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Attracting and retaining talent

A qualitative study about Talent Management within the knowledge-intensive organizations in Sweden

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Abstract

Although Talent Management is an area of research that has captured the attention of many as organizations around the world compete for talent, it is a relatively new area of research. Sweden is a country where the shortage of skilled workforce is significant and demand is high, especially in the knowledge-intensive industry. Hence, the aim of the thesis is to contribute to the understanding of how organizations in Sweden in the knowledge-intensive industries, attract and retain talents through talent management practices. This study is based on a qualitative methodology where the data collection was conducted through eight semi-structured interviews with ten respondents. The results show that talent can be defined both as something that all employees can become and develop into, and as personal qualities, but also depending on the context and situation. Talent attraction is achieved through employer branding and reputation building. A good reputation can be achieved through honesty and openness, through partnerships with other actors that are beneficial to the organization and through personal encounters both outside and inside the organization. In addition to the obvious benefits, an organization can develop methods to develop and enable career goals. Organizational culture can have an impact on the work of Talent Management and thus can set norms and influence perceptions of talent within an organization.

Keywords - *Talent management, talent, attracting talent, retaining talent, organizational culture, Swedish context, human resource management.*

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1. Introduction

Attracting high-performing candidates is a critical component of staff selection for the overall success of the organization. Over time, human capital has become important to companies and organizations because it can contribute to long-lasting competitive advantage (Konopaske & Werner, 2005; Chapman et al., 2005). Over the past two decades, it has become increasingly recognized that the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees contribute to organizational performance. The human asset is considered to be the primary source of value, growth and sustainable competitive advantage in an organization (Kashive & Khanna, 2017; Chapman et al., 2005). Thus, it is significant for companies around the world to create knowledge about the practices in the talent process that can help employers attract talented individuals to become their potential future employees and then stay and develop within the organization (Holland et al., 2007). Due to the changing, uncertain and competitive global environment, many organizations around the world encounter challenges in attracting and retaining talent (Schuler et al., 2011). Many professions encounter this type of challenge, but knowledge-intensive organizations in particular (Alvesson, 2000). One of the main barriers, especially in knowledge-intensive industries, is the difficulty in recruiting staff with the necessary skills (Almega, 2019). Why the challenge mainly concerns knowledge-intensive organizations is because these types of organizations are composed of parts and knowledge on which its survival and success depends. Furthermore, research differs according to geographical regions, and it is thus important to take into account the cultural awareness and differences, not only of a country but also of the organization's internal culture. This means that practices in the recruitment process may differ also depending on the cultural aspects. There are several countries that are in need of developing talent management activities and one of them is Sweden for which the shortage of skilled labor is evident (Tyskbo, 2019).

1.1 Background

There are different organizational practices and methods that affect the number and types of recruiting individuals willing to apply or accept a particular vacancy (Chapman et al., 2005). Organizations need to invest resources in activities and practices for the most promising talent (Iles et al., 2010). Before allocating resources, the organization needs to understand what they need and hence it is wise to start by identifying how the organization views and defines talent. As the concept of talent can be defined differently (Bolander et al., 2017), practices, methods and activities for managing talent may thus vary. More exhaustive descriptions of different definitions will be presented later in the study, but first the concept of talents is reviewed overall.

The concept of talent is not always clear-cut; such workers may be characterized by having specialist skills and the ability to apply their skills to problem areas that are critical to the organization's sustainable benefits (Ferris et al., 2007). Research has indicated that talented individuals have shown, for example, tendencies to change jobs frequently because of their desire to develop (Holland et al., 2007) and organizations thus need to develop practices to attract talent to stay within the organization and contribute to growth. Moreover, talented individuals are often career-focused, highly mobile and attracted to jobs that offer challenges and potential for self-development (Holland et al., 2007; Tarique & Schuler, 2017; Collings et al., 2019). As such employees add significant value to organizations, they need to be carefully managed and offered development opportunities as they represent valuable knowledge bases (Holland et al., 2007; Collings et al., 2019). However, several researchers seem to agree that talent is characterized by having high human capital (Tarique & Schuler, 2017), which leads on to the next concept in research that examines the very work of individuals characterized as talent.

Talent Management (TM) is an area of research that focuses primarily on high quality human capital (Stahl et al., 2012) and has grown over the past two decades and has attracted much interest (Tarique & Schuler, 2017). Although the concept of TM is still ambiguous, there seems to be some progress towards a more rigorous and common understanding, based on principles of holistic integration between different HR practices and a focus on competencies (Cascio & Boudreau, 2016). One of the biggest challenges for organizations is to build strong talent development due to both the fact that it is a relatively new field and that the competition for talent is palpable (Collings et al., 2019; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). TM can be understood as strategic activities, processes, methods or practices that involve identifying key positions and filling them with competent, potential and high-performing individuals, and then ensuring their continued commitment to the organization (Tyskbo, 2019). Simplified and brief, TM can be explained to focus on three areas: creating positions within the organization, attracting talent (i.e. individuals with high human capital) and retaining talent (Tarique & Schuler, 2017; Stahl et al., 2012).

To effectively attract, motivate and retain talented employees, many organizations seek to become attractive employers, defined as organizations that are always the first choice for top candidates because of their status and reputation in terms of organizational culture and HR practices (Kashive & Khanna, 2017). It is thus significant for organizations to learn how to attract the best applicants and then retain and develop them (Chapman et al., 2005). Different industries are in need of adapting TM in different ways, for example, knowledge-intensive organizations have received much interest in research (Alvesson, 2000). This category refers to organizations where most of the work can be said to be of an intellectual nature and where well-trained, skilled employees make up the majority of the workforce. The knowledge of staff in knowledge-intensive organizations is therefore the most important resource (Alvesson, 2000). Then there are difficulties around determining the degree of knowledge intensity, roughly speaking it can be an organization whose knowledge-intensive elements are critical for the survival and success of the organization.

1.2 Problem formulation

Organizations often struggle with their TM efforts, which is sometimes explained by the existence of a war for talent, where a key issue is the shortage of skilled labor and higher demand (Tyskbo, 2019). In a world where human resources have become more scarce and the shortage of skills is becoming more evident, competition is fiercer than before (Konopaske & Werner, 2005). The dilemma is essentially that talent has become an attractive source of competitive advantage and at the same time many organizations are facing talent shortages and finding it increasingly difficult to attract, manage and retain talented individuals (Bolander et al., 2017). This can be similar to the race for talent, with organizations facing highly competitive local markets, wage inflation and high staff turnover (Manning et al., 2012). Holland et al. (2007) and Konopaske and Werner (2005) argue that organizations and their HR functions need to attract and develop people who have skills and capabilities that can make the organization productive, otherwise there is a high risk that the organization will fail. For example, a study conducted in Australia has shown that companies there, which need to compete both nationally and internationally, focus primarily on working practices related to attraction and recruitment processes (Konopaske & Werner, 2005).

Talent management as a concept may be considered attractive to tackle, but the problem is that TM is difficult to grasp and navigate, as research mostly offers a tangled ball of different approaches without these being coherent or concrete enough. It is difficult to navigate and it takes a long time to understand what TM actually means (Bolander et al., 2017; Alziari, 2017). By this means that research may offer methods, which organizations try to emulate but these are superficially attractive, that they may not be tailored just for the specific business within a specific industry (Alziari, 2017). Despite attempts at common explanation, there is no common and no clear definition of what TM is (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). It is therefore of utmost significant to first understand how organizations view the concept of talent, then it is essential to examine organizational culture and vision and goals. Moreover, if a contextual approach is to be taken seriously, TM researchers must acknowledge that organizations may practice TM despite the fact that they may not be aware of it, or even know what TM is in formal terms (Tyskbo, 2019). Therefore, it is important to first understand how organizations view the concepts of TM and Talent and how they adapt the concepts based on the needs of specific industry, which in this study is the knowledge-intensive one.

As organizations are in a changing environment, unforeseen situations may happen (Becker & Huselid, 2006), it is thus relevant to anticipate which positions will be needed in the future, in order to maintain dynamism and differentiation (Collings et al., 2019). This means that before organizations can even work with TM, there are a number of activities they need to perform, such as identifying critical positions within the organization. This also creates the opportunity to activate talent pools where organizations can identify talent.

One of the most essential drivers of attraction is values and ethics, as employees are discerning about who they work for and increased awareness of organizational values has a serious impact on how organizations are perceived in the talent market (Holland et al., 2007). Good work environments do not occur by chance but rather are the result of intentional and initiatives aimed at attracting, engaging and retaining employees (Dabirian, et al., 2017). The collective views of employees affect not only the loyalty, engagement and retention of existing workers, but also how organizations are perceived publicly and how they can attract new talent (Dabirian, et al., 2017). The publicly available information can be useful for job seekers who want to learn more about the potential employer and the organization's reputation (Ferris et al., 2007; Kashive & Khanna, 2017; Collins & Han, 2004) and is therefore a research area relevant to this problem area. Hence, it is of interest here to investigate how organizations go about creating organizational reputation. A good reputation in the area of human resources attracts more candidates with the right skills to apply for jobs within the organization and thus has a positive effect on the recruitment process. Fair treatment of employees combined with marketing it to the organization's stakeholders can be an important way for the HR department to increase its ability to attract qualified recruits but also retain them (Ferris et al., 2007). Furthermore, the problem lies with concrete methods to attract and retain talent, as research has failed to define specific methods falling under the TM label (Bolander, 2017).

Finally, as mentioned in the introduction, organizations practices in the TM process vary depending on the needs of their cultural and geographical aspects (Tyskbo, 2019). This means that TM activities need to be adapted and therefore more research is needed on how TM is managed based on the premise of different cultures within organizations and countries. The available research seems to be extensive as interest in the topic has grown (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016). However, the available research seems to concern mainly global, multinational organizations and their strategies and focuses less on private organizations and their concrete organizational activities for TM (Tyskbo, 2019). Hence, the literature does not seem to offer much help, concrete guidance and solutions for private organizations. Moreover, few researchers have examined Sweden, which is a country in great need of TM and in great need of skilled workers (Tyskbo, 2019), and in particular within knowledge-intensive organizations (Alvesson, 2000). Furthermore, Sweden is a country like other countries characterized by cultural aspects where people are subject to a norm that encourages employees to be average and not to stand out (Tyskbo, 2019). Thus, it is important to consider person-job fit and cultural differences to develop a successful approach to TM (Kashive & Khanna, 2017). Based on the above problem area and research gap, it is thus interesting to investigate (1) how Swedish, knowledge-intensive organizations view the concepts of TM and talent; and then (2) how Swedish knowledge-intensive organizations attract and retain talent.

1.3 Aim

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of how knowledge-intensive organizations in Sweden attract and retain talents through talent management practices.

1.4 Research questions

- How do organizations define the concept of talent?
- How do organizations implement Talent Management practices to attract and retain talent?

2. Conceptual framework

This chapter presents and reviews literature and previous research considered relevant to the proposed study. The chapter begins with human capital in the context of the resource-based approach in organizations. This is followed by presentations based on previous research presenting various preparatory activities in the context of TM. Previous research is presented with an emphasis on basic information about TM and then divided into attracting talent and retaining talent.

2.1 Human capital

Within the resource-based view (RBV), there are three types of resources that give organizations competitive advantage: organizational capital, human capital, and social capital (Stahl et al., 2012). Due to globalization and partly technological development and information transfer, competition through product development has decreased (Holland et al., 2007), as technologies allow organizations to produce similar products. Rather, differentiation is found in individuals who can produce new ideas that lead to new products and product development (Holland et al., 2007). For this reason, human capital has received increasing attention as it has an impact on sustainable and lasting competitive advantage (Stahl et al., 2012; Konopaske & Werner, 2005). Human resources are the source of competitive advantage and are about how organizations best manage knowledge, skills and capabilities within organizations. Organizations need to adapt their policies and practices to local environments but on the other hand, knowledge about how the firm best manages human capital should be differentiated from other organizations (Stahl et al., 2012).

2.2 Talent management & area of responsibility

As mentioned in the introduction, this paper focuses on examining knowledge intensive organizations. It is difficult to determine the degree of knowledge intensity of an organization. Knowledge-intensive organizations are characterized by autonomy, hierarchy, problem solving and extensive communication. According to Alvesson (2000), it is not easy to distinguish knowledge intensities in an enterprise because all work involves knowledge and the concept is thus vague. A problem for knowledge-intensive organizations is to retain their key personnel, which makes loyalty an significant factor. In addition to committed and qualified staff and customer relations, which are an important resource for many knowledge-intensive organizations, organization-specific knowledge of an informal nature, which is inscribed in the organizational culture and a certain working style, is valuable, as this is difficult to imitate (Alvesson, 2000). But who in organizations actually manages TM? Over several decades, it can be considered that the term HR has often changed its name and shape. For example, HR can be considered to be people management, human resource management, etc., practices differ between managing all employees or specific individuals. Because of this, confusion often arises about the function of HR. Although TM could fall within the scope of working in HR, according to Alziari (2017) it is important to remember that TM is not the same as human resource management. Therefore is actually managed by the management and not only within HR. Similar to Alvesson's (2000) description that knowledge-intensive organizations are often characterized by hierarchy it can be assumed that the same is true regarding the management of TM.

The main difference between people management and talent management is that TM puts a huge focus on a few people who have a huge impact on the success of the organization, which requires tailored solutions. People management distributes the focus on all employees, their development work environment etc. (Alziari, 2017). Hence, decisions within organizations about TM are usually made by management and then managed and developed by HR. Therefore, it is rather important in TM to focus on human capital management, which can be a compelling concept according to Alziari (2017) if applied in a thoughtful way. Capital can be seen as a valuable but also limited resource that, through investment, can create a range of opportunities that can ultimately result in competitive advantage. Therefore, talent can be classified as a type of resource, namely human resource that should be carefully analyzed and developed. This means that if an organization truly understands the value of talent and invests in it better than its competitors, it can result in competitive advantage (ibid).

TM can be considered attractive to organizations for several reasons because the right practices can secure the future of the organization's human capital, and not only secure but also add competitive advantage. The concept can also encompass career development which is a positive development for organizations as individuals have often previously been left to resolve for themselves best they want their career future. TM in general is about investing in the best people, developing them, building potential, leveraging their strengths and improving weaknesses. TM approaches can also be applied to both organization and individual needs

(Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). However, there is no common and clear definition of the term. What seems to be common in the research, regardless of clarity, is that TM is about the systematic attraction, identification, retention and use of individuals with high human capital and who have particular value to the firm (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008; Collings et al., 2019; Tarique & Schuler, 2010; Kashive & Khanna, 2017; Cascio & Boudreau, 2016; Tarique & Schuler, 2017; Chapman et al., 2005; Tyskbo, 2019; McCracken et al., 2015). The problem that organizations often encounter in striving for a common view of TM is that the concept itself is not always well understood outside the executive suite, i.e. the HR function. The concept is difficult to manage as confusion arises about what talent is, who can be considered talent, what the organization should do with those who are not, etc. (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). In order to navigate the hundreds of articles that have examined topics TM and find common ground, the concept of talent from different perspectives first needs to be defined and clarified, which is presented in the section below.

2.2.1 The concept of talent

The most valuable thing to remember is that talent is not something that is generic (Alziari, 2017). This means that talent should not be defined in the same way in different environments; what is defined as talent here may not be defined as such in another environment. Rather, talent is defined by the organization's goals, vision and strategies and the specific capabilities it requires. The focus of TM should rather be on managing people who are really good at what the organization needs them to be really good at (Alziari, 2017). Thus, if the human resource is considered to be talent in one organization does not automatically mean that it will be talent in another organization. Or as Bolander et al. (2017) put it, that talent is context-dependent, a person who underperforms in one part of the organization may be recognized as talent in another part of the organization. The next difficulty with TM is the very definition of the term, the concept of talent can range from a few managers to the entire workforce (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). Thus, there are different approaches within TM and how organizations view talent and in order to determine the approaches that organizations use within TM, it is important to understand how they view the concept of talent. Below, five key approaches are presented within the framework of the definition of talent.

The first perspective defines talents as subjects or as objects. The subject view identifies talents as individuals and the object view identifies talent as one or more characteristics of individuals as abilities. The second perspective differs from the first by viewing talents through the inclusive or exclusive approach (Bolander et al., 2017). The inclusive approach means that organizations recognise that all employees have their own strengths. This approach means that the organization is open to the fact that employees can make a difference to the organization's performance - immediately or in the longer term. The exclusive approach means that those who are considered talented are the elite subgroup of the organization and these individuals are identified based on specific criteria, this in relation to the unique characteristics of these individuals. These individuals can be further distinguished in terms of natural ability, mastery, commitment or adaptation to the organization context (McCracken et al., 2015). The third perspective distinguishes talent based on innate characteristics such as natural talent or acquired as something that individuals can read into (Bolander et al., 2017). The fourth perspective is about seeing talent as input where talent is defined as employee motivation and aspirations or output where talent is defined as abilities, achievements and results. The final approach is based on the fact that talent can be seen as a characteristic that remains unchanged regardless of context or something that emerges and changes in specific contexts (Bolander et al., 2017).

2.2.2 Positions & talentpool - fundamental activities in Talent Management

TM as mentioned earlier aims to systematically attract, identify, develop, and engage high-potential and high-performing employees to fill important key positions that have a significant influence on the organization's sustainable competitive performance (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen (2016). The first step that is critical for an organization is therefore to find out what the organization needs. Here, it is relevant to consider which parts of the organization and which types of positions and roles are served by additional investment and resources (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). Then based on the roles or positions, the organization can find the right people (talents) that will add value and fill the target roles that organizations have previously identified as critically crucial (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). By identifying and filling the key positions, organizations can achieve their strategic goals (Tyskbo, 2019). Thus, the focus is first on identifying the strategically critical jobs or key positions, and then identifying only those individuals who have the potential to fill these positions (Iles et al., 2010), which supports HRM practices focused on aligning strategy with the management of valuable talent (Tyskbo, 2019). This perspective of identifying key positions aims to recruit "A players" who can occupy these positions can be considered as talents. Ideally, a "perfect match" of "A-players" and "A-positions" is expected to contribute to "A-performance" (Iles et al., 2010). Furthermore, Iles et al. (2010) argue that given the limited financial and managerial resources available to attract, select and develop the best, organizations simply cannot afford to have "A players" in all positions. Hence, a portfolio approach is recommended where organizations place the best employees in strategic positions and good employees "B-players" in support positions. "Non-performing" jobs with employees who are "C players" who do not add value should be outsourced or eliminated (ibid). This perspective emphasizes the significance of workforce differentiation where those employees with talent should receive disproportionate attention and investment according to the strategic importance of their positions to the organization. Just as marketing requires customer differentiation, TM requires differentiation of employees and especially potential future employees (Tyskbo, 2019).

According to Tarique and Schuler (2010), a similar approach to attracting talent to positions is recruitment for positions. Recruitment towards positions involves the firm identifying key positions within the organization and recruiting the best people and then selecting them for positions rather than selecting specific people for specific positions (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). Collings et al. (2019) argue that organizations can benefit from identifying key positions within the firm but also thinking tactically for the future. It is important to be able to understand that organizations find themselves in a changing environment where unforeseen situations can happen (Becker & Huselid, 2006) and thus think about which positions and which skills will be needed in the future, in order to maintain dynamism and differentiation (Collings et al., 2019).

Furthermore, it is extremely relevant for the organization to develop objectives in the HR perspective. That is, it is crucial for the organization to understand what they want to achieve with TM and what development outcomes they want to see (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). Why the corporate objectives of TM are significant is because these objectives need to be monitored where the development and performance of employees is evaluated and possible change and improvement can take place. The complexity of TM is that organizations need to adapt their practices to the changing environment and in response to the characteristics of the workforce. Workers who can be identified within talent pools may be senior managers, technical experts or high-potential individuals at the beginning of their careers. Talent pools are identified as specifically related to the needs of the organization, this means that this approach is associated with the organization's goals and vision being more important than other stakeholders' interests, motivation and expectations (McCracken et al., 2015).

2.3 Attracting talent

Given the declining youth population in many industrialized countries, competition among employers to attract young talent is fierce. Therefore, in order to attract the younger generation (generation Y - born after 1982), businesses need to take into account the specific circumstances, interests, values, motivations and aspirations of this younger group. Organizations should thus adopt differentiated TM activities to meet expectations (McCracken et al., 2015). Employer reputation or the public evaluation of an organization has an impact on application behaviors and is defined as job seekers' perceptions of how other individuals view the organization as an employer (Kashive & Khanna, 2017). The HR function can nowadays be referred to as a strategic business partner and have an impact on organizational performance (Ferris et al., 2007). There is empirical evidence that job seekers are more attracted to organizations with a strong positive reputation than organizations with either no reputation or a negative reputation (Kashive & Khanna, 2017).

2.3.1 Reputation

Ferris et al. (2007) argue that the firm's reputation in the area of human resources attracts more people with the right skills to apply for jobs within the firm and thus has a positive effect on the recruitment process. Fair treatment of employees combined with marketing it to the organization's stakeholders can be an important way for the HR department to increase its ability to attract qualified recruits (Ferris et al., 2007). Some researchers argue that the organization's involvement in issues related to employees' family life linked to work increases the chances that former employees will recommend the organization as a potential workplace (Arthur & Cook, 2003). This may increase the organization's competitive advantage because it increases the number of qualified applicants and attracts productive employees (Ferris et al., 2007).

Ferris et al. (2007) argue that organizational reputation is one of the few resources that can create a sustainable competitive advantage because organizational reputation is a resource that cannot be replaced or substituted. According to (Kashive & Khanna, 2017), corporate reputation is a highly specialized form of organizational cognition as a personality trait to characterize a firm. Thus, corporate reputation is difficult for competitors to imitate because organizations acquire it through social and complex interactions that cannot be copied exactly for that reason (Ferris et al., 2007). Reputation can thus be assumed to be a measure of the firm's performance and social activity relative to competitors (Ferris et al., 2007). For example, people refer to some employment organizations as trendy, while other organizations are considered to be prestigious (Kashive & Khanna, 2017).

2.3.2 Employer branding

A concept more closely related to reputation is employer branding, which contributes to an employer's reputation and its value proposition to its employees. The term suggests that an organization benefits from employer branding when it is perceived as a good place to work (Dabirian, et al., 2017). Organizations with a good employer brand attract more applicants, regardless of salary level, and may even pay a lower salary than organizations with weaker employer brands do for the same service (Kashive & Khanna, 2017). Employer branding is the product of the sum of a firm's efforts to communicate to existing and potential employees that the firm is a desirable place to work (Dabirian, et al., 2017). An organization's efforts to recruit job seekers are similar in many ways to the organization's efforts to attract consumers to purchase their products or services (Kashive & Khanna, 2017). Both job seekers and consumers develop positive or negative perceptions of organizations and jobs based on their exposure to messages conveyed by organization (Kashive & Khanna, 2017). However, an employer brand obviously cannot be not controlled by the organization, but its beauty lies in the eye of the beholder (Dabirian, et al., 2017). There are various early recruitment activities that an employer can undertake in employer branding. Some of them are publicity such as (1) public relations which organizations can communicate through media; (2) sponsorship which has been shown to have an effect on organization image; (3) word of mouth where people can spread impressions about the organization and (4) advertising. All these methods can be used to raise awareness about the brand, can promote positive perceptions, can have an impact on job seekers' general attitudes and willingness to apply for the position (Collins & Han, 2004; Kashive & Khanna, 2017).

2.4 Retention of talent

Furthermore, previous research has identified another recruitment activity in addition to career opportunities where organizations provide information about the benefits they offer.

For example, salary is decisive but there are also other financial values for the applicants such as health care, pension, bonuses and job security, these are examples of benefits according to Dabirian, et al. (2017) value creation and make the employer attractive. Certainly, various benefits can be assumed to be attractive to those employees but it is not the best strategy to get talents to stay within the organization.

As mentioned earlier, it is the responsibility of both the management to identify different activities and strategies related to talent management (Alziari, 2017). But further it is the responsibility of HR to take care of the different activities and create a routine and flow. There, it is precious for the HR function to consider whether the organization is providing talents with new, exciting and challenging experiences for them to continue to grow in the process; thus, since decisions are made by management, it is important to consider whether HR has the ability to influence and provide a solid foundation for these decisions. It is also significant for HR how and where in the organization talent can be best utilized (Alziari, 2017).

Qualified people are an extremely valuable resource for the organization. This also means that an organization may risk having its entire workforce leave their employment, set up their own new businesses and bring other colleagues and customers with them. This can lead to the risk of organizations being drained of skilled labor and their customers. In addition, there is a risk that the organization's tacit knowledge will spread. This risk exists mainly in knowledge-intensive organizations because this type of firm usually competes in two markets - one is for its services (output) and the other is to attract and retain professional workers (Alvesson, 2000).

In the phase where organizations develop activities that can attract talent to stay with the firm, it is crucial that these activities are aligned with the firm's objectives (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). There are various activities that organizations can work on when trying to retain talent within the organization. For example, there may be annual talent assessments that the organization conducts internally. Employees' performance is discussed and their strengths are highlighted in order to find the right place for them within the organization (Bolander et al., 2017). TM focuses on identifying employees with potential and then training and developing them according to their career-specific potential and goals (Tyskbo, 2019). Therefore, it is essential that the potential employees can have an opportunity to improve their career prospects (Dabirian, et al., 2017). This is done by the organizations based on, as mentioned earlier, the organization's goals. In this phase, the organization should follow up on the efforts to attract and develop talent. This is where the work on talent is evaluated and organizations need to restructure and follow up on the identification of talent. For this is how the organization has the opportunity to create talent pools to ensure future resource allocation. This is also where organizations have the opportunity to review whether identified talent still enjoys their jobs and offer opportunities for change. As mentioned earlier, the identification of key positions and talent pools allows for rotation and offers talents the opportunity to try a different position that may suit them better than the previous one and with that comes development. This means that the organization can then equip employees and give them the opportunity to perform even better (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008).

In this phase, it is relevant for the organization to follow up on its efforts to attract and develop talent. This is where the work on talent is evaluated and organizations need to restructure and follow up on the identification of talent. For this is how the organization has the opportunity to create talent pools to ensure future resource allocation. This is also where organizations have the opportunity to review whether identified talent still enjoys their jobs and offer opportunities for change. As mentioned earlier, the identification of key positions and talent pools allows for rotation and offers talents the opportunity to try a different position that may suit them better than the previous one and with that comes development. This means that the organization can then equip employees and give them the opportunity to perform even better (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008).

2.5 Organizational culture

According to a study and report conducted by Almega (2019), Sweden as a country does not have any given competitive advantages compared to other countries, but succeeds because of the innovative capacity that exists within companies and the workforce. Due to the fact that Sweden as a country has a generally well-educated population, it generally has a knowledge-intensive business sector in relation to its size. However, many companies and organizations do not find the key skills they are looking for within the country. Thus, in addition to the culture of organizations, it is worth keeping a country's culture in mind. This is because a country's culture can be assumed to influence the organizational culture. For example, Tyskbo (2019) highlighted within his research that the societal values of collectivism are strong within organizations and for example in Swedish culture are covered by the "Law of Jante". culture in the country leads to the development of a norm where employees are encouraged to not stand out too much or be average (Tyskbo, 2019). Furthermore, organizational culture can be examined from several aspects, but what is relevant for the proposed study is to examine organizational culture in light of shared values and patterns of TM. From this point of view, it is not only to examine the link between organizational culture and the attractiveness of job seekers. What is also of interest is how organizational culture influences different TM decisions. After all, it is the shared values and behaviors that determine the methods and practices of TM. For example, depending on how an organization defines talent, different approaches to its management are created and developed. Thus, it can be argued that organizational culture can be linked to TM practices and influence the decisions about it and further argue that organizational culture can influence all elements: (1) the definition of talent; (2) the basic activities; (3) the attractiveness of the image of an employer towards talent; and (4) the retention and development of talent. To understand what organizational culture means, the term can be defined. Organizational culture can also provide members with a sense of identity, increase their commitment, reinforce organizational values, and also serve as a mechanism for shaping organizational behavior (Barbaros, 2020). In simple terms, organizational culture can be understood as a set of shared values, beliefs, and norms that influence how employees think, feel, and behave in the workplace (Schein & Schein, 2017). Because of the shared values and patterns, organizational culture can influence, for example, relevant management decisions regarding performance, knowledge management, effectiveness, and corporate social responsibility (Barbaros, 2020). Hence, it can be assumed that organizational culture can also influence the work with TM and how organizations view talent. It can also be assumed that the attractiveness of the organization can be determined depending on the culture within the organization and hence be a key aspect to consider where organizations seek to elicit a healthy organizational culture with sound values for external and internal stakeholders. According to Barbaros (2020), employee value proposition (EVP) is one of the significant aspects that an organization can take into account in terms of culture and can be simplified and explained as everything that an employer can offer, such as benefits, wellness, work environment, culture etc. Thus based on what an organization promises and offers to employees needs to be kept where an organization can match what they promise against their actions in reality. Organizational culture can be assumed to be an extremely complex set of activities, which within this paper means that everything an organization does, from small to big values can have consequences, both good and bad. Hence, organizational culture is an aspect that needs attention and not least because it can affect the attractiveness of the whole organization.

2.6 Model based on previous research

As mentioned earlier, several different definitions of talent have been found in previous research, as well as concrete methods in TM. Many authors have tried to create structure and increase understanding of how TM can work in practice, but there are many differences and research varies according to culture and types of organizations. This theory section has presented the common understanding that has been found and identified in previous research. Based on this, in order to more easily understand the different and most significant activities that TM can involve, a model has been created (See *Figure 1*). The model summarizes step by step the different preparations and activities that an organization can do to manage TM, as well as showing how these activities are interrelated.

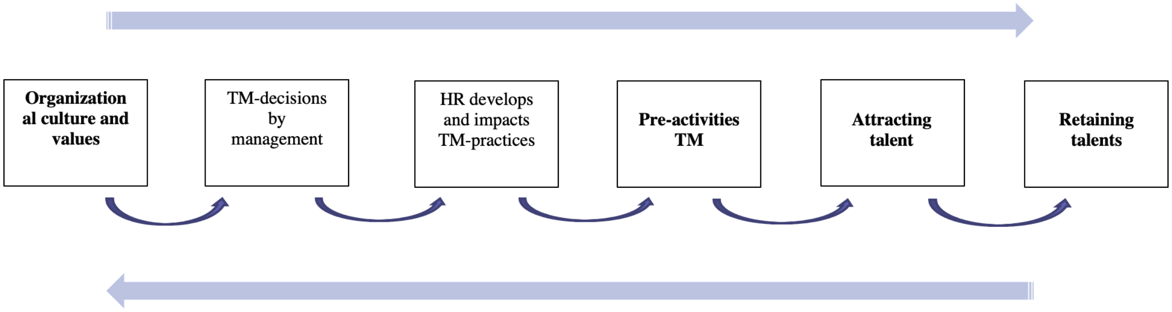

Organizational culture and values
TM-decisions by management
HR develops and impacts TM-practices
Pre-activities TM
Attracting talent
Retaining talents

Figure 1: *Talent Management model - visual presentation of the conceptual framework (2022)*

This model has illustrated the main elements that the conceptual framework has summarized based on previous research. The first phase *Organizational culture and values* shows that the work of Talent Management is grounded in the values and culture of the organization, which can serve as a basis for decisions. Further in the second phase it is highlighted that it is the *management* that *makes decisions* on TM practices as talent management can have a direct impact on the organization's performance and competitive advantage. In the third phase, it is indicated that the *human resource department* can take the lead in *influencing TM decisions* on TM but also develop practices for managing it. These last two phases are not bolded in the model because they have not been addressed in the analysis and results, but they are considered sufficiently necessary to show the process of TM in its entirety. Furthermore, the fourth phase shows that organizations need to take certain actions that can be called *pre-activities in TM* to enable a solid foundation and impact of the last two key activities. For example, one of the pre-activities is that an organization identifies in advance critical positions that should be filled by talent. The fifth phase shows that within the framework of TM, organizations can develop methods and activities to *attract talent.* The last phase shows that organizations need to think through how to *retain talent* and how to develop these individuals.

3. Research design

This section presents the qualitative method, methodological choice and approach, sampling, data collection, choices for data analysis, critical approach and limitations, quality criteria and ethical aspects related to research.

3.1 Qualitative method approach

The research area and focus of this study is the definition of Talent Management and talent, the attraction and retention of talent and to fulfill the purpose of this thesis a qualitative method has been decided. The choice of method for the study is based on the aim of the study and the research questions which intend to investigate how knowledge intensive industries in Sweden work with talent management and what practices they use in the process. Since the study is exploratory in nature, it is natural that the method should enable understanding a phenomenon. Hence, it is crucial to choose the relevant method which qualitative method is considered to be, as it enables participation, deeper understanding, access to conversations and trust, which according to Saunders et al. (2012) characterizes qualitative method.

The ambition of this thesis is that the respondents of the study will be able to share valuable experience that can contribute to understanding about practices in TM. This means that it is the respondents' closeness, their own experiences, which will be expressed in words that have then been transformed in transcription that are important for this study. Which is enhanced by Repstad (2007) who argues that it is the text that is the central working material in qualitative research. This is reinforced by arguments that the qualitative method allows for different methodological patterns that focus on human knowledge and experience as well as the production of descriptive and narrative data (Rolfe, 2004).

3.2 Abductive approach

Prior to collecting the data, a review of previous research was conducted. The author of this study has tried to gather all relevant knowledge for this thesis that has created prior understanding of what has already been researched in the field of talent management, attraction and retention of talent. Since the aim of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of how organizations within knowledge-intensive industries in Sweden attract and retain talent, it has been important to gather knowledge about the research area.

According to Saunders et al. (2012), qualitative research can be based on an inductive approach where the researcher has the opportunity to develop richer theoretical perspectives than what already exists. It is also possible that qualitative research deductive approach, and this means to test already existing theoretical perspectives. Prior to this thesis, as mentioned earlier, a literature review was conducted in which previous research was examined, compiled and from this a prior understanding was created. However, it is important to point out that there are opportunities for new discoveries, which is necessary to keep in mind since attracting and retaining talent is an unexplored area in Sweden. Instead of going from theory to data or from data to theory, Saunders et al. (2012) suggest the abductive approach. This means that this study is based on an abductive approach, which according to Saunders et al. (2012) can be used instead of either deductive or inductive approach. According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2017), this means that the study area is interpreted based on theoretical overarching patterns. The rationale for the abductive approach is that it thus enables explanations that will hopefully help to create understanding and knowledge about how organizations work to attract and retain talent. Moreover, the theoretical framework has been adjusted during the process, which according to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2017) is a characteristic of the abductive approach.

3.3 Semi-structured interviews

In this thesis, a qualitative method has been applied where the collection of primary data was done through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were an appropriate choice of method as the ambition was to create a broad database with exhaustive data material. An interview method is appropriate for this study because it is important to obtain as much relevant data material as possible. Interviews in this case have allowed closer contact with respondents and hopefully some trust. This is crucial for this study as the aim of investigating how organizations attract and retain talent should be pursued and respondents' experiences thus have been necessary. According to Fejes and Thornberg (2019), interviews are generally methods that can give the researcher an understanding of how the interviewees experience the phenomenon under study and thus the essence of the phenomenon can be accessed. Interviews are suitable methods because they are malleable and can be adapted to the need for structure and formality (Saunders et al., 2012).

Semi-structured interviews are considered appropriate for this thesis because there the interviewer can come up with a number of themes and key questions in advance in relation to the research topic (Saunders et al., 2012). Hence, an interview guide has been created in advance before conducting interviews where main themes based on previous research have been identified and main interview questions have been formulated. As this thesis is based on an abductive approach, as mentioned before, it is relevant to be open to new discoveries. This means that interviews need to be flexible where the interviewer can ask follow-up questions deviating from the interview guide. According to Saunders et al. (2012), during a semi-structured interview the interviewer can be open to discussion and be open to new relevant themes that may emerge. This thus provides an opportunity to ask follow-up questions to respondents and to change the order of questions during an ongoing interview (Saunders et al., 2012). As the aim is to achieve closer contact with respondents, and exhaustive answers, it is important that the interview takes place in a relaxed and natural environment without overly rigid structures. As the questions in a semi-structured interview can be adapted, there was a good opportunity to adapt the interview to the respondents so that they could hopefully feel comfortable.

3.4 Sample

As the aim of this thesis is to investigate how Swedish organizations in the knowledge-intensive sector attract and retain talent, which means that the sample is organizations in Sweden that are knowledge-intensive or to a certain extent. First, it is significant to point out that in this thesis the term organization refers to a legal entity. This delimitation was made because the criterion for this thesis is knowledge-intensive industry in Sweden rather than type of organization. And the criterion for organizations has rather been that they have experience in attracting and retaining qualified workforce. Therefore, a thorough survey of various to some extent knowledge intensive organizations in Sweden has first been conducted through secondary sources such as their websites. Based on the websites, a prior understanding and insight was created into how organizations choose to describe their activities directed towards potential future employees or even openness about TM. The reason why managing TM was not one of the criteria is then similar to Tyskbo's (2019) reasoning that organizations can practice TM even though they may not be aware of it. This may be mainly due to the use of other terms instead of talent or talent management.

Moreover, it can be assumed that no employer wants to hire a bad employee and hence strives to hire the best.

In order to pursue the ambition, research was conducted on the existing external information available on the organizations' websites. Some examples that have met the criterion of knowledge-intensive industry are for example professions in IT, engineering, banking etc. Knowledge-intensive industry is not necessarily characterized by delivering a service, but can involve the creation of a software, or even an advanced technology or product. The main criterion was that the knowledge-intensive part is such a large part of the organization that the organization could not do without it, for example that the knowledge-intensive part is the core, as in the case of creating a software where specific knowledge is crucial for the survival and success of the organization.

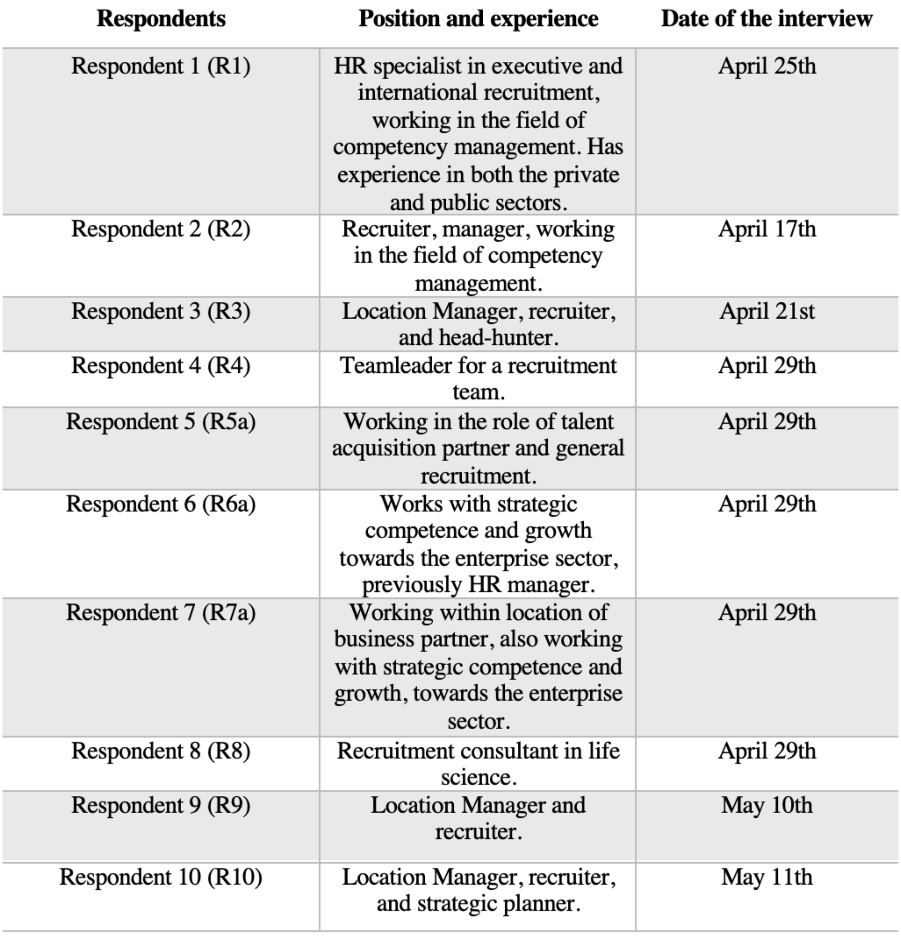
An additional criterion for this paper has been organizations that are larger in size in terms of number of employees. It is difficult to determine where the line is between a small and a larger organization, but in order to narrow down the sample, the ambition has been to interview respondents who work in organizations that have at least 3000 employees. And thus it can be assumed that the size and number of employees requirement has been met as the smallest organization in this study has around 3500 employees and the largest around 7200 employees. According to Lee et al. (2020), larger organizations can allocate resources more efficiently without threatening the survival of the organization, compared to the smaller organizations. The reason that organization size has been important in this study is because it can be assumed that organizations that are larger have the space and resources to develop practices in TM. The ambition has also been not to include organizations that are too large or organizations that differ too much in size. This criterion can also be considered as fulfilled. The reason for the choice that the organizations should not differ too much is due to the assumption that the organizational structure can be similar and the results therefore comparable. In view of this, the size and structure of the organizations have not been taken into account in the analysis.

3.4.1 Respondents

It is difficult to be sure about which respondents should be interviewed, as it is not possible to predict the data in advance. Therefore, it has been decided that the criteria for the number of respondents should be at least 10. Linked to the time constraint (10 weeks) for this thesis, the number of 10 is felt to be sufficient, while at the same time it has been felt to be realistic and feasible. Therefore, a total of 10 respondents from 8 organizations were interviewed, which means that three of the respondents came from the same organization. As mentioned above, this paper focuses on the knowledge-intensive industry, with the ambition of interviewing relevant for the study people with the right positions and experience. Hence, it has been important to get in touch with people who have relevant knowledge and experience in recruitment and resource planning. As mentioned earlier, TM can be handled by both management and the HR department (Alziari, 2017) and hence interview requests were sent to both HR employees and people working in management. Criteria for interview respondents are significant as it is crucial for the thesis to obtain data corresponding to the knowledge gap. Therefore, it was desirable that the respondent had worked on talent management, but this was not prioritized for the reason that not all organizations choose to use the term Talent Management. Rather, the criterion was that the respondent works in knowledge-intensive organization where it has experience in managing or recruiting knowledge-intensive employees.

There has been an awareness that interview requests may first be sent to a specific person who can then, like the snowball method, refer to the right people with the appropriate skills for this thesis, which happened several times. Requests for interviews with respondents were sent via email, stating the purpose of the study, the background to the study and brief information on the topic of talent management. The information letter also included information about the processing of personal data (see section *see Appendix A)*. Nearly 35 people were contacted with a request for an interview, 17 responded that they could participate in this study. However, due to lack of response before interviews , 10 respondents ultimately participated in this study.

Respondents participating in this study are presented in a table below (see *Table 1*), the table indicates the specializations of their positions and how they will be referred to in Chapter *4. Results and analysis*.



Respondents	Position and experience	Date of the interview
Respondent 1 (R1)	HR specialist in executive and international recruitment, working in the field of competency management. Has experience in both the private and public sectors.	April 25th
Respondent 2 (R2)	Recruiter, manager, working in the field of competency management.	April 17th
Respondent 3 (R3)	Location Manager, recruiter, and head-hunter.	April 21st
Respondent 4 (R4)	Teamleader for a recruitment team.	April 29th
Respondent 5 (R5a)	Working in the role of talent acquisition partner and general recruitment.	April 29th
Respondent 6 (R6a)	Works with strategic competence and growth towards the enterprise sector, previously HR manager.	April 29th
Respondent 7 (R7a)	Working within location of business partner, also working with strategic competence and growth, towards the enterprise sector.	April 29th
Respondent 8 (R8)	Recruitment consultant in life science.	April 29th
Respondent 9 (R9)	Location Manager and recruiter.	May 10th
Respondent 10 (R10)	Location Manager, recruiter, and strategic planner.	May 11th

Table 1 - *Respondents of the study*

Note that three respondents, as previously mentioned, are from the same organization and are described as R5a, R6a and R7a, the remaining respondents are from different organizations.

3.5 Data collection

As mentioned above, information letters were first sent to respondents by email. Once the respondents had replied, agreeing to take part in the interview, a time and date for the interview was set, which was of course adapted to the respondents' needs. Regarding the location, it is important to be flexible, therefore depending on the respondents' willingness and depending on the location, there was a possibility to conduct the interview in a face-to-face meeting. The reason for this is that it is easier to hold a natural conversation where the respondent and interviewer are in the same place, due to eye contact and gestures, for example. Since it is essential to be flexible, there has of course been the possibility to conduct the interview digitally, therefore based on the respondents' wishes, all interviews have been conducted digitally through Microsoft Teams and Google meet. All interviews have been conducted in Swedish, this is a natural choice as respondents participating in the study are from Sweden. With the consent of the respondents, all interviews were recorded and notes were also taken during the interview itself so as not to miss asking relevant questions or missing other significant information.

Before conducting the interviews, an interview guide was developed with the possibility of adaptation during the interview. The interview guide was constructed based on five themes: (1) Talent Management; (2) Talent, (3) Attracting Talent; (4) Retaining Talent and (5) Organizational Culture. The choice to include these themes in the interview guide is based on previous research and since this paper is based on the abductive approach, it was relevant to start from what is known about the topic of TM today. However, using the abductive approach there have been opportunities for new discoveries. Because of this, the interview questions have been adapted according to the situation that arose during each interview. Most of them were one interview per respondent, except for one organization where three respondents were present during one interview, which was a group interview.

3.6 Data analysis

After conducting the interviews, these were transcribed and the process of coding began, before moving on to the analysis of the data. In order to conduct a thorough analysis, a thematic analysis was used as a method. According to Saunders et al. (2012), template analysis involves a group of techniques for thematically organizing and analyzing textual data. Broadly, this means that the researcher creates a template in which they first identify key themes that can be identified in the textual data, which can then change as the researcher analyzes the data (Saunders et al., 2012). To assist, this analysis method followed King and Brooks' (2017) instructions for how to conduct a rigorous template analysis.

As a first step, there was a need to create an overall overview of the data and to become familiar with the material. If the interview is long, it is recommended to read the data at least once to create overall understanding, which was done. After becoming familiar with the data, all material was read again to begin coding. At the outset, it was significant to identify overarching themes that would be helpful in fulfilling the aim of this thesis. This was done by hand where notes and highlights of information were made directly in the transcribed data in the Word tool. After reading the data material, it was identified and marked with different colors and preliminary themes. Throughout the coding process, a mind map was developed in which key themes and sub-themes were constructed independently of relevance (see Appendix C). Each theme and sub-theme has a number and a color. Once the coding was completed, no new themes could be identified and it was time to move on to the cleaning of the identified themes, hence themes that were not relevant to the paper were removed. Appendix C presents both a mind-map showing all the themes that could be identified and a table numbering all the main themes with sub-themes.

3.7 Data quality

Reliability means that interviewers should ask questions in the same way and the situation should be the same for all respondents, and that a measurement at a certain point in time should give the same result when measured again. In order to achieve as high a degree of reliability or trustworthiness as possible, the researcher needs to keep in mind that the measurement needs to be stable and not subject to chance (Trost & Hultåker, 2016). Since semi-structured interviews have been conducted in this study, it has not been possible for the interview questions to be asked in exactly the same way, nor is this desirable since the ambition has been to be flexible with the study respondents. It is also not possible to standardize the interview process and this is another reason why reliability has not been pursued in this study, as it usually can be in quantitative studies. In order to achieve the highest possible degree of validity, it is necessary that the questions measure what they are intended to measure (Trost & Hultåker, 2016). In order to achieve the highest possible degree of validity, the interview questions in the interview guide need to be relevant and able to help answer the research questions and purpose of the study, which has been the ambition of this study. This has been followed up by conducting a pilot study. According to Saunders et al. (2012), it is desirable for one or more experts to assess whether the questions are relevant to this study. As it is not possible to contact experts, the pilot study was conducted with two independent respondents. The purpose of this pilot study was to examine whether the questions in the interview guide are understandable and constructed in a simple and comprehensible manner. After the pilot study, the interview guide was restructured and refined, because some questions were perceived as complicated.

The concepts of reliability have not been pursued within this thesis. Instead, according to Shenton (2004) within the qualitative method, researchers can focus on other relevant concepts within the qualitative approach - Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability.

Credibility is about whether the results and conduct of the study are consistent with reality and according to Shenton (2004) is one of the most important factors in determining the reliability of a study. To achieve this, a thorough review of previous research has already been done, this to gain prior knowledge of the topic. Due to time constraints, the sample population is not broad which is desirable according to Shenton (2004) and only the organizations' perspectives have been sought, which may have affected the credibility of the study. Thus, contact and dialogue has been maintained with the supervisors of this thesis who have been able to critically review the manuscript, which is also desirable Shenton (2004). Having others critically read the work during the process of text editing allows feedback and improvement.

The next concept is transferability, which delves into the extent to which the results of a study can be applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004). Thus, in order to take transferability into account, it is significant to have a critical methodological discussion regarding the selection of the study. This involves several aspects such as the time frame of this study which has been limited to ten weeks and it also concerns the scope of the study. Due to the time limitation and the size, the results cannot be generalized as the sample respondents are too few. However, there are good chances that the study can be applied to other situations as it concerns national context within Sweden and this study can be conducted in other industries, although most likely with different results.

According to Shenton (2004), dependability in qualitative studies means that the process of the study should be reported in detail, which has already been attempted in this research plan in this methodology chapter. The reader should be able to access all the information and documentation from the work of this thesis, which has been attempted to be achieved in this chapter. However, it is important to keep in mind that only the reader can determine whether the documentation is sufficient or not.

Finally, confirmability can be used instead of objectivity. Confirmability implies the use of tools that do not rely on human skill and perception and that the research is not subject to manipulated results (Shenton, 2004). Therefore, the study's empirical findings from interviews are based solely on the words of the respondents. However, this is not feasible within the framework of analysis, as the respondents' answers have been interpreted and analyzed against previous research. This also applies to the language barrier as the interviews were conducted in Swedish and then analyzed in English. Therefore, it is inevitable that the results of this study are subject to interpretation and the human factor. In addition, the quotes in this study are translated into English which also affects the quality, as one word and the same word can be translated differently depending on the translator.

3.8 Research ethics

In order to avoid that the data can be traced back to the respective respondent or organization, all organizations and respondents are anonymous and no names are shown in the transcription to avoid compromising anonymity, which is significant according to (Repstad, 2007). In addition, there are Swedish ethical rules for research including: information, confidentiality and use (Repstad, 2007). According to Dalarna University (2021), requirements for processing personal data (General Data Protection Regulation - GDPR) must be followed, these rules are found within the University's databases. Therefore, all respondents received an information letter stating, among other things: (1) the purpose of the thesis; (2) the basis for the processing and consent; (3) information about who has access to data; (4) how long the data will be stored; (5) that respondents can access all data and (6) about rights regarding withdrawal of consent (Dalarna University, 2021). There is also a template for via the University databases that holds detailed instructions with detailed description on what an information letter contains, which has been carefully followed.

4. Result & Analysis

This chapter presents results and analysis based on the empirical data collected from the interviews. The chapter is structured around five main themes identified from the analysis of interviews: (1) Definition and approach to the concept of talent; (2) Pre-activities Talent Pools and Positions; (3) Attracting Talent; (4) Retaining Talent and (5) Organizational Culture.

4.1 Talent and Talent Management

In order to find out how organizations work with TM, it was crucial to find out how organizations view talent. In addition, to investigate whether organizations actively work with the concept of Talent Management or whether they have other terms for it. Four respondents have confirmed that they are actively working with the concept of Talent Management and specific departments dealing with TM while the other respondents have confirmed that they have not implemented the TM concept. According to Tyskbo (2019), organizations may be actively working with the concept of TM without knowing about it or expressing themselves in those terms. For example Respondent 1 expressed that the concept of talent acquisition may be more common and that although the organization he works for does not explicitly use the concept of TM, it is important that all organizations do so in practice. Hence, it can be assumed that some work is being done with TM even though the respondents do not use the term on a daily basis. This can be assumed because respondents expressed that being able to manage a skilled workforce was critical to the survival of the organization.

Furthermore, respondents were asked how they define talent. This question was central as according to Alziari (2017), organizational practices and methods developed in TM vary depending on how organizations view talent and in particular define the concept of talent. Although several respondents indicated that they do not use the term and concept of TM on a daily basis, all respondents could relate to the concept of talent. This may be due to several aspects, one of them being that the concept of talent may be associated in other fields, such as sports. Regarding the definition of talent, the common theme is that the respondents see talent as something that all individuals (employees) can be or can become. This is similar to the inclusive approach, where Bolander et al., (2017) describe that all employees are included and the organization believes that everyone has the potential to become talented. Based on

Respondent's 4 answers, it can be interpreted that by an organization believing in its employees and helping them to develop, the organization can also develop and grow:

> **R4**: *"My view is that we define talent, that everyone is talented, that everyone can develop. We believe in people and it's very much about believing in the employees we've taken on and then we believe that all employees have the potential to grow and develop and in that way the company will also develop and grow."*

Furthermore, Respondents 2 and 4 argued that it matters whether talent possesses core values that are appropriate for the organization as an employer, which can be interpreted as a fundamental criterion. This can be assumed to mean that before hiring, e.g. during a possible interview, the employer examines whether the talent has similar values as the organization and through this can assess whether the person is a suitable candidate or not. Respondent 2 argued that personal values are so fundamental and therefore more important than education. Moreover, according to some respondents, the definition of talent is dependent on the situation which is similar to Alziari (2017) approach where talent is dependent on the situation and depending on an individual's strengths and skills, they may perform better with a certain role than another. In addition to core values that employees need to live up to, Respondent 1 indicated that the concept of talent is defined by context. A particular individual may be considered talented in one position, but perform much worse in another:

> **R1**: *"One role may require the person to be analytical or structured and the person is not. ...but the other role may require flexibility and the person to be able to make quick decisions and then the applicant may be better suited there. ...for that role the person may be a real talent, but not for the other. ...I think that talent is defined by context."*

Following the general approaches to the concept of talent, it emerged from interviews that talent can also be defined in terms of individual characteristics of an individual. However, these characteristics are not necessarily always good, for example Respondent 10 considered that talent can also mean that an individual is good at something, but does not make an effort because they rely on their talent. According to other respondents, a talent can mean the following qualities: entrepreneurial; innovative; easy to get new ideas; problem solver, solution oriented; easy going attitude; good attitude; reliable; driven; open to change. This view of talent is similar to the individual view where Bolander et al., (2017) argue that talent can be identified based on an individual's personal characteristics and is also similar to the exclusive view. Because it may imply that superficially few individuals possess specific qualities where an individual with these qualities may bring a better result to the organization.

4.2 Pre-activities

4.2.1 Positions

One of the basic activities is to find positions within the organization that are dedicated to talents (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016) because it can streamline the work of TM and simplify the routine. Furthermore, there are two practices that organizations can exercise, the first is that the positions can be designated in advance, that is, the organization designates specific positions designated for talents before these individuals are hired (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). Most respondents were able to confirm that they identify and map critical positions in advance, based on which talent is then hired. This can be considered the most obvious choice because in order to make the organization more effective, the organization needs to know which positions are needed to achieve the goal and vision. Based on interviews, it has also been shown that the positions can be temporary where a Respondent 1 believed that different positions can be appointed based on different projects that are ongoing for a limited time.

> **R1**: *"...well you could say that in some cases projects come up... ...so there can be several but otherwise we have sort of fixed positions."*

Interestingly, in addition to pre-designating positions, Respondent 8 expressed that organizations can attract and hire talent before the position is designated. This means that individuals are given the opportunity to try out different positions while already employed and then place the individual in the position for which they are best suited. This can be considered the second practice similar to Tarique and Schuler (2010) around organizations being able to both select individuals for positions but also different positions for individuals. This can be considered as a mutual value where an organization can take into account changes in the external environment but also the needs of individuals. However, it is difficult to imagine how organizations can hire individuals within the organization without having a ready-made position for them. This implies that individuals who are part of a trainee program are hired before they are assigned to a specific position and it is therefore similar to Tarique and Schuler (2010) reasoning and different ways of looking at positions. In practice, this practice can be implemented through varying trainee programmes as discussed by Respondent 2:

> **R2**: *"…this trainee programme meant that these people, they simply got into the organization for, say, a year and then they got to try out different roles ... and then at the end of the trainee programme they got a relatively good position straight away."*

Trainee programmes may vary but a common denominator is that people who are hired and part of a trainee programme get to try out several different positions and then get the final position when the programme is over, according to the study's respondents.

4.2.2 Talent pools

When asked whether organizations use Talent Pools, responses varied depending on how respondents defined Talent Pools. This means that not all respondents use the term, but the results show that most respondents recognise the meaning of the term. A common practice discovered in previous research is that organizations can make use of Talent Pools, with McCracken et al. (2015), for example, arguing that organizations can identify senior managers, technical experts and high-potential individuals, which can be done both inside and outside organizations. However, it has been perceived as somewhat unclear how organizations can do this in practice, but the view is and has been that organizations using databases simply identify, both internal and external individuals with talent. This perception has both proved to be true and not, based on the interviews the process has rather proved to be more complex than that. Based on Respondent R5a, it appeared that talent pools can be used for both internal and external applicants, but also for the younger generation or specific positions consisting of the technical roles:

> **R5a**: *"...different types of talent pools, partly focused on management and leadership... and we have talent pools towards the more technical roles as well so we have different types of talent pools that are actively ongoing that we're developing."*

Respondent 1 did not recognise the concept of a talent pool, but argued that the identification could be used, for example, to identify people who want to develop their careers and are aiming for a management role, for example. Respondent 3 also stated that they do not work with Talent Pools but some aspects still suggest this based on the interview. For example, respondent 3 said that within the organization there is a very specific skill set that is in demand. And for that reason, there are few people within Sweden who possess that knowledge and experience. Hence, this is always someone who knows someone and in this way the organization can already get on the person's reputation within the industry before the employment. Respondent 3 has also indicated that employees are sometimes asked if they know someone who works in the same field. Which suggests some internal identification of strong candidates even if this is not recorded in a database or called a talent pool. This is also related to headhunting, more on this in section 4.3.1 Head-hunting.

4.3 Attraction

It is well known that attracting and retaining talent can be a complex process, especially for organizations whose knowledge-intensive parts determine the survival of the organization. This may be because knowledge-intensive occupations involve specific knowledge that is difficult to find. During interviews, Respondents 1 and 2 suggested that knowledge-intensive occupations are particularly difficult to attract and this may be due to high competition from other organizations in the sector. According to Alvesson (2000), knowledge-intensive organizations need to retain their key personnel in order to be successful, on the grounds that knowledge-intensive occupations involve not only specific knowledge but also knowledge of an informal nature that makes it difficult for competitors to imitate. From interviews it emerged that the difficulty is due to competition, which means that organizations are fighting for talent in knowledge-intensive occupations. Both respondents 1 and 2 expressed that the benefit does not matter much as most organizations can offer similar benefits. Here it is more about standing out from the crowd and the first need in the labor market. Hence, it is of greater importance, according to Respondent 1 to be able to be transparent and deliver truth where the wild organization selling to the candidates matches the reality:

> **R1:** *"...talking about EVP, an employee value proposition. ...what am I presenting to you in terms of values. ...if I set up a picture for you and the picture that I have sold you is not right when you come here, why should you stay. ...so transparency is something we work on a lot."*

Based on previous research, it appears that organizations will already face challenges in attracting talent now and in the future and therefore need to adapt their practices based on the changing environment. The challenge however is not only based on the changing environment but also the generational shift, for example the younger generations are not necessarily attracted by the same types of factors as the older generation. Therefore, organizations can take into account other aspects that influence the younger generation who may have different expectations, values, motivations and interests (McCracken et al., 2015). Respondents 1, 2 and 7a highlighted the problem of being able to adapt the organization's practice based on the circumstances. Like McCracken et al. (2015), they have mentioned the importance of being able to attract the younger generation and hence have different practices. For example, according to Respondent 2, this can be expressed in displaying their sustainability reports and telling about the organization's vision. Respondent 1 expressed that the environmental issue could be in attracting the younger generation. Respondent 7a highlighted the significance of being able to review the needs of the department and thus understand what other aspects need to be included, mentioning gender, culture and other ethical aspects in addition to age.

> **R7a:** *"The very aging department needs change, but they also need women to create a better culture, so there's a lot that goes into that, ... it's strategic thinking."*

4.3.1 Head-hunting

Depending on the sector in which an organization operates, attraction strategies may vary. But what should an organization demand not match availability? This theme has chosen to be referred to as Head-hunting and a theme that was identified based on interviews and was thus not pre-selected based on the theoretical chapter. Several respondents have indicated that head-hunting occurs mainly in the context of shortages of skilled labor in specific knowledge.

However, to point out that the concept of head-hunting is not always used as a term. For example, according to Respondent 7, the concept of Searching can alternatively be used. Head-hunting can be assumed to be a more tailored approach as organizations need to adopt different and tailored measures to attract the right person to the organization. In addition, head-hunting can be directly related to occupations in the knowledge-intensive sector as there is a lack of specific knowledge within it, and hence organizations themselves need to ensure access to that specific knowledge. Several respondents have also expressed that they hire people internationally and this is because of the lack of the right skills for the organization in Sweden which reinforces the reason for head-hunting.

4.3.2 Employer branding & reputation

The main activity that organizations can do based on previous research is employer branding which is considered as a thorough and well-established method (Dabirian, et al., 2017). Through this activity, organizations have the chance to show a good workplace and employer they are. Employer branding is the product of the sum of a company's efforts to communicate to current and potential employees that companies are a desirable place to work (Dabirian, et al., 2017). And that's exactly what it's all about - communication to both external and internal stakeholders. According to all respondents, their organizations are working on just employer branding, which can be considered as another obvious activity in Talent Management. In addition to marketing the organization as a good employer, respondent R6a has informed that employer branding can be done during face-to-face meetings. This included, for example, visits to different colleges or collaborations with universities relevant to the organization. Moreover, marketing activity can be assumed to be managed by the communication department or the marketing department according to some respondents. However, what was surprising is that departments do not seem to have close cooperation between each other as some of the respondents, despite their position in HR of the organization, could not admit that cooperation exists. On the other hand, respondent 7a was able to confirm that cooperation existed with both the marketing department and the communication department. This could be interpreted as being due to the pursuit of a common view of the organization where relevant departments and employees can participate and influence decisions. In addition to the uniform confirmation that all organizations work with employer branding, all respondents could confirm that word of mouth was something that was paid attention to in connection with employer branding. This is consistent with Kashive and Khanna's (2017) discussion that word of mouth is one of the activities that an organization can take into account in the context of employer branding.

However, word of mouth is not something that can be interpreted as solely related to employer branding. Some respondents have mentioned that the perception of the organization is dependent on what other stakeholders think about the organization and that this is independent of the organization's efforts to market itself well as an employer. This can thus be interpreted to mean that even if an organization tries to present itself as a good employer, it is their actions in reality that determine the reputation they receive. According to Respondent 4, it is beneficial to keep track of what perception the stakeholders have about the organization as well as being true to the reality. On the other hand, specifically related to recruitment, an image about the organization can be created during the recruitment process. There, Respondent 1 believes that even if recruitment with a particular person did not go all the way, if the organization has created a good image, the candidate will put it in mind and apply for a position at a later date. This suggests that organizational reputation can be created by both the overall and marketing or more specifically employer branding which is consistent with Dabirian et al. (2017) argument. But also through small and personal encounters between people and potential candidates.

Furthermore, it can be assumed that a good organizational reputation acts as an invisible competitive advantage. According to Kashive and Khanna (2017), organizations with a good reputation may even offer lower salaries because people want to work for them anyway. This does not quite match the findings from the interviews where it was clear that salary is something that organizations should take into account as it is a fundamental factor for candidates to want to work there. On the other hand, Respondent 10 argued that a good reputation can be an interesting advantage:

> **R10:** *"I've had feedback that they weren't interesting ads and so on, but historically we've been very bad at actually marketing ourselves and selling ourselves in a job ad precisely because we've relied on the fact that we're a very attractive employer because you have a really good reputation."*

Respondent 10 said that the quality of the advertisements has not always been good and it is not the advertisements that have attracted the candidates to apply for the post. Thanks to the good reputation of the organization, it has managed to recruit and attract the necessary candidates they want to work for the organization because they are considered as a good employer. This is similar to Kashive and Khanna's (2017) argument that a good reputation can bring benefits and it shows that there can be benefits other than salary. Furthermore, Respondent 1 argued that reputation was not solely due to the values of the organization but also that current and former employees spread a good message about them as an employer. This was also confirmed by Respondent 2 as an important source of spreading the word about them as a good employer.

4.4 Retention

Furthermore, it is of utmost importance for the organization to develop objectives in the HR perspective. That is, it is crucial for the organization to understand what they want to achieve with TM practices and what developmental outcomes they want to see (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). Why the corporate objectives of TM are essential is because these objectives need to be monitored where the development and performance of employees is evaluated and possible change and improvement can take place. The complexity of TM is that organizations need to adapt their practices to the changing environment and in response to the characteristics of the workforce.

Retaining talent is not always easy and something that organisations struggle to develop methods to make talent thrive and stay within the organization (Alvesson, 2000). Here, organizations have the opportunity to differentiate their practices to stand out and gain competitive advantage by being able to get talent to continue to choose them as an employer. According to some respondents, salary is absolutely a decisive factor, as it should be worthwhile for them to work for the organization. However, this can be considered as the most fundamental and decisive factor, as salary can be considered as a prerequisite of being employed. However, according to respondent 1, organizations can consider that things like salary, for example, are something that all other organizations can offer and therefore not a good differentiating factor. Furthermore, various benefits such as health care, company travel, job security may also be something that respondents have expressed is important. Like salaries, these factors lean towards the economic values and according to Dabirian, et al (2017) can create value. But here it is worth considering whether various benefits of economic value are rather than a prerequisite than something that creates additional value. It is also worth analyzing what talents actually value depending on the industry. As mentioned earlier, there is a shortage of talent especially in knowledge-intensive occupations (Alvesson, 2000) and this can be assumed to be due to the fact that the work requires specific knowledge and experience. Hence, it can be assumed that talents in that sector have several organizations to choose from when they are hired or change jobs. Salaries and other benefits of financial value may thus be overshadowed as most organizations can offer similar benefits according to all respondents. Because of this, organizations need to differentiate in different ways and offer what is actually demanded and needed. But having said that, it means that organizations need to develop activities, methods and practices that align with the goals (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008) but also values.

According to several respondents, many employees choose to stay within the organization because they are given the opportunity to change jobs and change positions. This means that an employee can develop within his/her profession, and can have the opportunity to change position and through this develop his/her career, which both contributes to personal development but also enables the achievement of goals for an individual. This is similar to Tyskbo's (2019) argument that within the framework of TM, organizations need to identify and pay attention to individuals' career-specific potential as they can be empowered to improve their career opportunities. According to Respondent 9, they have a programme specifically developed for talent called the talent programme where individuals similar to Tyskbo's (2019) reasoning are recognised and offered opportunities for development through according to Respondent 9 different training programmes that are of interest. Respondent 3 also expresses that they usually pay attention to talents and then offer them opportunities for development, this both through training and after that the opportunity for change of position or service. This could lead to employees feeling valued and appreciated, but also that they may choose to stay with their current employer because of this. This may also lead to the employer being perceived as attractive internally as well, which is of importance for organizations to work with according to Barbaros (2020). And according to Garrow and Hirsh (2008), talent development and training can enable employees who experience career progression to perform even better for the organization. This can be assumed to mean development in both directions, where organizations can achieve goals and effectiveness and employees can fulfill their career and development goals, which Respondent 1 believed is the ultimate for the organization.

Offering talent development and the achievement of goals within the career framework can be accomplished through the attention and monitoring of individuals. In practice, according to all respondents, this can be done through follow-up and coaching conversations. According to Respondent 3, coaching conversations give them the chance to follow up on the employee's performance and to examine whether the employee has their own vision and goals for the workplace. These follow-up meetings can therefore be assumed to enable better preparation for the organization where it can be noted that the employee may want to change employer or that they may show dissatisfaction and therefore want to change position for further development, which can equip the employee for better performance according to Garrow and Hirsh (2008).

Respondent 1 believes that the younger generation is very different from the older generation and that employers need to take privacy into account:

> **R1**: "*Because now the generation that punches in at seven and out at four is not born anymore. ... I would think that four or five years might be an average, and people don't stay longer than that, so you need to adapt your organization to those fluctuations. ... I also think that this is where an employer can take into account the conditions, but also private life.*"

This is similar to the reasoning of Arthur and Cook (2003) who argued that it can be beneficial for an organization to engage in wellbeing and family life. Which can be assumed to increase the chances that employees may both recommend the organization to others, but also stay within it. Thus, when it comes to developing methods for retaining talent, it can be assumed that organizations need to be creative, not least to take account of different generations. According to McCracken et al. (2015), generational differences and consequently differences in values are something that organizations need to take into account. For example, organizations can adapt working hours and enable working from home which can also be considered as one of the benefits that organizations can offer.

4.5 Organizational culture

As mentioned earlier, the definition of talent by organizations can have an impact on the work of talent management because it is through this definition that organizations can adapt their practices depending on the need. One thing that has emerged from interviews is that the definition of talent can be based on the values and culture of the organization. Based on the more controversial approach, Iles et al. (2010) argued that organizations can recruit talent based on the A, B or C player approach. However, this approach may involve drastic measures and critical treatment of the employees. If it were so easy in practice to create A positions and recruit A players and the same with B positions, no organization would have to struggle with developing advanced TM approaches. This approach could be considered very risky and lead to a negative effect on the reputation of the organization, which could be portrayed as a bad employer. Unlike the controversial view, most respondents believed that all employees added value to organizations which is contrary to the view that C players should be abolished (Iles et al., 2010). In addition, all respondents believed that all employees can develop into talents, even if they need help along the way. For example, Respondent 1 argued that talents are defined by context and therefore a person may underperform in one position and be at the top in another role within the organization. Which can be supported by the argument of Bolander et al. (2017) who argued that talents are context-dependent, and that just because a person may be considered a talent in one position, they may not be a talent at all in another position. Organizational culture was not a theme constructed prior to conducting interviews, but emerged from the data collection because it became so clear that views on talent and management practices were shaped by their shared organizational values. According to Respondent 2, it is extremely important to adhere to their organizational values and thus to be and be perceived as trustworthy:

> **R2**: *"I think one of the biggest things that ... is just that it's these values, that we really live by our values and follow them."*

More respondents have mentioned that openness and transparency are crucial for success in human resource management and to be attractive in the labor market. Thus, values within an organization can serve as an important building block and the basis for a perception of an organization. As mentioned earlier in the section on attraction of potential candidates, one of the respondents opined that one of most relevant values that an organization can have is to be true and offer what the organization has actually more or less promised to them employees. Similar to Barbaros (2020) who mentions Employee Value Proposition (EVP) which means everything that an employer can offer to its employees in terms of benefits, work environment and so on. This can be considered as a concept not only related to attraction but also to organizational culture as it is about values. For this reason, the process of organizational culture can be considered very complex as it permeates most of the activities that an organization can do in TM. For example, reputation is also something that, according to Barbaros (2020), can be created based on the perception of an organization's culture. If stakeholders perceive that a culture within the organization is bad, the reputation can be damaged. Here it can be assumed that organizations need to think about the whole process, from start to finish. An organization may be attractive and able to attract talent, but on the other hand it may be less good at retaining talent and hence less credible. Organizational culture, as mentioned earlier, can be defined as the set of shared values, beliefs and norms that influence how employees think, feel and behave in the workplace (Schein & Schein, 2017). Hence, an organization's inclusiveness can also affect its reputation. For example, respondents 1, R7a and 10 have expressed that they try to be more inclusive and balanced when hiring individuals, which means that besides skills, education and criteria that they take into account cultural and ethical aspects, which can be assumed to improve reputation.

The culture within a country can also influence the behavior of organizations. For example, Tyskbo (2019) explained that in Sweden the norm is not to excel too much and hence organizations can be influenced where employees are treated equally. This can be considered as a good sign because basic values within an organization such as respect are needed. However, on the other hand, it can be assumed to be contrary to practices in TM where the purpose of talent can be assumed to be that those individuals can improve the performance of the organization and within their time bring competitive advantage over other players. During the interview, the question was asked whether talent is treated differently and almost all respondents could confirm that talent is treated differently within their organizations. Different approaches may therefore mean different benefits or different earnings. This result is very interesting because most respondents also indicated that they believe that all employees can be talented. The fact that talents are treated differently can be assumed to be a sign that not all employees within the organization are considered talents. Another interesting aspect related to a country's culture is that the respondents who could confirm that talents are treated differently, also informed that this is done internally. That is, not something that is openly talked about within the organization, which may indicate some ambiguity. From the results it can be interpreted that organizations want to be able to look at all employees as talents but that in practice it is different, talents are treated differently and within Swedish culture organizations have been influenced by what Tyskobo (2019) called the "Law of Jante”. Hence, it can be assumed that organizations are not ready to be open with that talents are both rewarded differently but also that in practice not all employees are talents.

5. Discussion

Talent Management consists of different practices that are linked to each other and therefore each practice can be assumed to be dependent on the other in order to function coherently. Before organizations can focus on attracting and retaining talent, they need to understand which positions are critical and crucial, and which need to be filled by individuals who will do the most good and improve the organization's performance. Organizations can be assumed to have two approaches to this, the first where people are hired based on pre-created positions that are deemed to be a good fit for those specific individuals. This method can be seen from the results as the most obvious as non-existent positions can be assumed to create imbalance and ambiguity about which roles are necessary and do the most good. The second method is different, is not as obvious and is more rare, which means that organizations can hire individuals before placing them towards specific positions. This method may be more different but can be assumed to allow for more individualisation and may allow for more thorough decisions about who is suitable for which position or vice versa. This may also be thought to allow for some customisation and may thus allow for organizational well-being. The satisfaction may increase as different individuals are given the opportunity to try out different roles and may therefore create a prior understanding of which role they will be most comfortable with. Talent pools on the other hand are not as obvious a concept as the term itself varies in its use. It is clear from the results of interviews that organizations use different types of formal identification of individuals outside the organization.

However, it is not certain that organizations do not do so either. Here the results may be misleading due to the use of concepts and definitions. For example, several respondents have indicated that they do not use talent pools, yet they have indicated that they can use internet information and they can seek out the person at the right time to offer a job. This can be done through various means, for example, one respondent mentioned that existing employees can be asked if they know of a person who would be suitable for the organization and possess the right knowledge and skills. This can be assumed to be an informal way of identifying potential candidates suitable for the post. Similarly, another respondent used a different word, suggesting that organizations can search external sources for people with the right skills. This could also be considered as indicating the identification of potential talent despite the non-existent use of the term talent pool. Very few respondents were able to confirm that they use talent pools within their organization, but it was clear that identification and development of talent is still taking place. This means that talent pools are being used but without the concept itself being used, which may call into question the meaning of the concept and its need. Several respondents were able to confirm that they have implemented a kind of talent programme where organizations identify talent and then offer them opportunities for development within their job positions and skills. Again, this may indicate internal use of talent pools as talent is identified and evaluated, although the term talent pool is not used. What is interesting is that talent pools can partly be used for the identification of potential candidates but also the identification of already existing talents within the organization and hence this part cannot be assumed to come as a pre-activity. It can therefore be argued that talent pools as an activity in TM processes can be assumed to come both at the beginning and at the end of the TM cycle or process.

Furthermore, in terms of attracting talent, it is clear that employer branding is used as a method, however, it has emerged during interviews that it is the communications or marketing department that has this as its responsibility. Surprisingly, only three respondents were able to state that they have transparency and communication with the department that handles employer branding. This could be considered a shortcoming and a risk of missing crucial information from both parties. Furthermore, it was clear that the respondents were fully aware of organizational reputation as a concept and during the data collection the concept was perceived as central. That reputation is a central concept can be understood from the insight that reputation is some kind of aggregate result of all activities that an organization does, and from it the perception of the stakeholders and not least the candidates about the organization is formed. Based on the data collection, it appeared that organizations work with and evaluate reputation based on different activities. For example, in addition to employer branding, it was found that personal meetings with candidates could influence their attitude towards the organization, despite the fact that the employment has not been completed. Personal meetings can be conducted either through interviews or when an employer actively seeks out a suitable candidate. According to another respondent, face-to-face meetings can take place by arranging visits or collaborations with universities relevant to the organization. This can be assumed to be another method that falls within the scope of employer branding, but which also has a long-term impact on the reputation of the organization. This method can also be considered preventive as it concerns a younger generation, which can be an advantage as younger generations may have completely different values, demands and wishes on their future employers (McCracken et al., 2015). Another respondent mentioned for example the value proposition (EVP) which according to him means that it is of utmost importance that the organization is actually truthful and implements in reality what they have promised in terms of working environment, benefits and other values.

In terms of talent retention, there was a consistent view on the most appropriate methods among all respondents. For example, partly as mentioned earlier, it is essential to be able to identify talent first in order to offer them development. But also that the organization needs to allocate resources as they need to evaluate talents individually at one or more face-to-face meetings. Personal meetings can then be conceptually called differently, according to some respondents they are called evaluation meetings, according to others coaching meetings. These meetings may be organized and conducted annually, but also several times a year depending on whether it is part of a programme or not. The first step is therefore the identification of talents and then work on the development of talents can begin. Development work depends on what has emerged during personal meetings and what the wishes of the organization and the talent are. If, for example, the talent wants to develop more in a specific area or for a specific position, the organization can help him or her through, for example, various training courses. Then it can be assumed that reputation is central to this part of the process too, as talent may leave employers if it does not meet reality with what it has promised from the start. And a damaged reputation within the organization could lead to a shortage of qualified workers in the future.

The key point that has emerged from the data collection is that the culture and values of the organization permeate the process of TM. This may mean that talent management must be done in accordance with the values of the organization but also based on how the organization views the concept of talent. It is here that a problematic area may arise as all respondents were able to acknowledge the concept of talent and in particular relate to it in their everyday work. However, not all respondents could confirm that they actively work with TM as a concept. On the one hand, organizations may work with TM without acknowledging the concept itself or without even knowing about it (Tyskobo, 2019). Which could be discerned and analyzed from the data collection as organizations are working on identifying positions, talent pools, attracting, developing and retaining talent. On the other hand, there is a cultural aspect that may influence the use of the concept of TM. As Sweden is a country where there is a shortage of skilled labor in knowledge-intensive professions, it can be assumed that TM methods are of great interest for organizations to develop competitive advantage. On the other hand, Sweden is a country where organizations urge the norm where employees should be treated equally and this can be assumed to complicate the work with TM where talents are in practice not treated equally. The cultural difference may also affect the culture of the organization where all individuals should be treated equally. Which may lead to the assumption that all employees can be seen as talents, and this was also evident from the data collection. However, this can be considered a bit ambiguous as some respondents have argued that talents are treated differently, internally though and non-formally. Similarly in terms of different concepts, organizational culture and values may obscure the use of concepts found in the research such as talent pools and other concepts as well. Which leads to wondering if TM as a concept is accepted and if it should even be used within organizations, or if other milder concepts that fit the Swedish organizational culture better will suffice.

Based on the data collection, an evaluation of the conceptual model created earlier based on previous research has been carried out. Thus, it has made the development and re-evaluation of the model (See *Figure 2*), the ambition is that the model should summarize TM practices, as a small addition on the way towards fulfilling the aim of the thesis. The aim of the thesis was to contribute to the understanding of how knowledge-intensive organizations in Sweden attract and retain talent through talent management practices.

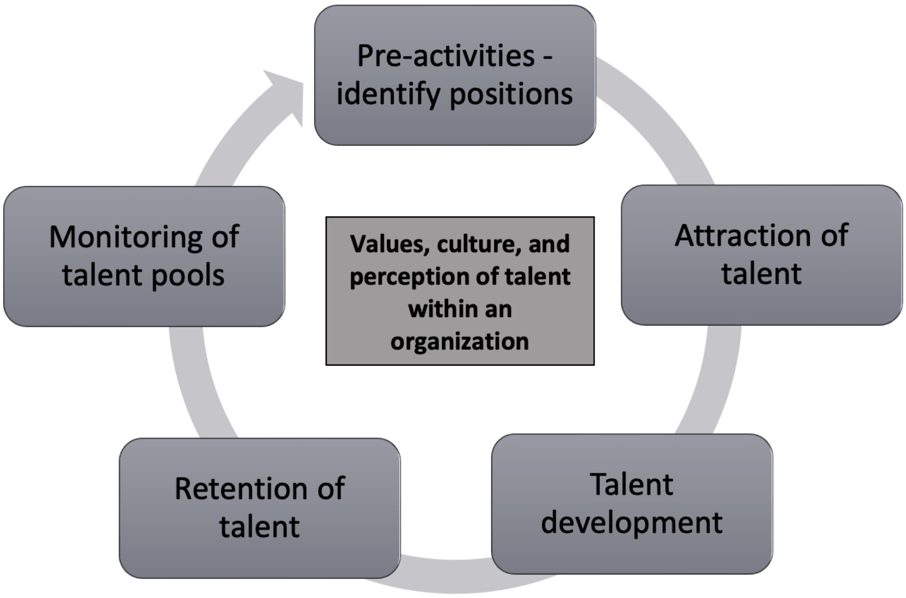

Pre-activities - identify positions
Attraction of talent
Talent development
Retention of talent
Monitoring of talent pools
Values, culture, and perception of talent within an organization

Figure 2. *Visual presentation of the Talent Management practices*

Firstly, based on the data collection, TM can be considered a circular process where the work is constantly ongoing and there is no clear end or beginning. Talent pools are an activity that can be implemented before attraction but also after retention and hence have reached the final stage of the cycle. Instead, the pre-activity identification of critical positions has ended up at the beginning of the process. Next comes the attraction, development and retention of talent, which, based on the data collection, can be considered as established, conscious activities and basic activities that can form the basis for talent management. Finally, values, culture and the view of talent are placed in the middle. This choice was made based on the reasoning that an organization's culture and values permeate the practices and work of TM. Organizational culture is thus a central element and hence should be neither at the end nor the beginning, but in the middle. Also the definition of talent is based on culture and values and therefore this part should also be in the middle, which can act as a starting mechanism that will trigger other parts of TM. For example, if an organization has a perception that all employees can be developed into talent or that all employees are talented, the rest of the activities in the circle will be affected. The same is true if organizations have exclusive views and judge very few individuals as talented.

6. Conclusion

To complete the aim of this thesis, this chapter presents the conclusion and contributions.

6.1 Research questions

The aim of the thesis was to contribute to the understanding of how knowledge-intensive organizations in Sweden attract and retain talent through talent management practices. To fulfill the aim, it was first essential to find out how talent is defined within knowledge-intensive organizations as this can have an impact on how an organization manages talent. Based on the results and analysis, it appears that all organizations view talent as something that all employees can become and develop into, which leans towards the inclusive approach. Furthermore, despite the previous definition, talents were also considered to possess personal qualities such as drive, right education, entrepreneurial spirit, positive attitude, a person who lifts the group, reliable and caring person, curious and open to change and development. These definitions are similar to the individual approach where talents are considered to be people with different characteristics that make them talents. A further definition could be discerned from the results and analysis where talent can be considered dependent on the situation and hence similar to the contextual approach. Furthermore, in order to fulfill the purpose, this study would address how organizations through different practices attract and retain talents. Talent attraction is achieved through employer branding and reputation building, which can lead to competitive advantage in talent recruitment. A good reputation does not necessarily mean that an organization markets itself well and appears to be a good employer. Rather, a good reputation can be achieved through honesty and transparency, through partnerships with other actors useful to the organization, through personal encounters both outside the organization and during, for example, interviews with potential candidates. Thus, a good reputation can be assumed to improve attractiveness. To retain talent, an organization can develop and recognise these individuals. In addition to the obvious benefits, an organization can develop methods to develop and enable career goals.

6.2 Contributions

Talent can be defined differently within knowledge-intensive organizations regardless of whether the concept of Talent Management has been implemented or not. Depending on the definition of talent, organizations' approaches to managing talent vary, here organizations may consider the definition of talent in relation to organizational culture in order to meet the objectives. Furthermore, this study has shown that organizational culture can bring about a certain norm within organizations, and has thus contributed to the understanding of TM within the Swedish context. Hence, it can be assumed that it is of utmost importance for the management to be aware of the different norms that have been created as a result of the organizational culture, in order to be able to influence the norms if necessary to enable the organization to work towards vision, goals and own values. Furthermore, organizations may consider whether they are in need of implementing specific concepts in Talent Management. If the need exists, common guidelines can be developed within the organization to facilitate the work on Talent Management. Clearer guidelines and practices within an organization may also be important given that the study's findings suggest that there may be mixed signals regarding the treatment of talent. This is since within organizations it may be assumed that all employees can be considered talented and treated equally but at the same time treat talent differently in practice. Clearer guidelines may create a common view on talent management among employees who can be considered as important stakeholders of the organization. This paper has shown that it is not always clear to distinguish different phases and practices within Talent Management, and implementation is therefore a complicated process. For example, the identification of talent can occur both before attraction and after talent development. For this reason, it is suggested that Talent Management should be seen as a circular process where there is no clear end. Moreover, different phases can work and run simultaneously, such as attracting and retaining talent.

7. Limitations and proposals for future research

This concluding chapter presents the limitations of this study linked to the methodology and suggestions for future research.

Due to the fact that most interviews were conducted with one respondent per organization, this has been identified as a limitation. Interviews with, for example, three respondents per organization would have allowed for different and more in-depth responses. For this reason, it has been identified as a limitation and it is therefore suggested to explore TM in the future, possibly through a case study, with different divisions within an organization, for example HR and management. The second limitation identified relates to the language barrier. As mentioned earlier, the interviews were conducted and transcribed in Swedish and then analyzed and contributed to the findings and included in this study in English. This means that there is a risk of mistranslations and the author's interpretations of words in this study.Another limitation of this study can be considered to be that it is based on a single perspective, the organizational one. When it comes to the issue of attracting and retaining talent, there are several perspectives, one of which is the organizations and the other is the job seekers or employees. Within the scope of this thesis, there was no space to examine two perspectives due to resource and time constraints, and therefore it is proposed that in the future both perspectives. Linked to culture, another suggestion is to examine how different cultural aspects influence the work with TM in other cultures and countries. This is suggested partly because of the results of this study but also because of the assumption that the lack of a common view on TM may be due to differences in culture within different countries.

In conclusion, based on the problem that organizational culture is the foundation on which TM practices are built, it is suggested that future research investigates how organizational culture more concretely influences the behavior and design of TM practices and activities in organizations. Linked to culture, another suggestion for future research is to examine how Swedish culture specifically influences organizational behaviors and how the concept of talent is implemented and defined. This is of utmost importance as this study has shown that there is some ambiguity around the concept of talent. On the one hand, there is a reluctance to distinguish individuals who may be considered talented from the crowd, but on the other hand, talent is treated differently. This study examined talent management in knowledge-intensive organizations, so the results may be different if other industries are examined. Hence, it is suggested to investigate Talent Management from other industries to find out which methods of managing are most appropriate.

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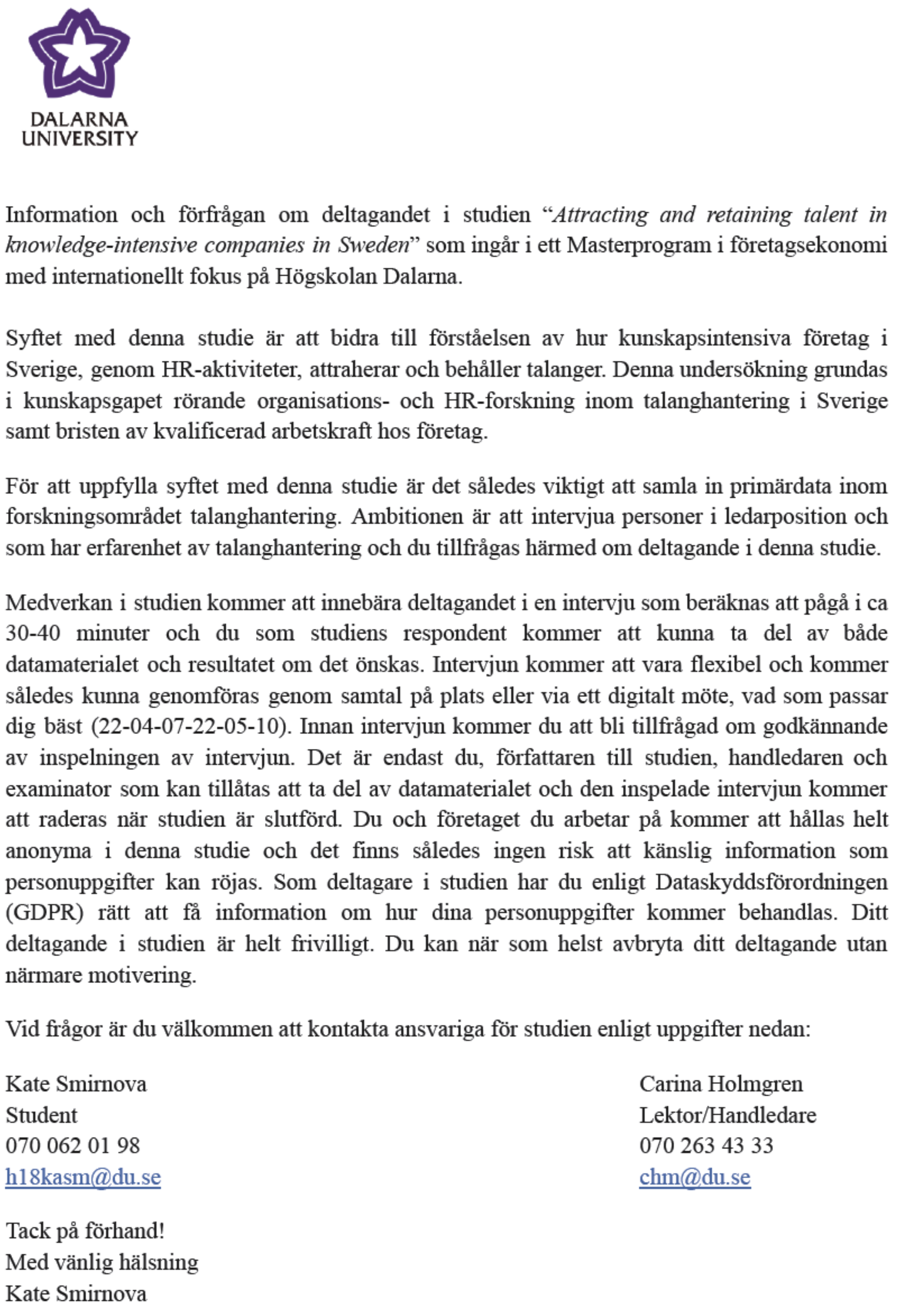
Appendix A - Information letter respondents (Swedish)



DALARNA
UNIVERSITY

Information och förfrågan om deltagandet i studien "*Attracting and retaining talent in knowledge-intensive companies in Sweden*" som ingår i ett Masterprogram i företagsekonomi med internationellt fokus på Högskolan Dalarna.

Syftet med denna studie är att bidra till förståelsen av hur kunskapsintensiva företag i Sverige, genom HR-aktiviteter, attraherar och behåller talanger. Denna undersökning grundas i kunskapsgapet rörande organisations- och HR-forskning inom talanghantering i Sverige samt bristen av kvalificerad arbetskraft hos företag.

För att uppfylla syftet med denna studie är det således viktigt att samla in primärdata inom forskningsområdet talanghantering. Ambitionen är att intervjua personer i ledarposition och som har erfarenhet av talanghantering och du tillfrågas härmed om deltagande i denna studie.

Medverkan i studien kommer att innebära deltagandet i en intervju som beräknas att pågå i ca 30-40 minuter och du som studiens respondent kommer att kunna ta del av både datamaterialet och resultatet om det önskas. Intervjun kommer att vara flexibel och kommer således kunna genomföras genom samtal på plats eller via ett digitalt möte, vad som passar dig bäst (22-04-07-22-05-10). Innan intervjun kommer du att bli tillfrågad om godkännande av inspelningen av intervjun. Det är endast du, författaren till studien, handledaren och examinator som kan tillåtas att ta del av datamaterialet och den inspelade intervjun kommer att raderas när studien är slutförd. Du och företaget du arbetar på kommer att hållas helt anonyma i denna studie och det finns således ingen risk att känslig information som personuppgifter kan röjas. Som deltagare i studien har du enligt Dataskyddsförordningen (GDPR) rätt att få information om hur dina personuppgifter kommer behandlas. Ditt deltagande i studien är helt frivilligt. Du kan när som helst avbryta ditt deltagande utan närmare motivering.

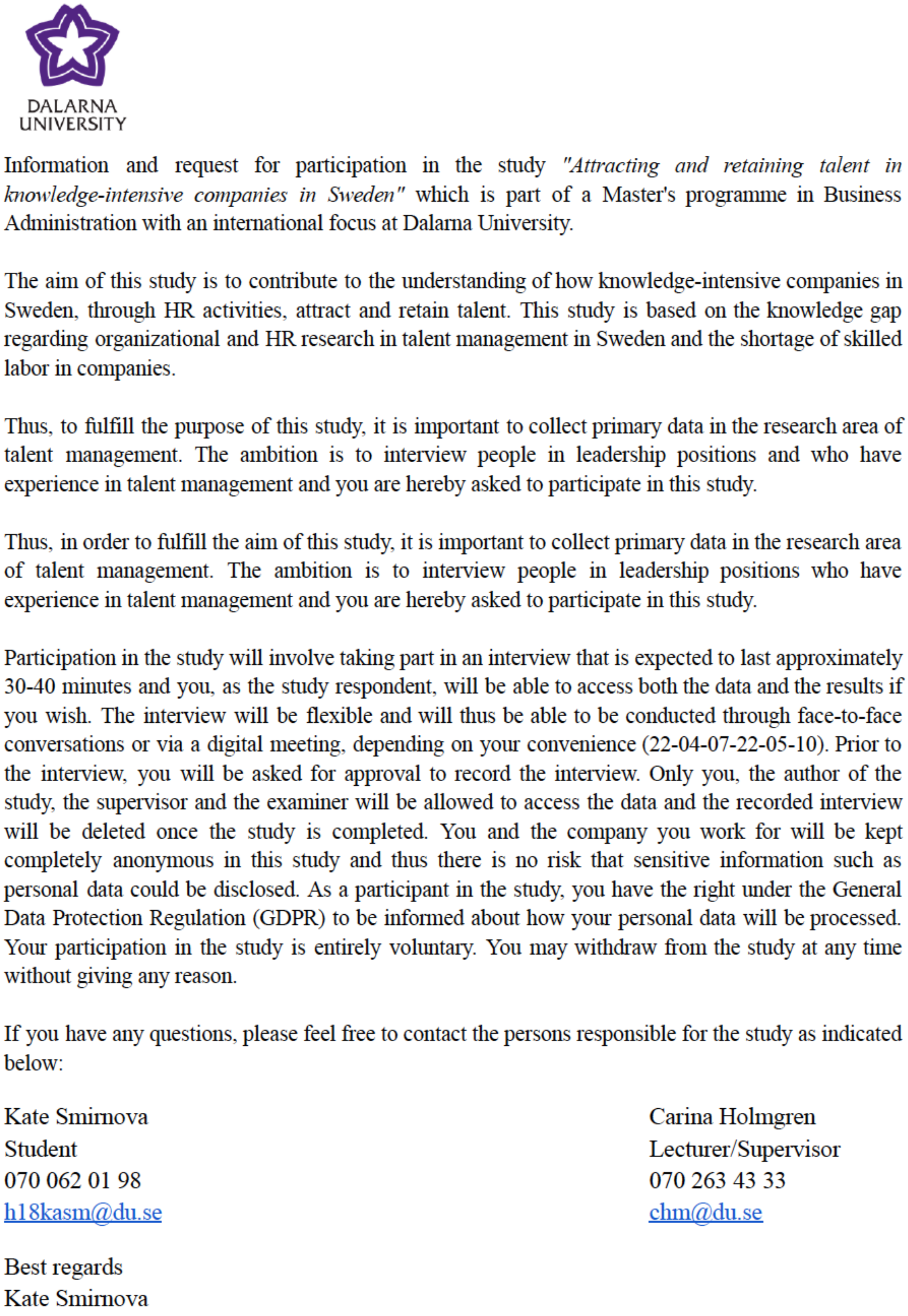
Vid frågor är du välkommen att kontakta ansvariga för studien enligt uppgifter nedan:

Kate Smirnova
Student
070 062 01 98
h18kasm@du.se

Carina Holmgren
Lektor/Handledare
070 263 43 33
chm@du.se

Tack på förhand!
Med vänlig hälsning
Kate Smirnova

Information letter respondents (English)



DALARNA
UNIVERSITY

Information and request for participation in the study *"Attracting and retaining talent in knowledge-intensive companies in Sweden"* which is part of a Master's programme in Business Administration with an international focus at Dalarna University.

The aim of this study is to contribute to the understanding of how knowledge-intensive companies in Sweden, through HR activities, attract and retain talent. This study is based on the knowledge gap regarding organizational and HR research in talent management in Sweden and the shortage of skilled labor in companies.

Thus, to fulfill the purpose of this study, it is important to collect primary data in the research area of talent management. The ambition is to interview people in leadership positions and who have experience in talent management and you are hereby asked to participate in this study.

Thus, in order to fulfill the aim of this study, it is important to collect primary data in the research area of talent management. The ambition is to interview people in leadership positions who have experience in talent management and you are hereby asked to participate in this study.

Participation in the study will involve taking part in an interview that is expected to last approximately 30-40 minutes and you, as the study respondent, will be able to access both the data and the results if you wish. The interview will be flexible and will thus be able to be conducted through face-to-face conversations or via a digital meeting, depending on your convenience (22-04-07-22-05-10). Prior to the interview, you will be asked for approval to record the interview. Only you, the author of the study, the supervisor and the examiner will be allowed to access the data and the recorded interview will be deleted once the study is completed. You and the company you work for will be kept completely anonymous in this study and thus there is no risk that sensitive information such as personal data could be disclosed. As a participant in the study, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to be informed about how your personal data will be processed. Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the persons responsible for the study as indicated below:

Kate Smirnova
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070 062 01 98
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Carina Holmgren
Lecturer/Supervisor
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chm@du.se

Best regards
Kate Smirnova

Appendix B - Interview guide (Swedish)

Generellt

- Vilken är din arbetsposition?
- Hur länge har du varit anställd på organisation X?
- Vad består dina arbetsuppgifter av?
- Arbetar organisation X med talanghantering specifikt eller använder ni annan benämning för det?

Definition Talang

- Använder ni begreppet Talang?
- Hur definieras begreppet Talang?
- Vilken betydelse har talang för organisationen?
- Vad är talang för dig och organisationen?
- Har ni några kriterier för talang genom vilken individer kan urskiljas och identifieras?

Talanghantering

- Arbetar ni med att aktivt söka efter och rekrytera talanger?
- Vilken avdelning eller vilken position har personen som arbetar med talanghantering?
- Generellt hur skulle du beskriva arbetet med talanghantering?
    - Finns det olika faser?
- Används talangpooler?
- Hur arbetar ni med positioner avsedda för talanger?

Locka talanger

- Hur arbetar ni med att attrahera talanger?
    - Hur ser det ut i praktiken?
- Arbetar ni med marknadsföring gentemot potentiella/framtida medarbetare?
- Arbetar ni med employer branding?
    - Word-of-mouth
- Finns det koppling mellan employer branding och organisationens rykte?
- Hur kommunicerar ni att det finns möjlighet till karriärutveckling innan anställning?

Utveckling och bevarandet av talanger

- Hur arbetar ni med att behålla talanger?
  (Utbildning, coachsamtal, uppföljningssamtal etc.)
- Behandlas talanger annorlunda i jämförelse med andra medarbetare?

Övrigt

- Hur tror du organisationskulturen påverkar arbetet med talanghantering?
- Har du kunnat identifiera några utmaningar inom talanghantering?
    - Om ja, vilka?
- Vill du lägga till något annat?
- Kan jag kontakta dig för kompletterande frågor?

Tack för din medverkan!

Appendix B - Interview guide (English)

General

- What is your working position?
- How long have you been employed by organisation X?
- What are your duties?
- Does organisation X work with talent management specifically or do you use another term for it?

Definition Talent

- Do you use the term Talent?
- How is the term Talent defined?
- What is the significance of talent for the organisation?
- What is talent for you and the organisation?
- Do you have any criteria for talent by which individuals can be distinguished and identified?

Talent Management

- Do you actively search for and recruit talent?
- What is the department or position of the person working on talent management?
- In general, how would you describe your work with talent management?
    - Are there different phases?
- How do you work with positions dedicated to talents?
- Are talent pools used?

Attracting talent

- How do you work to attract talent?
- What does it look like in practice?
- Do you market to potential/future employees?
- Do you work with employer branding?
- - Word-of-mouth
- Is there a link between employer branding and the reputation of the organisation?
- How do you communicate that there are opportunities for career development before employment?

Talent development and retention

- How do you work to retain talent?

(Training, coaching sessions, follow-up sessions, etc.)

- Are talents treated differently compared to other employees?

In conclusion

- How do you think the organisational culture influences the work on talent management?
- Have you been able to identify any challenges in talent management?
- If yes, what are they?

Is there anything else you would like to add?
Can I contact you for additional questions?

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix C - Data analysis

Themes:

1. Talent & TM concept definition
    - 1.1 Inclusive approach
    - 1.2 Individual or exclusive approach
    - 1.3 Contextual approach
    - 1.4 Non-use of concept of talent management

2. Pre-activities
    - 1.1 Positions
        - 1.1.1 Adapted to talents
        - 1.1.2 Adapted from talents

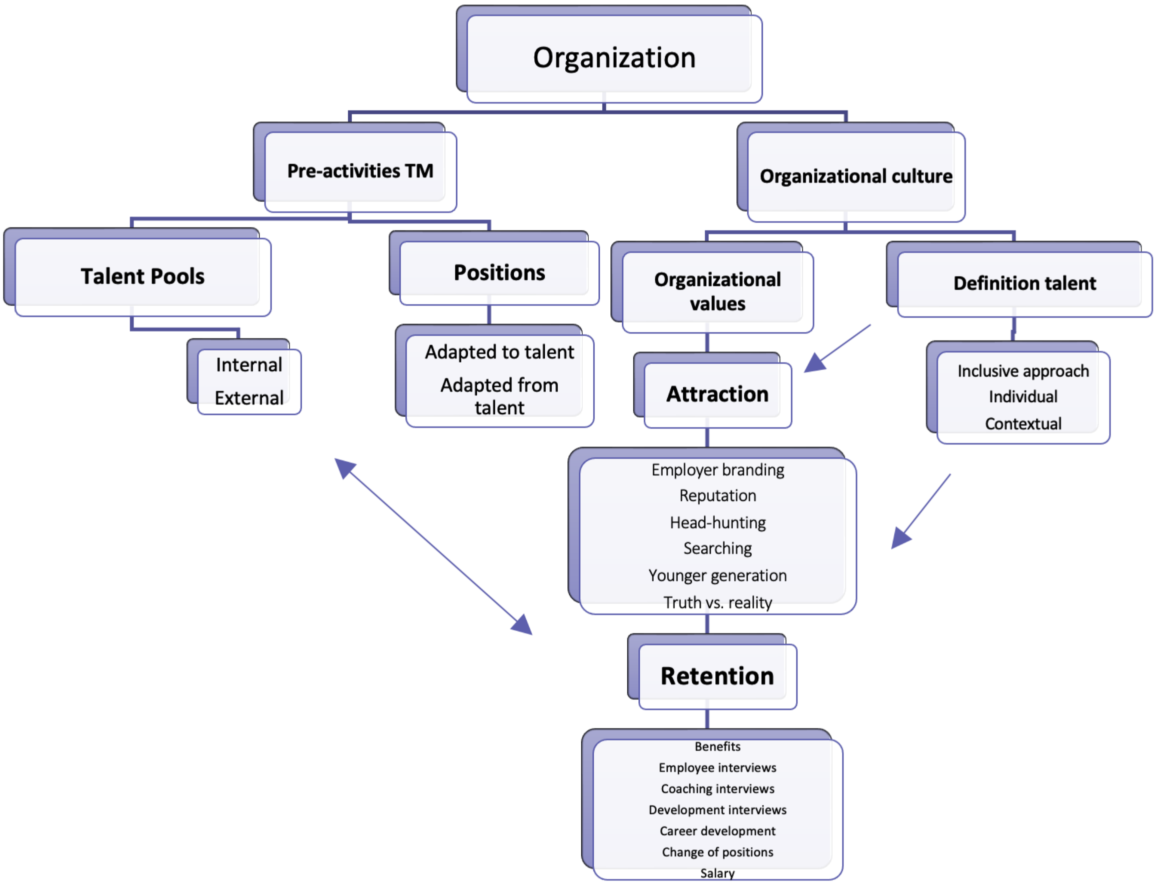
    - 2.1 Talent pools
        - 2.1.1 Internal and external
        - ~~2.1.2 Other terms for talent pools~~

3. Attraction
    - 3.1 Employer branding
    - 3.2 Reputation
    - 3.3 Head-hunting / Searching
    - ~~3.4 International competence~~
    - 3.5 The knowledge industry - difficulties
    - 3.6 Younger generation
    - 3.7 Truth vs. reality
    - 3.8 ~~Trainee program~~

4. Retention
    - 4.1 Benefits
    - 4.2 Employee interviews
    - 4.3 Coaching interviews
    - 4.4 Development interviews
    - 4.5 Career development
    - 4.6 Change of position
    - 4.7 Truth vs. reality
    - 4.8 Salary

5. Organizational culture
    - 5.1 Values
    - 5.2 Culture within the country influences common behaviors within organizations
    - 5.3 Organizational culture influence the definition
    - 5.4 Shortage of skilled labor in knowledge-intensive sectors

Themes (Mind Map):


Organization
Pre-activities TM
Organizational culture
Talent Pools
Positions
Organizational values
Definition talent
Internal
External
Adapted to talent
Adapted from talent
Attraction
Inclusive approach
Individual
Contextual
Employer branding
Reputation
Head-hunting
Searching
Younger generation
Truth vs. reality
Retention
Benefits
Employee interviews
Coaching interviews
Development interviews
Career development
Change of positions
Salary