



CONTEXT-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVES ON TALENT MANAGEMENT

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEO(s)	chief executive officer(s)
Dr.	doctor
ed(s).	editor(s)
et al.	et alii (and others)
etc.	et cetera
e.g.	exempli gratia (for example)
€	euro (currency)
GFC	global financial crisis
(G)NBS	(German) national business system
GTM	global talent management
HR	human resources
HRM	human resource management
Hrsg.	Herausgeber (Editor/s)
i.e.	id est (that means)
MNE(s)	multinational enterprise(s)
p./pp.	page/s
Prof./s	professor/s
SI	special issue
SME(s)	small and medium enterprise(s)
TM	talent management
TRM	talent relationship management
VAW	value adding web
Vol.	volume
vs.	versus

1 INTRODUCTION

Talent management (TM) has been consistently cited as being one of the most urgent priorities for executives around the globe over the last few years (BCG and WFPMA 2010; BCG and EAPM 2011; BCG and WFPMA 2012; BCG and EAPM 2013). Likewise, it has caught academic researchers' attention, and the research field has rapidly developed in this respect in the last decade (Tansley et al. 2007; Scullion and Collings 2011; Gallardo-Gallardo, Gallo and Dries 2013b). The reasons behind this increased focus are rooted in demographic shifts and challenges, such as declining birth rates, an ageing workforce, shortages of skilled labor, and the war for talent, all of which make it an interesting topic of strategic importance for practitioners and academics alike (Chambers, Foulton, Handfield-Jones, Hankin and Michaels III 1998; Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod 2001; Strack, Baier and Fahlander 2008; European Commission 2011; World Economic Forum 2011). Acknowledging the various forms and definitions of TM, in this thesis it is understood as an organization's ability to attract, select, develop, and retain key employees (in a global context) (see Stahl et al. 2007).

A large body of TM research in the early stages stemmed from the United States and focused on investigating organizational TM practices (Stahl et al. 2007; Stahl et al. 2012); however, academics called for TM insights beyond American soil (Collings, Scullion and Vaiman 2011; Scullion and Collings 2011; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier 2013b), thereby emphasizing the need for more context-oriented TM research (Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier 2013a). Nevertheless, contributions on TM in different organizational and national settings are advancing slowly, but more research is needed in order to gain a better understanding of the drivers and challenges of TM in different contexts.

Furthermore, diversity aspects in TM and the individual, the talent perspective, for the most part have been neglected (Tansley 2011; Dries 2013b; Thunnissen et al. 2013b), which is surprising, given the demographic shifts and talent shortages in some countries (European Commission 2011) and today's diverse workforces. Hence, research with respect to generational aspects and an ageing workforce, as well as the inclusion of diversity aspects and values, preferences, and the perspectives of talents themselves, seems crucial, in order to better attract and retain diverse talents (D'Amato and Herzfeldt 2008; Tarique and Schuler 2010; Benson and Brown 2011; Schuler, Jackson and Tarique 2011; Al Ariss, Vassilopoulou, Özbilgin and Game 2013).

Although one can no longer call the research field ‘infant’, it is still far from the adolescent stage: Different definitions of talent and TM foci coexist (Lewis and Heckman 2006; Collings and Mellahi 2009; Tansley 2011; Dries 2013b; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz 2013a; Thunnissen et al. 2013b), large-scale empirical investigations on TM are scarce, and more profound academic research into TM, the combination thereof with other research domains, and TM in various contexts is required to further advance and develop the field (Collings and Mellahi 2009; Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe 2014).

In an attempt to address these research gaps, this dissertation and the four manuscripts which form the foundation of the dissertation seek to make a contribution to context-oriented TM by focusing on analyzing and investigating the subject at various levels, such as:

- *National*: Investigating TM in medium-sized enterprises in Germany and researching to what extent and how the national environment is impacting the design and applied practices of TM in these enterprises.
- *Regional*: Analyzing, on a regional level, how human resource management (HRM) and TM networks can contribute to a firm and a cluster’s value creation.
- *Industry and organizational level*: Gaining insights into TM practices on the organizational and industry level of larger German enterprises in the media industry, and especially analyzing the question whether TM is inclusive with respect to gender in these companies.
- *Individual*: Conceptually analyzing the impact of TM on the psychological contract of talents and the moderating role of generational effects.

Thus, the aim of this thesis is to enrich and advance knowledge on TM and to contribute to a better, more informed understanding of the growing research field in various contexts, by shedding light on this topic from different perspectives and by integrating insights from the literature, namely institutional theory (e.g. the national business systems approach, Whitley 1999), gendered HRM and gender studies (gender-inclusiveness of TM), psychological contract theory (Rousseau 1995), and generational studies. Furthermore, by using a variety of research methodologies, the four manuscripts also deliver initial empirical, exploratory, and conceptual contributions to the research topic that have not been investigated in this way before.

In the following, starting with Chapter 2, an introduction to defining talent and TM, as well as a call for more context-oriented research, will be provided, supplemented by a descrip-

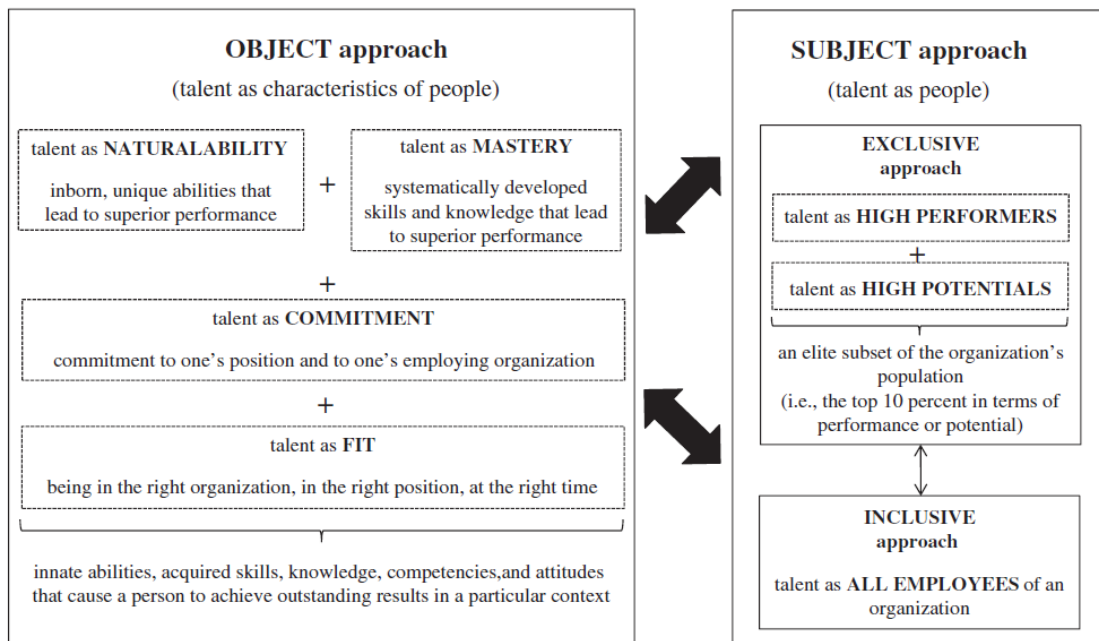
tion of the background to this thesis, namely the German context. This is followed by Chapter 3, which outlines the structure of the thesis and summarizes the main research questions and methodologies used in the different manuscripts. The core of the thesis is the presentation of the four manuscripts in Chapter 4. Finally, in the concluding chapter, the dissertation finishes with a summary of its key findings and contributions, a discussion of its limitations and potential future research topics, and, lastly, some practical implications.

2 STATUS QUO OF THE TALENT MANAGEMENT FIELD

2.1 Defining talent and talent management

In the late 1990s, McKinsey consultants coined the term ‘war for talent’. Based on the findings of a consulting study, they pushed forward the idea of the differential treatment of high performers, based on the recognition that some employees contributed significantly more to the overall performance of the organization than others (Chambers et al. 1998; Michaels et al. 2001). They introduced the terminology of A (high performers, who should be developed and retained), B (average performers, who should be affirmed and developed), and C players (those with low performance, who should either be supported to perform better or be removed), based on individual employee performance (Chambers et al. 1998; Michaels et al. 2001).

However, a decade later, Tansley (2011, p. 266) summarized the findings of a philological analysis (from a historical and linguistic-comparative perspective): “There is no single or universal contemporary definition of ‘talent’ in any one language;” rather, “there are different organisational perspectives of talent.” Furthermore, scholarly debate has discussed whether talent is innate (giftedness, nature) or can be acquired (nurtured) (Lewis and Heckman 2006; Tansley 2011; Dries 2013a; Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013a; Meyers, van Woerkom and Dries 2013); however, the general consensus is that talent is highly organization-specific and influenced by the type of industry, context, and nature of work and mainly relates to the individual level, although this is difficult to measure (Tansley 2011; Dries 2013a; Nijs, Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and Sels 2014). In a review on the meaning of talent in organizational contexts, Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, and González-Cruz (2013a, p. 291) summarize the various debates on talent definitions and propose a framework, distinguishing between “theoretical approaches to talent into ‘object’ (i.e. talent as natural ability; talent as mastery; talent as commitment; talent as fit) versus ‘subject’ approaches (i.e. talent as all people; talent as some people).” Their model can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Framework for conceptualizing talent in organizations.

Source: Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz (2013, p. 297).

What differentiates talented individuals or talent from other human resources is the assumption that they are key strategic resources, because they contribute most to the organization's performance (Tansley et al. 2007; Collings and Mellahi 2009; Schuler and Tarique 2012), and to the competitive advantage of the firm (Barney 1991; Barney 1995; Vaiman and Vance 2008). Defining talent is crucial for every organization, as failing to do so would mean risking identifying key talents at all. Based on the subject approach to talent definition, and the varying degree of inclusiveness, two approaches currently prevail in the TM literature: The elite, or exclusive, approach, which focuses on a small group of high performers and high potentials (assuming some are more valuable than others), and the more universal and inclusive approach, which focuses on many target groups or even all employees (Lewis and Heckman 2006; Collings and Mellahi 2009; Iles, Chuai and Preece 2010; Schuler et al. 2011; Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013a; Thunnissen et al. 2013b). In organizations, however, these approaches seldom occur in a distinct form, and so a 'hybrid' approach is most commonly used (Stahl et al. 2012, p. 26). Therefore, when talking about talent in this dissertation, it generally includes persons (subject approach) who are high performers with high potential and are pivotal to the organization (Tansley 2011; Thunnissen et al. 2013b).

With respect to defining the term TM itself, several streams can be identified within the TM research field (Lewis and Heckman 2006). Some scholars see it as a substitute for

HRM (focusing on certain HRM practices), a second stream emphasizes the development of talent pools, focusing on HR planning, staffing needs, and succession planning, and thirdly, another stream focuses on the management of talents in general (talent categorizations). Collings and Mellahi (2009) identified another perspective, suggesting focusing on the identification of key positions rather than on talented individuals. Consequently, as outlined above, there are various perspectives with regard to defining TM.

In this dissertation, as previously mentioned, TM is defined as an organization's ability to attract, select, develop, and retain key employees (see Stahl et al. 2007). By doing so, TM is clearly differentiated from general human resource management (HRM) practices, which are defined as all "policies, practices, and systems that influence employees' behavior, attitudes, and performance" (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wright 2010 p. 4). Therefore, TM and HRM differ significantly with respect to the scope of practices involved and target groups (talents vs. human resources), meaning that TM only involves a set of selected HRM practices (Lewis and Heckman 2006) for a smaller group of particularly talented individuals (as defined by the company), compared to HRM, which includes all policies and practices (e.g. labor relations, compensation and benefits, workplace safety) and involves various stakeholders such as the whole workforce, labor unions, customers, suppliers, and investors (Tarique and Schuler 2010). As a result, TM is part of HRM but covers a specific niche thereof (Meyers et al. 2013). Furthermore, when talking about TM, another differentiation which can be drawn sets apart talent definition (as discussed previously), TM practices (attract, develop, and retain key employees – as shown in the outer ring), and the so-called 'guiding principles' of TM (Stahl et al. 2012, p. 27), which apply equally to all TM practices and are critical for TM to be effective (CIPD 2006; Stahl et al. 2012). These points are summarized in the TM wheel (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. The TM wheel.

Source: Stahl et al. (2012, p. 27).

2.2 The rising call for more contextualization in TM research

As mentioned earlier, in its initial stages the TM research field was dominated by publications originating from the United States, heading the geographic productivity rankings, similar to other aspects of HRM and management, which were originally developed and conceptualized in the United States; however, the majority of those insights stemmed from non-academic institutions, such as consulting companies and practitioners, promulgating TM best practices in large multinational companies, and there was a lack of academically and theoretically sound TM research (Chambers et al. 1998; Michaels et al. 2001; Brewster 2004; Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013b; Thunnissen et al. 2013b). In an attempt to shed light on TM beyond the United States, which acknowledges and values geographical and cultural differences and thus follows a call for more context-oriented research, more and more contributions from other regions, as well as special issues focusing on European (e.g. SI on TM in Europe, see Collings et al. 2011), Asian (SI on TM in the Asia Pacific, see e.g. McDonnell, Collings and Burgess 2012; Cooke, Saini and Wang 2014), Middle Eastern (Afiouni, Ruël and Schuler 2014; Sidani and Al Ariss 2014), and global TM (GTM) perspectives (Scullion and Collings 2010; 2011) contributed greatly to enriching the research domain from the late 2000s onwards.

As the subject area has expanded, growing opinion has emerged that there are differences in how TM is defined and implemented, depending on the national context (Collings et al. 2011; Scullion and Collings 2011; Thunnissen et al. 2013a) and different types of organi-

zation. For instance, TM is not only relevant for MNEs (Stahl et al. 2007; Stahl et al. 2012) but is equally important to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); however, TM in the latter organizations is different, due to, for example, financial and human resources constraints and a lower degree of HRM professionalization (Iles et al. 2010; Festing, Schäfer and Scullion 2013; Valverde, Scullion and Ryan 2013).

In a recent conceptual paper on the relevance of context to TM, Thunnissen, Boselie, and Fruytier (2013a, p. 330) also call for a more ‘pluralistic view’ on the subject through broader and newer perspectives. A number of ways to achieve this aim include focusing on talents and their employment and work relationships, investigating value-creation processes in TM, and acknowledging that organizations exist in and interact with their environment and institutional context (Thunnissen et al. 2013a). In a similar vein, in a special issue exploring TM theories and future directions, Al Ariss, Cascio, and Paauwe (2014, p. 177) call for more research on various levels and within a number of contexts, citing the individual level, organizational level, institutional context, as well as national, international, and sectoral contexts as key elements that define TM research.

Therefore, following calls for more context-oriented TM research implies acknowledging that contextual variables, such as historical, economic, social, and political factors, may have an impact on TM (Collings and Mellahi 2009; Iles et al. 2010; Tarique and Schuler 2010; Collings et al. 2011; Thunnissen et al. 2013a). This is especially true for Europe, which (compared to the United States, for example) is characterized by the significant control of governments and various regulations regarding the recruitment and dismissal of employees, and the high influence of trade unions and works councils in employee relations (Ronen and Shenkar 1985; Brewster 2004; Collings et al. 2011; Festing 2012).

To conclude, the discussion about context-oriented perspectives on TM builds on the contextualist paradigm of research on HRM in general, compared to the universalist paradigm which focuses on identifying universal approaches and best practices, and thus moving towards convergence of HRM practices (Brewster 1999; Festing 2012).

2.3 Background to the studies: The German context

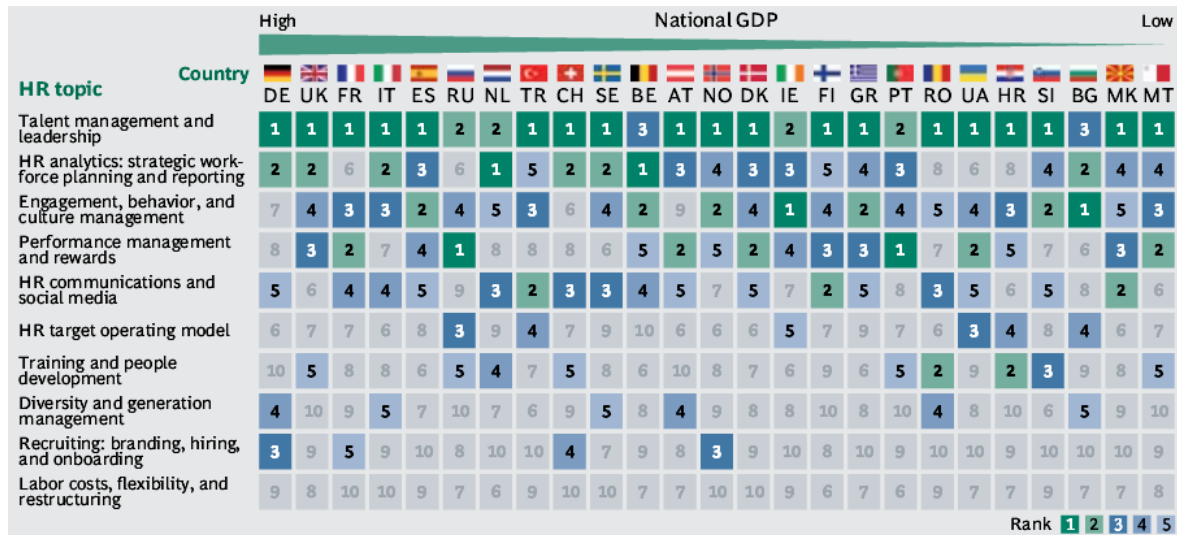
The idea behind this thesis was to keep the national setting constant by focusing on the German context for all papers (except for the conceptual paper), and by doing so avoiding challenges and issues of carrying out research in different countries and cultures (e.g.

language, metric equivalence, internal-consistency issues, see Cascio 2012), while at the same time filling a research gap on TM insights in Germany. Sticking to the German national context, various levels inside the country, such as regional, industry, and organizational differences, are taken into account in an attempt to better understand these peculiarities of the external environment to be able to predict how the external environment might influence HRM and TM practices in these specific environments.

Interestingly, at the time of starting this dissertation, no academic paper had been written on TM in Germany, and even in practitioner-oriented literature, TM research in the German context was scarce (Festing, Schäfer, Massmann and Englisch 2011; Festing et al. 2013), although the country demonstrates an interesting setting for studying how TM and labor markets operate in a post-financial crisis setting whereby the effects of the global financial crisis (GFC) have been overcome quickly, and where moderate economic growth rates have been observed (The World Bank 2012; Destatis 2013). However, similar to other European countries, on the one hand, the German population is characterized by declining birth rates and an ageing population (Beechler and Woodward 2009; European Commission 2011), while on the other hand, employment rates are stable and even growing (European Commission 2011; Ward 2011; Bujard et al. 2012; Destatis 2013); in fact, Germany reported one of the lowest number of unemployed persons in 2012 (2.9 million) (Iwd 2013). These influential macroeconomic and demographic factors lead to intense competition for talents on an organizational level (Festing et al. 2011), and based on various forecasts, immigration and growth rates will not sufficiently cover this gap, so severe talent shortages will continue to be an issue for organizations in the future (Ward 2011; World Economic Forum 2011). This has led to a discussion on paying more attention to previously neglected groups, such as attracting international talent from abroad, older employees, and particularly women (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales 2011). In Germany, women only represent 3% of management boards and around 12% of the supervisory boards (Holst, Busch and Kröger 2012), and so in order to address this situation, in the recent coalition agreements between the CDU/CSU and SPD (2013), the German government discussed the introduction of legislative measures, such as a 30% female quota for supervisory boards, and regulations for companies to introduce measures that increase the percentage of women in top management positions (CDU/CSU and SPD 2013). As a result, attracting, retaining, and developing female talent, as well as talent stemming from different generations, is of high priority for German companies – regardless of company size – in order to cope with the challenging demographic situation. The

strategic importance of TM, for Germany as well as other European countries, can be seen in Figure 3, which highlights that TM was cited as the most critical HR topic among a sample of 2,304 European executives (BCG and EAPM 2013).

Figure 3. TM and leadership identified as the most important HR issues (EU).



Source: BCG and EAPM (2013, p. 7).

Furthermore, with respect to the German national context, some peculiarities of the German national business system (GNBS), such as long-term orientation and investment in human capital, a strong focus on training and development, and a high level of rigidity regarding regulations and policies governing cooperation between management and employees, make it an even more interesting arena for studying TM (Streeck 1995; Ferner and Varul 1999; Festing 2012). These characteristics of the German national environment pertain not only to large international companies which are involved in foreign operations (Kutschker and Schmid 2005), but also to regional clusters and networks of companies, as well as to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which compose the majority of German companies and are crucial for the economic situation of the country (Institut für Mittelstandsforschung 2011; Destatis 2012). Especially SMEs, which often do not have enough resources (financial and human) to set up complex, professional HRM and TM systems, and which are usually less well-known, have more challenges to overcome and face increasing difficulties in attracting employees (Cardon and Stevens 2004; Valverde et al. 2013). One way for SMEs to cope with these challenges is to join forces and create networks and regional clusters (Sydow 2006; Helbich 2007); however, research and insights into how SMEs cope with these challenges and (jointly) manage their talents is extremely scant (Festing et al. 2013).

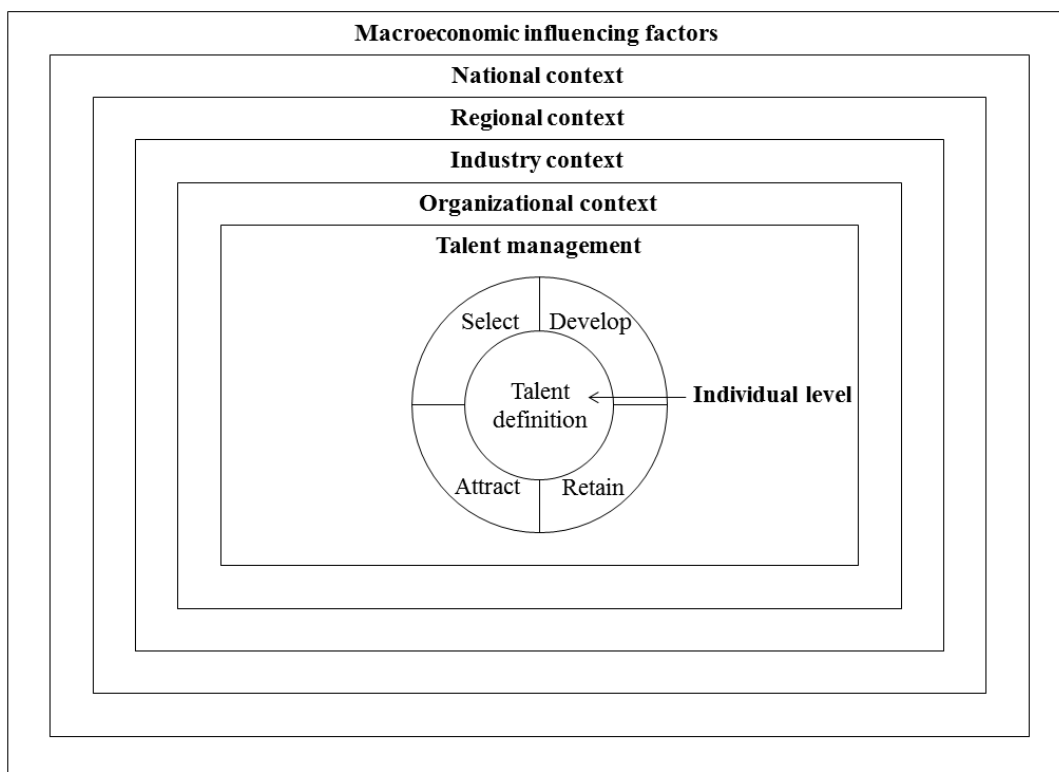
3 DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

3.1 Overview of the manuscripts

This dissertation, at its core, consists of four papers comprising two published journal articles, one paper which was recently resubmitted to a journal, and one published (peer-reviewed) book chapter in a collected edition. Table 1 presents a detailed overview of the manuscripts included in this dissertation, including further information on co-authorships, publication details, etc. (see page 12).

As can be seen in the overview of manuscripts in this thesis, the common ground and constant theme for the papers is TM. However, each paper focuses on investigating and exploring a different aspect thereof, at a different level of analysis. Based on the introduction of and a call for more context-oriented research on TM, the underlying framework for this dissertation is summarized in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Framework for studying context-oriented TM.



Herein, the various factors affecting TM are collated, starting with *macro-economic influencing factors* such as the war for talent, demographic shifts, and challenges which represent the outer ring, all of which have an impact on the demand for and supply of labor and talent, continuing one layer further inside with the *national context* (e.g. Germany),

Table 1. Overview of the manuscripts included in this thesis.

No.	1	2	3	4
Title	Talent management in medium-sized German companies: an explorative study and agenda for future research	Value creation through human resource management networks and talent management in clusters – A case study from Germany	Think talent – think male? A comparative case study analysis of gender inclusion in talent management practices in the German media industry	Generational challenges to talent management: A framework for talent retention based on the psychological contract perspective
Co-authors	1) Marion Festing 2) Hugh Scullion (National University of Ireland, Galway)	1) Marion Festing	2) Marion Festing 3) Angela Kornau	1) Marion Festing
Journal/book	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> (IJHRM)	Peer-reviewed book chapter, Rainer Hampp Verlag	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> (IJHRM)	<i>Journal of World Business</i> (JWB)
Ranking position	B [according to VHB-Jourqual]		B [according to VHB-Jourqual]	B [according to VHB-Jourqual]
Publication status	Published, April 2013	Published, winter 2013	Revised version submitted April 2014	Published, April 2014
Points	0,67 [according to VHB-Jourqual]		0,67 [according to VHB-Jourqual]	1,0 [according to VHB-Jourqual]
Research method	Questionnaire, quantitative	Single case study, qualitative	Multiple case studies, interviews, qualitative	Conceptual
Contributions	Insights into TM in SMEs, analysis of the GNBS and its impact on TM, identification of three types of TM approaches applied in SMEs (based on a cluster analysis)	Insights into cooperation and networks on HRM and TM among various cluster actors and their potential for value creation for the cluster	Development of propositions for studying gender-inclusive TM and insights from a multiple-case study	Literature review, framework and testable propositions for studying the impact of TM on the psychological contract and the moderating role of generations
Others	Paper presented at the 1 st workshop on talent management of the European Institute of Advanced Studies in Management (EIASM) in Brussels, Belgium, April 2012	Paper presented at the 11 th World Congress of the International Federation of Scholarly Associations of Management (IFSAM) in Limerick, Ireland, June 2012	Paper presented at the 29 th Colloquium of the European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) in Montréal, Canada, July 2013	Paper presented at the 2 nd workshop on talent management of the European Institute of Advanced Studies in Management (EIASM) in Brussels, Belgium, October 2013

assuming that the peculiarities of this national environment, i.e. the national culture, legislation, governments and state involvement, works councils, and trade unions, provide the framework for managing human resources and talent.

Moving on, the *regional level* encompasses, for instance, clusters of companies in one region which are characterized by a series of linkages between single firms in the region. Clusters in Germany contribute to economic success and include numerous companies, and so understanding how TM can contribute to value creation in these clusters, compared to single firms, is of interest in this respect.

The *industry context* is included, in order to further analyze whether industry characteristics also impact the way TM is conducted. Integrating this level of analysis into the framework, we build on prior research and highlight “the potential for industry context to moderate the relationship between HR systems and organizational effectiveness” (Datta, Guthrie and Wright 2005, p. 142). In this thesis, the industry context of the media industry will be investigated partly as the frame for manuscript 3.

Concerning the *organizational context*, namely the organizational unit level, differences between SMEs and MNEs will mainly be investigated. In this innermost ring, TM takes place and is defined (as previously) as organizational practices utilized to attract, select, develop, and retain talented individuals. Thus, the individual level and talent definition (see e.g. Stahl et al. 2012) build the core for TM.

As outlined in the introduction, the aim of this thesis is to contribute to a more informed understanding of TM by shedding light on the subject through various context-oriented perspectives; therefore, each manuscript is dedicated to a different research level of the framework, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Overview of the research focus and context-level in the four manuscripts.

No of manuscript	Title	Research focus/context-level
Manuscript 1	Talent management in medium-sized German companies: an explorative study and agenda for future research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National context: Germany • Organizational context: TM practices in SMEs
Manuscript 2	Value creation through human resource management networks and talent management in clusters – A case study from Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National context: Germany • Regional level: TM and HRM networks in a cluster
Manuscript 3	Think talent – think male? A comparative case study analysis of gender inclusion in talent management practices in the German media industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National context: Germany • Industry context: Media industry • Organizational context: TM in two MNEs
Manuscript 4	Generational challenges to talent management: A framework for talent retention based on the psychological contract perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual level: Studying the impact of TM on the psychological contract of talents

All papers expand on the extant literature on TM and further develop the research around managing talent in various contexts in a number of ways: First, they provide in-depth knowledge on TM in Germany (national level), TM in regional clusters in Germany (regional level), and TM practices in organizations in the media industry, as well as SMEs. Thus, the case studies represent a (small) snapshot of the latest TM practices applied in German companies. Second, conceptually, they deliver interesting theoretical insights regarding potential indicators for analyzing the degree of gender inclusion in TM (within an organization), as well as the impact thereof on the psychological contract of talents and the moderating role of generations (individual level). Third, methodology-wise, the four papers offer a variety of insights, including empirical, large-scale quantitative survey results and multiple-comparative and single-case studies in Germany, thereby providing firsthand consolidated findings on TM in Germany.

In the subsequent chapters, in which the manuscripts are reproduced, the majority are written in American English; only the book chapter is written in British English, due to the formal requirements of the book's editors. Furthermore, all chapters cover different papers, each starting with an abstract and an introduction and then concluding with the respective bibliographical information and appendices relating to that particular manuscript; therefore, the sequences and numeration of footnotes, tables, and figures only refer to that particular paper. For the remaining figures, tables, and appendices referred to in this dissertation (introduction, conclusion), these can be found in the respective lists of tables, figures, and appendices at the beginning of the thesis. As can be seen, although the papers are self-contained with respect to research questions and methodologies, they sometimes

make use of prior findings, e.g. the paper on TM and HRM in clusters investigates the aspect of co-operation, i.e. networks in SMEs, a finding which was revealed in the paper on TM in German medium-sized companies. In case cross-linkages between the papers are made, these are indicated by corresponding references and sources.

3.2 Research objectives and questions

In Anne Huff's words, "Academic work is interesting and involving, but also difficult to organize and bring to completion" (Huff 2009, p. xiii) – being distracted by the wealth of research topics, or becoming paralyzed by the numerous possibilities and responsibilities of scholarship are just a few of the many pitfalls encountered in academic work. In this respect, formulating specific research questions at the beginning may help authors to keep track and stay focused throughout the entire research project (Flick 2003a; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2003).

In this dissertation, I seek to provide answers not only to descriptive research questions on how TM is applied in practice, exemplified using SMEs, a regional cluster, and two MNEs in Germany, but also I aim at making an explanatory contribution to the research field, by drawing on theoretical insights from other domains, as well as putting forward new frameworks and conceptualizations (e.g. the moderating role of generations on the relationship of TM on the psychological contract of talents and the conceptualization of gender-inclusive TM). Thirdly, I would like to provide some normative suggestions for practitioners with respect to practical recommendations and lessons learned (indicated by subheadings such as 'practical implications' and 'managerial relevance in the different manuscripts'). In detail, the underlying research questions for each of the four manuscripts are as follows (see Table 3).

Table 3. Research objectives and questions in the four manuscripts.

Manuscript 1	<p>Objective: Investigating TM in a national context and researching to what extent and how the national environment affects the design and applied practices of TM in small and medium-sized enterprises in Germany.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do SMEs in Germany deal with a skills shortage? • What are the special characteristics and challenges in TM for SMEs? • Can the characteristics of the GNBS be used to explain features of TM in Germany?
Manuscript 2	<p>Objective: Analyzing, on a regional level, how active participation in a cluster environment can contribute to a firm and a cluster's value creation in the area of HRM and TM, by focusing especially on SMEs.</p> <p>Question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can active participation in a cluster environment contribute to a firm and a cluster's value creation in the area of HRM and TM?
Manuscript 3	<p>Objective: Gaining insights into TM practices on the organizational and industry level of larger enterprises in the media industry in Germany, looking for variations (based on the comparative case study design) and especially analyzing the question whether TM is inclusive with respect to gender in these companies.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do firms pursue different TM approaches with respect to gender inclusiveness and, if so, are these linked to the number of women in management positions? • How can gender-inclusive TM be conceptualized, and under what conditions may TM be considered inclusive with respect to gender? • What are the possible indicators for gender-inclusive TM?
Manuscript 4	<p>Objective: Conceptually analyzing the impact of TM on the psychological contract of talents and the moderating role of generational effects.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does TM impact the psychological contract of talents? • How do different generations and preferences affect this relationship?

3.3 Research design and methodologies

This section summarizes the research design and methods used in the four manuscripts on an aggregated level; a detailed description of the respective methods, data collection, and analysis can be found in each manuscript.

When considering the construction of a research design, research objectives and specific research questions (see Chapter 3.2) play a role, as well as the methodological approach, degree of standardization, and control over research events, as well as the availability of resources (e.g. material, time and human resources) to conduct the research (Flick 2003b). As already shown in Table 1, the four manuscripts all use different research methods, and, as outlined earlier in the chapter describing the need to contextualize TM, the thesis can be assigned to the contextualist paradigm of research on HRM (Brewster 1999). This means

that research on TM is aimed at collecting evidence and understanding differences of TM in different contexts (e.g. by using the NBS approach), and it is less concerned with probing and testing hypotheses (Brewster 1999). This is mainly due to the fact that the research field of TM is not yet advanced; therefore, the research approaches used herein follow a rather inductive approach, by analyzing and trying to understand complex organizational phenomena and TM architectures and thus trying to contribute to theory enhancement and building, rather than theory testing (Gioia and Pitre 1990; Flick 2003a). Based on the scarcity of empirical investigations in TM in general, and the fact that TM in Germany has not been academically investigated before, many ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions have emerged. In order answer these, we used different research methods (e.g. a quantitative questionnaire) but focused particularly on qualitative research methods (multiple- and single-case studies, interviews, and secondary data analysis), in order to enable us to analyze companies in-depth (Yin 2009). Consequently, the majority of the papers can be ascribed furthermore to the frame of reference of the interpretive paradigm, in an attempt to “generate descriptions, insights, and explanations of events so that the system of interpretations and meaning, and the structure and organizing processes, are revealed” (Gioia and Pitre 1990, p. 588), and partly on the verge of the radical humanist paradigm, focusing on investigating ‘why’ certain phenomena occur and looking for deeper structural-level answers (Gioia and Pitre 1990; Burrell and Morgan 2005; Lamnek 2005).

Moreover, using a variety of research methods in different papers to approach one topic (TM) allows for a triangulated approach in a twofold way: The first is data triangulation (using multiple sources of evidence, e.g. HR/TM experts, male and female talents, documents, and publicly available sources) and the second is method triangulation, i.e. ‘between-method triangulation’ through the combination of interviews, the analysis of secondary material, and questionnaires (Flick 2003b; Denzin 2009; Yin 2009; Farquhar 2012).

Table 4. Overview of the research methods used in the four manuscripts.

Manuscript 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research method: Quantitative study using a questionnaire, with 24 questions • Sample size: 700 SMEs • Sample description: SMEs (not publicly traded) with 30 and 2,000 employees and varying yearly sales volumes of < 30 million euros: 30%; 30-100 million euros: 51%; and > 100 million euros: 19% • Time of data collection: Summer 2011 • Way of collecting data: Telephone interviews with chief executive officers (CEOs) and owner/founders to answer the questionnaire • Data analysis: SPSS (Version 18.0), descriptive statistics, cluster analysis
Manuscript 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research method: Qualitative study using a single-case study as the research object • Sample size: One cluster with 173 actors • Sample description: intelligent technical systems (ITS) cluster in Germany • Time of data collection: Spring 2012 • Way of collecting data: Collecting data based on publicly available sources, such as the internet, newspaper articles, industry reports, and statistical data issued by the Federal Statistical Office in Germany, and internal company documents, such as newsletters • Data analysis: Data were analyzed according to the various levels and relationships in the firm, network, and context level of the clusters
Manuscript 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research method: Qualitative study using a comparative case study design • Sample size: Two media companies in Germany, 43 individual interviews • Sample description: Both media companies headquartered in Germany, with several thousands of employees and similar product portfolios (print and digital online products) • Time of data collection: Winter 2012 through summer 2013 • Way of collecting data: Primary data collection through semi-structured interviews with six HR and TM experts and another 37 employees (talented individuals who participate in talent development programs); secondary data collection using publicly available sources, such as industry reports and internal company documents • Data analysis: Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the content was analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA (Version 11)
Manuscript 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual paper • Research method: Literature analysis, development of a framework with testable propositions

4 RESEARCH MANUSCRIPTS

4.1 Talent management in medium-sized German companies: an explorative study and agenda for future research

Manuscript No. 1

This manuscript is published as: Festing, M., Schäfer, L., Scullion, H. (2013). Talent management in medium-sized German companies: an explorative study and agenda for future research. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 24 (09), 1872-1893.

DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2013.777538

4.2 Value creation through human resource management networks and talent management in clusters - A case study from Germany

Manuscript No. 2

This manuscript is published as: Festing, M., Schäfer, L. (2013). Value Creation Through Human Resource Management and Talent Management in Clusters - A Case Study from Germany. In: K. Brown, J. Burgess, M. Festing & S. Royer (Eds.): Resources and Competitive Advantage in Clusters. Munich and Mehring. Rainer Hampp Verlag.

DOI: 10.1688/9783866189652

4.3 Think talent – think male? A comparative case study analysis of gender inclusion in talent management practices in the German media industry

Manuscript No. 3

This manuscript was accepted for publication with the International Journal of Human Resource Management on June 7, 2014 for the special issue: A global perspective on diversity and inclusion in work organizations; guest editors Elaine Farndale, Michal Biron, Dennis R. Briscoe, and Sumita Raghuram.

Festing, M., Kornau, A., & Schäfer, L. (In press). Think talent – think male? A comparative case study analysis of gender inclusion in talent management practices in the German media industry. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*.

Manuscript available from the author upon request.

4.4 Generational challenges to talent management: A framework for talent retention based on the psychological contract perspective

Manuscript No. 4

This manuscript is published as: Festing, M., & Schäfer, L. (2014). Generational challenges to talent management: A framework for talent retention based on the psychological-contract perspective. *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 49 (2), 262-271.

DOI: 10.1016/j.jwb.2013.11.010

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of key findings and main contributions

Having outlined in detail the four manuscripts in the previous chapters, this section now summarizes the key findings of the different research projects on the different levels of framework analysis (see Figure 4). Therefore, subheadings based on the different layers of the framework were chosen to discuss the respective results.

Key findings regarding the national context

With respect to particularities of the national context, the GNBS, which is characterized by a strong focus on long-termism and developmental orientation (heavy investments in training and development), and a high degree of co-determination (Hall and Soskice 2001; Festing 2012), not only impacts the way companies do business, but it also influences the way TM in German companies is conducted. This was apparent in MNE case companies, which used a rather hybrid approach to TM, by offering huge assortments of general training and development programs, seminars, workshops (publication of yearly company brochures), and especially apprenticeships – traineeships to develop talent early on – in addition to designated talent development for only small target groups. Furthermore, the strong focus on long-term orientation and heavy investment in training and development was also visible in SMEs, in the identified TM profiles (highly engaged talent managers, reactive talent managers, and retention-based talent managers); for instance, in the questionnaire, talent retention (long-term orientation) turned out to be number-one priority for the participating companies. And finally, the high degree of co-determination characterizing the GNBS (Hall and Soskice 2001; Festing 2012) was also reflected in the TM processes, when the works council and certain steering committees had the last say in the final selection decisions for the talent development programs. To conclude, it turned out that using the national business systems approach (Whitley 1999) can serve as a good indicator for studying possible influencing factors of the respective national context on TM practices – at least in the case of Germany.

It was also noted that government, as well as political entities such as trade unions and works councils, have significant control over the management of human resources and talents in organizations (Brewster 2004; Festing 2012), and thus they can also shape the strategic goal setting of TM; for example, the political discussion regarding introducing a gender quota resulted in a focus on female career advancement in TM (CDU/CSU and

SPD 2013). However, the German government is also quite supportive with respect to the services and initiatives offered by institutions, agencies, and ministries to help companies retain workers (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales 2014), and it also contributes special funding (e.g. cluster competitions and funding) (BMBF 2012) for organizational/cluster development and thus indirectly influences the disposable resources available for managing talent.

Key findings with respect to the regional and industry context

In the *regional context*, in our case study on an IT cluster in Germany, we analyzed and identified interdependencies, cooperation, and networks in the areas of HRM and TM (OstWestfalenLippe Marketing GmbH 2012). It was interesting to note that relationships among horizontal, vertical, and lateral cluster actors went beyond knowledge sharing, included joint investments in skills, resources, and cross-sectoral projects, and created several types of interdependencies (Thompson 1967); consequently, overcoming barriers of knowledge and resource sharing in clusters generates relational rents (Dyer and Singh 1998). This strategy of resource sharing is especially attractive for SMEs as a way out of the resource dilemma and possibility as a way to better compete in the war for talent. Overall, TM and HRM networks in clusters contribute to value creation, and thus they have the potential for creating the competitive advantage of the cluster.

With respect to findings on the *industry context*, our case study on the media industry offered interesting insights into the applied TM practices of media companies. The media industry, with an approximately equal 50% split of females and males at entry level, and relatively high numbers of women in management positions (as shown in the case study, examples of around 30% women with managerial responsibilities and in Company B even 33% at board level), resulted in the high priority of gender diversity measures and explicit TM activities to promote female career advancement. As mentioned in the description of the German context, only 3% of management board members in Germany are women (Holst et al. 2012); thus, the cases are not representative of all industry sectors. Consequently, the introduction of a gender quota for talent development programs has to be seen against this background and is rather unique. Another major influencing factor associated with the media industry in Germany at the moment is digitalization, and it became apparent that the topic of digitalization as a major challenge for the media industry was discussed and addressed in talent development programs (e.g. keynote sessions, roundtables) and incorporated in assessment processes (talents had to demonstrate

creativity and entrepreneurship in assessment centers). As a result, there were small indicators showing that industry-relevant topics and themes were incorporated in TM. However, as the sample of only two companies was very small, one cannot generalize based on these findings but can only detect and identify common actions and potential trends.

Key findings regarding the organizational context

One major insight identified in the research projects on TM practices in SMEs and MNEs was that SMEs choose a different TM approach than MNEs, by applying a rather universal approach and focusing on larger, all-employee target groups, specific technical expert groups, and only seldom senior management/executives or high potentials. As mentioned earlier, as a finding of the cluster project, one way of coping with the war for talent for SMEs is to join forces with other companies/institutions and cooperate or form a network on HR and TM topics. However, only 25% of the SMEs in this instance used this option. A surprising result was that, for SMEs, diversity management, or topics such as the consideration of new target groups (especially women, older workers and migrants), was of least importance. In contrast, the two MNEs investigated took an extremely professional approach to managing diversity and gender inclusion in particular – measures included mentoring programs for women, networking events, speaker series, part- and flexi-time, kindergarten and daycare offers for working mothers, and the implementation of a gender quota for talent development programs. The assigned importance of (gender) diversity topics in media companies can be attributed partly to the fact that the numbers of women in the workforce and in managerial positions (in Company B even at the board level) were relatively high. A closer look at the findings of the small- and medium-sized sample, however, illustrated that the larger the company, the more emphasis it places on TM, backing prior findings of studies which found that larger companies mostly have HR strategies and formalized HR systems, whereas small enterprises, due to resource constraints, only dedicate a few resources to HR (Kabst, Wehner, Meifert and Kötter 2009). Therefore, the degree of TM professionalism and the priority of diversity management can be determined by organization size as well as the number of women in management positions.

However, our analysis of the TM practices in MNEs disclosed that, although TM was aimed at female career advancement, sex-related discriminatory risk and gender bias were prevalent in the talent definition, the approach, underlying career orientation, program

content, and selection processes, thereby risking replicating the previously known ‘think manager-think male’ phenomenon to talent (Schein 1973; 1993; 2007). As a result, we concluded that gender inclusion is high, but only if these identified TM elements address and support all talents – irrespective of their sex and gender value orientation.

Insights on the individual level

Conceptually, the manuscripts proposed comprehensive literature reviews and a framework (manuscript 4) for analyzing the impact of TM on the psychological contract of talents. Organizations can use TM as a signaling device, in order to demonstrate the importance of talent and to fulfill their part of the psychological contract/obligations (Guzzo and Noonan 1994; Rousseau 1995; Sonnenberg, Koene and Paauwe 2011), which in turn should lead to a more fulfilled and relational psychological contract for the designated talent. Investing in fulfilled, relational psychological contracts can lead to desired outcomes such as job satisfaction, loyalty, and performance, and a reduction in the intention to resign (Rousseau 1995; Morrison and Robinson 1997; Conway and Briner 2005). However, as indicated in the framework, this relationship between TM and the psychological contract is moderated by generational effects. Accordingly, based on differences in work-related values and preferences, highly engaged and extensive TM activities are especially important for retaining Generations X and Y talents, who value but also demand training and development opportunities and continuous career advancement.

Empirical and conceptual contributions

Building on the key findings of the four manuscripts, as outlined in the introduction, the aim of the thesis is to enrich and advance the knowledge on TM and contribute to a more informed understanding of TM in various contexts. To outline the significance of the findings of this thesis to the research field on TM, empirical and theoretical contributions will now be outlined.

Empirical contribution: The four research manuscripts provide the first results on TM in Germany – a domain which, so far, has not been investigated in academic papers. The key results and insights presented cover findings on TM in company examples of SMEs, MNEs, and a regional cluster in Germany. They identify and highlight the variety of approaches taken to TM by different organizations, and thus they clearly argue for a context-oriented approach when studying TM (e.g. at the national, regional, industry, organizational, and individual levels). Although the findings are based on German company examples, some overall insights into TM differences between SMEs and MNEs

are of higher importance to the research field of TM and provide new starting points for future research; for example, we determined that SMEs rather use a universal approach to TM, compared to MNEs, which mainly follow an elite (mixed) approach. In another study on TM in SMEs in Spain, the authors also found out that SMEs managed talent differently; many companies used a more universal approach (seeing all employees as talent), but some also used an exclusive approach, although the differentiation was not formalized in separate HR policies nor transparently communicated and treated much more informally, in order to try to avoid favoritism regarding non-talent employees (Valverde et al. 2013).

Conceptual and theoretical contribution: The thesis contributed to theory development and the formulation of new theoretical insights for TM, by integrating, adapting, and combining it with existing theories and literature from other research areas, such as institutional theory, gendered HRM, gender studies, generational studies, and psychological contract theory. First, the thesis greatly contributed to a multi-level analysis of TM in different external contexts and demonstrated that using the NBS approach can help identify and better understand institutional considerations in the national environment which influence the design and implementation of TM practices, because they structure and shape the ways in which companies do business in certain environments (Whitley 1992). Second, the thesis made a contribution to the theoretical enrichment of studying TM in SMEs and providing insights into and new starting points for future research, especially given the identification of the three TM profiles (highly engaged talent managers, reactive talent managers, and retention-based talent managers), findings on HRM networks and TM indicating cooperation as a potential strategy to cope better with the war for talent, and possibilities of value creation in clusters. Third, it places the talent's perspective in the spotlight and focuses on the individual level of TM – as seen in manuscript 3, a conceptualization of gender-inclusive TM is proposed, highlighting the need to support all talented employees equally, independent of their sex and/or gender-stereotypical orientation. And lastly, through manuscript 4, the thesis highlights the impact of TM on the psychological contract of talents and the role of different generations, resulting in a conceptual framework on which to study the impact of TM on the psychological contract of talents and testable propositions to investigate the mediating role of different generations.

5.2 Overall limitations of the manuscripts

The research methods applied in the different manuscripts of this thesis also have some disadvantages and limitations. Whereas a detailed discussion of the limitations can be found in each of the four papers, at this point a general discussion on the limitations regarding research methods and the context level will be addressed.

Methodological issues

Due to the dearth of research on TM in Germany, especially of any qualitative nature, explorative research methods and case studies were conducted, to understand and investigate TM applied in German companies. As such, when selecting the research methods, the authors were aware of and accepted the general concerns and disadvantages with regard to measurement problems, small sample sizes, and problems generalizing the findings. Especially with respect to sample size, the choice to study a smaller number of specific companies in-depth in the case study designs, and thus be able to portray only an excerpt of common practices and companies, makes it difficult to generalize the findings; small sample sizes – per definition – do not allow for statistical analysis to verify the findings (Flick 2003a; Yin 2009; Farquhar 2012). Moreover, in the case of using a questionnaire, some limitations emerged. As indicated, data collection for manuscript 1 took place as part of a larger research project run by a large auditing company, which had an impact on the design of the questionnaire (lengths, scales, use of single items). Furthermore, due to the explorative stage of empirical studies on TM, one could not refer to validated scales to operationalize and measure TM, thereby contesting the robustness of scales and the items used. With respect to the timing of data collection, research took place between 2011 and 2013 as singular snapshots, and no longitudinal research design was carried out. This means that results have to be interpreted as portraying applied contemporary practices, and they do not provide additional insights into how practices have evolved or changed over time (Yin 2009). Lastly, with respect to the conceptual paper, there is the general limitation of relying solely on literature reviews and the analysis of secondary data without primary data collection.

Context-related issues

The national context chosen for the manuscripts was Germany. However, although it was intended to keep the national setting stable, in order to avoid cross-national variations, this context specificity can also be interpreted as a limitation. As one of the strongest econo-

mies in the world (The World Bank 2012), Germany has managed to overcome the GFC quickly and instead, due to demographic shifts, suffers from a shortage of skilled labor. Therefore, data and findings collected in German organizations cannot be transferred easily to other contexts. Based on the fact that SMEs face similar problems with regard to resource constraints, the liability of smallness (Stinchcombe 1965), and a lack of brand awareness, as well as insights into value creation processes through relationships among cluster actors, one can assume the applicability and generalizability of some findings beyond the German context. Conversely, it must be acknowledged that some insights are linked closely to the specific company example, for example its scope, and the focus of talent development programs in the two media industry MNEs.

Issues regarding the conceptualization of TM

The third area of limitation focuses on the conceptualization of TM itself. In the manuscripts, TM was either seen as an entire, idiosyncratic system (manuscript 1, manuscript 4), without going into detail and tackling various practices, or, on the contrary, the research focus was on one particular aspect of TM only (manuscript 2 focused on HRM and TM networks; manuscript 3 on talent development programs). The attempt was made in each paper to point out that the terms ‘talent’ and ‘TM’ (and the focus of practices involved) are defined differently from company to company; however, the varying, heterogeneous conceptualizations of TM used in this thesis present a limitation that needs to be addressed.

5.3 Future research needs

Based on the various limitations and findings of the different research projects, in this chapter a comprehensive overview of topics and questions for future research will be outlined. These are grouped into three subheadings: First, some more general aspects, specifically addressing the identified limitations and based on the selected research methods of this thesis, are presented; second, further research needs are structured according to the various levels included in the framework for studying context-oriented TM (see Figure 3); and lastly, ideas for incorporating other theoretical lenses to the field of TM are proposed.

General considerations for future research

As mentioned previously, the TM research field still lacks empirical, large-scale studies complementing the numerous qualitative research contributions and case studies on TM

(Dries 2013a; Al Ariss et al. 2014). Furthermore, additional longitudinal insights, looking at how TM evolves in a certain context and possibly develops and changes over time, would be desirable.

Furthermore, with respect to the immediate research needs based on the manuscripts included in this thesis, research projects replicating and transferring the design of the studies to other companies and contexts, and encompassing larger samples, are necessary in order to back up and confirm the validity of the results taken from the manuscripts in this thesis, especially with respect to the proposed indicators for studying gender-inclusive TM. Moreover, the inconsistent operationalization of the breadth and width of TM included in this thesis calls for more conceptual and theoretical work for developing all-encompassing definitions of the practices and scales employed to conceptualize and measure TM. Lastly, with respect to the conceptual paper and literature-based development of a framework to study the impact of TM on the psychological contract and the moderating role of generations, the propositions suggested herein need to be tested empirically in the field in another research project.

Future research needs concerning different context-levels

As mentioned previously, the different papers in this dissertation focused on Germany as the national context, in order to keep one component of the context stable. However, and needless to say, TM also takes place beyond the German border. The internationalization of companies, the need for international managers, global competition, global mobility, and the challenges involved in attracting international talent, as well as the diversity of the workforce, have led collectively to the development of global talent management (GTM) (Tarique and Schuler 2010; Scullion and Collings 2011; Collings 2014). However, cross-country and cross-cultural research projects are scarce, so systematic research on GTM practices, by comparing TM in different national settings, and making use of cultural dimensions (Hofstede 1980; Ronen and Shenkar 1985; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta 2004), or researching TM between headquarters and subsidiaries (Mäkelä, Björkman and Ehrnrooth 2010; Mellahi and Collings 2010), balancing the global standardization of TM decisions, and local variations and adaptations (Collings et al. 2011; Festing and Eidems 2011; Dowling, Festing and Engle 2013) or TM in emerging markets (CIPD 2010; McDonnell et al. 2012) are interesting fields. With an increasingly diverse workforce, and intense competition for international talents, differences in attracting, developing, and retaining talent from diverse backgrounds, as well as challenges in fully integrat-

ing the talent of skilled ethnic minorities (Al Ariss et al. 2013), need to be investigated, in order to succeed in the global war for talent (Collings et al. 2011; Scullion and Collings 2011; Festing et al. 2013).

In the *national context*, using Whitley's (1999) concept of national business systems for studying peculiarities of the national context that have an impact on the dominant approach to HRM in Germany turned out to be very fruitful in better understanding drivers and influencing factors behind the applied TM practices of German companies. Therefore, we recommend using the NBS approach, or the varieties of capitalism perspective (for overviews, see Hall and Soskice 2001; Brewster 2004), to investigate clearly distinctive, country-specific TM features.

With respect to the *regional context*, a first example on value creation processes through HRM and TM networks among horizontal, vertical, and lateral cluster actors demonstrated that investments in relationships, joint projects, knowledge, and resource sharing among cluster actors which would usually compete against each other and fight for the same pool of talent, can generate competitive advantage through joining forces. Since to date only around one-quarter of the investigated German SME sample makes use of cooperation and networks, further studies and primary data (quantitative and qualitative) are needed to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of cooperating in the field of HRM and different rent generation processes at all cluster levels. However, if the findings from the case study, and the potential of HRM and TM networks to contribute to competitive advantage and thus to the economic success of clusters, can be confirmed, this has major implications for cluster management as well as governmental and political institutions investing in cluster development.

In the *industry context*, our findings were based on two media industry MNEs in Germany, but further studies are necessary to verify the data gathered. For instance, the media industry in general is considered to provide modern workplaces, and the 50% share of female students and women in media companies is quite unique, compared to other, more conservative and male-dominated sectors (e.g. construction, engineering, technical industries). It can be assumed that the investigated TM practices and special gender diversity initiatives of the two MNEs in the media industry are rather well-advanced and professional examples, and it is therefore rather unlikely to find voluntarily installed gender quotas for talent development programs in other circumstances again. As a result, more cross-sector research on applied TM practices, gender inclusion, and general

diversity management is needed. Furthermore, the impact of industry characteristics on the way human resources and talents are managed should be investigated in more detail (Datta et al. 2005; Stahl et al. 2012) – one interesting observation cited by Stahl et al. (2012, p. 30) was that the degree of local adaptations of GTM practices varied across industries and that consumer products, for instance, needed to reflect local markets much more than, say, software or pharmaceutical companies.

While there is a good deal of agreement on the need for integrated approaches to TM practices in large MNEs, there is little rigorous research on the subject in their SME counterparts (Stahl et al. 2007; Mellahi and Collings 2010; Festing et al. 2013; Valverde et al. 2013).

In the *organizational context*, despite the findings of our study on TM in SMEs, more rigorous research is needed into how SMEs apply TM practices. Furthermore, research on TM in SMEs vs. MNEs, in both the private and the public sector, such as in not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, or ministries, could reveal interesting findings on managing talent in different types of organizations, which subsequently would also be particularly interesting for practitioners. Furthermore, there is not only a call for contextualizing TM, but also for ‘contextualizing talent’ (Nijs et al. 2014, p. 187), assuming that talent is context-dependent (Dries 2013a) and that the organizational context will influence the kind of talent definition; in this case, research projects investigating *how* the different organizational variables (for instance company size, culture) impact the definition of talent would also be interesting.

With respect to the *individual level*, aspects such as the impact of TM on the psychological contract of talents, the role of different generations (or generation-specific TM), and gender (gender inclusion) in TM have been mainly put forward conceptually, so further analyses and research projects are required to better understand the drivers, influencing factors, and preferences of the talents themselves. New research projects could investigate the impact of TM on the contents of the psychological contract, the process of contract-making, the parties involved (contract makers), related generational differences, and whether TM has a positive impact on creating a relational psychological contract and thus has the potential to contribute to attracting and retaining talents. If so, and going even further, comparing those people who have been identified as talent to those who have not been selected could be compared with respect to differences in the psychological contracts of various generations and be the subject of future study (Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Mäkelä,

Smale and Sumelius 2013). Similarly, instead of generational differences, gender issues could also be included in this research design (Tatli, Vassilopoulou and Özbilgin 2013). To sum up, regarding future research needs at the individual level, in the studies included in this thesis no deliberate distinction between permanent or contingent workers was made; however, future research could also investigate whether there are differences based on the duration of employment modes (temporary, part-time, contracted, outsourced, and consulting services) as a fast-growing group in the workplace (Vance and Vaiman 2008; Vaiman 2010).

Future research needs incorporating other theoretical stances

Finally, with respect to possible *theoretical perspectives* which could be adopted when studying TM, questions as to why and how TM has become so popular (in a certain context) could be investigated, using the new institutionalism perspective of (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), which could then serve as a reference and possible theoretical lens to investigate why firms apply TM practices. For instance, one reason for the popularity of TM could be mimetic isomorphism, which occurs when practices which have been proven successful in a given environment by important players are imitated by competitors (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Furthermore, research endeavors analyzing TM more systematically through the lens of the situational approach (also referred to as contingency approach, see Kieser 2006) would also be interesting, as the approach states that in order to be effective, organizations have to change and adapt their organizational structures to specific situations and contexts, alter external circumstances and differentiate between internal (e.g. size, ownership structure, production technology) and external (context, competition, customers, technological advancement, societal and cultural aspects) influencing factors on the organizational structure. Thirdly, another germane theoretical perspective is the agency theory (Eisenhardt 1989), which describes tensions and conflicts between principals (e.g. CEOs, owners) and agents (e.g. line managers) and could be used to investigate this relationship with respect to TM. For instance, one example which came up in a discussion with an HR manager was that line managers were withholding information on their best employees and not nominating them for differentiated talent development programs, because they feared losing their best team members; therefore, they hid information on excellent working performance. Therefore, future research could investigate this principal-agent relationship with respect to TM, in order to better understand the

dynamics of and possible risks associated with information asymmetries and hidden intentions.

This comprehensive overview of research topics substantiates the need for more in-depth, empirical, and conceptual studies to advance and develop the TM research field and to allow for theory building in TM. The cited areas for future research are just a small example, as possibilities and prospects for integrating other theoretical frameworks and concepts into the TM research field are numerous and promising.

5.4 Practical implications

Based on the many different research projects investigating TM in different companies in Germany, some implications for line managers, decision-makers, and HR and TM experts emerged. Whereas detailed recommendations are addressed in each manuscript, in this section some overriding recommendations with managerial relevance are outlined.

Take TM seriously: Given the shortage of skilled labor and the demographic situation in many countries (European Commission 2011), attracting and retaining talent should be of the utmost strategic priority for companies of any size. Furthermore, as proposed in manuscript 4, TM also has the potential to serve as a signaling device, and thus it positively influences the psychological contract of talents (Guzzo and Noonan 1994; Rousseau 1995; Sonnenberg et al. 2011; Katou and Budhwar 2012). Projected outcomes of fulfilled, relational psychological contracts are job satisfaction, commitment, performance, and a lower intention to quit (Rousseau 1995; Morrison and Robinson 1997; Sonnenberg 2011). This pertains not only to large, international companies, but also especially to SMEs, which are struggling even more in the competition for talented individuals and often do not follow a strategic long-term strategy in managing their human resources; as a result, TM might be a way to increase their brand awareness, attract more talent, develop, and train talents, and thus increase retention rates.

Join forces: Another interesting insight from the research project on TM in SMEs was that, so far, only 25% of the 700 SMEs in the sample indicated that they cooperate with other companies and institutions; however, as outlined above, building networks and cooperating with others can help companies to bundle their resources, generate economies of scale, gain access to other markets, and share knowledge and experiences (Sydow 2006; Helbich 2007). As demonstrated in the example of TM in clusters, networking and cooperating

with other clusters in HRM and TM can contribute to value creation in clusters. Accordingly, companies should take a more strategic approach and consider joining forces with other companies, to form a cluster, or with public institutions or universities. For instance, taking the case of business schools, these can be a good partner for organizations with respect to talent attraction (access to relevant pools of talents) and talent retention (investing in the development of talents through higher education programs or customized/joint talent development programs).

Start to attract talent early on: As demonstrated by the findings on SMEs in Germany, in order to cope with the challenges involved in attracting young talents, companies try to recruit them locally at an early career stage, for example by visiting schools. Due to the shortage of labor and shifts in demography, many MNEs are also looking for first contacts with young talents early on in the recruitment process, with the aim of creating a relationship with these talented students before they make a hiring decision – something which is referred to in the German context as ‘talent relationship management’ (TRM) (based on concepts of customer relationship management) (Trost 2012). Some companies offer complex software solutions for managing pools of talents, such as by recruiting contacts, internship alumni, and potential candidates, supporting organizations in their talent-sourcing strategies, to fuel talent pipelines, and also allowing customized targeting (Intraworlds 2014). Although available TRM examples focus on Germany (Trost 2012), more academic research is needed to study and validate the drivers and challenges of TRM and its application in other circumstances.

Ensure equal opportunities: When promoting a company as an attractive employer to male and female talent, the design and implementation of TM practices and talent development programs might play a critical role in the talents’ choice of a future employer. Especially in contexts such as that found in Germany, which serves as an example through its discussion on introducing a nationwide gender quota and the country’s shortage of skilled labor, the focus is on female career advancement, and in this respect companies should be careful and self-critical when designing TM processes and practices, and make sure that these are not based upon a ‘think talent-think male’ philosophy. In line with ensuring equal opportunities, the transparency of processes and information is also very important, and on a more standardized level, as shown in one case company, an effective measure to guarantee equal chances for and the participation of female talent in talent development programs is the introduction of a gender quota (50% for TM programs).

Train the 'talent managers': With any organizational TM system, there are new tasks and responsibilities for those in charge of identifying, recruiting, reviewing, evaluating, and nominating employees for talent development programs or any kind of differentiated treatment. As outlined in the case studies on MNEs and SMEs, HR and TM departments are usually in charge of managing processes and systems, but owners, CEOs, and direct supervisors still have a huge impact on identifying and nominating talents, and therefore training for those managers and executives with managerial responsibility should be installed to guarantee consistency and fairness and to avoid selection errors in the identification and selection of talent (Mäkelä et al. 2010; Björkman et al. 2013; Gelens, Dries, Hofmans and Pepermans 2013).

Focus on the individual: In many service-oriented business models, human resources are the key to success; therefore, companies should try to better understand the preferences, needs, values, and expectations of their employees. Individual variables discussed in the manuscripts include generational (older and younger workers) and gender aspects; however, looking beyond the German context, valuing and embracing the cultural diversity of talents (different nationalities) are also highly important (Crampton and Hodge 2007; McCartney and Worman 2010). Hence, considering that diversity elements such as age, gender, and culture are just a few means of interpretation, one could also extend the term to diverse employment conditions (contingent vs. full-time) (Vance and Vaiman 2008; Vaiman 2010) or the country of origin of employees (local employees, expatriates, and inpatriates) (Al Ariss et al. 2013). As a result, bearing in mind the diverse pool of employees available nowadays, a one-size-fits-all TM approach seems inappropriate.

Summing up the concluding chapter of this dissertation, the varied avenues for future research, as well as important managerial implications, emphasize the potential of this research field for academics and practitioners alike. Accordingly, although TM research is still lacking a sound theoretical foundation, it is far from being just another management fashion and should be treated as an independent, growing research stream which can offer interesting insights into and added value for the management of people in organizations.

Looking ahead, the research field of (global) TM will surely advance and mature. Some recent special issues on TM theories and future avenues (Dries 2013b; Al Ariss et al. 2014) have contributed significantly to the development of the field, and more calls for papers (call for papers on TM in emerging markets, Glaister, Ahammad, Sarala and Glaister 2014) and book publications are expected to follow (Sparrow, Scullion and Tarique forthcoming).

ing). In the future, the individual perspective of talents (and non-talents), as well as diversity aspects in managing talent, will most likely play a more dominant role in TM research, due to demographic developments, talent shortages in many countries, and the crucial need to attract and retain talent (Strack et al. 2008; European Commission 2011). Alongside the increasing number of publications on GTM and TM in emerging countries (CIPD 2010; Cooke et al. 2014; Sidani and Al Ariss 2014), the convergence vs. divergence debate on TM practices will increase in importance (Stahl et al. 2012). While there are some indicators of convergence, as MNEs compete for talent around the globe and want to ensure consistency of processes and practices (Stahl et al. 2012; Al Ariss et al. 2014), finding a balance between global standardization and local adaptations will be a challenge for any international organization, in which case calls for multi-level approaches and context-oriented research will surely persist in the future.

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SWORN DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have written this thesis entirely independently (apart from manuscripts 1-4, which have been published together with co-authors) and have used no other sources and resources than those indicated herein. Furthermore, all the quotations and citations from foreign sources are clearly marked as such.

The thesis has not been presented to any other examining body; however, parts of the thesis (manuscripts 1, 2, and 4) have already been published in journals or (manuscript 3) are accepted for publication in the near future.

I am aware that a false declaration will have legal consequences.

Place, Date

Signature