positions of an industry or region and innovative approaches that foster social development (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013b).

This study presented theoretical concepts that are key to the talent identification process and developed several frameworks, typologies, and models. The findings of this research will assist leaders and firms in establishing more effective identification processes and in pinpointing the key people within the organisation. Having said that, firms will only be able to capitalise on the findings of this study, if they review the findings presented here thoroughly, if they apply these findings to their organisational context, and if they move away from a subjective and intuitive approach and engage in systematic TM strategy development, implementation, and evaluation. Talent

identification is a socially constructed process which includes various social key actors (King, 2015). It is these actors that need to be engaged and it is these actors that need to be considered as part of multi-dimensional TM. Collaboration between industry and scholars must be strengthened to better understand the talent dynamics, improve the talent identification processes in organisations, and maximise the impact of TM research. After all, talent identification is only one piece of the bigger TM puzzle.

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## APPENDICES

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## Appendix A: Snapshot of Multinational Hotel Corporations

The hospitality sector is both national and international in nature and ranges from individual businesses to large MNHCs and from hotels to resorts, guesthouses, casinos, restaurants, and cruise ships (Barrows, Powers & Reynolds, 2012; Wood, 2015). The latter has been identified as the most rapidly growing segment of the industry (Coggins, 2014). While some MNHCs are widely known around the globe, it has to be recognised that there are also more than 100,000 individually operated hotel properties with more than 7,000,000 rooms worldwide (Smith Travel Research, 2015a). The rapid growth of the global hotel inventory between 2008 and 2018 is represented in Table A.1.

**Table A.1: Global Hotel Inventory 2008 – 2018**

Year	Properties	Rooms
2008	170,047	14,419,917
2010	172,969	15,001,109
2012	175,767	15,479,484
2014	178,533	15,984,508
2016	182,149	16,615,817
2018	184,299	16,966,280

Source: Smith Travel Research (2018)

The contemporary hospitality industry is a growing global industry with many well-known MNHCs (HotelNewsNow, 2015b; Nickson, 2013). Multiple acquisitions and mergers took place in recent years forming even larger conglomerates, for example, Marriott International acquired Starwood Hotels and Resorts, and AccorHotels Group acquired FRHI Hotels and Resorts (Marriott International, 2015; Vidalon & Thomas, 2015). This trend of mergers and acquisitions is likely to continue to increase as organisations seek synergies to expand their market share which results in increased revenues and capabilities (Baynham, 2011; Jain, 2014; Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

As the make-up of hotel groups is rapidly changing, this appendix provides a snapshot of the largest MNHCs. According to Ferrary (2015), all hotels were operating independently until the beginning of the 20th century. Since then, businesses have expanded and increasingly formed alliances which results in many hotel chains (Elmuti & Kathawala, 2001; Smith Travel Research, 2015b). Some of the largest hotel corporations are truly global players as they have properties in more than 100 countries. Marriott International is leading the ranking with hotels in more than 127 countries and territories, followed by Hilton in 105 countries (Hilton, 2018; Marriott International, 2018).

The Hotel Census Report by Smith Travel Research (2015a) reveals a total of 991 hotel chains. Considering the number of properties as the main criterion, Wyndham Worldwide leads the 2016 ranking followed by Choice Hotels International, and Marriott International (Smith Travel Research, 2017). Out of the 30 largest hotel groups considering the property count, the USA is represented with 13 organisations followed by China (5), France (3), the UK (3), Japan (2), Canada, Singapore, Spain, and Sweden (Smith Travel Research, 2017). Table A.2 provides an overview of the largest hotel corporations by number of properties in 2016.

**Table A.2: Largest Hotel Corporations by Property Count in 2016**

Rank	Hotel Corporation	Country	Properties
1	Wyndham Worldwide	USA	8,222
2	Choice Hotels International	USA	6,465
3	Marriott International	USA	5,930
4	InterContinental Hotels Group	UK	5,037
5	Hilton	USA	4,857
6	AccorHotels Group	France	3,996
7	Best Western International	USA	3,656
8	G6 Hospitality	USA	1,393
9	Jinjang International Hotel Group	China	1,236
10	Groupe du Louvre	France	1,194
11	Red Lion Hotels Corporation	USA	1,177
12	Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group	USA	1,144
13	7 Days Inn	China	1,027
14	Homeinns Hotel Group	China	955
15	LQ Management LLC	USA	887
16	Whitbread Hotel Company	UK	769
17	GreenTree Inns Hotel Management Group	China	696
18	Huazhu Hotels Group	China	681
19	Hyatt Hotels Corporation	USA	663
20	Extended Stay America	USA	630
21	Westmont Hospitality Group	Canada	575
22	Travelodge	UK	541
23	NH Hotel Group	Spain	363
24	B&B Hotels	France	359
25	The Ascott Limited	Singapore	310
26	Toyoko Inn	Japan	254
27	Route Inn	Japan	223
28	WoodSpring Hotels	USA	220
29	Scandic Hotel	Sweden	211
30	InTown Suites	USA	189

Source: *Developed from* Smith Travel Research (2017)

Considering room count as the main criterion, the same organisations dominate the ranking. The largest hotel corporations by number of rooms in 2016 are presented in Table A.3. Three organisations joined the top 30: Meliá Hotels International, Riu Hotels and Resorts, and Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts. Consequently, three firms dropped out of the list: B&B Hotels, WoodSpring Hotels, and InTown Suites.

Marriott International's acquisition of Starwood Hotels and Resorts in mid-2016 resulted in the largest hotel group with more than one million rooms (Marriott International, 2017) followed by Hilton, InterContinental Hotels Group, and Wyndham Worldwide with more than 700,000 rooms in each group. In 2016, there were 14 parent companies with more than 100,000 rooms (Smith Travel Research, 2017).

**Table A.3: Largest Hotel Corporations by Room Count in 2016**

Rank	Hotel Corporation	Country	Rooms
1	Marriott International	USA	1,158,450
2	Hilton	USA	791,024
3	InterContinental Hotels Group	UK	728,920
4	Wyndham Worldwide	USA	708,245
5	AccorHotels Group	France	570,321
6	Choice Hotels International	USA	513,937
7	Best Western International	USA	291,718
8	Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group	USA	180,069
9	Hyatt Hotels Corporation	USA	173,236
10	Jinjang International Hotel Group	China	154,482
11	G6 Hospitality	USA	124,828
12	Homeinns Hotel Group	China	121,041
13	7 Days Inn	China	101,385
14	Groupe du Louvre	France	99,354
15	LQ Management LLC	USA	87,184
16	Huazhu Hotels Group	China	83,165
17	Red Lion Hotels Corporation	USA	77,108
18	Whitbread Hotel Company	UK	69,967
19	Extended Stay Hotels	USA	69,584
20	GreenTree Inns Hotel Management Group	China	63,778
21	Westmont Hospitality Group	Canada	55,261
22	NH Hotel Group	Spain	54,403
23	Meliá Hotels International	Spain	54,174
24	Toyoko Inn	Japan	49,258
25	Riu Hotels and Resorts	Spain	43,706
26	Travelodge	UK	41,066
27	Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts	Hong Kong	40,556
28	Scandic Hotel	Sweden	39,975
29	Route Inn	Japan	35,339
30	The Ascott Limited	Singapore	34,539

Source: *Developed from Smith Travel Research (2017)*

The organisational form of MNHCs' properties can differ between equity investments such as wholly-owned operations and partly-owned joint ventures, management contracts, and franchises (Contractor & Kundu, 1998; Dimou, Archer & Chen, 2003; Gannon, Roper & Doherty, 2010). Many firms, such as Hilton, InterContinental Hotels Group, and Marriott International expanded first through franchising agreements and begun to add hotel management contracts as a further type of alliance in the 1980s (Ferrary, 2015). Nowadays, it appears that managing contracts and franchising are the two most popular approaches, whereas only few hotels are owned by the respective hotel groups (Contractor & Kundu, 1998; Dev, Erramilli & Agarwal, 2002). Ferrary (2015) argues that franchising is the most common alliance, however, management contracts the fastest growing alliance.

According to Dev *et al.* (2002) the decision to employ a management contract or franchising depends significantly on the irreproducible capabilities of a firm (e.g. organisational and quality competencies), the availability of talent and investment partners in the host country, and the level of development in the host country. Hence, a resource-based decision is made by organisations (Kaufman, 2015; Wright *et al.*, 2001). In addition to organisational factors, business environment and industrial factors must be considered when deciding which organisational form to employ (Todeva & Knoke, 2005). Dev *et al.* (2002) identify the following tendencies: first, the more important the irreproducible capabilities are, the more management contracts have been employed. Second, the more investment partners in the host country are available, the easier it is to employ management contracts. Third, the greater the availability of host-country managers and the more developed the host country is, the greater the preference to use franchising (Dev *et al.*, 2002). Hotel groups focusing on management contracts are the GreenTree Inns Hotel Management Group, Homeinns Hotel Group, and Jinjang

International Hotel Group (all from China). Hotel groups with a majority of franchising properties are Choice Hotels International, Hilton, InterContinental Hotels Group, and Wyndham Worldwide. A more balanced approach is followed by AccorHotels Group and Marriott International (HOTELS, 2015).

In addition to hotel groups, there are a number of consortia of which Hotusa Hotels (Spain), Best Eurasian Hotels (Russia), Preferred Hotel Group (USA), Global Hotel Alliance (UAE), and Worldhotels (Germany) are ranked in the top five (HOTELS, 2015). Other consortia are The Leading Hotels of the World (USA), Great Hotels of the World (England), Small Luxury Hotels of the World (England), and the Relais and Chateaux Collection (France) (HOTELS, 2015).

Most hotels are branded in North America (67%), South America (59%), and APAC (51%). The non-branded hotels preponderate in Africa and the Middle East with 44 per cent of branded hotels and only 41 per cent in Europe (HotelNewsNow, 2015b). As brand recognition, affinity, and loyalty increase in importance, effective loyalty programmes are crucial as part of a broader strategy in many hospitality organisations (ATKearney, 2013; Roth & Fishbin, 2015). In addition, guest preferences change, in particular through the Millennium travellers, who will account for 50 per cent of all travellers by 2025 (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2015). Therefore, new brands have frequently been introduced in the last few years (Roth & Fishbin, 2015). Hilton added four new brands to their portfolio (Tapestry Collection (2017), Tru (2016), Curio (2014), and Canopy (2014)) (Hilton, 2017). InterContinental Hotels Group launched avid hotels (2017), Kimpton Hotels and Resorts (2015), and Hualuxe Hotels and Resorts (2012) (InterContinental Hotels Group, 2017a, b). Similarly, other MNHCs also added brands to their portfolio: Hyatt Hotels Corporation launched Hyatt Centric in 2015 and Marriott International created Moxy Hotels in 2013 (HotelNewsNow, 2015b).

Deloitte (2010) announced a new era of consumer-led brands for the hospitality industry. These brands might include the concepts of a low budget hotel, a lifestyle hotel, or a combination of a hotel and hostel atmosphere (Roth & Fishbin, 2015). Barrows and Powers (2009) argue that large MNHCs offer a comprehensive portfolio of brands to their clients. Marriott International offers the largest portfolio in the industry with 30 different brands covering a wide range of categories and targeting various distinctive customers (Marriott International, 2018). AccorHotels Group customers can select between 21 different brands, Hilton and Hyatt Hotels Corporation offer 14 brands, and InterContinental Hotels Group encompasses 13 brands (Hilton, 2018; Hyatt Hotels Corporation, 2018; InterContinental Hotels Group, 2018). Generally, the number of choices for customers will continue to accelerate (Amadeus Traveller Trend Observatory, 2015). From a TM perspective, the role of brands is crucial as people choose not only organisations, but brands to work for, and a strong brand can considerably increase the attractiveness of a workplace (Deloitte, 2017; Neeti Leekha & Sanjeev, 2014; Ready *et al.*, 2008).

All brands can be classified by a number of criteria, such as price, function, location, market segment, or style (Barrows & Powers, 2009). When using price as a main criterion, hotels are commonly classified within six categories: Luxury, upper upscale, upscale, upper midscale, midscale, and economy (Smith Travel Research, 2015b). According to HotelNewsNow (2015b), most of the global rooms are offered in an economy class hotel (29%) followed by upper midscale (21%), upscale (16%), midscale (14%), and upper-upscale (13%). Luxury hotels only amount to five per cent of the total global rooms available. Price is often closely linked to the amount of service provided which leads to a distinction between full-service, limited-service, and extended stay service (Olsen & Zhao, 2008). For this current study, focus is placed on luxury hotels as

these hotels have the highest standards of service which require skilled talent (Tungate, 2009; Walls *et al.*, 2011).

An alternative criterion is the location of a hotel which usually fits in one of the following six categories: urban (a densely populated area in a large metropolitan area), suburban (suburbs of metropolitan markets), small metropolitan town areas (less than 150,000 people), resorts, airports, and motorways (Barrows & Powers, 2009; Roth & Fishbin, 2015). While most hotels are in a suburban area (36%), others are situated in small metropolitan town areas (19%), or urban areas (16%). Resorts (23%), motorways (10%), and airports (7%) are other important locations (HotelNewsNow, 2015a, b). This trend seems to continue as there is a significant population growth in outlying suburban areas, and therefore, many opportunities for investment exist (Roth & Fishbin, 2015).



## Appendix B: Overview of Definitions

This appendix provides definitions of the terms talent (Table B.1), TM (Table B.2), and GTM (Table B.3) in chronological order. The respective definition applied or adapted in this study is marked with an asterisk (\*).

**Table B.1: Definitions of Talent**

Author(s)	Definition
Simonton (1999)	‘Any innate capacity that enables an individual to display exceptionally high performance in a domain that requires special skills and training.’ (p.436)
Gage (2000)	‘[...] superior mastery of systematically developed abilities or skills.’ (p.67)
Williams (2000)	‘[...] describe those people who do one or other of the following: regularly demonstrate exceptional ability – and achievement – either over a range of activities and situations, or within a specialized and narrow field of expertise; consistently indicate high competence in areas of activity that strongly suggest transferable, comparable ability in situations where they have yet to be tested and proved to be highly effective, i.e. potential.’ (p.35)
Buckingham and Vosburgh (2001)	‘Talent should refer to a person’s recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied.’ (p.21)
Jericó (2001)	‘The implemented capacity of a committed professional or group of professionals that achieve superior results in a particular environment and organization.’ (p.428, translated)
Michaels <i>et al.</i> (2001)	‘[...] the sum of a person’s abilities – his or her intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, judgment, attitude, character and drive. It also includes his or her ability to learn and grow.’ (p.xii)
Michaels <i>et al.</i> (2001)	‘A code for the most effective leaders and managers at all levels, who can help a company fulfil its aspirations and drive its performance. Managerial talent is some combination of a sharp strategic mind, leadership ability, emotional maturity, communications skills, the ability to attract and inspire other talented people, entrepreneurial instincts, fundamental skills and the ability to deliver results.’ (p.111)
Lewis and Heckman (2006)	‘[...] is essentially a euphemism for “people.”’ (p.141)

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Tansley, Harris, Stewart, and Turner (2006)	‘Talent can be considered as a complex amalgam of employees’ skills, knowledge, cognitive ability and potential. Employees’ values and work preferences are also of major importance.’ (p.2)
Stahl <i>et al.</i> (2007)	‘[...] a select group of employees – those that rank at the top in terms of capability and performance – rather than the entire workforce.’ (p.4)
Tansley <i>et al.</i> (2007)*	‘Talent consists of those individuals who can make a difference to organizational performance, either through their immediate contribution or in the longer-term by demonstrating the highest levels of potential.’ (p.8)
Ulrich (2007)	‘Talent equals competence (able to do the job) x commitment (willing to do the job) x contribution (finding meaning and purpose in their work).’ (p.3)
Cheese, Thomas, and Craig (2008)	‘Essentially, talent means the total of all the experience, knowledge, skills, and behaviours that a person has and brings to work.’ (p.46)
Vance and Vaiman (2008)	‘All of the employed people within an organization who may differ dramatically in levels of knowledge, skill, and ability.’ (pp.3-4)
González-Cruz, Martínez-Fuentes, and Pardo-del-Val (2009)	‘A set of competencies that, being developed and applied, allow the person to perform a certain role in an excellent way.’ (p.22, translated)
Silzer and Dowell (2009b)	‘In groups talent can refer to a pool of employees who are exceptional in their skills and abilities either in a specific technical area (such as software graphics skills) or a competency (such a consumer marketing talent), or a more general area (such as general managers or high-potential talent). And in some cases, “the talent” might refer to the entire employee population.’ (pp.13-14)
Silzer and Dowell (2009b)	‘An individual’s skills and abilities (talents) and what the person is capable of doing or contributing to the organization.’ (p.14)
Bethke-Langenegger (2012)	‘We understand talent to be one of those workers who ensures the competitiveness and future of a company (as specialist or leader) through his organisational/job specific qualification and knowledge, his social and methodical competencies, and his characteristic attributes such as eager to learn or achievement oriented.’ (p.3)

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Ulrich and Smallwood (2012)	‘Talent = competence (knowledge, skills and values required for today’s and tomorrow’s job; right skills, right place, right job, right time) x commitment (willing to do the job) x contribution (finding meaning and purpose in their job).’ (p.60)
Ewerlin (2013)	‘Employees who have an above-average performance potential based on their talent and perform their responsibilities (very) well. In addition, it is necessary for them to be willing and able [to] progress further.’ (p.281)
Foster, Moore, and Stokes (2013)	‘In terms of a <i>prima facie</i> definition talent can be a special skill or ability that a person may possess.’ (p.17)
Nijs, Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, and Sels (2014)	‘Talent refers to systematically developed innate abilities of individuals that are deployed in activities they like, find important, and in which they want to invest energy. It enables individuals to perform excellently in one or more domains of human functioning, operationalized as performing better than other individuals of the same age or experience, or as performing consistently at their personal best.’ (p.182)
Schiemann (2014)	‘The collective knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences, values, habits and behaviors of all labor that is brought to bear on the organization’s mission.’ (p.282)
Böhmer and Schinnenburg (2016)	‘All employees are talented individuals who, if necessary, have the willingness and potential to undergo the development to fill key positions with their unique set of skills and competencies and who also promise high performance in these positions.’ (p.74)
Cappelli and Keller (2017)	‘Those individuals who are currently or have the potential to contribute differentially to firm performance by occupying strategic jobs.’ (p.28)

Source: *Developed from Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013)*

**Table B.2: Definitions of Talent Management**

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Buckingham and Vosburgh (2001)	‘Talent management refers to the art of recognizing where each employee’s areas of natural talent lie, and figuring out how to help each employee develop job-specific skills and knowledge to turn those talents into real performance [...] elevating each person’s performance to its highest possible levels, given the individual’s natural talents.’ (p.22)
Sloan <i>et al.</i> (2003)	‘Managing leadership talent strategically, to put the right person in the right place at the right time.’ (p.236)
Pascal (2004)	‘Talent management encompasses managing the supply, demand, and flow of talent through the human capital engine.’ (p.9)
Ashton and Morton (2005)	‘TM is a strategic and holistic approach to both HR and business planning or a new route to organizational effectiveness. This improves the performance and the potential of people – the talent – who can make a measurable difference to the organization now and in future. And it aspires to yield enhanced performance among all levels in the workforce, thus allowing everyone to reach his/her potential, no matter what that might be.’ (p.30)
Dutttagupta (2005)	‘In the broadest possible terms, TM is the strategic management of the flow of talent through an organization. Its purpose is to assure that a supply of talent is available to align the right people with the right jobs at the right time based on strategic business objectives.’ (p.2)
Armstrong (2006)	‘Talent management is the use of an integrated set of activities to ensure that the organisation attracts, retains, motivates and develops the talented people it needs now and in the future. The aim is to secure the flow of talent, bearing in mind that talent is a major corporate resource.’ (p.390)
Warren (2006)	‘In its broadest sense, the term can be seen as the identification, development, engagement, retention and deployment of talent, although it is often used more narrowly to describe the short- and longer-term resourcing of senior executives and high performers.’ (p.26)
Jerusalim and Hausdorf (2007)	‘High potential identification and development (also known as talent management) refers to the process by which an organization identifies and develops employees who are potentially able to move into leadership roles sometime in the future.’ (p.934)
Stahl <i>et al.</i> (2007)	‘Our conception of talent management specifically involves attracting, selecting, developing, and retaining high-potential employees.’ (p.5)
Cappelli (2008b)	‘At its heart, talent management is simply a matter of anticipating the need for human capital and setting out a plan to meet it.’ (p.1)

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Collings and Mellahi (2009)*	‘We define strategic talent management as activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organisation’s sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organisation.’ (p.304)
Silzer and Dowell (2009a)	‘Talent management is an integrated set of processes, programs, and cultural norms in an organization designed and implemented to attract, develop, deploy, and retain talent to achieve strategic objectives and meet future business needs.’ (p.18)
Hajikaimisari, Ghalambor, and Hajikarimi (2010)	‘Talent management may be defined as a core sub-system of an organization’s strategic management system, to develop a human resource asset base that is capable to support current and future organizational growth directions and objectives.’ (p.68)
Tymon, Stumpf, and Doh (2010)	‘[...] a comprehensive view of talent management in emerging markets – i.e., the best practices for the attraction, onboarding, development, appraisal, motivation, retention and/or redeployment of professional talent.’ (p.109)
Bethke-Langenegger, Mahler, and Staffelbach (2011)	‘We understand talent management to be a distinctive process that focuses explicitly on those persons who have the potential to provide competitive advantage for a company by managing those people in an effective and efficient way and therefore ensuring the long-term competitiveness of a company.’ (p.527)
Piansoongnern, Anurit, and Kuyyawattananta (2011)	‘Talent management is therefore, defined here as both a philosophy and a practice. It is both an espoused and enacted commitment – shared at the highest levels and throughout the organization by all those in managerial and supervisory positions – to implementing an integrated, strategic and technology enabled approach to human resources management (HRM), with a particular focus on human resource planning, including employee recruitment, retention, development and succession practices, ideally for all employees, but especially for those identified as having high potential or in key positions.’ (p.1579)
Dries <i>et al.</i> (2012a)	‘Talent management is the differential management of employees based on their relative potential to contribute to the competitive advantage of their organizations.’ (p.271)

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Höglund (2012)	'[...] we conceptualize talent management as the explicit differentiation of employees based on the capacity and potential of employees to influence organizational performance.' (p.127)
Chadee and Raman (2013)	'[...] we refer to talent management as the deliberate and organised efforts by firms to optimally select, develop, deploy and retain competent and committed knowledge employees for key positions which bear significant influences on the overall performance of the organisation.' (p.463)
Funk, Conley, Bery, and Gawande (2013)	'Talent management concerns the way in which organizations recruit, promote, and terminate employees to streamline the workforce and maximize productivity.' (pp.2521-2522)
Raman, Chadee, Roxas, and Michailova (2013)	'[...] we refer to talent management as top management's deliberate and organized efforts to optimally select, develop, deploy and retain competent and committed employees who bear significant influence on the overall performance of the organization.' (p.336)
Baker and Kelan (2017)	'Talent management at a very broad level concerns the attraction, development, retention, mobilization, and succession planning of employees and leaders.' (p.522)
Cappelli and Keller (2017)	'The process through which organizations meet their needs for talent in strategic jobs.' (p.28)

Source: Author

**Table B.3: Definitions of Global Talent Management**

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Collings and Scullion (2008)*	‘The strategic integration of resourcing and development at the international level that involves the proactive identification, development and strategic deployment of high-performing and high-potential strategic employees on a global scale.’ (p.102)
Mellahi and Collings (2010)	‘Broadly defined, global talent management involves the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization’s sustainable competitive advantage on a global scale, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles which reflects the global scope of the MNE, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with the best available incumbent and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization.’ (pp.143-144)
Scullion <i>et al.</i> (2010)	‘Global talent management includes all organizational activities for the purpose of attracting, selecting, developing, and retaining the best employees in the most strategic roles (those roles necessary to achieve organizational strategic priorities) on a global scale. Global talent management takes into account the differences in both organizations’ global strategic priorities as well as the differences across national contexts for how talent should be managed in the countries where they operate.’ (p.106)
Tarique and Schuler (2010)	‘Defined most broadly, global talent management is about systematically utilizing IHRM activities (complementary HRM policies and policies) to attract, develop, and retain individuals with high levels of human capital (e.g., competency, personality, motivation) consistent with the strategic directions of the multinational enterprise in a dynamic, highly competitive, and global environment.’ (p.124)
Newhall (2012)	‘Global talent management is not only about recruiting the right talent for certain countries, it is also about identifying good talent and transferring skills and expertise around the world.’ (p.31)

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Cerdin and Brewster (2014)	‘Global talent management is centered on the development of employees, and it includes both high-potentials development and global-careers development. High potentials development is defined as the combination of a segmentation approach to talent management that relies on the development of high potentials and a strategic approach to expatriation management. Global-careers development implies the development of a career system within the organization, open to all employees, and integrating international work experiences as a step in the overall careers of individuals.’ (p.248)
Böhmer and Schinnenburg (2016)	‘We understand GTM as all organizational activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions that contribute to the organization’s sustainable competitive advantage in a global context.’ (pp.74-75)

Source: Author



## Appendix C: Competency Models for the Hotel Sector

This appendix builds on the overview of competency models presented in Table 2.6. Each model encompasses several clusters, dimensions and/or competencies which are illustrated in Table C.1 – C.5. The model by Chung-Herrera *et al.* (2003) focuses on competencies of future hospitality leaders. It encompasses eight clusters, 28 dimensions, and 99 competencies.<sup>8</sup> Seven out of eight clusters display general management competencies. The final cluster, industry knowledge, stresses the importance of developing business and hospitality industry expertise.

**Table C.1: Model by Chung-Herrera *et al.* (2003)**

<b>Cluster</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>
Self-management	Ethics and integrity, time management, flexibility and adaptability, self-development
Strategic positioning	Awareness of customer needs, commitment to quality, managing stakeholders, concern for community
Implementation	Planning, directing others, re-engineering
Critical thinking	Strategic orientation, decision-making, analysis, risk taking and innovation
Communication	Speaking with impact, facilitating open communication, active listening, written communication
Interpersonal skills	Building networks, managing conflict, embracing diversity
Leadership	Teamwork orientation, fostering motivation, fortitude, developing others, embracing change, leadership versatility
Industry knowledge	Business and industry expertise

Source: Chung-Herrera *et al.* (2003)

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<sup>8</sup> A list of all 99 *competencies* can be found in the article by Chung-Herrera *et al.* (2003).

The model by Suh *et al.* (2012) focuses on competencies of future managers. It encompasses six clusters and 25 competencies. In addition to people skills, focus is placed on operational knowledge and skills in various hotel departments (i.e. F&B, front office, housekeeping, HR, accounting, and finance).

**Table C.2: Model by Suh *et al.* (2012)**

<b>Cluster</b>	<b>Competencies</b>
Hospitality skills	Knowledge in front office operations, knowledge in HR, knowledge in housekeeping operations, knowledge in accounting, knowledge in finance
Interpersonal skills	Interaction with subordinates, peer interaction, guest interaction, interaction with superiors
Supervisory skills	Staff training, scheduling, interview skills, knowledge in event planning, knowledge in cultural differences
F&B skills	Basic food preparation, basic beverage management, food service skills
Leadership skills	Tolerance for change, openness to new ideas, strategic thinking, personal integrity
Communication skills	Oral English communication, English writing skills, presentation skills, oral communication

Source: Suh *et al.* (2012)

The model by Bharwani and Jauhari (2013) includes two main clusters: technical competence and hospitality intelligence. The study investigates competencies for frontline employees within the hospitality industry. For the purpose of their study, they focused on the second component, hospitality intelligence. Hospitality intelligence encompasses three dimensions (i.e. emotional, cultural, and hospitality experiential intelligence) and 22 competencies which are presented below.

**Table C.3: Model by Bharwani and Jauhari (2013)**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Competencies</b>
Emotional intelligence: <i>interpersonal intelligence</i>	Empathy, effective communication, influencing skills, seeking and assimilating guest feedback, anticipating guest needs, responsiveness – ‘yes, we can’ attitude, flexibility, conflict resolution skills, team playing
Emotional intelligence: <i>intrapersonal intelligence</i>	Emotional resilience, optimism, commitment, self-awareness, self-management
Cultural intelligence	Cognitive cultural intelligence, motivational cultural intelligence, behavioural cultural intelligence, cultural sensitivity and mindfulness
Hospitality experiential intelligence	Centricity of guest experience, creativity and innovation, generosity, professional behaviour

Source: Bharwani and Jauhari (2013)

The model by Wang (2013) focuses on competencies for career advancement of F&B employees. It encompasses four clusters and 14 competencies. The competencies related to career adjustment and control appear to be the most influential factors for career success (Wang, 2013).

**Table C.4: Model by Wang (2013)**

<b>Cluster</b>	<b>Competencies</b>
Career development	Career attitude, career action, career recognition
Career adjustment and control	Job seeking and mobility, learning and problem-solving, self-management
Workplace attitude	Communication skills – negotiating, social networking – with other people, social networking – with customers, social networking – with colleagues, social networking – with directors
Communication and networking	Basic work attitude, work ethics and safety, teamwork

Source: Wang (2013)

Bharwani and Jauhari (2017) adopted Le Deist and Winterton's (2005) competency model including cognitive competence (knowledge), functional competence (skills), social competence (attitude and behaviour), and meta-competence (facilitating learning). The model focuses on GMs in the hospitality industry and encompasses four clusters and 43 competencies.

**Table C.5: Model by Bharwani and Jauhari (2017)**

<b>Cluster</b>	<b>Competencies</b>
Cognitive competence	Strategic thinking, decision-making skills, creativity and innovation, systems thinking, information gathering skills, planning prowess, critical thinking and analytical skills, risk taking, change management
Functional competence	Service orientation, business and industry expertise, revenue management skills, interviewing and selection skills, commitment to quality, resource allocation skills, crisis management skills, employee performance management appraisal skills, ability to manage stakeholders, information technology (computer) skills, financial analysis and cost control, knowledge of statutory compliances
Social competence	Effective communication skills, cultural intelligence, networking skills, conflict management and resolution, teamwork orientation, diversity management skills, fostering motivation, active listening skills, developing others
Meta-competence	Emotional resilience and composure, optimism, achievement orientation, self-awareness, self-confidence, self-management, initiative, diplomacy, time management, ethics and integrity, adaptability and flexibility, tenacity and perseverance. openness and willingness to learn

Source: Bharwani and Jauhari (2017)

## **Appendix D: Email Enquiry to Organisations**

Dear Mr/Ms [...],

As part of my role as a PhD researcher at the Dublin Institute of Technology in Dublin, Ireland, I am conducting research on global talent management in the hospitality industry. Specifically, I am investigating the identification process of pivotal talent.

The aim of this research is to get an insight into the entire talent management discipline, but in particular the talent identification process. In this international collective case study, my research will focus on talent management strategies developed by corporate headquarters and on how these strategies are implemented across regions and properties. The research aims to operationalise the concept of pivotal talent. Given the size and reputation of your corporation, it would be invaluable to co-operate with you.

Naturally, I will work with you on establishing a distinct methodology to suit the needs of your organisation. The research time frame can also be adapted to your needs. As part of the research, all information provided will be treated confidentially and individual responses, names, and companies will be anonymised. All findings will be made available to participating organisations in report form. This research will establish a benchmark for talent metrics and best practices in talent management in the international hospitality industry.

I hope this research will be of interest to you and please advise when we can set a date for a short Skype call in which I will introduce myself and the project in more detail. Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,  
Stefan Jooss

## Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet and Research Proposal

### **Global Talent Management**

The identification process of pivotal talent in multinational hotel corporations

#### **PhD Researcher**

Stefan Jooss

Assistant Lecturer

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#### **Lead Supervisor**

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#### **Dublin Institute of Technology**

College of Arts and Tourism

School of Hospitality Management and Tourism

Cathal Brugha Street, Dublin 1, Ireland



## **Participant Information Sheet and Research Proposal**

### **1. Overview**

As part of my role as a PhD researcher at the Dublin Institute of Technology in Dublin, Ireland, I am conducting research on global talent management in multinational hotel corporations. Specifically, I am investigating the identification process of pivotal talent.

### **2. Research Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this research is to get an insight into the entire talent management discipline, but in particular the talent identification process. In this international collective case study, my research will focus on talent management strategies developed by corporate headquarters and on how these strategies are implemented across regions and properties. The research aims to operationalise the concept of pivotal talent. Its objectives are:

- To understand how corporate leaders define pivotal talent
- To analyse the strategies and criteria used to identify pivotal talent
- To evaluate the talent management system and tools in place
- To assess how the talent management strategies have been implemented globally

### **3. Data Collection**

I will achieve this by using semi-structured in-depth interviews (approx. 45-60 min) with key stakeholders. A first round of interviews will be completed with senior group HR directors at the global and regional headquarters. A second round of cascading interviews will be carried out at various levels of the participating global hotel corporations. The purpose of these interviews is to critically examine the identification process of pivotal talent. Proposed interview questions will be sent in advance to the participants.

### **4. Participants**

The interviews will be held with the following groups:

- Global headquarters
- Regional headquarters
- Cluster managers
- GMs, operations managers, HR directors, and talent managers

All participating enterprises have a global presence and a substantial market share. This research focuses on three key players in the hotel industry with headquarters in the Americas, APAC, and EMEA. Given the reputation of your organisation, it would be invaluable to co-operate with you.

## **5. Data Management**

Naturally, I will work with you on establishing a distinct methodology to suit the needs of your organisation. The research time frame can also be adapted to your needs. As part of the research, all information provided will be treated confidentially and individual responses, names, and companies will be anonymised. All interviews will be recorded and a transcript will be produced. Interview data will be stored on an encrypted and password protected Dublin Institute of Technology's personal computer and exclusively be accessible by the PhD researcher, Stefan Jooss, and the lead supervisor, Dr Ralf Burbach. Transcripts will be made available to respondents upon request.

## **6. Outcome**

Findings will be made available to participating organisations in report form. This research will establish a benchmark for talent identification in the international hospitality industry.

Should you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,  
Stefan Jooss



## **Appendix F: Overview of Participants**

The following Tables F.1, F.2, and F.3 provide an overview of the participants in chronological order including their code, position, and location. In addition, the interview date, type, and length (duration in minutes) are presented. The three gatekeepers are marked with an asterisk (\*).

**Table F.1: Participants at American Hotel Group**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Length</b>
A1	Head of HR EMEA*	Switzerland	03/08/2016	F2F	90
A2	Regional Head of HR	Switzerland	03/08/2016	F2F	59
A3	Cluster GM	Switzerland	03/08/2016	F2F	42
A4	Cluster HR Director	Switzerland	03/08/2016	F2F	50
A5	Front Office Manager	Switzerland	03/08/2016	F2F	43
A6	Cluster HR Director	Russia	24/08/2016	Skype	62
A7	Hotel Manager	Russia	24/08/2016	Skype	48
A8	Regional Head of HR	China	26/08/2016	Phone	61
A9	Head of HR APAC	Hong Kong	26/08/2016	Skype	62
A10	Cluster HR Director	China	31/08/2016	Skype	59
A11	Regional Head of HR	UAE	31/08/2016	Skype	61
A12	Rooms-Division Director	China	02/09/2016	Skype	37
A13	GM	Brazil	02/09/2016	Skype	40
A14	GM	Australia	05/09/2016	Skype	40
A15	Cluster HR Director	Thailand	05/09/2016	Skype	48
A16	Hotel Manager	Brazil	05/09/2016	Phone	39
A17	Cluster HR Director	Australia	06/09/2016	Skype	62
A18	F&B Director	Australia	06/09/2016	Skype	37
A19	Cluster HR Director	Brazil	06/09/2016	Skype	64
A20	Head of TM	USA	12/09/2016	F2F	121
A21	HR Director	USA	12/09/2016	F2F	63
A22	Head of HR the Americas	USA	13/09/2016	F2F	51
A23	GM	USA	14/09/2016	F2F	44
A24	Hotel Manager	USA	14/09/2016	F2F	40
A25	Rooms-Division Director	USA	14/09/2016	F2F	35
A26	Regional Head of HR	USA	21/09/2016	Phone	46
A27	F&B Manager	Germany	23/09/2016	F2F	37
A28	Cluster HR Director	Germany	29/09/2016	Skype	69
A29	GM	Germany	30/09/2016	Phone	47
A30	Cluster HR Director	France	13/10/2016	Phone	45

Source: Author

**Table F.2: Participants at APAC Hotel Group**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Length</b>
B1	L&D Director	USA	02/09/2016	Skype	61
B2	F&B Director	UK	07/09/2016	F2F	60
B3	Head of TM*	UK	08/09/2016	F2F	89
B4	Head of Operations the Americas	USA	20/09/2016	Skype	52
B5	HR Director	Macau	21/09/2016	Skype	50
B6	Head of Operations EMEA	UK	29/09/2016	Skype	45
B7	Hotel Manager	USA	06/10/2016	Skype	39
B8	L&D Manager	USA	12/10/2016	Skype	38
B9	Hotel Manager	USA	13/10/2016	Skype	36
B10	HR Director	USA	14/10/2016	Skype	57
B11	Head of HR the Americas	USA	19/10/2016	Skype	56
B12	HR Director	USA	20/10/2016	Skype	28
B13	F&B Director	Hong Kong	03/11/2016	F2F	52
B14	GM	Hong Kong	03/11/2016	F2F	39
B15	GM	Hong Kong	03/11/2016	F2F	60
B16	Group L&D Manager	Hong Kong	04/11/2016	F2F	52
B17	Chief HR Officer	Hong Kong	04/11/2016	F2F	52
B18	Head of Operations APAC	Hong Kong	04/11/2016	F2F	39
B19	HR Director	Hong Kong	04/11/2016	F2F	54
B20	Hotel Manager	Hong Kong	04/11/2016	F2F	43
B21	GM	Macau	05/11/2016	F2F	62
B22	Head of HR EMEA	Switzerland	17/11/2016	F2F	81
B23	GM	Switzerland	17/11/2016	F2F	39
B24	HR Director	Switzerland	17/11/2016	F2F	58
B25	L&D Manager	Switzerland	18/11/2016	Skype	38

Source: Author

**Table F.3: Participants at EMEA Hotel Group**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Length</b>
C1	HR Director	Spain	30/11/2016	Skype	49
C2	GM	Germany	30/11/2016	Skype	50
C3	Regional Head of TM	UK	07/12/2016	F2F	66
C4	Talent Manager	UK	07/12/2016	F2F	52
C5	Regional Head of HR	UK	07/12/2016	F2F	55
C6	HR Director	UK	07/12/2016	F2F	41
C7	HR Manager	Germany	09/12/2016	Skype	50
C8	Cluster GM	China	15/01/2017	Skype	39
C9	GM	Kuwait	15/01/2017	Skype	65
C10	HR Director	Kuwait	16/01/2017	Skype	41
C11	HR Director	China	17/01/2017	Skype	47
C12	Hotel Manager	Spain	23/01/2017	Skype	40
C13	GM	UAE	07/02/2017	F2F	20
C14	HR Director	UAE	07/02/2017	F2F	45
C15	Head of TM*	UAE	08/02/2017	F2F	69
C16	Group Talent Manager	UAE	08/02/2017	F2F	68
C17	GM	UAE	08/02/2017	F2F	56
C18	HR Director	UAE	08/02/2017	F2F	35

Source: Author

## Appendix G: Interview Protocol

### Global Talent Management

The identification process of pivotal talent in multinational hotel corporations

#### PhD Researcher

Stefan Jooss  
Assistant Lecturer  
[stefan.jooss@dit.ie](mailto:stefan.jooss@dit.ie)  
+353 14024187

#### Lead Supervisor

Dr Ralf Burbach  
Assistant Head of School of Hospitality Management and Tourism  
[ralf.burbach@dit.ie](mailto:ralf.burbach@dit.ie)  
+353 14024372

#### Dublin Institute of Technology

College of Arts and Tourism  
School of Hospitality Management and Tourism  
Cathal Brugh Street, Dublin 1, Ireland



**Dear Interview Participant,**

I would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to take part in this research project. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time should you require clarification on any of the below. Your responses will remain confidential. I look forward to meeting with you.

Kind regards,  
Stefan Jooss

**Interview Questions**

**Introduction to HR**

1. Could you tell me about your role and responsibilities in the company?
2. In your view, what role does the HR department play in the organisation as a whole?

**Introduction to Talent**

3. Does your organisation currently have a formal definition of talent in place?  
If so, how has it been communicated within the organisation?
4. How would you define talent and how would you define pivotal talent?
5. What role does talent management play in your organisation?
6. In your view, what impact does pivotal talent have on your organisation?

**Talent Strategies**

7. Could you describe the talent management strategy of the organisation?
8. How do you develop talent management strategies and by whom are they developed?
9. Could you take me through the recruitment and selection process with a particular focus on how you would attract and select pivotal talent?
10. What strategies and criteria do you use to identify pivotal talent in different levels and departments of the organisation?
11. How do you evaluate your talent management strategy and processes? What criteria do you use to measure the effectiveness and quality of your talent management strategy?

**Talent Criteria**

12. In your opinion, what specific talent pools are mission critical in your organisation, how are these identified (based on what criteria), and how are they developed?
13. Looking into the future, what new kinds of talent and competencies will be needed?
14. Can you take me through the steps of your talent pipeline, perhaps giving examples?
15. What is the most critical element of the talent pipeline and how does the organisation ensure that this element receives the attention it deserves? What type(s) of succession plans do you have?
16. How often and on what basis do you review pivotal talent?
17. Could you describe any programmes your organisation may offer to enhance pivotal talent identification?

**Systems and Tools**

18. What systems and tools do you use to identify, track, and analyse talent and what were the key drivers to invest in these tools?
19. Could you describe how you use the talent management system and for what purposes? What do you think does the organisation want to get out of using the system?
20. In your opinion, how digitalised is the talent management implementation?

**Global Implementation**

21. What future trends will shape the talent management of your organisation?
22. Could you describe how your talent management strategy is rolled out globally/from a property point of view? What is your role in operationalising the talent management strategy?
23. Could you identify any potential challenges and barriers (if they exist)?

## **Appendix H: Email Invitation to Participants**

Dear Mr/Ms [...],

I hope you are doing well. I have the pleasure to conduct my PhD research on global talent management in co-operation with [...]. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study and thank you for communicating with [...]. I started my research this week at [...] and now I would like to conduct further research.

Ideally, we could conduct a Skype interview on one of the following dates: [...]

Please let me know what suits you best. Thank you for your support. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,  
Stefan Jooss



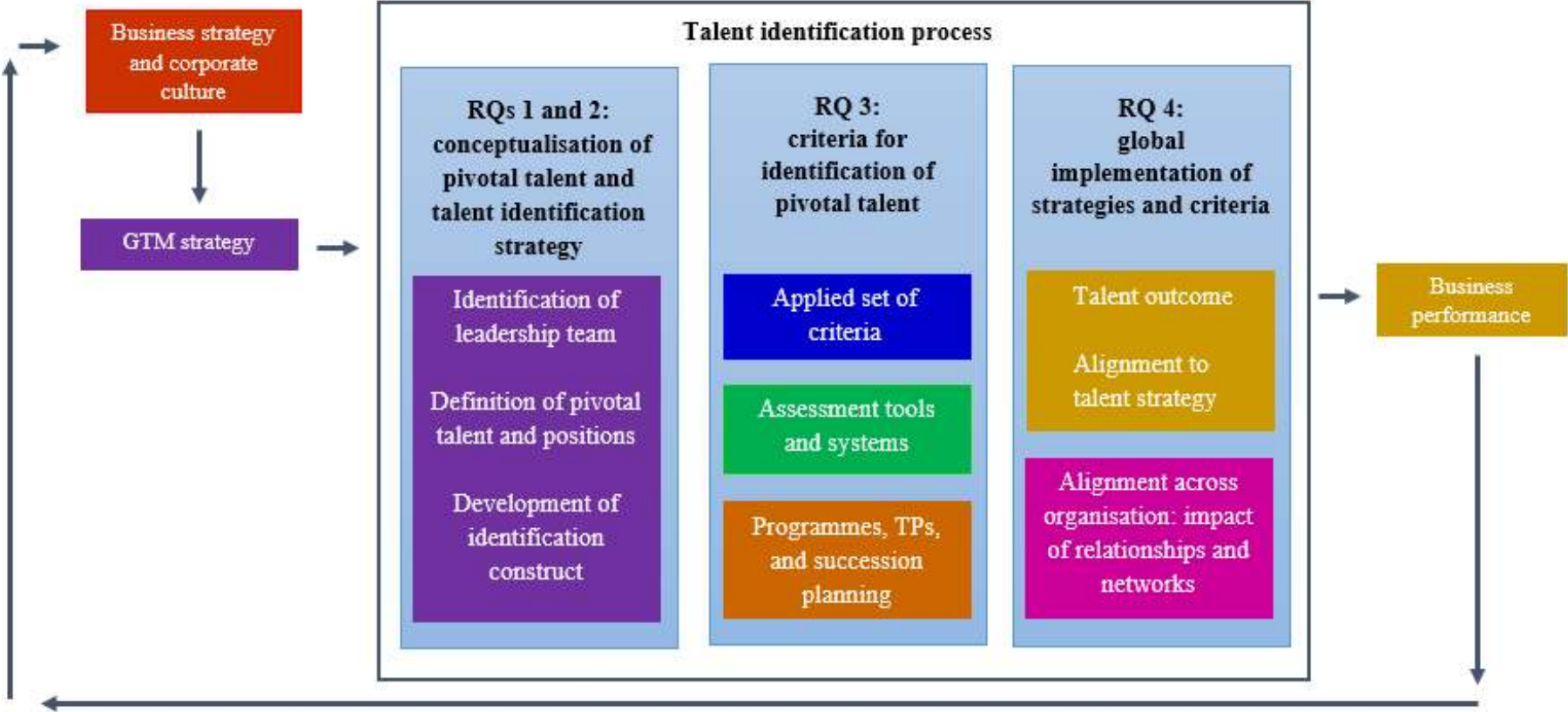
## Appendix I: Consent Form

<b>Researcher's Name:</b> Stefan Jooss	<b>Title:</b> Mr																				
<b>Faculty/School/Department:</b> School of Hospitality Management and Tourism College of Arts and Tourism Dublin Institute of Technology																					
<b>Title of Study:</b> Global Talent Management: The identification process of pivotal talent in multinational hotel corporations																					
<b>To be completed by the:</b>																					
<table> <tr> <td>1. Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study?</td> <td>YES</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?</td> <td>YES</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?</td> <td>YES</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. Have you received enough information about this study and any associated health and safety implications if applicable?</td> <td>YES</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5. Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study?</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>    • at any time</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>    • without giving a reason for withdrawing</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>    • without affecting your future relationship with the Institute</td> <td>YES</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6. Do you agree to take part in this study the results of which are likely to be published?</td> <td>YES</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7. Have you been informed that this consent form shall be kept in the confidence of the researcher?</td> <td>YES</td> </tr> </table>		1. Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study?	YES	2. Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	YES	3. Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?	YES	4. Have you received enough information about this study and any associated health and safety implications if applicable?	YES	5. Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study?		• at any time		• without giving a reason for withdrawing		• without affecting your future relationship with the Institute	YES	6. Do you agree to take part in this study the results of which are likely to be published?	YES	7. Have you been informed that this consent form shall be kept in the confidence of the researcher?	YES
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2. Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	YES																				
3. Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?	YES																				
4. Have you received enough information about this study and any associated health and safety implications if applicable?	YES																				
5. Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study?																					
• at any time																					
• without giving a reason for withdrawing																					
• without affecting your future relationship with the Institute	YES																				
6. Do you agree to take part in this study the results of which are likely to be published?	YES																				
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<table> <tr> <td>Signed:</td> <td>Date:</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Name in Block Letters:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Signature of Researcher:</td> <td>Date:</td> </tr> </table>		Signed:	Date:	Name in Block Letters:		Signature of Researcher:	Date:														
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Signature of Researcher:	Date:																				

**Appendix J: Codebook**

The coding framework in Figure J.1 presents the links between the four RQs and the seven colour codes applied for the NVivo analysis.

**Figure J.1: Coding Framework**



Source: Author

**Table J.1: List of Initial Codes**

<b>Initial Codes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>	
Company Growth and Openings	13	19	●
Continuous Growth of People	3	3	●
Corporate Culture	26	36	●
Employee Grades	5	5	●
Guiding Principles I	8	8	●
Guiding Principles II	7	10	●
Role of Human Resources	34	39	●
Values	18	30	●
Analytics	8	12	●
Critical Positions	22	35	●
Cultural Exchange Ambassadors	3	3	●
Definition of Pivotal Talent	47	65	●
Definition of Talent	58	89	●
Development of Talent Management Strategy	15	19	●
External Talent	18	22	●
Hotel Schools and Higher Education	21	36	●
Internal Talent	20	29	●
Niche Talent	5	5	●
Promotion	15	21	●
Sourcing Channels	9	15	●
Talent from Outside Hospitality	9	13	●
Talent Management	29	47	●
Talent Management Leadership Team	12	19	●
Talent Management Strategy	37	53	●
Young, Emerging, or Up-and-Coming Talent	9	13	●
Accomplishments	1	1	●
Age	1	3	●
Appearance	7	9	●
Aspiration to Grow and Learn	33	46	●
Asset Management Skills	1	1	●
Behaviour, Personality, and Attitude	31	42	●
Business and Commercial Acumen	3	6	●
Capability	4	4	●
Care	12	14	●
Chemistry	3	4	●
Communication Skills	16	18	●
Competencies Set	28	58	●
Completed Projects or Training	7	10	●
Core Hospitality Skills	5	8	●
Cultural Fit	19	25	●
Customer Focus	23	30	●

<b>Initial Codes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>	
Decision-Making Skills	6	6	●
Education	11	12	●
Emotional Intelligence	9	17	●
Empathy	2	4	●
Engagement or Commitment	18	22	●
Entrepreneurial Skills	2	3	●
Experience	16	18	●
Financial Skills	9	10	●
Flexibility and Agility	16	19	●
Global Mindset	3	4	●
Going the Extra Mile	9	11	●
Gut Feeling	9	11	●
Happiness	1	1	●
Higher or More Complex Role	16	21	●
Humility	5	6	●
Identification Criteria (General Comments)	29	46	●
Individual Goals and Objectives	20	47	●
Initiative	21	26	●
Innovation and Creativity Skills	14	15	●
Integrity	4	4	●
Intuition	1	1	●
Key Performance Indicators	13	18	●
Language Skills	14	18	●
Leadership Skills	25	37	●
Local Knowledge	3	3	●
Maturity	7	10	●
Mobility and Transferability	23	37	●
Operational Skills	9	10	●
Organising Skills	1	1	●
Passion	23	26	●
People Skills	7	11	●
Performance	22	42	●
Positive Attitude	3	3	●
Potential	24	41	●
Proactive Attitude	4	5	●
Problem-Solving Skills	4	4	●
Readiness	9	10	●
Revenue Contributor	1	1	●
Selling and Upselling Skills	6	6	●
Seniority	2	4	●
Service Quality and Productivity	6	6	●
Social Skills	7	12	●
Strategic Thinking Skills	2	2	●

Initial Codes	Sources	References	
Strategic Value	6	6	●
Team Fit	9	11	●
Teamwork Skills	8	8	●
Technical Skills	7	8	●
Understanding of Luxury	6	6	●
15 Factor Questionnaire Plus by Psytech International (Test)	1	2	●
20 I 20 Skills by Aethos Consulting Group (Test)	2	2	●
360 Assessment or Feedback	24	31	●
360 Survey by TalentQuest (360)	2	2	●
ASSESS by Outmatch (Test)	2	4	●
Assessment Centres	6	8	●
Background and Reference Check	4	4	●
Caliper Profile by Caliper Corporation (Test)	3	3	●
Conversations	22	33	●
Culture-Fit Assessment in Development (Test)	1	1	●
Customer Feedback & Score	21	28	●
Curriculum Vitae	14	18	●
DISC by DISC Profile (Test)	2	3	●
Emotional and Social Competency Inventory by Hay Group (360)	1	1	●
Executive Development Assessment Centres	3	6	●
Hogan Personality Inventory by Hogan Assessments Systems (Test)	1	1	●
Interviews	32	56	●
Leadership Impact by Human Synergetics International (360)	1	1	●
Leadership Profile	12	25	●
Myer-Briggs Type Indicator by The Myer-Briggs Foundation (Test)	1	1	●
Nine-Box Grid	30	68	●
Oracle Peoplesoft (Software)	14	26	●
PageUp (Software)	2	2	●
PDI Assessment by Korn Ferry (Test)	5	8	●
People Answers by Infor PeopleAnswers Talent Science (Test)	3	6	●
Performance Appraisal	46	102	●
Personality and Preference Inventory by Cubiks Group Limited (Test)	3	5	●
Psychometric Tests	15	27	●
SAP SuccessFactors - Profile (Software)	12	24	●
Situational Leadership by The Ken Blanchard Companies (Test)	2	2	●
Sniperhire (Software)	3	3	●
Social Media	1	1	●
STAR Programme	3	3	●
SumTotal - TMS (Software)	12	33	●
Supporting Documents	1	1	●
Survey including Leadership Index by Gallup	2	4	●
Talent Reviews and Calibration	24	59	●
Talent Scenarios	2	2	●

Initial Codes	Sources	References	
TalentHub (Software)	3	5	●
Taleo (Software)	8	11	●
Ten-Question Potential Assessment	2	3	●
Trial Work	1	1	●
Workday - At Proposal Stage (Software)	2	2	●
Apprenticeships	4	4	●
Corporate High Potential Programme	13	35	●
Corporate Management Trainee Programme I	15	30	●
Corporate Management Trainee Programme II	7	17	●
Future GM Programme	1	2	●
Heads of Departments Development Programme I	1	1	●
Heads of Departments Development Programme II	8	15	●
Internships	7	9	●
Master of Business Administration with RMIT University	5	10	●
Mentoring	11	16	●
National Leaders Programme	2	2	●
National Management Trainee Programme	3	4	●
Rotation, Exposure, and Task Force	20	26	●
Segmentation	17	26	●
Succession Planning	39	82	●
Supervisor Development Programme I	7	11	●
Supervisor Development Programme II	1	1	●
Supervisor Development Programme III	2	2	●
Talent Pools	37	65	●
Australia (Country)	2	2	●
Brand and Branding	12	16	●
Brazil (Country)	2	7	●
China (Country)	11	22	●
Expatriates	17	29	●
France (Country)	1	1	●
Generations	1	1	●
Germany (Country)	5	7	●
Global Implementation	46	114	●
Hong Kong - China (Country)	3	5	●
Hotel Property	7	7	●
Identification Challenges	44	83	●
Image of the Industry	3	3	●
India (Country)	1	1	●
Indonesia (Country)	1	1	●
Japan (Country)	2	2	●
Kuwait (Country)	1	2	●
Macau - China (Country)	2	5	●
Mexico (Country)	3	3	●
Relationships and Networks	43	89	●
Resources	1	2	●

Initial Codes	Sources	References	
Russia (Country)	2	5	●
Saudi Arabia (Country)	2	2	●
Seasonality	4	7	●
Shareholders	5	6	●
Spain (Country)	1	1	●
Thailand (Country)	2	3	●
Transparency	28	44	●
Turkey (Country)	1	1	●
UAE (Country)	6	7	●
UK (Country)	1	1	●
Unions	8	10	●
USA (Country)	8	12	●
Business Results	9	10	●
Employee or Engagement Survey	23	27	●
External Forums	2	2	●
Feedback or Observation	15	18	●
Improvement of Moral	1	1	●
Internal versus External Ratio	7	7	●
Number of Lateral Moves or Transfers	9	10	●
Number of Placements	1	1	●
Number of Promotions versus External Hire	17	17	●
Number of Successors	3	3	●
Process Evaluation by People	3	3	●
Recruitment Cost and Business Profit	1	1	●
Referrals	2	2	●
Retention and Turnover Rate	22	25	●
Talent Gaps	4	4	●
Talent Pipeline	8	10	●

Source: Author

**Table J.2: List of Initial Themes**

<b>Initial Themes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>	
Corporate Culture	43	87	●
Human Resources	41	63	●
Approach to Talent Management	64	238	●
Critical Positions	22	35	●
Definition of Talent and Pivotal Talent	64	159	●
Sourcing Channels and Strategic Partnerships	33	64	●
Performance (Outcome)	44	131	●
Aspirations (Impact Factor)	63	157	●
Black Box (Subjective Decision)	17	21	●
Cognitive Competence - Knowledge (Frame)	12	15	●
Competencies Set (General Comments)	28	58	●
Education (Impact Factor)	11	12	●
Experience (Impact Factor)	16	21	●
Functional Competence - Skills (Frame)	51	110	●
Identification Criteria (General Comments)	29	46	●
Intellectual Abilities - Intelligence (Pre-Condition)	12	21	●
Potential (Outcome)	31	62	●
Social Competence - Attitudes and Behaviours (Frame)	66	271	●
Psychometric Testing	27	65	●
360 Assessment or Feedback	24	35	●
Classic Selection Tools	36	83	●
Performance and Potential Evaluation Tools	68	339	●
Software	44	106	●
Development Programmes	48	130	●
Apprenticeships	4	4	●
Internships	7	9	●
Mentoring	11	16	●
Rotation, Exposure, and Task Force	20	26	●
Segmentation	17	26	●
Succession Planning	39	82	●
Talent Pools	37	66	●
Country Perspective	44	90	●
Global Implementation	46	114	●
Identification Challenges	44	83	●
Influential Factors	65	214	●
Engagement	24	28	●
Business Results	9	11	●
Feedback and Observation	20	23	●
Internal versus External Hire	37	59	●
Talent Pipeline	14	20	●

Source: Author










**Table J.3: List of Reviewed Themes**

<b>Reviewed Themes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>	
Role of Corporate Culture	42	84	●
Role of Human Resources	43	66	●
Approach to Talent Management	71	423	●
Critical Positions	22	35	●
Definition of Talent	64	159	●
Talent Management Leadership Team	12	19	●
Competency Framework	67	314	●
Education	11	12	●
Experience	17	25	●
Intellectual Abilities	12	21	●
Performance	45	144	●
Potential	31	62	●
Readiness	9	10	●
Assessments	61	219	●
Documentation	14	18	●
Interviews	32	56	●
Software Support	44	106	●
Talent Reviews	62	223	●
Succession Planning	39	82	●
Talent Pools	37	66	●
Talent Programmes	51	159	●
Communication	28	44	●
Relationships and Networks	47	108	●
Supply and Demand	62	156	●
Talent Management Culture	44	90	●
Feedback	33	47	●
Key Performance Indicators	9	11	●
Talent Pipeline	42	78	●

Source: Author

**Table J.4: List of Defined Themes**

<b>Defined Themes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>	
Business Strategy	58	145	
Global Talent Management Strategy	73	600	
Talent Identification Criteria	71	588	
Talent Identification Tools	72	622	
Talent Identification Initiatives	64	274	
Global Implementation Impact Factors	72	434	
Evaluation of Talent Identification Process	55	136	

Source: Author

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