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The Paradoxes of Talent Management

A qualitative study on how the idea of Talent Management has been
translated within the Swedish IT industry

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Abstract

This paper aims to broaden the understanding of how the idea of Talent Management has been brought in and understood within a specific setting - the Swedish IT sector. The purpose is firstly to understand how and why the idea of Talent Management has been introduced by the organizations, and secondly to investigate how the idea is interpreted and understood within the specific industry and organizational settings. The study is qualitative in its nature and investigates how four organizations have brought in, interpreted and adapted this fashionable management idea into their operations. Data has been collected by conducting 14 interviews with respondents at the four firms. By analyzing using institutional theory and translation theory, the results show that the organizations on a concept level present similar ideas of the meaning of Talent Management and talent, but when investigating in detail the idea has been interpreted and translated differently in different local contexts. The study also identifies a number of paradoxes in how the organizations reflect upon and practice the idea. The paper provides new insights on how the idea of Talent Management is contextualized and understood within specific national, industrial and organizational settings. The paper may inspire to a continued debate on how and why organizations involve fashionable management ideas into their operations.

Key Words
Talent Management, Contextualization, Paradoxes, Institutionalization, Translation.

Introduction

In today's business environment characterized by globalization and an intensified international competition, organizations face increased difficulties in finding and keeping the most competent personnel (Capelli, 2008; Kim and McLean, 2012; Schuler, Jackson and Tarique, 2011). Despite rising unemployment rates and economic downturns, Talent Management (TM) and the so-called war for talent (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 2003) nevertheless continues to be a hot topic. Talented employees are said to play an important role in creating competitive advantages (Garavan 2012; Iles, Preece, and Chuai, 2010; McDonnell, 2011; Turner, Tansley, Foster, Harris, Stewart, Sempik, and Williams,

2007) and thereby contribute to the long-term success of organizations (Aguinis, Gottfredson and Joo, 2012; Sidani and Al Ariss, 2014; Schuler et al., 2011). The concept of TM, being launched by consulting firm McKinsey in 1998 (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin and Michaels, 1998), is rather young, both in academic research and in managerial settings (Gallardo-Gallardo Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Tarique and Schuler, 2009). The idea of managing talents has grown increasingly popular during recent years and organizations today use it liberally in a variety of industries and regions. In business magazines, headlines like "Sweden's 101 Super Talents" (VA, 2016a) and "The Talent List" (SvD, 2014a) are recurring and in job advertisements the word "talent" is frequently used to describe what organizations are searching for. The talent term has also found its way into formal job titles with roles such as Talent Management Officer (TMO) becoming internationally established (Berg, 2011; Meister and Willyerd, 2010; Tunbrå and Wennerhill, 2015).

The TM concept lacks a clear definition (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Lewis and Heckman 2006; Tarique and Schuler, 2009), but is often explained as an organization's ability to attract, recruit and retain productive and engaged employees (Mäkelä, Björkman and Ehrnrooth, 2010; Wikström and Martin, 2012). It has been shown that TM is applied differently in different settings, but the idea is often understood as a tool to attract new personnel, to develop internal career advancement for talented employees (Vorhauser-Smith, 2012), or to create talent pools consisting of top ranked personnel in terms of performance, motivation and leadership abilities (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Michaels et al., 2001; Mäkelä et al., 2010). Ever since its launch in 1998 (Chambers et al., 1998), the meaning and consequences of TM continues to be debated. Some argue that it is a buzzword that will fade and disappear (Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Mucha, 2014) while others present it as crucial in creating strategies that will help organizations survive in an increasingly competitive market (Aguinis et al., 2012; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Sidani and Al Ariss, 2014; Schuler et al., 2011). A recent study by Bersin, Harris, Lamoureux, Laurano, and Mallon (2010) for example show that organizations pursuing an effective TM strategy can have up to 40% less turnover among key employees, compared to organizations not working with TM. In addition, the business world is becoming more knowledge based, and since globalization intensifies, organizations must be prepared to compete for skilled employees (Groysberg and Connolly, 2015; Schuler et al., 2011).

Most research has studied TM as a universal concept, while less has focused on how it may become contextualized in different national, cultural, industrial and organizational settings (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Mäkelä et al., 2010). Contextualized in this case refers to how an idea is settled in a context and how it is affected by it. The question on how the TM idea may be influenced by specific industry settings is particularly unexplored. To provide new insights to how TM may be affected by its environment, this paper investigates how TM has been understood and translated within a specific setting; the Swedish IT sector. The industry is interesting as it is in a phase of large growth and since many of its organizations are in need of extensive recruitment to continue to grow (DN, 2011; IT & Telekomföretagen, 2015). Previous research has focused on studying TM in American MNC's (Bolander et al., 2014; Capelli, 2008; Collings, Scullion and Vaiman, 2011; Stahl et al., 2007), and therefore it is of interest to study how TM becomes contextualized in smaller organizations in other regional and cultural contexts. As an

example, it has been shown that European firms differ from American in terms of managing talent: they tend to be more long-term oriented and less hierarchical (Collings et al., 2011). Thus, it is of interest to see what patterns that could be identified in the Scandinavian context. Sweden is particularly interesting to study in terms of TM, as it has been identified as a coordinated market economy with a government taking an active role in developing employee competencies (Thelen, 2001). The ambition to be "The world's best IT country" has for example served as motivation for investments in its IT sector since the early 1990's when the Swedish government founded its first IT commission (Larsson and Delin, 2015).

Similar to other fashionable management ideas like CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and BPR (Business Process Reengineering) launched by consulting firms, the idea of TM can be seen as if it has been interpreted, reformulated and spread by different consultants and actors who have crossed its path (Berglund and Werr, 2000). From an institutional perspective, the concept of TM may be understood as a norm in the Swedish society since organizations may feel pressured to work with it. This could be due to a desire to be similar to others, to gain legitimacy among shareholders or simply to survive (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). From a less static perspective on institutionalization, differences in TM work could be understood as occurring due to a translation process taking place within organizations (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). The translation perspective could also be used to explain contradictions between what organizations claim they do and actually do in terms of TM.

The TM concept has settled in Sweden during the last 15 years and is increasingly used by Swedish companies (Bolander; Asplund and Werr, 2014; Wennerhill and Tunbrå, 2015; Wikström and Martin, 2012). The Swedish IT sector distinguishes itself from others as it faces an extremely high pressure for recruiting new employees while employers fight for the few IT-professionals that are available (Svenskt Näringsliv, 2015; SvD, 2014b). The situation is predicted to worsen within the next few years and even if many firms face global competition, few employees are recruited outside of Sweden (Computer Sweden, 2015). As a result of this, Swedish media often present TM as an idea that can help organizations develop tools for how to better work with attracting, recruiting and retaining skilled personnel (Bolander et al., 2014; Wikström and Martin, 2012). This paper aims to develop an understanding for how, and why, a number of Swedish IT firms have chosen to work with TM, and how the idea is understood in a local setting. The study intends to answer the following: 1) How and why the idea of TM has been introduced by the organizations and 2) How the idea of TM has been interpreted and understood in the specific industry and organizational contexts.

Previous Research on Talent Management

Previous findings on the TM concept and the different attitudes towards it are important to have in mind when aiming to investigate how the idea has been introduced, interpreted and understood within a specific industry setting. The concept developed as a response to increased competition between organizations in attracting, recruiting and retaining skilled employees (Galagan, 2008) and since its launch it has been playing a lead role in a number of consultancy reports, management journals and HR forums. Ashton and Morton (2005) state that TM is one of the most important human capital challenges facing organizations in the
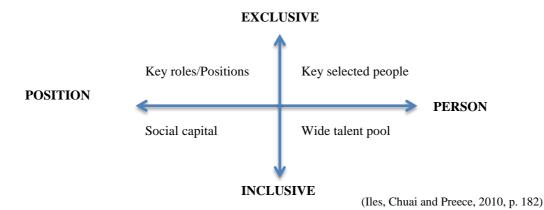
twenty first century. Wikström and Martin (2012) claim that TM is a modern version of HR that should be seen as an important part of an organization's strategy. Several researchers reflect upon the importance of aligning a strategy for TM with the overall strategy of the firm, claiming that TM can be used to fulfill human capital needs and contribute to a firm's competitive advantage and profitability (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Capelli, 2008; Collings and Mellahi, 2009). Organizations working with TM as a strategic issue are also said to be better at motivating and retaining talented personnel (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). Numerous studies have aimed to show why TM matters and has impact, but few have focused on specifying the actual definition of TM and what potential consequences it may bring (Huang and Tansley, 2012). Critique is thus raised against it, as researchers have not settled upon a shared meaning of what TM is and what it can do to an organization. Moreover, TM is often criticized due to the lack of scientific data supporting the idea, and it is questioned why organizations so easily get engaged in the concept (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Lewis and Heckman, 2006). The concept has also been questioned for its strong focus on leaders as it is argued that isolation of these may signal to other employees that they are not of value (McDonnell, 2011; Capelli, 2008). In addition, an overly strong focus on specific individuals may increase competition among employees, which in turn has a negative impact on collaboration and knowledge sharing (Minbaeva and Collings, 2013; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006).

TM is also questioned in terms of its distinction from other HR concepts, as some argue that organizations have already been practicing TM for long, but under different labels (Galagan, 2008; Lewis and Heckman, 2006). It may thus be difficult to distinguish TM from other HR concepts (Lewis and Heckman, 2006) such as assessment centers, coaching, employee ranking, succession planning and trainee programs, which are all HR and management ideas that have grown popular during the last decades (Lewis and Heckman, 2006). For this reason, it is interesting to investigate how TM is being reflected upon and how this may differ from other HR concepts. Several studies show that TM creates value in ways that HRM does not (Chuai et al., 2008; Huang and Tansley, 2012; Iles et al., 2010) and that it differs from other HR practices by being more elitist (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005), by differentiating the workforce (Collings and Mellahi, 2009) and by providing organizations with a long-term strategic approach focused on finding an organization-person match (Medved, 2015). Some researchers also claim that TM should be connected to the idea of employer branding, as the concept involves attracting talent and since marketing oneself as an employer could be a tool for this (Wilska 2014; Collings et al., 2011). Wikström and Martin (2012) state that an important component of TM is to attract the right employees by building a strong employer brand. TM has also been connected to the idea of potential, as the performance of junior employees may be difficult to assess (Ashton and Morton, 2005; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Lewis and Heckman, 2009; Tarique and Schuler, 2009).

In addition to debating on the meaning of TM, the word "talent" itself can be defined in a variety of ways and many organizations struggle in deciding what talent is (Tansley, 2011). The main discussions in the field reflect upon who, or what, is considered a talent and often involve questions as: Is talent about being a talented individual or about possessing specific traits, do everyone or a few possess it, is it innate or acquired, and determined by motivation or by performance? (Bolander et al., 2014; Dries 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al.,

2013; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries, 2013). In English dictionaries, talent is often defined as an individual having an ability to perform above average (Gagne, 2003), and it has been emphasized that talent must always be perceived as organization specific, as it is influenced by industry type and nature of work (Tansley, 2011). Many publications on TM present talent as something exclusive that only a few possess (Michaels et al., 2001; Andersson 2015; Berger and Berger 2010; Gagne, 2003). It is then a label used to identify the best performers – also referred to as A-players or super keepers - within an organization (Berger and Berger 2010: Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Tansley, 2011). From another perspective, talent is equal to human capital and competence, and is something that everyone possess (Iles et al., 2010). From this view, TM is understood as a method for managing intellectual capital in a way that affects a majority of employees (Boudreau and Ramstad 2007).

As a result of the inconsistent definitions of who/what is a talent, organizations manage talented employees in different ways. A central debate in the literature is thus if TM is an inclusive approach for managing all employees or an exclusive approach targeting a few (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Tansley, 2011; Tunbrå and Wennerhill, 2015). Inclusive TM offers a holistic talent solution enabling all employees to grow and develop their talent, while exclusive TM offer special treatment and development for a few key employees with extraordinary skills assessed as crucial for the organization's future (Iles et al., 2010; Collings and Mellahi, 2009). TM can also be conducted in a way focused on fulfilling positions, or in a more people oriented focused on putting the right person in the right place (Iles et al., 2010). These organizations' different approaches are summarized by Iles et al. (2010), who claim that how TM is used depends on how an organization understands talent - excluding (for positions), excluding (for persons), including (for positions) and including (for persons). These are shown in the model below.

Figure 1. Approaches to Talent Management

(Iles, Chuai and Preece, 2010, p. 182)

Similar to other management ideas, TM has been called a trend by many (Frank and Taylor, 2004; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Tarique and Schuler, 2009) and the potential goals and benefits of it have been questioned. Being launched by a consulting firm, the concept has spread mainly through the consultancy profession who has acted as a carrier, spreader and translator of the TM phenomenon, both in international and national contexts (Berglund and Werr, 2000). Even if a focus has been on seeing TM as a global issue relevant for international firms, some researchers claim that practicing TM is of extra relevance for firms

in the European region (Carter and Galinsky, 2008; Collings et al., 2011; Vaiman and Holden, 2011). Sweden is of particular interest for studying TM as it is a nation with a long-term approach to personal development and since its government is continuously providing large investments in the educational system (Thelen, 2001). The country is also interesting as the Swedish egalitarian and collectivist culture (Holmberg and Åkerblom, 2012) by nature could be understood as encouraging a behavior that is the opposite of the elitist perspective that the original TM idea is advocating (Chambers et al., 1998). Even though there is not a vast amount of research present in the field of TM in Sweden, some researchers have studied the concept in a Scandinavian context (Bolander et al., 2014; Hogg and Lesley, 2016). Bolander et al. (2014) present a categorization system for how Swedish organizations work with TM: humanistic, competitive or entrepreneurial approach. Humanistic TM is the most common view in Sweden and perceives talent as something that can be taught (Bolander et al., 2014; Talent Management Barometern, 2016). Organizations using this approach tend to handle all employees as if they obtain some sort of talent and focus on developing the strengths of each employee. The competitive approach perceives talent as something unique that only certain people possess and reflects upon it as being innate. Organizations following this approach aim to motivate talented personnel by internal education and by providing challenging tasks. In these firms, talented people are seen as potential future leaders and the main objective of TM is thus to promote these people into a hierarchical development. Entrepreneurial TM perceives talent as something that can be acquired and look upon it as something coming from within an individual, such as motivation and ambition. Firms using this approach often focus on creating opportunities for individuals who show this ambition to deliver (Bolander et al., 2014).

To provide explanations to how and why organizations get involved in TM, and why they end up doing it in similar or different ways, institutional and translation theory are useful. These theoretical perspectives will now be presented.

Institutional and Translation Theory

The theoretical framework of the study presents different tools for explaining organizational behavior and how companies tend to deal with ideas circulating in their surroundings. The study is using institutional theory as a tool to explain organizational similarities while translation theory is used to provide possible answers to the organizational differences. New institutional theory argues that industry trends impact the behavior of organizations, as these wish to gain legitimacy from their stakeholders (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Meyer and Rowan (1977) emphasize that there is a difference between what organizations claim they do and what they actually do, arguing that a decoupling takes places between formal structure and actual behavior. An example of decoupling could be that organizations bring in fashionable management ideas and concepts in order to improve their image, while in practice not making use of them. TM could be understood as an example of a concept that is travelling through different organizational fields and settings. Working with an idea such as TM may thus be done for external reasons rather than to improve the internal practices within an organization. The main reason for this decoupling is the fact that all organizations face external pressure, meaning opinions from the society, customers, shareholders, the government and other stakeholders, demanding firms to act in certain ways. Meyer and

Rowan (1977) argue that this could be an explanation to how and why companies act like they do, as organizations that do not follow the pressure may be abandoned by customers and employees and thus face a risk of losing their profitability. They also argue that organizations often implement ideas without truly reflecting upon what they mean, thus not being able to make use of them in practice. This legitimacy search and implementation of ideas without any greater reflection could explain why industry actors become increasingly similar. An example of this could be that organizations implement the TM idea without settling upon a shared meaning of what talent is in their specific context. Brunsson (1986) also reflects upon that there is a difference between organizational talk and action, and state that organizations have to make a decoupling between these in order to handle and act upon existing inconsistencies in their surroundings. Brunsson (1986) calls this organizational hypocrisy and states that it occurs as organizations develop structures and processes to gain support and legitimacy from their environment, causing internal contradictions.

The phenomenon of isomorphism could also be used to explain organizational behavior, as it is a process that forces an organization to behave and act in similar ways to others active in the same field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Isomorphism can be seen as the way organizations tend to copy one another, either because they seek uniformity with institutions that they depend upon, or as they want to be similar to organizations that they would like to be associated with (Erlingsdottír and Lindberg, 2005). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that organizations are not only competing on resources and customers, but that they race for gaining political power and legitimacy. They present three main styles of institutional isomorphism: normative, coercive and mimetic. Normative isomorphism occurs when organizations follow the pressure from within an industry, while coercive isomorphism means that organizations are forced to change due to cultural expectations in the society or by pressure from other organizations that the firm is dependent upon (ibid). Mimetic isomorphism means that organizations change because of insecurity, and is described as an organization's tendency to imitate the behavior of other firms since this is thought to be beneficial (ibid).

Institutional theory is useful in explaining organizational similarities, industry uniformity and how and why ideas, such as the one regarding TM, are spread. However, it is less successful in explaining organizational differences and why ideas are spread and disembedded in different ways. Thus, the translation perspective on organizational processes can be applied. Scandinavian institutional theory differs from new institutional as it describes institutionalization as a translation process of an idea (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996), rather than as a static diffusion (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The Scandinavian School investigates the actual institutionalization process rather than its results, and considers change and stability as institutional norms (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). From this perspective, organizations change by searching for and picking up ideas in their surroundings, and in order for ideas to transform into practice, organizations must adapt and translate them to local context (ibid). Røvik (2008) labels this process decontextualization as an idea is picked out of its surrounding and then translated and packaged into a new organization. Contextualization is the process when the idea lands and get established within a new setting (ibid). Erlingsdottír and Lindberg (2005) contribute to the debate on organizational behavior and its similarities by presenting the process of isonymism, which also explains how ideas are reproduced.

Isonymism describes how organizations imitate each other in terms of copying concept and process names, even though working with various practices (ibid).

Translation theory investigates what actors actually do with the different ideas that bring change, and aims to explain why change is implemented within an organization (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). Latour (1986) argues that a translation of an idea takes place when the idea is placed in a context and then further spread within it. Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) also describe how ideas are disembedded from previous contexts, set free and then embedded in new ones. This can be seen as if the idea travels through time and space, and then becomes translated to fit its new surroundings. The translation of the idea, meaning how it is changed and adapted to an organization, depends on the specific situation and how people within the organizations choose to interpret it (ibid). Changes in ideas are to be understood as generated from human involvement, as people and collectives interpret and spread ideas in different ways (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). For an idea to be allowed to travel, it must be separated from its original context and translated into an object (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). Therefore, an idea such as the idea of TM must be supported in order for it to spread accordingly. Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) also claim that ideas are affected by an organization's frame of reference, meaning that a new idea is put into an organizational context in which several other ideas are already in residence, meaning already existing within the firm. These ideas in residence constitute a friction for new ideas to enter, but can be seen as something positive, as the friction between ideas and translators is what is creating energy within organizations (Czarniawska, 1997). If not having idea friction, there would be no translation of ideas (ibid). Friction is thus crucial in order to unleash energy between the ideas already in residence and the ones that are travelling in order to transform them (ibid). Adding to this, Czarniawska and Sevón (2005) claim that organizations and actors also have a tendency to put together different ideas in a never-ending pursuit of sensemaking. Czarniawska (1997) also argues that organizations sometimes act paradoxical in order to be able to make use of new ideas and concepts. By paradoxical, Czarniawska (1997) refers to something containing a contradiction, and says that paradoxes are important as they open up to self-reflection and enable change in organizations. Paradoxes are told to arise between the rational, abstract logic presented by organizations on the surface and the reality-based, constructive logic taking place in practice (Czarniawska, 2005). As TM can be seen as a fashion in today's business world, Czarniawska's (2005) ideas on the paradoxes of fashion also becomes relevant. Fashion is complex in the sense that it consists of collective choices of ideas, and it is a powerful mechanism of choice as it is invisible and has big impact on organizations. Among others, the paradoxes of fashion include that fashion sometimes creates new things from those already existing, and that organizations and individuals following fashion act different as they want to behave similar (Czarniawska, 2005). To exemplify this, organizations can create something new by combining ideas already in residence, and due to insecurity reasons, firms introduce ideas to become unique like everyone else.

The concept of translation originates from Callon (1986) and Latour (1986) who presents that ideas, when being translated from one actor to another, are interpreted differently. Actors within this process become interested in the idea because they can use it for their own interests, and each time a new group becomes interested in the idea, it is transformed (Latour, 1986). Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) claim that a similar process

takes place during organizational change, and suggests that planned organizational change is in fact rare as change processes often result in unintended consequences. These contingencies, meaning the differences between the planned and actual results of a change process, can be explained by the translation model, as the original idea for change is often translated into something different within the organization. Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) describe how change can come from new management ideas that are translated into objects, which are then sent to other places far from where they originally emerged. This could be exemplified in the case of TM, which emerged in the US and have now been established in Sweden. Callon (1986) claims that translation is driven by shared desires among several organizations or individuals, as this shared desire cause them to translate ideas, objects, and practices for their own use. As an example of a shared desire, many of today's organizations wish to become better at finding and recruiting talented employees and the idea of TM has thus captured their interest. The popularity of this idea may be explained by the fact that it is told to help organizations to improve themselves in terms of efficiency or legitimacy. Thus the idea, even if being fashionable, is seen as rational as it satisfies a certain demand among organizations and managers. Consultants who spread the idea of TM and its potential benefits in turn supply the idea. The idea is therefore translated into other objects and actions, which if repeated may become stabilized into institutions, which in turn could be described and summarized through abstract ideas (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996).

Methodology

As the study aims to investigate a socially constructed phenomenon; the case of how and why TM is introduced and understood within in a number of Swedish IT firms - a qualitative research method was chosen. It was considered essential to place the studied phenomenon in a context by thoroughly studying its background and history (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Accordingly, extensive literature studies about the concept of TM and how it unfolds in different contexts was undertaken. Undertaking a qualitative study made it possible to use different data collection methods, (Silverman, 2011) which facilitated the creation of a wider, more comprehensive and more diverse basis for the analysis.

Collection of Data

To provide insights to how and why TM has been introduced and understood within the Swedish IT sector, both secondary and primary data was collected. The secondary data consisted of information on TM found in Swedish media, while the primary data consisted of information received from subjective interview statements regarding TM gathered at organizations. These two types of data were collected as the researchers considered it to be interesting to be able to make a comparison of how TM was discussed at an industry level compared to organizational level. The collection of secondary data was done by searching for information regarding how TM has been presented and reflected upon in Swedish media. This data was collected using a systematic search approach where the researchers focused on newly published articles on the topic of TM. The researchers used the search engine at each magazine's website to search for articles containing the keywords "TM" or "talent". When looking at how TM has been presented in Swedish management journals and magazines, a strategic selection was done focusing on articles published during the years 2010-2016 in

well-known printed and digital medias. A large amount of articles were found and the researchers therefore chose to focus on the papers that were considered most relevant for the topic. The primary data was collected through interviews at four organizations active in the Swedish IT industry. This created a possibility to better understand TM as a phenomenon affected by its surroundings, and allowed for potential comparison of narratives (Eisenhardt, 1989). The choice of which organizations to interview was based on a non-randomized selection. Thus, the organizations must be seen as mainly representing themselves and the results are not to be understood as general for the industry (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). When selecting suitable organizations to interview, firms active in the Swedish IT sector, and especially IT consultancy firms with a B2B orientation, were in focus. A larger amount of IT consultancy firms were contacted, but several were rejected due to not being suitable in regard to how extensive their TM work were. Four organizations were chosen as they represented different types of employers active in the industry in terms of size, age, ownership and main focus areas. All of the organizations had developed a strategy for TM, some a formal one while others a more informal. This was considered important, as the investigated employers had to show an interest in working with the concept. In addition, the choice of organizations was based on accessibility and the information found regarding their established TM work. This information was searched for and found on their websites. The organizations were representative for the industry in terms of being located in several Swedish regions and represent different types of industry employers as they consisted of small to large employers, some of them new in the industry and some who has been active for several decades. When assessing the size of the organizations, the EURLex (2007) framework was used to identify a small (10-49 employees), a medium-sized (less than 249 employees) and two large organizations (250+ employees) active in the IT industry in Sweden. Having a mix of different types of organizations was considered important as the study aimed to investigate whether different types of organizations in the industry worked with and talked about TM in similar or different ways.

After establishing contact with the organizations, respondents were selected. Interviews were conducted with three to four employees at different hierarchical levels within the studied organizations, and a total of 14 respondents participated in the study. The researchers expressed a desire to meet with different types of respondents in the organizations, and consequently met with HR managers, employees with leadership responsibilities and non- managerial employees in order to obtain different perspectives on how the employees within the organizations understood and made sense of TM. Meeting with different types of respondents helped to understand how the studied phenomenon had been interpreted from different hierarchical viewpoints (Silverman, 2004).

A comparison between how different Swedish IT-employers reflect upon TM was considered interesting as the study could potentially draw conclusions on how TM has been interpreted and understood in different ways within the industry. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, which offered a possibility to better understand TM as a contextual phenomenon and allowed for a comparison of data (Eisenhardt, 1989). The interviews lasted 45-60 minutes, which was considered enough to obtain an understanding of the respondents' perceptions of TM. Even if notes were taken during the interviews to remind about issues needing to be further explained (Czarniawska, 2014), the focus was on listening and trying to

understand the respondents' accounts. The interviews were also recorded to have the possibility to go back and confirm interpretations when analyzing the material. Since the study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the concept of TM in the IT industry, semi-structured interview questions were used to place emphasis on how the concept has been adapted and how it is understood within the specific industry. Interview questions were asked following four main themes: 1) Perceptions on TM and the organization's interpretation of it, 2) Perceptions on talent and who/what is considered a talent within the organization, 3) Perceptions on how and why the idea of TM was introduced and 4) Perceptions TM 's potential consequences on attracting, recruiting and retaining talent. After completing all of the interviews, a decision was made to only include data from the first, second and third theme, since the interview statements from these were considered sufficient to answer the study's research aim. Thus, data from the fourth theme has not been addressed in the empirical data or analysis as this was not considered relevant to fulfill the study's purpose. Allowing respondents to talk freely about their work and perceptions of TM in their workplace was done in order to not steer the respondents in the dialogue (Czarniawska, 2014). By letting the respondents talk freely, the researchers made sure that they affected the respondents and their statements as little as possible, thus recognizing possible power dynamics. This was considered necessary in order for the study to be objective and ethical (Kvale, 2008). A decision to anonymize the organizations and respondents was made in order for readers to not be affected by company names or perceptions connected to brands. In addition, names, age, gender and other personal attributes of respondents have also been neutralized in order to protect the respondents from any potential harm. Therefore, the organizations will in the following be addressed to as organization Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta on the basis of their size.

Table 1. Participating organizations and respondents

Name	About the organization	Employed	Respondents	Why relevant for the study
ALPHA	Large employer founded in a smaller Swedish city. Operates in several Nordic countries. Employs system engineers, consultants and specialists. Founded in the mid 1980's.	800+	Regional Manager Talent Manager Senior Consultant	Has recently launched a TM project.
BETA	Large employer with Swedish origin. Operates in several European cities. A consulting firm employing both system engineers and consultants. Founded in the end of the 1990's.	600+	Talent Manager HR Specialist Senior Consultant Trainee	Has a strong focus on attracting and recruiting talents and has a TM team.
GAMMA	Medium sized employer with European origin operating in several Swedish regions. An IT and digital consultancy firm employing both system engineers and consultants. Founded in the mid 1990's.	200+	HR Manager Senior Consultant Junior Consultant	Has developed a talent program targeting university students.
DELTA	Small employer operating in a larger Swedish city. Originated in the same city. Employs consultants and specialists. Founded a few years ago.	20+	CEO HR Manager Senior Consultant Trainee	Has developed a trainee program. Recruits students from upper secondary schools.

Analysis of Data

As TM can be understood as a socially constructed phenomenon, using a grounded theory approach was suitable as the study aimed to construct a theory about the concept (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The approach was particularly well suited to handle qualitative data such as material collected from semi-structured interviews and since it enabled the researchers to make a comparative analysis (Turner, 1981). Using a grounded theory approach also limited the extent to which the study's results may have been affected by incorrect or misaligned preconceptions (ibid). Grounded theory also enabled studying TM in the industry by interviewing different respondents in the IT sector, and was considered appropriate since it consisted of a continuous comparative analysis of the field material (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Further, the approach was useful in dealing with large amounts of qualitative data from, for example, semi-structured interviews in case studies (Turner, 1981). In addition, the study approach was relevant for understanding how TM is perceived at the chosen organizations.

The interviews arranged during the study were first transcribed and then the material was coded. Selective coding was done by focusing on data seen as relevant to the studied concept (Martin and Turner 1986). The researchers specifically focused on reflections and interpretations of TM, talent and how and why the organizations had chosen to introduce the idea. This type of data was considered important in order to be able to answer the research aims. After the initial coding, which generated over a large amount of detailed codes, data was categorized by searching for different themes found in the interview transcriptions. Codes were thereby combined into broader concept groups, which were compared to identify potential patterns among them (Czarniawska, 2014). By comparing the data, concepts of theory were discovered. The categories that occurred the most and were assessed as most interesting were placed in focus. From these concept groups, a number of core categories were then identified. The first core categories were: (1) TM to structure HR processes, (2) TM to follow industry trends, (3) TM expressed through other concepts and (4) TM to handle potential. The first-order concepts were handled as facts of an ethnographic study since they possessed both descriptive properties of the studied phenomenon and the respondents' interpretations of it (Van Maanen, 1979). In the second part of the coding process, data was categorized into themes closer to the given theoretical framework: (5) Avoiding elitism and relying on potential, (6) Isomorphic behavior to cope with industry competition and (7) Organizational differences resulting from local adaptiveness. The second-order concepts were understood as theories that the researchers used to organize and explain the facts (Van Maanen, 1979). The organizing and explaining of the field material was done by drawing on the sociology of translation, which enabled the researchers to understand how the idea of TM traveled to new local contexts. This helped to understand how the concept of TM, involving various actors, was reflected upon and understood within each organization, and how it was adapted and translated into local context. To get an understanding of the context in which this study has taken place, a short introduction of the Swedish IT industry is presented below.

The Swedish IT Industry

The success story of Sweden's rapidly growing IT sector took off with a number of governmental investments in the area during the 1990's (Larsson and Delin, 2015). By providing computer subsidies and investing in the broadband network, the foundation was laid to what has today become one of the world's leading IT sectors (ibid). Many technology and IT firms originated in the country have reached global success, and organizations like Skype and Spotify have paved the way for other companies in the industry (SvD, 2015a). Even though the number of IT firms is relatively small compared to the total number of firms active in Sweden - being 46.000 out of more than 1.000.000 companies - the sector represents a large part of the country's business earnings and during 2006-2013, the industry accounted for 42% of the productivity growth in the Swedish economy (IT & Telekomföretagen 2015). However, the country may lose its position as a leading IT nation as the industry suffers from a severe shortage in competent personnel (DN 2013; SvD, 2014b; Svenskt Näringsliv 2015), and the situation is told to become even worse within the next few years (SvD, 2015b). Employment is nevertheless growing in the sector and in 2014 the industry employed nearly 200.000 people (IT & Telekomföretagen, 2016). In addition, 72% of Swedish companies employing IT-professionals expect the number of employees to increase during the next few years (SCB, 2015). There is a widespread praxis in the industry with recruitment bonuses, where an employee is rewarded if he/she manages to suggest and recruit someone in their network. The alarming shortage of competent IT-professionals have also been identified by a recent industry report, concluding that in 2020, the sector can be expecting a deficit of close to 60.000 people if nothing is done drastically (IT & Telekomföretagen, 2015). The industry also has a need for hiring candidates with academic degrees, and it is shown that soft skills, such as social- and teamwork skills, customer understanding and business sense alongside technical competence are of great importance (IT & Telekomföretagen, 2015). It is also shown that organizations are recruiting few candidates with traditional tools such as ads and assistance from the Swedish Employment Office. Instead, recruitment is managed through informal networks, social media and by considering spontaneous applications (Svenskt Näringsliv, 2015).

As shown, some researchers have aimed to study TM in the Swedish context, but few have focused on TM within a specific, Swedish industry. In a recent study of Swedish business leaders' perceptions on TM, 63% claim that TM is key strategic activity for their organization, while 87% says it will become increasingly important in the future (Talent Management Barometern, 2016). However, only 21% of Swedish organizations claim that they are satisfied with their present way of working with TM (ibid). Bolander et al. (2014) argue that this may be due to the fact that TM means different things to different companies in different industry settings. In a recent letter to Swedish politicians, founders of Spotify also raise complaints towards the congested housing market in Stockholm, arguing makes it hard to attract talents to Sweden, and towards the Swedish education system as this is told to not encourage programming as a compulsory subject. Due to this, Spotify says it becomes increasingly difficult to attract talented employees, and receives support from other Swedish IT companies (VA, 2016c).

As TM has increased in popularity among Swedish organization, the concept has also captured the interests of Swedish media. Most Swedish management magazines and online

leadership forums present the concept as involving the three core pillars of attracting, recruiting and retaining talented personnel (Chef, 2012; Dagens PS, 2012; HRBloggen, 2010; Motivation.se, 2013). TM is told to be a tool to help companies develop in the market (HRBloggen, 2010), to increase competitiveness (Dagens PS, 2012; Motivation.se, 2013) and is said to provide long-term benefits for firms as it strengthens the competence and employee knowledge in organizations (CFOWorld, 2015). However, different opinions are presented regarding if TM should be seen as a concept that should include all employees (Chef, 2012; Dagens PS, 2012) or if it should be focused on a few super talents (CFOWorld, 2015; HRSverigeBloggen, 2015). In some cases, the economic benefits of working with TM are particularly highlighted. As an example, HR Sverige Bloggen (2015) states that so-called super talents can be up to 400% more efficient than other employees, and thus have bigger impact on firm performance. The Swedish management magazine Chef (2015) also state that the top percent of organizations who state that they are good at TM have increased their amount of sales faster than others, and that profits in general are increasing faster in firms that are actively working with TM. Several media also reflect upon that Swedish organizations are lagging behind in terms of TM, and that being inadequate at managing talent may cause a decreased level of commitment and reduced profitability for companies (Motivation.se, 2013; Realtid, 2016). Developing TM among Swedish organizations is also told to be important for Sweden as a nation, since the country must become better at attracting international talents in an increasingly competitive market (Realtid, 2016). Even though TM, in general, is presented as an underdeveloped area, some magazines claim that more and more Swedish organizations are beginning to focus on it (Realtid, 2016). It is especially industries with skill shortages that are said to be early adopters in terms of bringing in the concept of TM into their company (Realtid, 2016). Dagens PS (2012) also reflect upon that Swedish companies may not be comfortable with using words such as "talent" and "A-players". Instead, Swedish organizations reflect upon TM as a concept to give every employee opportunities to develop themselves in ways that enables them to optimize their competences (Dagens PS, 2012).

Empirical Data

Talent Management to Structure HR-Processes
Four organizations have participated in this study by providing their perspective on how they reflect upon and make sense of TM. All organizations say they work with TM but their definitions of the concept vary slightly. Most firms agree that TM involves ideas on how to attract, recruit and retain talented employees within the organization. A shared idea is also that TM is of significant strategic importance, as working with these matters can help the organizations to improve recruitment in this competitive industry. TM's abilities to structure and make HR more relevant and strategically important is emphasized as the organizations are in a phase of growth and thus in need of more organized processes to handle employees. As an example of giving TM more strategical weight and visibility, several of the firms have developed so-called Talent Managers - employees working solely with TM issues who are hired to align the overall strategy of the firm with a TM strategy. Two firms have also launched specific departments that work solely with TM issues.

TM at the two largest employers, Alpha and Beta, is according to their managers aimed to target all employees. Alpha says TM is about "*attracting, recruiting, motivating, developing and rewarding employees*" and describes it as if TM has enabled the organization to connect single islands of previous HR work which otherwise would not have been connected. Beta defines TM as a collective concept to manage "*the attracting, recruiting, motivating, developing and exiting of employees in one single process*". Gamma in turn perceives TM as a tool to improve the attracting and recruitment processes of the firm. The smallest employer Delta argues that TM is needed since the organization is no longer a start-up and explains TM as a way to develop employees in line with the firm's strategy. At Delta, TM is in turn explained as a more exclusive tool to handle the competence and development of their best performers:

> *Not everyone at Delta are talents. We have a few A-players who really distinguishes themselves in terms of having the little extra, both in their personality and in the work role* - CEO, Delta

Table 2. Definition of Talent Management

Name	Formal definition	Key words/ Approximate definition
ALPHA	Yes	A concept for career management that can be applied for all positions, not only for managers. It is to attract, recruit, motivate, develop and reward employees
BETA	Yes	It is the whole process of attracting and recruiting, the onboarding, the life in the organization and the exit of an employee
GAMMA	No	A way to get closer to the raw material in terms of newly graduates and to attract and recruit them
DELTA	No	To develop talents

Alpha claims that their TM work aims to identify the competences that the organization will need in the future, and to make sure that the company will be able to attract talents possessing these skills. This is done through clearly establishing qualities needed for each and every role. Alpha describes TM as enabling the organization to work with retention issues in a more organized manner, saying that they have always aimed to keep good performers and that the new TM strategy enables them to do this in a more concentrated manner.

> *Some may feel that specific colleagues are favored. However, the positive aspects of working with TM outweighs the negative side as we take good care of those who wish to develop. We cannot afford not working with Talent Management just because of this. This is a little like the old, Swedish "Jantelag", we just have to ignore it* - Senior Consultant, Alpha

Several of the firms reflect upon similar aspects of TM and say that employees may sometimes be preferentially treated due to being good at their work or simply just because the managers like them. When explaining the special treatments that have been offered to favored employees, some respondents claim that they have been assigned to popular consultancy projects, have gotten more flexible working hours and extra encouragement and attention

from managers. At Beta, for example, several respondents explain that a "top league" of employees exists, and that these are given more opportunities than others.

> *I think I am considered a talent. At least I was allowed to take one year off from work to focus on one of my personal projects. To me, that signalized that my employer really valued me. I do not think that everyone would be given the same opportunity* - Senior Consultant, Beta

Beta in turn says that TM is used to follow and implement trends in their career opportunities given to employees.

> *Previously we worked with TM mostly as a leadership development program, but now we focus more on satisfying the employees' different needs - some still wish to be leaders but others instead aim for more entrepreneurial roles* - HR Manager, Beta

A majority of the firms also claim that TM can be used to structure individual career paths and argue that they perceive TM as being related to developmental issues of employees. They state it is crucial for the organization's survival to focus on motivating and developing their personnel in order to retain and keep their talented employees. Three organizations claim that they use mentoring and personal coaching as a way to keep up motivation at work, and they all do it in a similar way. The mentoring meetings cover both personal and professional aspects, and the discussion circles around how they employee feels at work, what he/she would like to do next and what he/she needs to improve in order to take the next step in the career path. These meetings also serve as a follow up to how the employees contribute to the overall goals of the firm and to develop paths for how they can develop in the work role. Delta has launched Balanced Score Cards to enable employees to have a clear insight in how they, in their everyday work, contribute to overall strategy of the firm. All organizations bring up the importance of asking the question *"What do you like to do?"* frequently to the employees. This is done both to motivate the individual in terms of allowing him/her to speak his/her mind regarding what to try on and do next within the organization, but it is also important for managers and the HR department in terms of planning for this individual and his her learning. In line with asking what employees wish to do, Beta claims that TM is not only understood as an idea to enable talents to develop into leaders, but that motivated and talented personnel should also be given the chance to develop into other professional roles.

Besides wanting to structure and improve HR processes, all firms state that they do not have any formal goals attached to their TM work. Instead, they describe loosely defined goals such as wanting to attract new talents, to grow and to become better at recruiting talented employees. All organizations state that goals related to TM are difficult to state and measure, as it is a long-term process and since its success and progress may be understood differently by different employees. In terms of evaluation and follow-up on how the TM work is proceeding, no organizations present a clear structure for this. A pattern among respondents is also that junior employees, senior employees and managers in the four firms tend to reflect upon the meaning of TM, and how the concept is used, in different ways. Several of the

trainees and junior employees are for example not sure if their employer is practicing TM, while more senior personnel and managers are convinced that their organization use TM in the everyday work.

> *I know that Talent Management is a fashionable idea today and that many firms use it, but I am actually not sure if we use it at Gamma. Maybe we do but in that case it is probably something that the HR department is working with. I am not too familiar with the concept, to be honest* - Junior Consultant, Gamma

The statement above shows that the Junior Consultant is not sure if his/her employer Gamma has implemented the concept of TM, even though being aware of the fact that other organizations have. The Trainee at Delta responds in a similar matter, stating that he/she has not heard about the concept before and that he/she is not sure if the employer works with these matters. This employee is one of the individuals that Delta's CEO describes as one of their talents, but the Trainee claims that he/she is not comfortable with being labeled as this and also state that everyone at the organization is a talent. The statements from employees and managers also differ on the topic of who is a talent. At Beta, for example, the managers state that everyone are talents and that TM is used to handle all employees, but the Junior Consultant in the firm does not agree with this.

> *I think we have a few talents who stand out at Beta. They are extremely competent and well performing while being good teammates and role models for many of us. I look up to them, but do not think that I will ever be seen as a talent myself* - Junior Consultant, Beta

Talent Management to Follow Industry Trends

All firms claim that the reason for why they chose to adopt the TM idea into their operations is that their future depends on the organization's ability to recruit and retain the most skilled employees. Many of the organizations claim that they introduced the idea of TM as other organizations worked with it and since they wanted to improve their competitiveness.

> *The reason for why we started working with Talent Management was that we wanted to find new ways to compete in the market. We saw it as a tool to differentiate us from other IT companies* - Senior Consultant, Alpha

Several respondents describe the Swedish IT industry as rapidly developing and highly competitive and argue that the company could have been more successful if not suffering from shortage in competent personnel. The fast growth phase requires the organizations to recruit more people and they reflect upon TM as a solution that can help them with this. All organizations argue that they brought in TM as a tool to improve recruitment but also as they wanted to be seen as an attractive and modern employer among potential new employees and competitors. Several respondents also reflect upon the situation of being a consultancy firm, saying that customers often expect the organization and its employees to represent and be

updated on the new IT and management trends, and that this is the reason for why the organization must constantly work with recruiting, retaining and educating their personnel.

The firms although differ in explaining how they introduced the idea. Alpha explains that the idea was initiated when the new CEO and Business Unit Manager entered the organization a few years ago. These two had been working with TM in the recruitment industry, and identified it as a tool to satisfy future recruitment needs at Alpha. Thus, a new Talent Manager was hired and a TM project was launched within the organization. As the Talent Manager had also worked with TM at a previous employer, he/she together with the management were inspired by how TM had been designed at other organizations before implementing the project at Alpha. As an example, the usage of competence step plans was something that the Talent Manager had worked with earlier. Beta argues that they have been working with the idea for many years. However, the idea was formally introduced in 2010 when the organization launched a TM department. The organization claim that they were among the first in the industry to use the idea, and that this was done mainly to differentiate oneself from competitors in terms of being an employer that is well known to take care of their consultants. Gamma and Delta both explain that they implemented the idea of TM in combination with the idea of a trainee program, and define TM as focused on working with attracting and recruiting junior personnel and to educate them in their way of working. The programs were launched by newly recruited HR Managers at the two organizations, and they had both been in contact with TM and trainee programs at previous employers.
Gamma claims that they work with TM in many different ways, but the talent program is the most emphasized, while TM at Delta is explained as a way to develop employees in line with the firm's strategy.

> *We brought in the idea of Talent Management in a similar way as we have done with several other management ideas in the past. In the beginning, the process was not very structured* - Regional Manager, Alpha

Talent Management Expressed through Other Concepts
A common pattern among the organizations is that they, when describing their understanding of TM, bring in other ideas and concepts to explain what TM means to them. All firms claim that employer branding is an important part of TM, and say that it is difficult to market oneself as an employer in this industry. This is partly because there are so many organizations active in the industry, but also since they as B2B-companies operate behind the scenes and seldom have direct contact with private consumers. A majority of the organizations reflect upon these difficulties, and say that their customers are well known but that few end consumers know about the IT-company that enables them to create their product.

> *We have built many of the largest websites in Sweden, but Gamma's logo is not found on those. Our customers are in center, and sometimes this is bad for us since people do not know about the cool stuff that we do!*
> - Senior Consultant, Gamma

None of the organizations have a formal strategy for working with employer branding and attracting talent, but many bring up the office space as an important factor for attracting new employees. All organizations say they use their office space to arrange events at which they aim to recruit new talent by talking about projects and techniques being used. Both clients and network contacts are invited to these events, and the organizations say they also participate in different industry conferences to market themselves as employers. All organizations agree that being present at events is a way to present the organization in a creative way and to spread the idea about the company as a great employer.

Another pattern among the four employers is that they use educational programs to manage talents within their organization. In two organizations, TM has settled in the shape of a formal trainee program through which they hire and educate junior employees. The programs were designed as the HR Managers at the firms had been inspired by how other organizations had developed similar ones. Gamma launched the trainee program as a reaction to competing firms developing similar programs, and thus felt a need to implement one as well, as this was thought to increase Gamma's abilities to hire the best graduates. Delta's reasons for developing the program was the fast changing market conditions in combination with a low quality education in IT at Swedish universities. The content of the trainee programs, even though varying slightly, was decided upon after adjusting it to organizational setting and partly imitating the content of other trainee programs. Beta and Alpha have also developed educational programs to train recruits. These programs are not as formal as trainee programs, but are told to be important since they help new employees to learn about how the profession and industry works. Several respondents describe the work of an IT consultant as being a craftsmanship, and claim that constantly training and developing specialized knowledge is important in the industry in order to be talented. In terms of educating and developing employees in order to keep them motivated, all of the organizations claim that they do not think that Swedish IT educations are kept up to date with the rapid development and changes in IT knowledge. Consequently, the organizations argue that it has become their own responsibility to train and develop employees to fit the specific firm and market demands for knowledge.

In addition to TM's connection to employer branding and internal education programs, two firms also claim that TM is used to handle succession planning and leadership transitions within the organization. Alpha says they use TM as a succession planning tool and explains that employees are offered different development opportunities given what they are interested and talented in. Alpha's process for career management consists of a two-way career opportunity at the organization, either by the possibilities to advance to a leadership position, or to become a technical specialist in a specific area.

Talent Management is expensive, it is not something that we do for fun. It is extremely important for us to identify new leaders among our employees. We use Talent Management to identify internal leadership talents and help them take the next step in their careers. This means that we aim to find employees who can handle and thrive in a leadership position. All of our higher managers work with succession plans for their potential successors and for their own development
- Regional Manager, Alpha

Delta also says that they partly use TM as a tool for position transition purposes. They have connected their TM work to a Balanced Score Card, so that each individual will know is expected of him/her in order to develop into the next career step.

Talent Management to Handle Potential

The organizations present similar perceptions regarding who/what they identify as a talent and reflect upon talent as having a mixture of technical skills (IT certificates, software skills, being updated on technology) and suitable personality traits (inner drive, taking initiatives, being social, being creative, being a team player, ability to sell) that matches the organizational culture and core values. They all agree upon seeing talent as something that can be taught and developed. What is also being emphasized is the fact that talent depends upon the individual's own will and desire to learn more and develop in the work role. All firms claim that they perceive every employee as a talent, but differences are to be found in who are treated as talents.

Table 3. Definition of talent

Name	Definition of a talent	Described as a talent	Treated as a talent
ALPHA	A person with an inner drive to improve and develop him-/herself who shares the organization's values	All employees	All employees
BETA	A talented individual who scores high in the firm's three core competences: business sense, creativity and technical skills	All employees	Those who score high in the three core competence areas
GAMMA	A person with consulting skills, technical skills and an open and collaborative personality	All employees	The trainees
DELTA	An A-player who can handle the work of a technical expert, a salesman and a project leader while being a social and collaborative co-worker	The A-players	The A-players

The organizations differ in terms of who is treated as a talent, as some target only a few while others manage everyone like talents. Gamma is one of the firms that differ in terms of who is seen and who is treated as a talent. All respondents at the organization claim that everyone at Gamma is a talent, but at the same time they all describe that the talents are the persons enrolled in the company's trainee program. As the program serves to educate newly graduates into the role of being an IT consultant, talent has become a label to identify the employees that are in the pipeline of becoming consultants in the firm.

> *We used to call them juniors but now we have moved on to saying 'The Talents'. It is a good word because everyone then knows whom we are talking about*
> - Junior Consultant, Gamma

All organizations argue that talent, especially among junior employees, is determined by potential. Potential, at most firms, is explained as an individual having a relevant education in combination with an inner drive and a genuine interest in working with IT consultancy: "*Hire for attitude, train for skill*" is something that is mentioned by several organizations. Delta

distinguishes itself from the other organizations by having a more narrow definition of who is treated as talent in their firm. An example of a talent, or an A-player in the words of the CEO, is a person that can handle all aspects of the IT consultancy role; an employee who is great in sales, technology and project management and who can handle all this type of work without the involvement of others.

All respondents claim that it is the leaders in the organization who are responsible for identifying who is a talent. In terms of discussing who is a talent, many organizations also show an unwillingness to use the specific word "talent". Instead the usage of words such as "gifted" and "proficient" is common in the respondents' answers. The HR Manager at Delta for example states that "*Talent is a very strong word. I prefer to call them well performing or gifted*".

Discussion

The Paradoxes of Talent Management
The empirical data presented above has provided the study with a number of main findings. The results point towards the fact that the four Swedish organizations all attempt to act in line with the egalitarian Swedish culture (Holmberg and Åkerblom, 2012). This has caused them to change the meaning of TM from being very elitist into being more of a general, collectivistic idea for managing the competence of the entire workforce (Iles et al., 2010). The Swedish culture may thus be understood as a friction for the idea to be implemented, as it forces the organizations to translate TM into a concept that the firms can make sense of in their local context (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). The empirical data also reveals four areas of contradictory behaviors in the respondents' interview statements and actions. Not all organizations represent all of the paradoxes, but in general most of the firms exemplify two or three of them. The paradoxes will be briefly presented below and then further elaborated on in the discussion.

1) Saying TM is strategically important vs. Not presenting a clear vision or plan for the TM work. The first paradox reveals that the organizations contradict themselves when emphasizing that TM is strategically important, while not being able to express any goals, plans or visions for what to accomplish with the TM work. One can thus discuss if the TM work is actually important for the firms, or if it is about wanting to say they work with a fashionable idea in order to be perceived in a certain way by their environment.

2) Aiming to avoid elitism vs. Giving special treatments to best performers. The second paradox is that a majority of the firms claim that they work with TM in an inclusive manner targeting all employees, while a behavior of favoring the top-league or A-players displays the opposite. A majority of the firms emphasize that they work with an inclusive TM approach, and the respondents tend to avoid the elitist ideas that are surrounding the TM concept. As an example, not many respondents are comfortable with using the word "talent". This wish to avoid elitism, and to present oneself as working inclusively with TM, is although contradicted as several organizations give special treatments to their best performers. It must therefore be debated whether the organizations introduce the idea of TM with the aim of actually improving themselves internally and to develop talent in general in the firm, or if they bring in this fashionable concept due to legitimacy reasons.

3) Arguing that talent can be taught vs. Seeing talent as dependent on inner drive and motivation. The third paradox is the organizations' tendencies to emphasize that talent can be taught, while saying that talent comes from an inner drive and motivation. The paradox in this case lies in the fact that when saying that talent can be taught, the organizations also imply that it is the manager's responsibility to bring out and develop the talent of each individual. However, when also stating that talent is something that comes from within a person, the responsibility is in turn solely put on the individual employee to develop his/her own talent. This contradictive behavior create incentives for a continued debate on whether these employers, being affected by the Swedish collectivistic and egalitarian culture, have decoupled the managers' official meaning of talent from their actual actions.

4) Claiming that TM was introduced to differentiate oneself vs. Bringing it in as competitors used it. The fourth paradox that has been identified is the fact that the organizations claim that they bring in TM to stand out amongst competitors and to differentiate oneselves, but since everyone have introduced and are using the TM idea, they in turn become similar. The statement about wanting to be different is not only paradoxical as it leads to all organizations using the same idea, but also since some firms say that they decided to bring in the TM idea after being inspired by others. This causes a paradox, as the organizations present a wish to want to be different, while being afraid of acting different from others.

These four areas of contradiction constitute the major research findings and have influenced the following discussion. From an institutional theory perspective, the paradoxes can be understood as a decoupling (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) between what the organizations say they do and what they actually do, and may have occurred due to legitimacy seeking reasons (ibid). Using Brunsson's (1986) approach, a decoupling may be seen as needed as organizations cannot always act in line with their formal talk. This is because organizations act upon inconsistencies in their surroundings, causing them to act paradoxical in order to reach legitimacy (ibid). Institutional theory can help explain why a decoupling takes place, but does not provide answers to why the decoupling takes place in different ways and why it results in differently expressed paradoxes. The introduction of the TM idea within the four firms can be perceived as if it has resulted in a number of different, practical translations, and thus it also becomes of interest to analyze the paradoxes from a translational theory perspective. The paradoxes could be explained using translational aspects (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005), as the initial idea of managing talents may have been interpreted and understood differently in different local settings and at different hierarchical levels. Thus, the intended change which the organizations aimed to achieve by bringing in the TM idea instead unfolded into unintended consequences (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996).

The contradictions that arise in the organizations are examples of organizational paradoxes (Czarniawska, 1997) and can be understood as occurring due to differences in organizational logics - on a representative level the firms present a rational, abstract logic of TM, while in reality they in turn follow a more concrete, practical logic (Czarniawska, 2005). Another pattern among them is also that the differences between what the organizations communicate and practice is also what makes TM function. As an example, several firms say that they treat everyone as talents, but as this claim is hard to execute in practice, this results

in only a few employees being managed as talents. Another example of a dysfunctional behavior is that many firms say they brought in TM to be different from competitors, but since many actors in the field use it they instead turn out to be increasingly similar. This contradictory behavior is not discovered by the organizations, but can be understood as if it has to occur in order for them to make sense of the TM idea (Czarniawska, 1997). By acting paradoxical, for example by saying that everyone is a talent and then only managing a few as this, the organizations thus present a difference between their rational logic and the practical one.
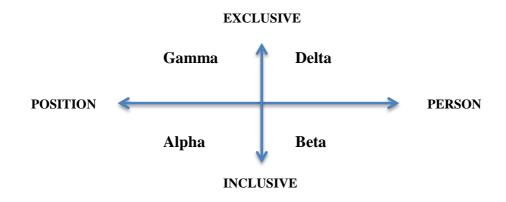
The paradoxes point out examples of contradictory behavior within the organizations and are to be understood as interdependent in the sense that one paradox cannot survive and be maintained without the presence of the others. As an example, the balancing between wanting to act inclusive while wishing to give opportunities to best performers point out the fact that certain excluding practices may have to be performed in order for the TM idea to be made sense of within the organizations. In order to achieve a functioning TM work, it may thus be necessary for the organizations to give special treatments to best performers and to rely on the inner drive and motivation of each employee. To the opposite, if a total inclusive approach was used, the organizations would not be able to make sense of the idea as this may demand too many resources. Stating that TM was introduced for differentiation reasons may also be understood as happening due to a will of attracting the best performers. Without being different from competitors, the firms may not be able to attract and recruit the best talents to the same extent, and thus it becomes important to communicate that one is different, even though acting very similar to others.

Avoiding Elitism and Relying on Potential

Using the findings of previous TM studies to analyze the data, results show that the organizations, on a general concept level, present similar definitions of TM. Some of the definitions are being formal while other organizations present a more informal definition of the concept. None of the organizations lack a definition of TM, thus pointing towards the opposite of what previous studies have claimed (Lewis and Heckman, 2006). All firms state that they see TM as a strategically important issue (Collings and Mellahi, 2009) in order to grow, improve recruitment and continue to be successful. However, none of the firms have been able to express any vision or goal with their TM work, which is something that has already been discussed by Lewis and Heckman (2009). The combination of saying that TM is strategically important while not setting goals for it therefore provides the study with its first paradox (*Saying TM is strategically important vs. Not presenting a clear vision or plan for the TM work*).

All organizations reflect upon similarities between TM and HR processes (Lewis and Heckman, 2006), but emphasize that TM has been given more strategical weight. As an example, two of the firms have developed a TM department in addition to an HR department. The respondents also claim that TM enables them to work with management of competent personnel in a more structured way and say that TM is used to attract, recruit and retain the right personnel (Wikström and Martin, 2012). Using Iles et al's (2010) framework to categorize the organizations' TM approaches, it becomes clear that even if they have similar definitions of TM, they make use of the concept in different ways. To clarify these

differences, the firms have been placed according to their TM approach in Iles et al's (2010) model:

Figure 2. The organization's approaches to Talent Management

EXCLUSIVE

Gamma   Delta

POSITION ←――――――――――→ PERSON

Alpha   Beta

INCLUSIVE

Three organizations claim that they have an inclusive approach to TM (Iles et al., 2010) that involves all employees within the organizations, saying "*all of our employees are talents*". Alpha has an inclusive (ibid) and entrepreneurial approach to TM (Bolander et al., 2014), as they state that all employees are talents but that some stand out a little extra with a strong business sense and technical skills. Employees that take own initiatives are told to be given more opportunities for career advancement, thus the similarity to the entrepreneurial TM perspective (ibid).

Alpha has a position-oriented approach to TM (Iles et al., 2010), as the organization use the idea for succession planning purposes focused on identifying future leaders. Beta represents an inclusive (Iles et al., 2010) and humanistic (Bolander et al., 2014) approach, as all employees are told to be talents and since everyone are told to be given equal career opportunities. The organization is people oriented, as employees are assessed according to how they as individuals live up to the company's core values. However, Beta also shows similarities to being exclusive (Iles et al., 2014) as the best performing employees in terms of business sense, creativity and technicality are referred to as "the top league" and are sometimes preferentially treated. Gamma and Delta both use TM in a more exclusive manner (ibid), targeting only a few employees. Gamma claims that they target everyone as talents, but when describing who is actually managed as talents it becomes clear that the trainees are the only ones handled as this. Thus, Gamma's approach may be seen as focused on position rather than person, as all employees working as trainees are handled as talents, no matter what type of personal attributes they possess (ibid). Gamma's usage of TM can be categorized as humanistic and entrepreneurial (Bolander et al., 2014), as all employees are told to be talents while the organization also encourages individual initiatives for personal development. Delta uses an exclusive TM perspective (Iles et al., 2010) that targets a few key employees identified by the top management, and the so-called A-players are treated preferentially with hope of them to one day fulfill a key position within the firm. Delta, in comparison to the other firms, uses a mixture of the entrepreneurial and competitive TM (Bolander et al., 2014). Entrepreneurial in the sense that it is up to each individual to exploit opportunities and express initiatives to be seen as a talent, and competitive as not all employees are given the

chance to be labeled as a talent. Delta is similar to the exclusive - position perspective, as the aim of the TM work is to place A-players at A-positions (Iles et al., 2010). However, they put more emphasis on personal qualities in relation to talent, and therefore their perspective has been interpreted as being most in line with excluding - person.

The organization's tendencies to show behaviors that fit into the description of being both inclusive and exclusive in terms of TM also reveals the difficulties in locating and categorizing organizations according to their TM approach. As shown, categorizing TM according to Bolander et al's (2014) and Iles et al's (2010) classification systems is not that simple, as the organizations claim they work with TM in a specific manner, while their actions sometimes show the opposite. Most of the firms believe that they represent an inclusive TM perspective, while at the same time showing similarities to a more exclusive perspective (ibid). As an example, good performing employees are given more chances to development and career advancement in several of the firms. Elitist tendencies are also shown in the way the organizations are recruiting, as only the best candidates in terms of personality and technical skills are hired, and in the way some organizations describe special treatments of skilled employees. This shows that even though the organizations claim they use inclusive TM, the idea is translated into more elitist actions when used in practice. This contradiction provides the study with its second paradox (*Aiming to avoid elitism vs. Giving special treatments to best performers*), and can be understood as if a decoupling occurs between what is communicated by the companies and what they actually do internally (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The fact that most organizations use a humanistic and inclusive TM approach may be explained by the fact that they are operating in Sweden, being a culture characterized by egalitarian values and collectivism (Holmberg and Åkerblom, 2012). As TM is an international concept that has been implemented in a Swedish context, the organizations may try to avoid the elitist terms and instead present a more collectivistic approach to the concept (Berglund, 2002; Bolander, Werr and Asplund, 2014). The behavior of three of the organizations to wish to include everyone may be seen as an example of this.

In alignment with having similar understandings of TM, it is also clear that the meaning of being appointed a talent is relatively consistent among the four organizations. The definitions of talent show similarities to what has been previously found in the literature. Most organizations present an understanding of talent as something that can be taught and developed and say that it is something that all employees possess. All organizations emphasize that it is partly the manager's responsibility to bring out this talent from employees. Results are the opposite of Michaels et al's (2001) description of talent as something exclusive that only few people possess. Delta's exclusive perception of talents as the best performers is similar to A-players and super keepers (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Berger and Berger, 2010). All organizations claim that having talent is about having potential (Ashton and Morton, 2005; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Lewis and Heckman, 2009; Tarique and Schuler, 2009). The results are similar to Boudreau and Ramstad's (2007) explanation of talent as something that an individual possess (individual traits that can be developed) rather than what is inherent (Berger and Berger, 2010; Andersson 2015; Michaels et al., 2001). All organizations point out that being a talent is about being a good match for the organization's needs in terms of personality and technical skills, and results thereby verify Tansley's (2011) idea about talent as organization specific. The fact that potential (Ashton and Morton, 2005;

Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Lewis and Heckman, 2009; Tarique and Schuler, 2009) is emphasized by all organizations also shows that they assess talent as depending on a person's motivation and determination, rather than his/her results and performance (Bolander et al., 2014; Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Meyers et al., 2013). When saying that talent is depending on an inner drive, several firms also say that talent must be understood as depending on a person's own will and initiatives to improve. This reveals the third paradox of the study (*Arguing that talent can be taught vs. Seeing talent as dependent on inner drive and motivation*), as saying that talent depends on efforts from managers contradicts the claim of saying that talent depends on the individual.

Most of the organizations address their TM to all employees, which may be interpreted as if they perceive employees as possessing talent at all organizational levels. Even if three firms say they do not use TM for employee classification purposes they show tendencies to use a more informal type of employee differentiation. Beta for example talks about their best performing employees as "the top league" - employees known to be good at their job and whom the organization often use as role models. The statement from Gamma regarding that not everyone are given time off from work to focus on personal projects also shows that employees who are known to be high achievers are given more opportunities and freedom compared to other workers. Gamma's claim that employees can be favored and special treated due to personal aspects can be understood as if ambitious and self-confident employees are given more opportunities to develop and succeed in comparison to less ambitious and more reclusive employees. This shows that the firms do not act in the same way as they claim to do, since employees are treated different depending on their personality. From an institutional perspective, this difference could be explained as a decoupling (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) as the organizations may have had to separate between the official meaning of TM and how it is actually practiced within the organization. It could also be that the organizations simply do not have the resources to manage and treat everyone as talents, and therefore the actual TM practices are not the same as the image that the organizations aim to spread about themselves in these matters. From a translational perspective, the decoupling may instead occur as the organizations already have a number of ideas in residence which creates friction for TM (Czarniawska, 1997). Ideas such as the one regarding succession planning could for example be understood as opposing the idea of an inclusive TM approach.

Isomorphic Behavior to Cope with Industry Competition
As shown, the organizations present similar meanings of how they perceive TM and talent. The way in which the organizations have introduced the idea could be understood as if the organizations have been affected by institutional norms in the society (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Being consulting firms active in a fast developing competitive industry, it could be argued that they are assumed to behave in certain ways in order for clients to remain or for new recruits to perceive them as attractive. Since the firms claim they feel pressured represent the latest management and IT trends available, TM could be understood as one of these ideas that is being implemented and used by the firms as it makes them gain legitimacy among its stakeholders (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The reason for why the four employers decided to work with TM could also be due to the fact that they feel insecure in the market, and therefore

imitate other organizations in the industry (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) as being different could lead to lost clients or legitimacy.

The reason for why TM was introduced is because the firms hoped that it could help them improve their recruitment practices, which is needed as their industry is highly competitive. In addition, TM is said to be an idea that could help the organizations differentiate themselves from competitors by enabling them to develop a stronger, more strategic focus on recruitment and retention issues. Three firms state that they perceive TM as an important tool to stay competitive during the growth phase that they experience. This shared behavior and understanding of TM could be interpreted as normative isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), since it makes the organizations become similar, and thus make them fit into the norm of TM which is currently prevailing in the industry and promoted by Swedish media. However, this tendency to behave similar to other organizations (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) contradicts the organizations' initial aim of using TM as a tool to be different from other firms. This tendency therefore provides the study with its fourth paradox *(Claiming that TM was introduced to differentiate oneself vs. Bringing it in as competitors used it)*. The initial aim of being unique while ending up being increasingly similar could also be understood as an example of Czarniawska's (2005) fashion paradoxes, which states that organizations act different to become similar.

In terms of how the TM idea was introduced, all organizations describe that it was launched when a new person entered the company. Thus, the idea entered the organization after the firm's management had identified it as having been successful in other contexts. Two organizations claim that they brought in TM through the development of a trainee program, which could be seen as a prevailing institution in today's society (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Since both these organizations claim they developed them as many of its competitors worked with similar programs, this could also be understood as if the companies are copying the behavior if other organizations. This indicates that a normative isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Erlingsdottír and Lindberg, 2005) is taking place in the sector, as these organizations similar to many other Swedish IT companies have started working with a combination of TM and a trainee program. The usage of trainee programs can perhaps also be interpreted as if they have been implemented in order to give the employers legitimacy in the industry (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) since they are very popular and since they make the organizations more visible as employers. In terms of how the programs were developed, the two companies using them claim that their HR Managers found inspiration in how other organizations had developed and designed their programs. This can be seen as an imitation of competitors' trainee programs (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) Even if not all organizations work with the idea of trainee programs, they all explain that TM entered the organization in similar ways as described above.

Adding to the fact that the organizations are very similar on a concept level, it can also be argued that the four organizations are affected by isomorphism and isonymism (Erlingsdottír and Lindberg, 2005). Isomorphism in the way that they have all brought the idea of TM and since it has settled in a similar shape within all of the organizations. Isonymism is present in the specific industry, as many of the organizations have chosen to implement the concept name of TM in both their practices and professional work titles, even if the work included in the label varies between the four organizations.

Organizational Differences Resulting from Local Adaptiveness

At first sight, the organizations' behavior and reflections regarding TM and talent seem very cohesive at a concept level. However, when analyzing them in detail, local differences are to be found. All organizations reflect upon the fashionable aspect of TM but emphasize that they work with the idea in their own way. This shows that TM has been adapted to each organization and their specific contexts, and that who is labeled and managed as a talent depends on individual circumstances in each firm (Tansley, 2011). The idea of TM could be understood as if it has created similarities and differences in activities within the organizations. These differences in local behavior may be seen as if the TM idea has been translated into different practices in different local contexts (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). The different ways in which the idea of TM has been interpreted could be understood as an example of idea translation (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). As an example of local differences, firms have interpreted the idea as a way to identify and educate leaders, some as a way to tailor career preferences to each individual and his/her dreams, some as a way to educate trainees in the company's way of working while some have understood TM as a mean to encourage and develop the best performing A-players. The idea has also been anchored in formal job titles and department names at some firms, while being more informal and lightweight at other companies.

The organizations' different reflections, and the contradictory reflections of TM coming from within the companies, may also serve as an indicator to the fact that TM has been translated and understood differently at different hierarchical levels (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). As an example, the CEO at Delta says that his/her organization work with TM in an exclusive manner, while the employees instead reflect upon the organization as pursuing an inclusive approach. Differences are also to be found when comparing the idea of TM and its potential benefits among the firms to the overall media debate on the concept. The four employers reflect upon TM as a useful tool to structure and strategically align HR with the overall objectives of the firm, and state that TM initially was brought in with the aim of differentiating the organization from competitors. In comparison, the debate on TM in Swedish media instead circles around the economic benefits of using the concept, and it for example highlights the fact that talented employees can be up to four times more productive than their colleagues. The firms and the general TM debate in Sweden although present similarities in terms of reflecting upon that organizations in Sweden may not, due to the culture, be comfortable with labeling certain people as "talents". Both the HR Manager at Delta and the newspaper Dagens PS (2012) for example state that Swedish organizations often avoid the word "talent" and "A-player" and instead use other phrasings such as "gifted". The Swedish media debate have not settled on whether TM should be used as an exclusive or inclusive concept, and the statements of the four firms show that them, too, represent different perspectives in this discussion. The differences between how TM has been understood at an industry level, in specific firms, compared to how it is being interpreted at a national level, in the media, may also be explain by using Czarniawska and Joerges'(1996) theory about idea translation.

In terms of managing TM in different ways, the firms also aim to explain their ideas on TM by combining it with other ideas and concepts. This is an example of creating something new (e.g. TM work) by combining the old, such as previous ideas in residence

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(Czarniawska, 2005). The ideas mentioned the most in relation to TM are the ones regarding employer branding, trainee programs and succession planning. This behavior could be understood as an example of Czarniawska and Sevón's (2005) description of organizations having a tendency to put together different ideas in order to make sense of them. In two firms, the TM idea is connected to another fashionable idea - the idea of trainee programs. As mentioned, the trainee programs were initiated by HR Managers after finding inspiration in how other organizations had developed and designed their programs. Thus, the idea is taken from one context to another, and then adjusted to fit the organization and its needs. Both Gamma and Delta uses the programs as their main tool to perform TM, and the concept of trainee programs is therefore helping the organizations making sense of TM (Czarniawska and Sevón's 2005) in their individual way.

Three firms also say they think the attraction-component of TM is closely related to employer branding in terms of being able to attract the right talent. This is in line with previous research (Wilska 2014; Collings et al., 2011; Wikström and Martin, 2012) on employer branding, which argues that it is of great importance when aiming to attract and retain talents. The fact that the firms chose to bring in the idea of employer branding to better ensure the attraction of talents can be understood as if the firms are using this idea in order to make sense of how to work with TM. Thus, the idea of TM can be seen as needing the backup of the idea of employer branding in order for organizations to know how to work with attracting talents in practice (Czarniawska and Sevón's 2005). The organization's' strong emphasis on having a nicely designed office space may also be understood as employer branding in terms of the organizations wishing to communicate their success and identity through material things such as interior (Wilska, 2014). The behavior of combining the TM idea with other ideas could also be explained by Czarniawska's (1997) arguments about the idea being connected to ideas that are already in the residence of each firm. It can also be understood as an example of organizations creating something new, TM practices, from ideas and concepts that are already present in the organization (Czarniawska, 2005). Thus, TM could be understood as if it is being made sense of by attaching it to other, already active, ideas such as succession planning and employee motivation that are already present within the organizations.

As shown, a possible explanation to why the different actors reflect upon, and work with, TM in different ways could be the translation effect (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). When applying translation theory onto the Swedish IT industry and the specific case of the four organizations, it can be argued that they have translated the idea of TM in different ways. The different interpretations offered by the employers could be explained by the fact that they, even though being active in the same industry, are operating in different local contexts (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996).

Conclusion and Implications

This paper tells the story of how a fashionable and highly debated concept – the idea of Talent Management – is being made sense of and used within four different organizations in the Swedish IT industry. The study may contribute to a broader debate on how and why organizations bring in and use management ideas that are circulating in their surroundings. The results show that the idea, at a concept level, has been interpreted in similar ways, but

when looking into local practices it has been translated differently, thus causing the organizations to use and reflect upon TM in different ways. The reason for the differences in the TM work is that the idea has been adapted to each organization's specific context and culture. Therefore, the meaning of TM in each organization differs from the original idea in terms of content and intended practices. This process could be understood as if the idea of TM has been translated into different meanings at the four different firms.

In terms of fulfilling the purpose of the study, the first aim was to investigate how and why the idea of TM has been introduced by the organizations. The results show that many of the organizations desired to become different from competitors and thus decided to bring in the concept. Some firms also show a tendency to work with TM due to institutional reasons, as they felt a pressure from the society and other organizations to work with the idea. To summarize how the idea was introduced, most firms describe that the idea of TM entered when a new employee, such as an HR Manager or CEO, joined the organization. These employees had experience from working with the ideas in other organizational settings, and several respondents reflect upon that TM was launched after first being inspired by how other organizations worked with the idea. The second aim was to develop an understanding of how the idea of TM has been interpreted and understood in the specific organizational and industrial contexts. Most firms in this study present TM as an inclusive concept and say that all employees are to be seen as talents. However, a majority of the firms although show tendencies to categorize their employees informally, and give special treatments to the best performers. The avoidance of the word talent and the distancing from the elitist TM approach can also be understood as if the concept has been hidden behind or combined with other ideas such as the ones about trainee programs and employer branding. This may have occurred in order to make a smooth introduction of the concept into the rather collectivistic Swedish context. In addition, it can be concluded that TM has been adapted to the Swedish company culture. This may be understood as if TM has been contextualized, meaning that it has been established and developed in a way in Sweden that differs from the American perspective on the concept.

The paper also presents new insights regarding the fact that the concept of TM, in this specific case, is surrounded by a number of paradoxes. The four paradoxes identified cover both the definition of talent and TM, and highlight the fact that all parts of the organizations do not always manage and interpret talents in line with the official perspective presented by managers. The study also contributes with new knowledge to the TM literature, as it reveals that the TM concept may cause paradoxical behavior within organizations. The paradoxes are not necessarily to be understood as something negative, but the study highlights that organizations should become more aware of the fact that differences between representational logics and practical logics often occur. The different interpretations of TM in this study may serve as an example of this. The study may also be used to exemplify that there is a battle of ideas taking place within organizations, and shows that organizations struggle in living up to all of these ideas and logics. This study for example points out the organizational difficulties in wishing to act in line with Swedish culture, while having a rational resource allocation, and at the same time facing friction by other ideas already in residence.

A central implication in the study is the fact that the investigated organizations have shown a tendency to label the concept of TM with different names. Researchers studying the

concept must thus be open-minded towards the fact that TM can occur under different names and labels. As shown, TM is sometimes combined with other ideas and concepts to make it more relevant. In addition, the paper highlights the fact that Swedish organizations show an unwillingness to use the specific words of talent and Talent Management. This serves as an implication to the study, since it makes it difficult to investigate the concept. Results may thus be understood as if TM is complex to investigate, due to the fact that some organizations may not be aware of the fact that they are practicing the idea in ways not intended. This paper is also highlighting a number of practical implications. The institutional factors affecting the TM process are one of these, as they have impact on how organizations understand and manage talent. Another practical implication is that organizations need to reflect on how open they are to ideas coming not only from outside the organization but also from within in order to pay more attention to talents.

A limitation of the study is that it has not been able to adopt a longitudinal approach and follow the investigated organizations for longer periods of time. A central limitation is also that the study is based on interviews with four employers in a specific industry. As a result, the findings are not to be seen applicable to a wider population of organizations and may not work as a general rule for how other business sectors works with TM. It can also be discussed whether an industry specific study like this may produce results that can support research in other industries. However, given the aim of the paper, the study's validity can be perceived as high as it fulfills its purpose as it provides possible answers to the research aims. The empirical data has been handled with great confidentiality and in good research manners, as informants have been cited properly and since nothing has been added to the interview statements afterwards.

In order to substantiate the level of relevance of the results, additional research on how TM is interpreted and translated within a specific national and industry setting is needed. The study has left the researchers with a number of new, interesting research topics to address in the area of TM. As differences have been found regarding how different employees within the same organizations perceive the firm's TM approach, future studies may focus on investigating how, and why, management ideas are received and understood differently at different hierarchical levels and to investigate how transparency issues are handled in regards to a TM strategy. Another idea could be to conduct a study comparing organizations using a formal TM strategy to organizations using a more informal approach to TM. The purpose of such a study could be to investigate whether there are any implications to the TM work in relation to if the TM strategy is formally or informally implemented. In the specific case of TM in the Swedish IT industry, it could also be of interest to look into the debate on gender equality and diversity in relation to TM within a male dominated industry such as the IT sector.

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