Coaching as a social exchange: examining the role of coaching in talent management

Karine Mangion-Thornley

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Oxford Brookes University

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2020

Abstract

This study focuses on the role of coaching in the context of talent and leadership development programmes in a multinational financial services organisation. Coaching is often regarded as a core element of these programmes, and yet there have been few attempts to examine coaching within this specific organisational context and its contribution to the development and career progression of talented employees. To address this neglect, this study examines coaching utilised in four talent management programmes targeting talented employees at different seniority levels in a multinational firm in the banking sector. Drawing on 30 semi-structured interviews of talented employees, HR managers, and internal and external coaches, this qualitative single-case study argues that coaching plays a critical role within talent management programmes.

From a theoretical perspective, this study examines coaching as a talent management practice through the lens of social exchange theory and the psychological contract. Overall, the findings indicate that talent coaching comprises a distinct practice blending a range of existing helping interventions used in organisations. By applying a social exchange theory lens, coaching may be perceived as a social reward mechanism whereby all participants benefit differently from the exchange. Specifically, it can strengthen the psychological contract between the talented employee and the organisation. Additionally, it enacts the employee's talent status. Finally, coaching is viewed as an ambivalent practice, which may lead to ethical dilemmas due to imbalanced power dynamics between stakeholders, whose agendas may or may not align with the organisation's talent management goals. As well as offering practical recommendations to HR professionals and coaches, the study demonstrates the importance of bringing context into our understanding and evaluation of coaching.

Acknowledgements

List of abbreviations

EMEA: Europe, Middle East, and Africa

HRM: Human Resources Management

MNE: Multinational Enterprise

SET: Social Exchange Theory

TA: Thematic Analysis

TM: Talent Management

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study examines coaching's role in the context of talent management and leadership development programmes in a global firm operating in the banking and financial services sector. The goal is to uncover the views of the main stakeholders engaged in the operationalisation and delivery of coaching as part of these talent programmes—namely, talented employees receiving coaching, HR managers, and internal and external coaches. This chapter introduces the background, rationale, and context of this study. Following this, the aims and objectives are proposed, along with the questions that guided this inquiry. Finally, this study's scope and key terms are defined to delineate the field of investigation. An overview of the thesis structure is included at the end of the chapter.

1.1   BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Over the past 10 years, talent management (TM) and leadership development have repeatedly been identified by CEOs and HR representatives as two of the most critical challenges currently faced by global firms (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; PWC, 2017; Charan, Barton and Carey, 2018). In particular, knowledge-based firms face challenges in recruiting highly skilled people able to operate at a global level in order to achieve a sustained competitive advantage (Morris, Snell and Björkman, 2016). A global survey undertaken by PWC (2017) reported that 77% of CEOs consider the availability of key skills as the greatest threat for their business. Additionally, due to demographic changes and the speed of technologic advances requiring a highly skilled workforce, talent is perceived as a scarce and valuable resource in multinational enterprises (MNEs) (Canwell *et al.*, 2014). This shortage of talent subsequently brings the management of high-potential and high-performing employees to the forefront in organisations (KPMG, 2014; Stahl *et al.*, 2012), making leadership development both a concern and a top priority for CEOs for the future. As a result, operationalisation of talent and leadership development strategies have emerged as a critical agenda item, which is particularly difficult to manage at a global level (Strack *et al.*, 2014).

Talent management

Talent management comprises a practitioner-led field that emerged in the early 2000s when the consulting firm McKinsey coined the expression 'war for talent' (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 2001). As an emerging field of study, scholars have attempted to establish its theoretical underpinnings by discussing its nature, scope, and boundaries in relation to strategic and international HRM (Festing *et al.*, 2013; Collings, Scullion and Vaiman, 2015; Lewis and Heckman, 2006). Although the nature, scope, and boundaries of TM are still being debated in the literature, a consensus has recently begun emerging among scholars (Nijs *et al.*, 2014; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017).

The term 'talent' refers to the human capital needed in organisations to create value and sustainable competitive advantage (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Talent management encompasses the management and development of high-performing and high-potential employees who are expected to make a disproportionate contribution at pivotal positions in the firm (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Collings, Scullion and Vaiman, 2015).

Over the last decade, TM has emerged as one of the fastest-growing disciplines in the business and management field (Collings, Scullion and Vaiman, 2015). The literature on TM has primarily been led by practitioners and consulting firms (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015). Most empirical papers in this nascent field have been published after 2010, with two journals publishing most of them and becoming specialists in the field—namely, *Journal of World Business* and *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Despite a sharp increase of academic publications in the last decade, evidence-based and theory-driven research remains crucial to advancing the TM field (Sparrow, 2019). Indeed, a review of TM literature has revealed that 38% of empirical papers published between 2006 and 2014 made limited reference to theory (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Consequently, TM has been heavily criticised as a field lagging behind practice (Lewis and Heckman, 2006), being just 'new wine in old bottles' (Adamsky, 2003), or even compared to a management fad (Iles, Preece and Chuai, 2010). This was confirmed by a recent review examining the rigour and relevance of TM empirical studies (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019) as well as by a historical analysis of the TM debates (Sparrow, 2019). Therefore, it is commonly claimed that TM requires further empirical studies underpinned by theory to move towards a stage of maturity (Dries, 2013b; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Amongst the theories underpinning TM, the resource-based view, social exchange, and institutional theories are central (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). This study draws on the social exchange theory (SET) and the psychological contract, which provide a useful framework for understanding coaching intervention for TM purposes, and especially the relationship dynamics between talented employees, coaches, and the organisation.

Due to the internationalisation of business operations, a global dimension of TM has emerged to accommodate the complexity of international workforce trends and aspirations in the pursuit of organisational success (Brewster, Sparrow and Harris, 2005; Kim and McLean, 2012). Global TM encompasses all organisational activities aimed at attracting, selecting, developing, and retaining the best employees in the most strategic roles at a global level (Scullion, Collings and Caligiuri, 2010). This field of study has emerged as a sub-set of TM focused on internationalisation's influence on the design and operationalisation of talent systems in MNEs. Approximately one-third of the TM studies

published between 1998 and 2013 focused on the management of talent within large multinational corporations, yet more empirical studies are needed to advance the field (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017).

Despite the proliferation of professional and academic publications in the past two decades, TM practices have remained surprisingly under-explored in a global context. Based on a review of the literature, Cappelli and Keller (2014) suggested that TM research does not reflect the challenges and uncertainties of the current global labour markets. More specifically, they argued that TM strategies and practices continue to consider a career as a life-time plan in the organisation, despite the shift in career management characterised by the global mobility of employees and the prominence of external labour markets (Cappelli and Keller, 2014). Consequently, TM studies adopting a macro approach and focussing on global mobility trends and migration have begun to emerge (Khilji, Tarique and Schuler, 2015; King and Vaiman, 2019). In addition, at the micro level, career management has undergone dramatic changes since the 1990s, and new approaches are providing increasing responsibilities to the individual rather than the organisation (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). Surprisingly, the underlying TM processes and practices promoting the career and development of talented employees have attracted little attention (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Cappelli and Keller, 2014). In addition, it has been argued that TM requires a better understanding of practices in organisations from the perspective of multiple internal stakeholders, including employees, managers, and HR managers (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Accordingly, this study addresses this neglect by including the views of talented employees, HR managers, and internal and external coaches regarding coaching as a TM practice.

It is widely acknowledged that TM plays a significant role in a company's overall performance and competitive advantage (Vaiman and Vance, 2008; Andrianova, Maor and Schaninger, 2018). However, the effectiveness of TM activities is often questioned, despite steady interest from HR practitioners and academics over the past 10 years (Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe, 2014; Andrianova, Maor and Schaninger, 2018). Additionally, HR professionals claim that, whilst TM activities are taking place in three-quarters of MNEs, their effectiveness and impact are perceived as limited and difficult to evaluate (CIPD, 2015). Furthermore, a global McKinsey survey reported that only 5% of participants consider TM practices as effective (Andrianova, Maor and Schaninger, 2018). However, the barriers to effective TM, and the factors mediating positive or negative outcomes of TM practices, have remained under-explored, with few studies addressing this topic (Mellahi and Collings, 2010; Khoreva, Vaiman and Van Zalk, 2017). From an HR perspective, most empirical studies have argued that the corporate HR function may play various roles to facilitate global TM effectiveness (Farndale, Scullion and Sparrow, 2010; Sparrow, Farndale and Scullion, 2013). From an

individual perspective, it has been argued that the more high-potential employees perceive TM practices to be effective, the more they are committed towards leadership competence development (Khoreva, Vaiman and Van Zalk, 2017). This suggests that organisations may invest in TM practices perceived as effective by employees in order to increase their commitment towards personal and leadership growth. Nevertheless, questions remain concerning which practices are deployed and why these are or are not deemed effective.

Coaching for managing and developing talent

Workplace coaching comprises a developmental intervention widely employed in organisations for performance, leadership, and career-development purposes. From a practitioner perspective, coaching has been defined as a helping and developmental intervention similar to mentoring, whereby a one-to-one discussion would support the development of an individual's skills, knowledge, or work performance (CIPD, 2017). Amongst scholars, coaching refers to a '*human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools, and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee and potentially for other stakeholders'* (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2018: 1). Amongst the TM practices taking place in large organisations, coaching has continuously been identified as one of the most effective by HR professionals and practitioners (Deloitte, 2015; CIPD, 2015). Typically, leaders receive coaching support when they transition between two roles, when there is a prospect of a future promotion, or when they join a TM scheme (Bond and Naughton, 2011; Passmore, 2010; CIPD, 2015). However, this can take multiple forms and appellations in organisations, such as business, managerial, executive, leadership, and performance coaching, which may generate confusion amongst practitioners and hinder advancement of this nascent field of study.

Similar to the TM field, the coaching literature is characterised by a proliferation of publications over the past 20 years due to a steady and growing interest in empirical research on coaching for leadership development (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015; Grover and Furnham, 2016). However, similarly to TM, it has been claimed that academic research is lagging behind the practitioner literature and that, without strong theoretical underpinnings and empirical research, this emerging field could be dismissed as a managerial trend (Feldman and Lankau, 2005). Furthermore, the lack of empirical research has been repeatedly highlighted by early literature reviews on executive coaching (Kilburg, Leonard and Kilburg, 1996; Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001; Joo, 2005). Ten years later, a systematic review of 111 published empirical papers investigating business coaching theory, processes, and outcomes has advocated the evolution of coaching as an academic field of study

(Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016). Despite this, the authors claimed that, although the number of evidence-based coaching studies has dramatically increased over the past 10 years, the field remains defined by a general shortage of empirical research on business coaching as a developmental tool. Specifically, they argued that further empirical studies are needed to understand coaching's influence on performance and the nature of the coaching intervention in the workplace (Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016). As such, this study strives to advance this field by providing empirical analysis of coaching as a TM practice.

In addition, coaching in organisations is often perceived as an expensive, yet widely used intervention and a growing industry (CIPD, 2015; CIPD, 2017). For example, a report commissioned by the International Coaching Federation (ICF, 2016) estimated the global total revenue from coaching at $2.356 billion USD in 2015, representing a 19% increase over the 2011 estimate. Consequently, the extent of the funding allocated to coaching activities in large firms has aroused keen interest from HR managers and coaching practitioners to identify coaching's benefits in an attempt to establish correlations between its cost and its positive contribution to the firm's competitive advantage. As a result, it is widely assumed that coaching in the workplace represents 'the way to go', with line managers incentivised to coach their teams and to contribute to developing a coaching culture in organisations (Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2016; Grant, 2017). To evidence this, some studies have reported extraordinarily positive results associated with the use of coaching (Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014; ICF, 2016). For example, one survey claimed that the mean return on investment (ROI) in coaching reached seven times the initial investment, and over a quarter of coaching clients reported ROI of 10–49 times the cost (ICF, 2011). However, the method for establishing the ROI of coaching has been criticised in terms of veracity and usefulness (De Meuse, Dai and Lee, 2009; Grant, 2012). Nevertheless, the need to measure coaching's effectiveness at the individual and organisational levels continues to feed controversial debates in the literature (Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016; Ely *et al.*, 2010; Tooth, Nielsen and Armstrong, 2013; Osatuke, Yanovsky and Ramsel, 2017).

Surprisingly, despite being identified as an effective TM practice, coaching outcomes have received little attention when delivered as part of a TM strategy (Ely *et al.*, 2010; Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016). In addition, few studies have attempted to explore the negative impact of coaching in the workplace (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019). To address this neglect, this study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the role of coaching when embedded within TM programmes in a global firm. Specifically, it seeks to investigate the positive and negatives impacts that coaching may have on talented individuals and their organisation. However, it is important to clarify the focus of

the thesis here. Departing from the debate concerning the effectiveness of workplace coaching, this study does not intend to examine coaching in terms of benefits or ROI in an attempt to establish a correlation between the financial investment in coaching and the post-intervention results. Conversely, it focuses on coaching's role within a global TM strategy at the micro (individual) and meso level (organisational) with regard to leadership development and career progression of the talented employees positioned in the organisation's talent pipeline.

Moreover, the literature provides little evidence concerning the role of coaching as perceived by the participants involved in global TM and leadership development programmes, since most coaching studies have instead explored the perspective of HR managers and coach practitioners (Passmore, Peterson and Freire, 2013; Clutterbuck, Poulsen and Kochan, 2012; Clutterbuck, 2012). As such, this study sheds light on the perceived role of coaching from multiple perspectives, including those of talented employees, HR managers, and internal and external coaches taking part in TM programmes. This study's expected contribution resides in characterising coaching for TM purposes. From a theoretical perspective, it is expected for this study to shed light on the relationship between talented employees and their organisation, particularly the mutual expectations derived from the use of coaching as part of a TM and leadership development strategy. From a practical perspective, this study is expected to provide insights into the talent coaching intervention. This will support HR managers and coaching practitioners in adapting their TM systems and coaching interventions to meet the needs of talented employees as they evolve professionally within an organisation. The context of this study is discussed in the following section.

1.2   CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Context matters, as a recent special edition of one of the leading journals for TM (*International Journal of Human Resources Management*) highlighted a need for further empirical and contextualised research to advance the field (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020). Notably, TM practices remain underexplored regarding *what* happens in specific contexts, as well as *how* and *why* (Thunnissen & Gallardo-Gallardo, 2017). Furthermore, a recent review of the empirical TM literature revealed that research has been conducted in a broad variety of contexts (countries and organisations), yet the impact of internal and external contextual factors, such as the role of actors regarding the conceptualisation and operationalisation of TM, has largely been neglected (Thunnissen & Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019). Additionally, the authors drew attention to methodology sections, which lack detailed information concerning the study's organisational context, if any. The lack of detailed descriptions of the context in TM studies hinders their quality and impedes both practitioners' and scholars' ability to grasp their findings and significance. Therefore, contextualised

empirical studies are viewed as critical for elevating the TM discipline to a stage of maturity. Similarly, a review of the executive coaching literature calls for further context-sensitive and empirical studies to better understand the contextual drivers of coaching in organisations (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). To address this concern, this study seeks to provide a thorough description of the context, which is particularly important since the research design adopted comprises a single case study in a global company.

Talent management and coaching practices occur primarily in large multinational organisations (ICF, 2016; Collings, Mellahi and Cascio, 2019). As such, TM has typically been studied in the context of MNEs or large governmental organisations, mainly in the US and Europe (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Recently, emerging countries have received greater attention as domestic firms assert their presence on the global market and are increasingly competing to attract the best talents (Beamond, Farndale and Härtel, 2016; Al Ariss, 2014). In addition, a review of empirical TM research indicates that a large majority of TM publications remain focused on the education and healthcare industries (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2017). Despite broad interest concerning how the global financial crisis influenced the development of future leaders and global TM (McDonnell *et al.*, 2010), few TM studies have been conducted in the banking and financial sector (Sparrow, Farndale and Scullion, 2013). This is all the more surprising since the global financial crisis of 2008 originated from this specific industry.

This study is concerned with large firms operating at an international level in the banking and financial services industry. Both TM and leadership development comprise perennial issues and offer core priorities for organisational development in a highly competitive, uncertain, and knowledge-based economy (McNally, 2014; Deloitte, 2018). Since the global financial crisis of 2008, the banking sector has been facing ongoing transformative change. The drivers for change stem from the digitalised and technology-augmented world of work, the need for strong ethical decision-making processes, the global talent shortage of highly skilled individuals, and the disruptive innovation in fintech, comprising computer programmes and new technologies supporting banking and financial services, that shake the traditional banking business model (Gomber *et al.*, 2018). In addition, the sector faces low employee engagement, particularly with young professionals. A PwC survey (2017) revealed that 42% of millennials working in the financial services sector plan to move to new job opportunities, and 48% are actively seeking a way out from their current organisation. As a result, a future leadership crisis has been predicted in the banking sector, unless banks manage to deliver a more holistic career proposition that high-potential employees would see as meaningful, and to make the industry an employment of choice (Quinlan & Associates, 2017). As few TM empirical

studies have been undertaken in the banking and financial services industry, this study seeks to examine TM practices in a global bank that has experienced significant re-structuring, downsizing, and change following the global crisis of 2008.

The global economic environment in which GlobalFinCorp is operating sheds additional light on the external forces that may shape its TM practices and how they may be perceived differently by multiple stakeholders. As mentioned above, the banking sector has experienced significant changes since the global financial crisis of 2009 due to a disruptive and turbulent environment. The 2009 subprime mortgage crisis led to the collapse of two major American hedge-funds companies, and the first global recession since WW2. A decade was necessary for the world economy to recover, with significant disparities across countries and regions (Lund, Manyika and Goldshein, 2018). Notably, the crisis prompted the extraordinary intervention of global banks, regulators and policy makers in an attempt to prevent future financial shocks by imposing constraints on risk management and global investment (Martin and Gollan, 2012). As a result, the banks which survived the post-2009 crisis era are those that dramatically cut their operation costs, through continuous waves of restructuring and staff redundancy. This generated enhanced stress and low morale amongst employees, which appears to be alleviated by coaching programmes (David *et al.*, 2016).

GlobalFinCorp, the case organisation selected for this study, is a large US corporation including subsidies in more than 160 countries. This study focuses on its TM programmes deployed in the EMEA region, which accounts for 55 countries. This means that GlobalFinCorp operates and competes in multiple regional and national settings, which are subjects to variations in terms of national and regional economic, political, regulatory, technological and cultural conditions. The multiple contexts in which a company operates may influence and shape its TM systems and practices (Khilji, Tarique and Schuler, 2015). Recently introduced in the TM literature, "macro TM" refers to "*the activities that are systematically developed by governmental and non-governmental organisations expressly for the purpose of enhancing the quality and quantity of talent within and across countries and regions to facilitate innovation and competitiveness of their citizens and corporations*" (Khilji, Tarique and Schuler, 2015: 237). Acting directly or indirectly on talent flow and country attractiveness, macro TM trends at regional and national levels may reinforce or undermine the TM strategy of MNEs and their ability to attract, recruit, develop and retain talented employees (King and Vaiman, 2019). So, despite being often overlooked by organisations, macro TM forces may help to understand and shape effective intra-organisational TM strategies and practices.

Further, the complexity of these trends is greater when multinational corporations, such as GlobalFinCorp operate in multiple national and regional contexts, which have distinct macro talent

contexts. King and Vaiman (2019) argued in a conceptual paper that it is imperative for global organisations to understand the conditions and the impact that macro TM may have on the local implementation of global TM strategy, in the form of an integrated macro-micro talent strategy. Further, drawing on contingency and system theories, they advocate a contingency-based approach to TM and argue that macro TM directly influences organisational TM. Consequently, a one-size-fits all may not be conducive of effective TM practices at corporate level in various contexts. Given the multiplicity of the contexts in which GlobalFinCorp is operating, the macro TM factors may help to understand how TM practices are translated locally, implemented, and received by talented employees. Macro TM considerations are examined further in the findings chapters (chapter five, section 5.2) and in the discussion chapter (chapter eight, section 8.3.2), especially the role of banking corporate culture, the US national culture and the changes in the banking sector post-2009 financial crisis.

Here, it seems important to provide details regarding the researcher's background and context from which this study has emerged. Prior to this investigation, the researcher had developed a continuous interest in global leadership development and coaching over a number of years. Raised in France, the researcher has been living abroad for more than 20 years in Denmark, Bulgaria, and the UK. Global leadership and cross-cultural competence development comprised the focus of a previous dissertation achieved in 2001 (Specialised Master in International Project Management and Human Resources). She continued her education in the UK by specialising in coaching and has held a Level 7 diploma in executive and leadership coaching since 2011 (Institute of Leadership and Management UK). Furthermore, the researcher combined academic interest as a lecturer in HRM with practice by founding a cross-cultural training and coaching practice from 2008 to 2017 in the UK.

The choice of this study's topic and context emerged as the researcher began coaching individuals in an American global bank in their London offices. As an external coach, the coaching relationship was funded independently by the coachee. The purpose of the coaching was developmental and included the following topics: career management, leadership, influencing skills, time management, cross-cultural communication, and self-confidence. The coaching clients were often, but not exclusively, women working at vice president (VP), senior vice president (SVP), and managing director (MD) levels, which are common appellations reflecting the hierarchical position in the banking industry. During these coaching conversations, it emerged that most coaching clients had taken part in talent and leadership programmes or had recently been nominated to join such programmes in their organisation. As such, the coachees were seeking external and independent support to address concerns and issues in the workplace, so far unresolved by the coaching

intervention offered in TM programmes. Moreover, the researcher was informed that they had already experienced coaching as part of leadership and talent programmes. The coaching received was short term, provided by an internal or external coach appointed by the organisation, delivered individually or as part of a group. An inquiry began to emerge regarding why leaders identified as talents by their organisation would seek external coaching to progress on the career ladder and become global leaders whilst being coached as part of a TM programme. This suggested that some talented employees' needs and aspirations may not be fulfilled by the coaching intervention operationalised as a TM practice in the organisation.

The researcher acknowledges that the inquiry stemmed from her personal observation of a coaching deficit in the context of TM, and this potential bias is taken into consideration throughout the research process. Through this study, the researcher endeavours to explore how coaching is utilised in the context of TM in a global bank and how talented employees, coaches and HR managers make sense of the individual coaching intervention deployed for career progression and leadership development purposes. In sum, the practice of coaching, the research interest, and personal experience led the researcher to (a) seek detailed understanding of talented employees' needs and perceptions of TM, (b) explore and question the role of the coaching sponsored by the organisation for leadership and talent development purposes, and (c) better understand coaching practices from multiple perspectives in a global firm operating in the banking sector.

1.3   AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study aims to explore the role of coaching used as part of an organisation's TM strategy. Specifically, it offers a deep understanding of coaching's impact as perceived by talented employees, HR managers, and internal and external coaches taking part in TM programmes in a multinational company in the banking and financial services industry.

The objectives for this research are as follows:

1. To critically evaluate coaching as a developmental intervention in relation to the TM and coaching literature;
2. To analyse how coaching may contribute to the development of talented employees positioned in the leadership pipeline of a multinational company;
3. To better understand coaching's perceived role for talented employees receiving coaching at various stages of their careers in a global organisation;

4. To develop an understanding and evaluate the role of coaching as a TM practice for different stakeholders—namely, employees identified as talent, HR managers, and internal and external coaches;

5. To contribute to existing knowledge regarding how coaching may support TM and leadership development initiatives in MNEs from a practical perspective.

To this end, this study addresses the following questions:

1. RQ1: How do multiple stakeholders (talented employees, HR managers and coaches) perceive the contribution of coaching in the context of TM and leadership development programmes in a multinational company?

2. RQ2: What is the perceived role of coaching for talented employees receiving coaching at various stages of their careers in a global organisation?

3. RQ3: How is coaching characterised in the context of global TM and leadership development?

1.4   SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

This research was conducted in a MNE that delivers TM programmes as part of a global TM strategy. The firm was chosen for its extensive experience in coaching as a TM and leadership development practice and for its global reach. The company operates in the banking and financial services sector in more than 160 countries and holds approximately 200 million customer accounts. In 2019, roughly 200,000 people were employed worldwide, a 20% decline from 2014 (date of the start of the research process), due to ongoing organisational restructuring in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, and subsequent major changes in the sector. This study focuses on the TM activities delivered by this company in the Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) region, which accounts for approximately 55 countries. The EMEA head offices are based in London.

The researcher secured access to data via the head of organisational development and manager of global TM for EMEA. During the study, this person moved from the company, and the position has been restructured. A new manager took on the role of talent and coaching lead for EMEA, and the role was moved to offices in Eastern Europe in 2016. However, contact has been maintained during this research via regular update meetings and email exchanges between the researcher, HR managers, and study participants.

1.5   DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

This study focuses on coaching deployed in a global organisation as a developmental intervention supporting the firm's TM strategy and leadership pipeline. It examines how coaching may contribute to the leadership development and career progression of employees identified as talent and positioned in the leadership pipeline. As such, the concepts relevant for this study have been defined as follows: talent, TM, global TM, global leadership development, and coaching.

Defining 'coaching' for this study represented a particular challenge, as the term is commonly used in different contexts, such as sports (athlete and fitness coaching), personal development (life and career coaching), and organisations (business, managerial, leadership, and executive coaching). Interestingly, talent coaching is not used by scholars to characterise the coaching intervention occurring in organisations for TM purposes, with the exception of Nyfoudi and Tasouli (2018). The term 'executive' prevails as a type of coaching in organisations and refers to one-to-one conversations aiming at developing leaders in transitions between two roles and supporting the success of both individuals and organisations (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015; Joo, 2005). However, it does not apply to less experienced and/or young professionals identified as talent, who join TM programmes and receive coaching to support their ascension on the career ladder in the organisation. Moreover, the definitions of coaching and mentoring are often blurred in practice, with "coaching" often used as an umbrella term for a range of helping and developing interventions in the workplace such as training, counselling, consulting and mentoring (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2017; Gray, Garvey and Lane, 2016). Traditionally, mentoring in the workplace refers to a long-term relationship between two individuals which involves guidance, support and advice for personal growth. A mentor is typically a more experienced individual willing to share knowledge with someone less experienced in a relationship of mutual trust (Clutterbuck and Lane, 2004). Further, the professional record is an additional characteristic of the mentor, who is an accomplished and experienced performer who takes a special personal interest in helping to guide and develop a junior or less experienced person (Gibb, 1999).

Although coaching and mentoring require similar skills such as listening, communication, feedback and empathy, workplace coaching focuses on the development of performance or behaviours which are critical for the individual to develop and progress on the career ladder within an organisation (Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Joo, 2005). Furthermore, coaching and mentoring are often amalgamated in practice, and are often described as hybrid practices (Western, 2012). Indeed, these terms are often use interchangeably in organisations and beyond. Further, workplace coaching has become a "*generic signifier*" for good communication, people skills and empathetic management

skills in the workplace (Western, 2012: 67). Consequently, the term is used expansively and encompasses a variety of meanings and practices. Recently, coaching and mentoring have been characterised as "*two sides of the same coin*" to highlight the role of context in determining which approaches, skills and behaviours are used in practice by practitioners (Stokes, Fatien-Diochon and Otter, 2020: 1).

For the purpose of this study, the term coaching is selected because it reflects the terminology used by the study participants engaged in the TM programmes operated by the case company. In this context, coaching refers to a one-to-one intervention aiming at the leadership development and career promotion of the talented employee, deployed as part of a TM and leadership development programme. Accordingly, the term "coaching" is used in the title of this thesis to reflect the denomination used in practice by the research participants.

In addition, this study focuses on understanding leaders' perceptions of coaching in the context of TM. Accordingly, the definitions of coaching, talent, and TM are approached by the researcher as socially constructed phenomena, and thus not critical per se. It is expected that the research participants may possess different views and experiences of coaching, talent status, and talent development schemes in the workplace.

However, for the purpose of this study, the key concepts of talent, TM, global TM, global leadership development, coaching, and executive coaching are defined as follows:

- **Talent:** 'Talent refers to systematically developed innate abilities of individuals that are deployed in activities they like, find important, and in which they want to invest energy. It enables individuals to perform excellently in one or more domains of human functioning, operationalised as performing better than other individuals of the same age or experience, or as performing consistently at their personal best' (Nijs *et al.*, 2014:182);
- **TM** refers to 'the management and development of high-performing and high-potential incumbents in critical organisational roles' (Collings, 2014b: 111). Talent management processes typically include talent recruitment, identification and assessment, succession planning, and talent development to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Scullion et al, 2010);
- **Global TM** encompasses all activities in organisations that aim at attracting, selecting, developing, or retaining individuals who are adding or have the potential to add value for achieving organisational objectives at a global level (Scullion et al, 2010; Al Ariss, 2014);

- **Global leadership development** is understood as the acquisition, development, and utilisation of global leadership capability. Global leadership encompasses the skills and attitudes enabling an individual to leverage differences across cultures in a globalised and complex environment (Osland, Bird and Mendenhall, 2013);

- **Coaching** describes a 'human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee and potentially for other stakeholders' (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2018: 1);

- **Executive coaching** comprises a one-to-one intervention taking place in organisations and involving the development of leadership skills and behavioural change for leaders. Typically, the purpose of executive coaching is to support individuals in transition between two roles, prepare them for future challenging assignments and responsibilities, and ultimately support the success at individual and organisational levels. It is typically funded by the organisation as part of a leadership development and TM strategy (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015; Joo, 2005).

The next section provides an overview and presents the structure of this study.

1.6   OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE

The following figure gives an overview of the different topics examined in each chapter of this study:

Figure 1.   Overview and structure of the study

Chapter 1- Introduction
- Background and rationale
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CHAPTER 2: TALENT MANAGEMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review section is composed of two chapters corresponding to the two key areas delineating this study's focus—namely, TM and coaching. The first chapter examines TM with particular focus on the debates concerning the definition of talent, the TM discourse, the theories underpinning TM studies, and TM practices for global leadership development. In the second chapter, coaching is analysed as a developmental intervention deployed in the context of TM and leadership development programmes in organisations. Specifically, it explores the theories underpinning coaching research, the various ways coaching operates in a corporate environment, and its expected outcomes. The literature review section concludes with a summary of the key points and the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

2.2 DEFINING TALENT MANAGEMENT

This section reviews the concept of talent in TM, the dominant theoretical frameworks used in TM studies, the TM assumptions and discourse, and the TM practices for the development of global leadership.

2.2.1 Origins of the concept of talent

Talent is commonly defined as a distinct innate ability, skill, or aptitude employed to accomplish specific activities to high standards. In the business context, the term is typically defined as abilities that '*add immediate value to the prescribed activity, discipline or enterprise*' (Sparrow, Brewster and Chung, 2017:120). However, significant variations in the definition of talent can be found in the TM literature, leading to confusion and uncertainty on the topic examined in TM studies (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Nijs *et al.*, 2014).

To better understand the derivations of the term 'talent', Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) conducted an etymological analysis revealing that talent originally referred to a unit of money—a coin used in Ancient Greece representing a large amount of money. Later, the term was translated as 'capital' in the New Testament (25:14-30). This transfer of meaning supports the contemporary perception of talent, according to which talent is operationalised as human capital (Pascal, 2004, Dries, 2013). Accordingly, in the TM literature, as well as in practice, talent often refers to individuals identified as high potentials and high performers who contribute disproportionally to the organisation's success.

Nevertheless, the numerous variations of the definition of talent lead to debates and critics regarding the nature and scope of TM studies.

2.2.2 Debates on the conceptualisation of talent

Based on the review of the HRM and psychology literature, Dries (Dries, 2013a) argued that talent has been defined as capital, individual difference, gift, identity, strength, and the perception of talent. The table below illustrates the different tensions identified in the conceptualisation of talent, adapted from Dries (2013a):

Table 1.   The tensions on the definition of talent in TM studies

Innate:	Acquired:
People are born with talent	Talent as the outcome of a developmental process
Object (characteristics):	**Subject (people):**
Talent as the personal characteristics of an individual resulting in excellent performance	Talent as the people who possess special skills or abilities; assumes that people are the most important asset in an organisation
Transferable:	**Context-dependant:**
Talent can be transferred in another context; assumes that successful people in one context will be equally successful in another	Talent arises when the context is favourable, a high performer in one context can fail in another one
Input:	**Output:**
Talent as an input to a process	Talent as an outcome, the result of a process
Inclusive:	**Exclusive:**
Everyone has talent	Talent is rare and unique

Multiple views on the nature of talent exist based on a variety of current theories and paradigms. For instance, talent can be understood as a type of human capital with high-value and high-uniqueness characteristics (De Vos and Dries, 2013). Building on the social-constructivist view, talent has also been defined as a relational construct (Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe, 2014), suggesting that TM should be studied as a phenomenon, resulting from how people make sense of it in a specific context. The resource-based view (RBV) framework considers the firm as a unique combination of tangible and intangible resources (Werneerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991). According to this paradigm, talent results from a process of investment and learning acquired with experience and time by the firm.

Nevertheless, extant literature reviews on TM studies published between 2006 and 2020 have consistently highlighted that talent remains ill-defined in TM studies and repeatedly called for a clear definition to advance the field (Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013a; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Nijs *et al.*, 2014; Cappelli and Keller, 2014; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020; Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019; Sparrow, 2019). Drawing on the human capital and RBV, this study refers to talent as the set of competencies, qualities, and behavioural characteristics of employees identified as high-performers and high-potentials, and who are perceived as contributing disproportionally to the organisation's success.

2.2.3   Defining TM and global TM

Rationale for TM

According to Beechler and Woodward (2009), the rationale for TM is supported by four factors. First, global demographics and economic trends lead to increased attention towards talented people in a globalised economy with aging populations in developed countries (Khilji, Tarique and Schuler, 2015). Second, people are increasingly mobile across the world, as well as across organisations, due to a surge in foreign direct investment and trade across borders over the past 30 years (Cappelli and Keller, 2014). Third, globalisation leads to transformational change in people skills and corporate culture. Fourth, the global workforce is becoming increasingly diverse thanks to improved education at the global level (Collings, 2014a). As there remains no forecast signalling a change in these major global trends, academics and practitioners have agreed that TM will remain one of the priorities for global firms operating in the so-called 'VUCA' (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) world (Cascio and Boudreau, 2016; Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014).

Another reason for TM can be found in the growing concern for many organisations related to employees' retention. For example, factors of retention have been studied amongst 24,829 employees in the hospitality industry (Hausknecht, Rodda and Howard, 2009). Said study revealed that, more than other employees, high potentials consider advancement opportunities and organisational prestige as reasons for remaining in their organisation. In the banking sector, 42% of millennials plan to move to new job opportunities, and 48% are actively looking for a way out from their current organisation, suggesting low employee engagement and high career mobility levels (PWC, 2017). This supports the view that a workforce segmentation and differentiated HRM architecture is needed for organisations seeking to retain their talented employees (Morris, Snell and Björkman, 2016; Collings and Mellahi, 2009).

A definition in progress

Despite controversial debates about delineating the concept of talent (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013), a shared definition of TM started to emerge in the late 2000s. Currently, TM is increasingly viewed as an HR-led activity and process based on workforce segmentation to leverage human capital (Becker, Huselid and Beatty, 2009; Morris, Snell and Björkman, 2016). Notably, an increasing number of TM scholars are referring to the definition proposed by Collings and Mellahi (2009) to frame TM studies (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015), as is used as a reference in this study as well:

> *'HR-related activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions that differentially contribute to the organisation's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of talent pool of high-potential and high-performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents, and to ensure their continued commitment to the organisation'. (Collings and Mellahi, 2009: 304)*

In this definition, the authors advocated an exclusive TM approach based on identifying key positions requiring exceptional skills and abilities to achieve high performance, leading to the firm's success, whereby talented employees are identified as high-performers and high-potentials. However, these two characteristics used to identify talent remain undefined. Furthermore, the authors positioned TM as a strategic activity leading to performance and sustainable competitive advantage. Despite this, it remains unclear what high-potential and high-performance entail, and how managers may identify them in practice.

Global talent management

Global TM has developed as a sub-field of TM, focussing on the management of human capital in an increasingly globalised world. Since the 90s, HRM scholars have focused on the identification and management of individuals contributing disproportionately to the success of MNEs (Schuler, Jackson and Tarique, 2011). The interest in global TM has also increased dramatically over the past decade as organisations increasingly operate in an interconnected world (Scullion et al., 2010).

Three main factors have influenced the growth of global TM (Stahl *et al.*, 2012; Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Scullion, Collings and Caligiuri, 2010). First, the shortage of international managers has been recognised as a key concern for ensuring a sustainable competitive advantage in MNEs. Second, the competition for talent is increasingly operating at the global level, and significantly less nationally or

regionally. Third, global TM is influenced by demographics, such as increased life expectancy, availability, and labour flow at the international level. Furthermore, the mobility of people has dramatically increased across geographical and cultural boundaries as a result of globalisation. The so-called 'brain drain' phenomenon highlights the growing trends in migration of highly skilled workers (Tung and Lazarova, 2007). To counteract this loss of talent from domestic job markets, governments may implement macro-talent measures to attract their expatriates back to their home country (Carr et al, 2005). As such, MNEs compete fiercely to attract, develop, and retain talent in a global job market.

Global TM has been defined in the TM literature as including the following:

> *'All organisational activities for the purpose of attracting, selecting, developing and retaining the best employees in the most strategic roles on a global scale. Global TM takes into account the differences in both organisations' global strategic priorities as well as the differences across national contexts for how talent should be managed in the countries where they operate'. (Scullion, Collings and Caligiuri, 2010: 6)*

This definition has led to controversial debate regarding what constitutes the 'best employee', the 'high potential', and the 'top player' in an international organisation (Stahl *et al.*, 2012), as well as the difficulties involved in identifying and managing those individuals. Mellahi and Collings (2010) argued that this definition highlights the added value of individuals in key positions that support global sustainable competitive advantage. Accordingly, a strong connection between global TM and competitive advantage has been claimed, consistent with the definition of TM mentioned earlier.

In sum, TM and talent remain ill-defined concepts despite a strong interest combined with an explosion of academic publications over the past 10 years (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020). After a decade of debates on the nature, scope, and boundaries of TM, a unanimously approved consensus has yet to be found. Despite this, TM studies have increasingly referred to the definition proposed by Collings and Mellahi in 2009, which may suggest that a consensus has been reached amongst scholars (Collings, Scullion and Vaiman, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016).

Despite numerous critics and shortfalls, TM practices are widely used in organisations, and TM studies are published in some highly regarded journals, leading to critical reviews and meta-reviews defining future research paths (Sparrow, 2019). Although TM studies lag behind practitioners and professionals publications (Tung, 2016), it appears that TM is here to stay as the 'new norm'—a key

concern for CEOs and simultaneously one of the fastest-growing areas in management studies (Collings, Scullion and Vaiman, 2015; Schuler, 2015). To move the field towards maturity, scholars have recommended for TM studies to include clear framing in terms of definitions, theoretical underpinnings, and robust research methodology (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019), which this study seeks to address. The next section examines the dominant and emerging theories underpinning TM studies.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF TALENT MANAGEMENT STUDIES

As an emerging field of study, TM has drawn upon theories borrowed from HRM fields, especially strategic and international HRM, and more recently psychology (Dries, 2013a), organisational justice (Gelens *et al.*, 2013), and employee and societal well-being (Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013b). This section discusses TM's position within HRM-related fields. In addition, it examines the theories underpinning TM research in order to position this study within the dynamic theoretical landscape of TM.

2.3.1 Positioning TM within the HRM-related fields

Talent management has been identified as one of the fastest-growing fields in business and management (Collings, Scullion and Vaiman, 2015). However, the field first emerged only 20 years ago, and as such, it presents both advances and shortfalls, as is characteristic of new fields of study (Sparrow, 2019). Typically, a new field of study begins by conceptualising and delineating constitutive concepts in comparison with other related fields. Subsequently, empirical studies are developed to further understand the phenomenon. On the journey to becoming a distinctive and valuable research field, the TM field has not been immune from hurdles and lacunas previously discussed (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017; Farndale, Morley and Valverde, 2019; Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019). Each decade has witnessed a gradual development of TM studies, with scholarly debates moving from conceptualisation and distinctiveness to empirical studies and critical reviews of empirical TM literature.

During the first decade, most debates in the academic literature focused on TM's conceptualisation and positioning. Talent management has been extensively discussed in relation to other HRM-affiliated fields, such as international HRM, strategic HRM, and human capital management (Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Tung, 2016). The first review of the TM literature conducted by Lewis and Heckman (2006) claimed that TM is defined by three streams of thought. First, TM is presented as a specialist area of HRM, whereby talent represents a euphemism for people and TM is a synonym of HRM. Second, TM studies focus on the management of talent pools

in large organisations. Third, TM studies concentrate on the attraction, development, and retention of A-players, and subsequently on differentiated HR architecture. The authors concluded by claiming that TM encompasses all of the above components.

This view was questioned by Collings and Mellahi (2009) in their seminal paper, which distinguished TM from other HRM fields. For them, TM's starting point resided in the identification of key positions, which can differentially impact the firm's competitive advantage. Furthermore, the difference between TM and strategic HRM resides in the workforce segmentation, with an emphasis on the matching process between talented employees and key positions. Adopting an exclusive approach to talent, they advocated a differentiated HR architecture that aims to emphasise organisational performance. Their definition of TM is currently widely employed in TM studies, suggesting that TM has reached a certain stability and acceptance amongst scholars (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2017).

In the late 2000s, global TM emerged as a subset of international HRM to reflect the globalisation of labour markets and talent shortages across the world (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). At the end of this 10-year period of exploration and conceptualisation of the field, the concept of talent remained ill-defined, and the boundaries between TM and other related HRM fields continued to feed most debates in the TM literature (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Vaiman and Collings, 2013). Consequently, scholars have repeatedly called for more empirical studies to advance the field from a stage of infancy to one of adolescence (Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a), as was partially addressed in the next decade.

The second decade was marked by an explosion of publications and a series of special issues on TM in prominent journals such as *Human Resource Management Review*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, and *Journal of World Business* (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). A review of TM studies since 1998 revealed that 93% of papers were published after 2008 (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). Following the numerous calls for empirical studies over the past decade, scholars have published intensively quantitative and, to a lesser extent, qualitative studies exploring the definition of talent, intended outcomes of TM, and TM practices (Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013b). As a result, this decade has witnessed two main advancements in the field. First, the consolidation and establishment of the distinctiveness of TM related to the HRM field, and second, an emerging consensus regarding the definition of TM proposed by Collings and Mellahi (2009), which is currently employed in most academic studies (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015).

In addition, global TM has been defined as a subset of international HRM and TM. Specifically, it focuses on the management of expatriates identified as talent, as well as how to optimise the mix of expatriates, home-nationals, and third-country nationals, and how to foster global competence in MNEs (Cascio and Boudreau, 2016). Furthermore, TM has been increasingly studied at the macro level in order to better understand the dynamics of TM at the strategic and international level (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016), particularly the demographics and wider societal changes impacting talent mobility. Accordingly, scholars' attention has turned towards examining TM in a variety of regions, companies, and sectors to better understand how TM may contribute to sustainable organisation performance (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017).

In sum, TM and global TM have emerged as distinct research fields, detached from strategic and international HRM fields traditionally concerned with succession planning, expatriate management, and international management. Talent management comprises a discrete, yet fragmented field at the intersection of a number of HRM-related fields (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017; Farndale, Morley and Valverde, 2019). The three distinctive characteristics of TM involve the pivotal positions, the workforce segmentation, and the disproportionate contribution of high-performer/high-potential employees to sustainable competitive advantage. As such, the key concepts of talent and TM are currently acknowledged amongst TM scholars, signalling a significant advancement of the field. In addition, empirical studies have dramatically increased over the past decade. Despite this, the quality and lack of theoretical underpinning undermines their impact in advancing the field towards maturity (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019). The next section reviews the theoretical frameworks employed in TM studies.

2.3.2 Theoretical frameworks

The TM field is described as phenomenon-driven and practitioner-led, as opposed to being a theory-driven field (Dries, 2013b). This may explain why theoretical underpinnings are often missing in TM studies. In order to address this shortfall, this section reviews the existing theories underpinning TM studies and clarifies the TM theoretical framework utilised in this study.

First, TM papers often miss referring to any theoretical framework to underpin their investigations. According to a review of 88 articles published in high-ranked journals, less than 30 provided a theoretical framework, and those that did often used it only superficially (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). Drawing on existing reviews of empirical TM literature, it has been continuously claimed that most TM studies are descriptive and lack a clear theoretical framing (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). For instance, only 38% of empirical research papers published in peer-reviewed journals between 2006 and 2014 referred to a theoretical framework

(Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Consequently, scholars have called for more robust empirical research design underpinned by clear theoretical frameworks reflecting the choices made by the researcher (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015).

Second, the quality of TM studies is often questioned (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015). The extant reviews of TM literature have emphasised the lack of robust and justified theoretical underpinning in published papers. For example, an analysis of the TM studies between 2007 and 2017 highlighted that, despite growth in quantity, the quality of many empirical TM papers is lagging behind, hindering the progress of the academic field of TM (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020). The authors identified nine critical issues regarding the quality of the existing empirical TM research: (a) an incoherent and scattered community of scholars; (b) TM being used primarily as a label; (c) incoherent theoretical development; (d) carelessness in defining core concepts; (e) a lack of transparency regarding research methodology; (f) the use of vague research designs; (g) untraceable and misleading respondents; (h) relevant research, yet with a selective scope; and (i) being loosely embedded in context.

Third, despite the theoretical fragmentation of TM studies, a theoretical framework for TM has emerged (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017; Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2017; Sparrow, 2019). Based on the analysis of existing literature reviews (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Dries, 2013a; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016), the dominant theoretical frameworks used to analyse TM and global TM practices comprise the following: (a) resource-based view; (b) human capital theory; (c) SET; (d) psychological contract; and (e) institutional theory. This was confirmed in a recent systematic review of empirical and conceptual papers published in highly rated journals since 1998 (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, this paper added dependency theory, learning theory, brand equity, and signalling theory to the list of dominant theories identified in the aforementioned TM literature reviews.

Therefore, in order to contribute to a thorough understanding of the TM issues in practice, both rigour and relevance in empirical research are seen as critical (Lynham, 2002; Antonakis, 2017; Von Krogh et al., 2012; Vermeulen, 2005). Accordingly, Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2020) claimed that it is absolutely necessary for TM scholars to secure the quality of empirical TM research to advance the field. This study seeks to address these lacunas by discussing and justifying the theoretical lens adopted—namely, SET and psychological contract. This choice is further justified at the end of the literature review section. The following section reviews the steams of literature in the TM field.

2.3.3 Streams of literature

Talent management studies have examined the following knowledge areas: (a) cross-cultural management; (b) industrial and organisational psychology; (c) psychology; (d) employee assessment; (e) career management; (f) labour economics (human capital and labour market segmentation); (g) knowledge management; (h) supply chain management; and (i) leadership (Preece, Iles and Chuai, 2011; Dries, 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Khoreva and Vaiman, 2015; Ulrich, 2015). According to a recent review, TM studies increasingly refer to a range of areas, such as supply chain management, strategy, and employer branding, to understand TM's contribution in organisations (McDonnell, 2017). Recently, the TM debates have shifted to exploring some controversial aspects of TM practices in terms of equity, ethics, and organisational justice (Sparrow, 2019).

Additionally, TM studies are predominantly focused on examining TM at the organisational level, with 42% of studies examining TM practices or TM outcomes (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Meanwhile, the data collected at the employee level is remarkably absent, with only 23% of studies representing the employees' perspective (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). As such, scholars have called for further analysis of data collected from multiple perspectives, including employees, managers, and HR representatives, in order to provide an in-depth understanding of TM in context (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2017). Therefore, this study includes the views of multiple stakeholders engaged in the management or delivery of TM programmes, as well as their participants.

Moreover, this study aims to explore the role of coaching in TM programmes from the perspective of leaders positioned in the talent pool of a multinational organisation. Talent management programmes are typically designed to develop leaders and support their transition to a new pivotal position in the organisation. Therefore, the topic of career management is relevant for this study. As previously discussed, talent can be defined as a high-value and unique asset from an organisational and strategic perspective (De Vos and Dries, 2013). Consequently, organisations may seek to offer a clear career path to their talented employees. This can take the form of career development programmes aimed specifically at developing the organisation contextual-specific knowledge and skills in 'their high-value, high-uniqueness employees' (De Vos and Dries, 2013). However, few TM studies have examined how distinct TM practices influence career management. One exception can be found in a survey conducted amongst 306 companies in Belgium across sectors, investigating the views of HR managers and HR directors regarding human capital and career management (De Vos and Dries, 2013). The study claimed that organisations with a high value and unique level of human

capital will promote continuity in the form of clear career paths, and thus develop traditional career management policies that are 'strategic, paternalistic, bounded, formalised' (De Vos and Dries, 2013). The authors called for further bridges between career management and TM studies to explore the complementarity of the two fields.

Notwithstanding the multiple streams of literature found in TM studies, it has been suggested that the field should open to other disciplines and give further attention to talented individual needs. (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Collings, Scullion and Vaiman, 2015). To date, TM has focused more on the definition and processes at the organisational level, while the study of the individual unit has remained missing (King, 2015). As a result, little is known about those who are defined as talent, including their needs, motivation, individual outcomes, and perceptions (Farndale *et al.*, 2014; Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe, 2014; Björkman *et al.*, 2013). However, some studies have recently been conducted to start addressing this neglect. For example, an analysis of 769 managers in nine Nordic multinationals, underpinned by SET, revealed a positive correlation between talent and increased performance demands, skill enhancement, and further support for strategic priorities and turnover intentions (Björkman *et al.*, 2013). In addition, a comparison between the perceptions of employees who are and are not identified as talent in a single public sector scientific organisation confirmed that talent identification positively influences how people perceive their future prospects in the company (Swailes and Blackburn, 2016). Furthermore, TM as part of HRM practices signals the behaviours valued by the organisation for all employees, thus influencing employees' perceptions of what is considered desirable behaviour (Höglund, 2012). Despite this, employees may develop their own perceptions of organisational priorities, potentially resulting in dissonance between employees' perceptions of priorities and the actual corporate strategy (Guest and Conway, 2002). This questions the assumption whereby individual and organisational goals are aligned, as is discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Notably, considering TM as a relational construct, and drawing upon the psychological contract and SET, the 'talent deal' theorises how employees respond to TM and employee organisation relationship over time (King, 2016). Talent perceptions can be explored at the individual, organisational, and relational levels. This approach posits that employees would associate talent identification with (a) an increased social and economic contribution, (b) increased expectations for organisational support, (c) supervisor involvement, (d) access to leadership mentoring, (e) access to development programmes, and (f) accelerated career advancement. Furthermore, King (2016) advocated that strategic TM impacts talented employees, since human capital is modified and deployed through TM practices. She also warned against '*a possible risk of increased employee*

expectation of exchange' leading to dissatisfaction and negative perceptions of TM (King, 2016: 106). Interestingly, coaching and mentoring were identified in her study as one example of 'career anchor events' within the development phase of the employee lifecycle, yet their roles were not discussed in depth in the paper. This represents an omission that the current study aims to address. King (2016) concluded by calling for further multi-level (individual, team, firm level), multi-source (employee, supervisor, leadership, HR manager), and longitudinal research on HRM practices. Accordingly, this study analyses the views of multiple stakeholders, paying special attention to the talented employees receiving coaching as part of a TM programme. As such, it is expected that it will contribute to the leadership, career management, and organisational psychology streams of literature in TM.

In sum, after two decades of intense debate regarding the conceptualisation and positioning of TM related to other HRM areas, it seems that TM has eventually established itself as a discrete field (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, some significant advances of the field have occurred over the past two decades. Two recently published special issues of *Business Research Quarterly* and *International Journal of Human Resource Management* emphasised the extant contribution of TM for sustainable competitive advantage of organisations (Farndale, Morley and Valverde, 2019; Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020). However, the TM field lags behind practice and overall remains phenomenon-driven as opposed to theory-driven (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015), as confirmed by recent reviews (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017; Sparrow, 2019). Therefore, the TM field has been described as highly fragmented, with publications scattered across a range of various journals (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019).

Additionally, the quality and robustness of TM empirical studies are often questioned. The lack of theoretical frameworks deployed, combined with vague definitions of concepts, research designs, and unclear contexts of some studies, hinders the field from making clear contributions to the TM body of knowledge (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019; Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020). Notwithstanding, TM scholars engage in critical analysis of empirical TM studies, allowing them to set the path for future development of the field (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020; Sparrow, 2019; Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019). To address these critics, this study adopts a clear theoretical lens and ensures that a comprehensive description of the study's context is provided. The following section examines the TM discourse and assumptions underpinning the concept of talent in the literature.

2.4 TALENT MANAGEMENT ASSUMPTIONS AND DISCOURSE

2.4.1 Assumptions

The assumptions and philosophies underpinning TM studies and practices are seen as extremely varied (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Meyers et al., 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Dries, 2013; Sparrow and Makram, 2015). This section of the chapter discusses these assumptions in the light of insights emerging from empirical studies in the TM field.

Talent as a predictor of future performance

First, the definition of talent as a high-potential and high-performing employee assumes that past performance offers a predictor of future performance. However, talent is context-sensitive, meaning that high performers in one context can fail in another (Dries, 2013a; Hedayati Mehdiabadi and Li, 2016). Furthermore, the evaluation of individuals' performance and potential is not based on objective factors, but often relies on the subjective judgement of line managers (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Dries, 2013a). This outlines the scepticism felt by scholars and practitioners alike regarding the reliability and validity of TM practices.

Talent is in people

Second, instead of considering talent as the personal characteristics of an individual resulting in excellent performance, the approach of talent as a subject assumes that talent resides in people and is not context-dependant (Beechler and Woodward, 2009). As such, this position assumes that A-players differ from other employees without taking into consideration the impact of the context (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013). Furthermore, some TM studies assumes that talent is fixed and underestimates the impact, whether positive or negative, that talent status may have on employees (Beechler and Javidan, 2007; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Dries, 2013a).

In addition, the definition of talent as high potential assumes that the individual possesses the qualities needed to contribute positively to different roles in the organisation in the future. Consequently, high-potential employees are expected to progress faster than their peers whilst demonstrating different needs, motivations, and behaviours than regular employees (Pepermans, Vloberghs and Perkisas, 2003). However, the identification of talent is often questioned, especially regarding the decision-making mechanisms based on quantitative data, performance review, and/or intuition of line managers (Wiblen and McDonnell, 2020). Meanwhile, the designation of talented employees is often left to the judgement of line managers acting as talent spotters (Golik, Blanco and Czikk, 2018) or owners of talent (Ulrich *et al.*, 2017), but with little examination of the potential

biases occurring in the decision-making process, such as political, personal interest, or personal relationship.

Few studies have examined the criteria and factors used to identify talented individuals in organisations. One exception is a recent empirical study claiming that three factors influence the likelihood of individuals being identified as talent in MNEs, including (a) the cultural and institutional distance between the locations of a potential member of the talent pool and the decision-makers; (b) the homophily between the individual and the decision-makers; and (c) the network position of the person in question (Mäkelä, Björkman and Ehrnrooth, 2010). Another study suggested that talent identification is based on the combination of high potential, performance, and mobility of employees (Jooss, McDonnell and Burbach, 2019). This blurred talent-designation process questions the agency of employees, who may feel disempowered and develop a sense of organisational injustice (Gelens *et al.*, 2013).

The talent status positively impacts employees' behaviour
Third, being labelled as talent may produce various impacts on an employee's behaviour (Swailes and Blackburn, 2016). For example, it is assumed that employees who have been identified as talent will foster their performance, engagement, and commitment towards the organisation (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013). Accordingly, the 'Pygmalion effect', or self-fulfilling prophecy, stipulates that people perform better due to positive impact and confidence in their capacity (Dries, 2013a). Conversely, however, it may instead lead to the metaphorically named 'crown prince' effect, whereby the employees stop thriving for performance, since they have achieved an enviable status (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013). The impact of talent status can also be seen on the entire workforce, whether identified as talent or not (Björkman *et al.*, 2013). As such, TM practices may support organisations in communicating key leadership skills, performance expectations, and values, and subsequently encourage staff to replicate the behaviours of those identified as talent. On the other hand, it has been argued that the differential treatment between employees could create a source of frustration and dissatisfaction for the rest of the workforce (Björkman *et al.*, 2013). In fact, little attention has been paid to the effects that differentiated rewards and treatment induced by the talent status may have amongst employees (Dries, 2013a).

Individual and organisational goals are aligned
Fourth, TM studies presume that organisations and employees work towards the same goals, leading to sustainable competitive advantage (Thunnissen et al. 2013). However, misalignment of organisational and individual goals may occur, subsequently generating tensions, dissatisfaction, and

disengagement. Furthermore, employees may be viewed as an object to be managed using TM practices. Accordingly, TM may be viewed as a process whereby talented employees (input) are managed to disproportionally contribute to the organisational success (output) (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013). Surprisingly, the needs of talented employees regarding career development often remain overlooked in empirical TM studies (Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a). However, a recently published conceptual paper argued that talented employees may play an active role in gaining access and capitalising on TM practices (Meyers, 2020). In this context, this study investigates how talented employees perceive coaching as a TM practice, and how this may contribute to career progression.

Talented employees follow a traditional career path

Fifth, scholars often presuppose that traditional career progression in the organisation remains the norm, whereas proactive career plans are becoming part of current TM practice (Cascio and Boudreau, 2016). The emergence of contemporary career concepts in the 90s, such as protean and boundary-less career frameworks, as well as the next generation of career concepts, including integrative frameworks, hybrid careers, and the kaleidoscope career model, are rarely discussed in TM literature (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). As such, the insights from the career management literature are often neglected in TM empirical studies. One explanation may be that organisations rarely offer a formal career plan as part of their TM system (Guerci and Solari, 2012), tending to instead consider that talented employees are in charge of their own career and leadership development (Rhodes, Brundrett and Nevill, 2008).

Organisational success is the result of individual exceptional contributions vs collective effort

Sixth, Sparrow (2019) suggested that two ideological assumptions underpin TM studies. The first assumption posits that organisational effectiveness and productivity are best served by the sum of individual exceptional contributions. Some TM studies have assumed that rewards should be unevenly provided and focused on the small elite of high value-added (in business terms) individuals, resulting in TM being compared to an elitist HR system (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). Alternatively, organisational success may be viewed as the result of more collective and system-based interventions. These views restate the previously discussed opposition between the inclusive and exclusive approach to TM.

In sum, the assumptions and philosophies underpinning TM studies are numerous, yet they seem to present an individualised and unitarist view of organisations that is not informed by more critical or pluralist views. This may hinder the TM field from advancing towards a stage of maturity if they are not challenged and empirically explored. For instance, according to Sparrow (2019), the variety of

assumptions, philosophies, and theories underpinning TM studies result in the TM research focussing on the organisational level (meso), paying little attention to research at the individual level (micro) (Nijs et al., 2014; King, 2015, 2016; Swailes and Blackburn, 2016) or at macro level (Khilji et al., 2015; Vaiman et al., 2018a,b). Consequently, this empirical study seeks to challenge these TM assumptions by focussing on the perceptions of coaching in TM programmes at the individual and organisational levels. Furthermore, it is expected that talented employees, HR managers, and internal and external coaches possess different views of talent, TM practices, career management, and leadership development despite working in the same company. As such, this study highlights the patterns and discrepancies emerging from the participants' accounts on coaching in TM programmes.

2.4.2   TM discourse

Despite some key advancements in the research and the ever-growing interest of scholars, TM practices and discourse remain driven by business and consulting firms, which may result in a vague but appealing rhetoric (Cascio and Boudreau, 2016). A meta-analysis of a series of 12 reviews of TM and global TM papers published between 2006 and 2016 concluded that the TM discourse is normative and prescriptive (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2017).

Consequently, scholars have claimed that further empirical research should be undertaken by teams composed of academics and practitioners in order to leverage existing knowledge and experience to advance the TM field (Cascio and Boudreau, 2016; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen, and Scullion (2020) argued that contextualising TM research will help researchers build a bridge between academia and practice by enhancing both research rigour and practical relevance (Thunnissen & Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019). In addition, reviews of TM literature have often claimed a discrepancy between the discourse and operationalisation of TM in the organisation, whereby a humanist HRM discourse is opposed to hard and instrumental HRM practices. For example, Thunnissen et al. (2013a) conducted a review of 62 peer-reviewed articles published between 2001 and 2012, concluding that the TM literature has adopted a managerialist and unitarist approach where human capital is overemphasised in its role concerning growth and performance. The authors argued that the perspectives of the individual and the society have been neglected in research and in practice, and so called for further research adopting a pluralist view including individual and societal goals, well-being, and sustainability. Furthermore, this managerialist discourse of TM has led to the emergence of new topics for debates on power, ethics, and organisational justice in TM studies (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). The following section explores TM practices operationalised in MNEs to manage the leadership pipeline.

2.5 TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR GLOBAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Talent management practices typically encompass a range of interventions, policies, schemes, and programmes aimed at attracting, recruiting, developing, and retaining talent in the organisation. According to a review of TM empirical studies, TM practices have been the most researched topic since 2010 (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2017). Some scholars have studied how specific practices are implemented in practice (McDonnell *et al.*, 2016). In addition, some studies have examined the relationships between TM practices and outcomes, or between talent philosophies and TM practices (De Vos and Dries, 2013; Festing *et al.*, 2013; Mäkelä, Björkman and Ehrnrooth, 2010).

Despite steady interest in TM practices, a recent review of empirical TM literature revealed that few articles have specifically investigated talent development (Rezaei and Beyerlein, 2018). This may suggest that scholars have paid little attention to practices specifically concerning the development of talented employees (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2017; Rezaei and Beyerlein, 2018). An alternative explanation is that talent development practices are often amalgamated with broader HR interventions (Rezaei and Beyerlein, 2018). As such, an overlap may occur between HR development-related publications and talent development publications, with researchers using terms such as employee, leadership, management, talent, and career development interchangeably (Rezaei and Beyerlein, 2018). Consequently, further research is needed to examine talent development practices in detail and establish links between theory and practice (Rezaei and Beyerlein, 2018). This study seeks to address this gap by investigating coaching as a specific practice employed in TM programmes for developmental purposes. The nature of coaching for talent and leadership development is examined in the following chapter. The next section reviews the TM practices conducted by MNEs to develop talented employees into global leaders.

2.5.1 Global leadership development

The field of global leadership development emerged in the 1980s due to the pressing need of MNEs to understand the specificities of leadership in an increasingly complex and globalised world. The multidisciplinary roots of global leadership include (a) intercultural communication competence, (b) expatriation, and (c) comparative leadership (Osland, 2018). As a nascent field of study, the nature and scope of its constitutive concepts—namely, 'global' and 'leadership'—have been intensively debated by scholars over the past 15 years in their search of agreement on their respective meanings (Osland, 2018). Accordingly, a literature review undertaken by Bird and Mendenhall (2016) listed more than 13 definitions of global leadership employed by scholars despite a decade of controversial debates.

Nevertheless, a consensus on the nature and scope of global leadership has started to emerge:

> *'Global leadership is the processes and actions through which an individual influences a range of internal and external constituents from multiple national cultures and jurisdictions in a context characterised by significant levels of tasks and relationship complexity'. (Reiche et al., 2017: 553)*

In this definition, the leaders' hierarchical level or job title is not a determinant factor to qualify an individual as a global leader. This suggests that global leadership may occur at various levels in the organisation. Drawing on this definition of global leadership, this study specifically aims to examine the development of global leaders at different stages of their career, implying that talented employees will be considered at junior, middle management, and senior management levels in the organisation.

Global talent management and leadership development

The study of global TM and leadership development is closely connected in the TM literature. For instance, TM studies often posit global leadership development as an expected outcome of TM systems (Tarique and Weisbord, 2018). In addition, global TM has been identified as one of the main trends in global leadership studies (Tarique and Weisbord, 2018). Due to the nature of international operations of MNEs and increased globalisation, the management of a global workforce, including cultural, geographic, mobility, and generational challenges, have become prominent for achieving a sustainable competitive advantage (Collings, 2014a; Tarique, Briscoe and Schuler, 2016). Moreover, critical issues such as scarcity of talent and disruption in the leadership pipeline are exacerbated in knowledge-based companies, which often operate across borders. As such, a key challenge for global TM systems is to ensure that global leaders will be attracted, developed, and positioned to fill the current and future critical positions in the firm (Sparrow and Makram, 2015). Accordingly, based on the input-process-output view of TM, it is widely assumed that TM programmes in MNEs support the transformation of talented employees into future global leaders.

Additionally, due to external and internal factors, the operationalisation of global TM systems may vary considerably from one subsidiary to another (Tarique and Weisbord, 2018). The socio-cultural environment, political system, and regulations of the home and host country may considerably influence the design and implementation of HR policies internationally. Furthermore, internal factors, such as the corporate strategy or organisational culture, may affect the firm's global TM strategy. Additionally, cultural preferences and national culture may be critical to the development of global competencies within a global workforce (Van Velsor, McCauley and Ruderman, 2010).

Moreover, the field of global mobility has changed dramatically over the last two decades. The emergence of new profiles of expatriates has led to a redefinition of international assignments comprising part of global TM and leadership development programmes (Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016). Unfortunately, however, most MNEs tend to adopt a 'one-size-fits-all' approach in practice, assuming that national or regional cultures will produce little influence over the leadership development of talented employees (Oddou & Mendenhall, 2018).

2.5.2 Talent development practices in MNEs

Talent development systems typically include a bundle of activities, such as networking events, mentoring schemes, and international or national assignments on a long- or short-term basis (table 2). These TM practices are designed to execute the TM strategy and manage the firm's leadership pipeline. Typically, a TM programme represents the combination of one or multiple developmental activities and experiences aimed at the growth of its participants. For instance, Day and Halpin (2001) identified a number of practices linked to global leadership development, including 360 feedback, executive coaching, job assignments, mentoring, networking, reflection, action learning, and outdoor experiences. This section examines the various types of TM interventions, including specifically how coaching has been positioned as a talent development practice in the TM and global leadership development literature.

Various frameworks for global leadership development have been offered by leadership and TM scholars (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2009; Caligiuri and Tarique, 2012; Garavan, 2012). First, drawing from a review of the TM and global leadership studies and best practices in MNEs, the developmental interventions for developing global leadership can be clustered into three categories: (a) didactic learning programmes, (b) experiential opportunities, and (c) intensive experiences (Caligiuri, 2006). In this classification, coaching and mentoring are identified as 'experiential opportunities' and defined as a bespoke intervention to fit the developmental needs of the individual, support the development of soft skills, or improve skills and abilities, which are difficult to change through solely didactic learning opportunities (Caligiuri, 2006; Caligiuri and Tarique, 2012).

Second, drawing on Black and Mendenhall's cross-cultural leadership development experiences (Black and Mendenhall, 1990), Caligiuri and Tarique (2009) argued that multiple forms of talent development interventions exist. Based on the extent of interactions between participants and instructors, leadership development interventions can be positioned on a continuum ranging from low-contact to high-contact development experiences, as presented in Table 2. Notably, this positions networking activities and the development of social capital as the most effective global leadership development activities.

Table 2.   Talent and leadership development practices in MNEs

Low-contact development experiences	High-contact development experiences
- Formal university coursework - Cross-cultural training - Psychological assessments - Assessment centres for LD - Diversity training - Language training	- Structured rotational LD programmes - Short-term expatriate assignment(s) - Long-term (one year or more) expatriate assignment(s) - Global meetings in various international locations - Membership on a global team - Mentoring by a person or people from another culture

Furthermore, the authors claimed that the combination of high-contact cross-cultural leadership development experiences (behavioural) with the leaders' personality characteristics offer predictors of effectiveness in global leadership activities (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2009). Specifically, they advocated that extraverted traits of leaders, combined with greater participation in high-contact experiences, are conducive to effective leadership development. This suggests that certain leadership traits combined with high-contact development experiences, such as coaching and mentoring, may be conducive to effective global leadership development.

This was confirmed in an empirical study involving 420 global leaders, which identified what types of leadership development activities lead to the development of global competence (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2012). The study revealed that high-contact leadership development activities, such as short- and long-term expatriate assignments, global team tasks and meetings, leadership development programmes, and mentoring by executives from another country, are particularly effective. Consequently, the authors argued that MNEs should carefully select their employees to join the global leadership pipeline and that developmental-readiness factors should be assessed prior to positioning employees in the talent pool.

Another framework used to classify talent development programmes is based on the type of interventions—namely, (a) formal programmes; (b) relationship-based developmental experiences (including sponsoring, mentoring, coaching, career advice, and psychosocial support); (c) job-based; and (d) informal and non-formal developmental opportunities (Garavan, 2012). An alternative classification was proposed by Rezaei and Beyerlein (2018) in the form of a framework that categorises talent development interventions for organisational development (OD) in five groups: (a) formal training and development (T&D); (b) individual-level OD; (c) team-level OD; (d) organisation-

level OD; and (e) global-level OD. According to this classification, coaching represents an individual-level OD intervention, yet little is known about its effect on talented individuals and organisations.

In sum, coaching and mentoring have been identified as some of the most effective practices for talent and global leadership development and are classified as relationship-based, high-contact, and experiential interventions. However, talent development interventions, such as coaching, have been under-researched regarding their operationalisation in context and effects on individuals and organisations (Rezaei and Beyerlein, 2018). This omission provides scope for this study to make a significant contribution. The following section reviews the outcomes of talent and global leadership development schemes in MNEs.

2.5.3   Outcomes of talent and global leadership development systems

When examining the outcomes of global leadership development in TM systems, international HRM scholars have often referred to the acquisition or development of dynamic cross-cultural competencies (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2012; James, Tomasz and Salvador, 2006). Based on a review of the expatriate and global leadership literature, Tarique and Weisbord (2018) identified eight salient cross-cultural competencies comprising the expected outcomes of global TM programmes, generated from cross-cultural leadership development experiences. For instance, cultural agility and cultural intelligence (CQ) were identified as mega-competencies encompassing a unique combination of context-dependant competencies (Tarique and Weisbord, 2018). Figure 2 below illustrates the expected outcomes that leaders may develop or acquire when participating in a global TM and leadership development programme, based on the work of Caligiuri and Tarique (2012) and Tarique and Weisbord (2018):

Figure 2.   Expected outcomes of TM and leadership development schemes

Cultural agility : mega-competence
- cultural adaptation
- cultural minimisation
- cultural integration

Cultural intelligence (CQ) : mega-competence
- meta-cognitive CQ
- cognitive CQ
- motivational CQ
- behavioural CQ

Culture-general knowledge
- cultural differences across national cultures or countries
- impact of cross-cultural differences on behaviours and interactions

Culture-specific knowledge
- knowledge about one specific country
- includes language, customs, history, geography, ways to interact with local people
- realistic expectations about working and living in a new country

Cultural flexibility
- ability to substitute enjoyed activities in the home country to others in the host country
- capacity to manage feelings of loneliness, isolation, uncertainly, disorientation and frustration

Tolerance to ambiguity
- extent to wich the individual feels comfortable with uncertainty, unpredictable and ambiguous situations
- how an individual perceive and processes information in an unfamiliar, complex situation with uncongruent signals

Ethnocentrism
- seeing another culture through the lens of one's own set of values and beliefs
- can be an obstable to effective cross-cultural interactions and may lead to misunderstandings and miscommunication

Strategic thinking competency
- combination of knowledge, skills and abilities to develop strategic goals, identify competitive marke, labour or product opportunities
- adopting a systematic and long-term approach to problem solving and decision making, evaluating the impact on multiple stakeholders

Despite the steady interest of international HRM scholars and practitioners in expatriate management and global leadership, there remains surprisingly little empirical evidence concerning how talent development systems are related to the development of dynamic cross-cultural competences (Tarique and Weisbord, 2018). Some studies have argued that global leaders benefit differently from talent development interventions according to their personal traits, educational background, and previous international experience (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2009; Dragoni *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, it has been argued that organisations should offer such development

opportunities of development to leaders demonstrating a series of pre-dispositions and personality traits considered conducive to success (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2009). In addition, it has been claimed that individualised and personalised leadership development intervention is critical (Brownell and Goldsmith, 2006; Caligiuri, 2006). This may suggest that understanding the personal characteristics and learning needs of leaders taking part in TM programmes is critical to maximise the impact and effectiveness of such interventions.

The expected outcomes of TM programmes concern not only the leaders taking part, but ultimately the organisation's competitive advantage and success. Based on a systematic review of empirical talent development papers published until 2017, talent development produces effects at both individual and organisational levels (Rezaei and Beyerlein, 2018). Specifically, outcomes at the individual level include job satisfaction, turnover/retention, skill development, and commitment. At the organisational level, outcomes include ROI, firm growth, service delivery, and brand popularity. However, the authors claimed that further empirical research is needed to understand the impact of specific talent-development practices carried out in organisations. Specifically, the factors of success and failure of TM interventions require further investigation to enable organisations to improve their TM systems.

Factors of success for global TM programmes

Practitioners and consulting companies have repeatedly claimed that, whilst leadership development represents a top priority, existing TM programmes often fail to deliver their promises (Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe, 2014; Andrianova, Maor and Schaninger, 2018). It has been reported that only 7% of US companies think that their leaders possess the appropriate competencies, despite $14 billion being spent annually by US firms to support talented employees in their global leadership pipeline (Deloitte, 2015). Examining the success factors for leadership development programmes, McNally (2014) identified three key factors—namely, (a) the engagement and support of senior leaders and top management; (b) the implementation of multi-modal learning approaches; and (c) the alignment of the leadership development practices with the organisation's TM strategy. Furthermore, the author argued that leaders who benefit from developmental activities designed with a personalised approach are more likely to grow, suggesting that coaching may be conducive to leadership development in the context of TM. Moreover, the cohesion between global leadership development practices and the firm's TM strategy was emphasised as a determinant factor for successful talent development programmes (McNally, 2014; Tarique and Weisbord, 2018).

Challenges and factors of failure for global TM programmes

The purpose of global TM is to leverage the talent of individual employees as a source of competitive

advantage. Despite this, CEOs often claim that there are multiple challenges associated with the operationalisation of TM at the global level (Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Canwell *et al.*, 2014; CIPD, 2017). First, based on a survey of 500 executives and CEOs across industries and countries, Gurdjian et al. (2014) claimed that the rationale of failure of global leadership development programmes is four-fold: (a) the one-size-fits-all approach employed by most MNEs does not allow the context to be taken into consideration; (b) the off-the-job training may be superficial and may not lead to the necessary reflection and relevant action back at work; (c) behavioural change occurs if the leader is challenged to deeply examine thoughts, feelings, assumptions, and beliefs; and (d) the outcome and impact of global leadership development programmes are often not evaluated, or else are evaluated using the exclusive views of leader participants or HR managers, potentially distorting the results.

Additionally, Mellahi and Collings (2010) identified three operational management challenges faced by MNEs in implementing global TM programmes. First, managers in foreign subsidiaries may believe that it is in their interest to keep their talented employees at their local level, and consequently refrain from nominating them to participate in global programmes. Second, having access to an updated global database with all talented employees and their availability at the global level may comprise an operational challenge. Third, when information is available, the unreliability and volume of the data often prevents global HR decision-makers from managing people globally (Mellahi and Collings, 2010).

Another key challenge in the operationalisation of TM practices at the global level is linked to the necessary organisational investment in terms of financial and human capital resources. For example, talent development practices, such as coaching, are often considered an expensive and time-consuming intervention in organisations (ICF, 2016; De Meuse, Dai and Lee, 2009). Moreover, organisations appear to lack reliable evaluation tools for talent development interventions (CIPD, 2015). From quantitative and ROI perspectives, talent development practices are difficult to evaluate, confirming the results of Gurdjian et al. (2014). This challenge is even greater for evaluating the qualitative and broader effects of talent development practices at the individual, organisational, and societal levels (Sparrow, 2019).

In sum, TM practices in MNEs are extremely varied in nature, format, and scope. They are often studied in relation to the identification or attraction of talent, and to a lesser extent, to talent development (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2017). Indeed, talent development is rarely studied as a specific topic, and is often overridden by TM and HR development studies (Rezaei and Beyerlein, 2018). In addition, the global TM and leadership literature has often focused on the

conceptualisation of global leadership and cross-cultural competence (Cascio and Boudreau, 2016), with little attention given to specific talent development practices in MNEs. As such, TM practices have represented a dominant topic in empirical TM studies since 2010, yet they remain under-investigated regarding specific practices carried out in context (Rezaei and Beyerlein, 2018; Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020; Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2017). Specifically, little is known about the nature, scope, and outcomes of coaching as part of global leadership development and TM strategy. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by analysing coaching's contribution to the development of talented employees into global leaders as part of the TM strategy of a global firm.

2.6   KEY POINTS ON THE TALENT MANAGEMENT LITERATURE

Talent management represents a practitioner-led field that emerged in the late 1990s when the consulting firm McKinsey coined the expression, 'war for talent' (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 2001). Talent management has developed as a distinctive field compared to other HRM areas of studies thanks to a growing consensus concerning its key concepts, combined with a surge in empirical studies since 2010 (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017; Collings, Scullion and Vaiman, 2015).

Despite this significant advancement, scholars have repeatedly called for more systematic, empirical, and theoretically framed studies (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). In addition, there are rising concerns regarding the rigour and robustness of TM studies (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019). Furthermore, some scholars have emphasised the need to contextualise TM studies in order to increase their transferability and contribution to the TM body of knowledge (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020). Recently, more critiques of TM have risen regarding its societal impact at the macro level, as well as its effect on individuals identified as talent or not (Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a; Farndale, Morley and Valverde, 2019; Sparrow, 2019). Finally, TM practices can be viewed by some as an elitist HRM (Swailes, 2016) and a management fad (Iles, Preece and Chuai, 2010), suggesting that further empirical studies are needed to explore its value, ethics, and effects at the micro, meso, and macro levels (Sparrow, 2019). Considering the evolution of TM studies and some persisting theoretical challenges highlighted in this chapter, this study seeks to provide contextualised empirical research. To this end, it gives voice to individuals taking part in TM programmes in order to analyse the effects, positive and negative, of coaching as a TM practice at the micro and meso levels.

Drawing on the resource-based view and human capital theory, talent has often been operationalised as human and social capital in the TM literature (Dries, 2013b). Other dominant

theories underpinning TM research include social capital, SET, psychological contract, and institutionalism (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). This study refers to SET as a frame of reference for examining coaching as a specific TM practice for the development of leaders in an MNE. This is further explained and justified at the end of the literature review section of this thesis, following the chapter 3 reviewing the coaching literature.

In today's interconnected world, one of the key objectives of global TM strategy is to develop a talent pipeline geographically dispersed and culturally diverse in the expectation of a future positive impact on organisational competitive advantage (Morris, Snell and Björkman, 2016). In this context, CEOs consider global TM and leadership development as critical, especially in knowledge-based companies operating across borders in a highly competitive global job market (Tarique and Schuler, 2010; PWC, 2017; Morris, Snell and Björkman, 2016).

Talent management practices typically include leadership schemes with one-to-one support in the form of mentoring and coaching, training, and international assignments. Among these activities, coaching and in-house training have been identified as the most effective TM activities. However, most surveys and studies (CIPD, 2017; Deloitte, 2018) analyse data collected from HR professionals and decision-makers in organisations, but not specifically from the participants being coached in these programmes. Consequently, TM systems need to be better understood from the perspective of the talented employees, specifically examining their expectations and the impact that distinct TM activities may have on their leadership development and career progression within the company (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Cascio and Boudreau, 2016). Accordingly, this study explores the perceptions of the talented employees coached as part of TM schemes, as well as the views expressed by HR managers, and internal and external coaches involved in those programmes. The following chapter explores coaching as a developmental intervention in organisations.

CHAPTER 3: COACHING FOR TALENT AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Following the review of the TM literature, and particularly the TM practices for global talent development, this chapter focuses on coaching in organisations. It explores the various definitions of coaching in organisations from a practitioner and theoretical perspective. It further examines the theoretical framework underpinning coaching as an interdisciplinary field as well as the various streams of workplace coaching literature. Then, it focuses on the impact of coaching in organisations, particularly when used for talent and leadership development purposes. The chapter concludes by identifying SET as the main theoretical framework adopted for this study to examine the function of coaching as perceived by talented employees, coaches and HR managers involved in TM programmes.

3.2 COACHING IN ORGANISATIONS

3.2.1 Definition of coaching

The birth of coaching as a research topic can be dated back to 1937, followed by a quiet development until the 90s, with only 100 articles published in academic journals before 1990 (Cotterill and Passmore, 2018). This suggests that coaching, similar to TM, represents a relatively young field of study. During the past 30 years, coaching has been broadly defined as a helping relationship that enables people to reach their full potential (Hawkins and Smith, 2006; Ting and Scisco, 2006; Whitmore, 2009). For example, Passmore and Fillery-Travis defined coaching as follows:

> *'A Socratic-based focused dialogue between a facilitator (coach) and a participant (coachee/client), where the facilitator uses open questions, active listening, summarises and reflections which are aimed at stimulating the self-awareness and personal responsibility of the participant'. (2011: 74)*

In the 90s, executive coaching emerged as a practice primarily aimed at senior managers and executives, delivered by external coaches to support the development of those individuals and the success of the organisation (Kilburg, Leonard and Kilburg, 1996; Joo, 2005). Consequently, coaching is often assimilated within executive coaching in an organisational context, although many variants may be used in practice, such as managerial or peer coaching (Beattie *et al.*, 2014). The rationale for

engaging in executive coaching typically relates to performance growth, high-potential development, and adaptation to change (Maltbia *et al.*, 2014). Executive coaching is often identified as one of the top leadership development practices (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015; Maltbia *et al.*, 2014; Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen, 2014).

Numerous variants of coaching in business and organisational contexts exist (Maltbia *et al.*, 2014; Schutte and Steyn, 2015). The definition of coaching in organisations is manifold, with more than 30 variations identified in reviews of the coaching literature (Beattie *et al.*, 2014; Hamlin, Ellinger and Beattie, 2008). In addition, four different variants of workplace coaching have been identified and labelled as coaching, executive coaching, business coaching, and life coaching (Hamlin, Ellinger and Beattie, 2008). These are all defined as a set of helping interventions, differentiated only by the focus and emphasis on a specific aspect of personal development. Additionally, team coaching has recently emerged as another variant of coaching in organisations (Hawkins, 2014; Clutterbuck *et al.*, 2019).

Moreover, coaching's applications are diverse and widespread across a variety of organisational contexts, which, combined with the heterogeneity of coaching practitioners, has led to the emergence of a fertile production of practitioner-led literature (Grover and Furnham, 2016; Maltbia *et al.*, 2014). Accordingly, coaching as a workplace intervention has evolved as an amalgamation of a number of helpful, developmental, and training techniques commonly employed in organisations, such as mentoring, consulting, and counselling (Grover and Furnham, 2016).

One of the long-standing debates in the coaching literature seems to focus on differentiating coaching from mentoring and other helping interventions in order to characterise its specificities. It is notable that coaching has struggled to differentiate itself from other helping interventions (Maltbia *et al.*, 2014). For instance, scholars and practitioners have focused on distinguishing coaching from teaching, counselling, consulting, mentoring, and therapy in terms of purpose, audience, process, tools, and techniques (Whitmore, 2009; Grant and Stober, 2006; McMahon and Archer, 2010; Grover and Furnham, 2016). As an example, it is widely accepted that coaching differs from mentoring in that coaching is seen as a more structured, short-term, formal intervention based on an equal relationship between the coach and the coachee (Joo, 2005). By contrast, a mentor typically represents an experienced and knowledgeable employee—a role model who shares insights and provides advice to help the mentee evolve in the organisation in the long term (Clutterbuck, Poulsen and Kochan, 2012). Furthermore, comparing coaching with consulting, consultants may provide recommendations on business issues using their technical expertise, whereas coaches are not supposed to provide solutions (Kilburg, Leonard and Kilburg, 1996; Coutu and Kauffman, 2009).

In coaching, the assumption is that the coachee is in good mental health, separating it from psychotherapy and counselling (Peltier, 2001; Passmore, Peterson and Freire, 2013). Finally, training interventions typically encompass a formal curriculum that supports the development of knowledge and skills (Armstrong and Fukami, 2009). By contrast, topics explored in a coaching session are more fluid and centred on the coachee's specific needs (Passmore, Peterson and Freire, 2013). Despite numerous debates and significant advances in the field, however, coaching remains ill-defined, and the creation of a unique identity for coaching is still seen as an 'unresolved problem' (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2018: 3). Consequently, the lack of clarity and agreement concerning the definition of coaching in organisations may confuse practitioners and slow progress in theory-building and research, hindering the field from evolving to a mature stage of development (Maltbia *et al.*, 2014).

Another source of confusion may be related to the variety of purposes of coaching in organisations. In 2011, an EU Professional Charter on Coaching and Mentoring validated the following definition of coaching as a self-regulated profession:

> *'A professional coach/mentor can be described as an expert in establishing a*
> *relationship with people in a series of conversations with the purpose of serving*
> *the clients to improve their performance or enhance their personal development*
> *or both, choosing their own goals and ways of doing it'. (GCMA, 2011)*

This definition suggests that the purpose of coaching is twofold: (a) to enhance performance and/or (b) to develop the coachee. Scholars and professionals have claimed that such an 'either-or' type of definition may lead to confusion and misunderstanding regarding coaching's purpose in organisations as a developmental intervention or a tool for performance management (Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; ILM, 2013a). Additionally, this conceptual duplicity may have contributed to the amalgamation of coaching with remedial performance management interventions (Grant, 2017). For example, in early studies on managerial roles, coaching was primarily viewed as a technique that managers could use to correct deficiencies in employee performance (Feldman and Lankau, 2005). Moreover, the contributions of the coaching and mentoring professional bodies have been widely criticised in their role of regulator of this nascent profession. Their core revenue-making activity is to assist coaching by training providers and coaches to become accredited according to their set of standards. However, wearing two hats as accreditor of training centres and certifier of professional coaches may give rise to potential conflicts of interest, potentially threatening the creditability of coaching as an HR development intervention (Maltbia *et al.*, 2014).

Despite the multiple definitions of coaching, a number of key characteristics have emerged from a recent review of the coaching literature (Grover and Furnham, 2016). As such, coaching refers to a one-on-one systematic relationship, for non-clinical population, and concerned with learning, behavioural change, self-awareness, and improved performance (Grover and Furnham, 2016). Specifically, this study utilises the definition of coaching proposed by Cox et al. (2018), which highlights the extent of its potential benefits to a broader environment and multiple stakeholders:

> *'Human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee and potentially for other stakeholders'. (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2018: 1)*

This definition was chosen for this study because it emphasises the dynamics of exchange between coach and coachee, the wide range of competences employed in the coaching process, as well as its potential role as a change catalyst for the benefits of the coachee and stakeholders, which, in the context of the organisation, may include direct report, team, department, client, society, and family (Grant, 2014). The next section examines the various forms that workplace coaching may take.

3.2.2 Defining coaching in organisations

Coaching is widely used by 75% of organisations in the UK, primarily large firms, and is blended with other types of learning and development support, including TM programmes (CIPD, 2015). Human resource managers claim that the most effective development methods include on-the-job training, in-house programmes, and coaching by line managers or peers (CIPD, 2015). Talent management programmes typically include elements of executive coaching aimed at career and leadership growth, which may be delivered by external coaches, and increasingly, by internal manager-coaches (Feldman and Lankau, 2005). A CIPD survey (2015) claimed that internal coaching is expected to grow at a much faster rate compared to external coaching (62% vs 1%). Furthermore, coaching is considered more effective when delivered internally due to the familiarity with organisational processes (Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2016). Interestingly, the term 'talent coaching' is not used by scholars to characterise coaching interventions occurring in organisations for TM purposes, with the exception of Nyfoudi and Tasouli (2018).

The appellations business, managerial, performance, leadership, and executive coaching are often used in practice and to a certain extent in the literature, without being delineated by a set of distinctive features (Grover and Furnham, 2016; Maltbia *et al.*, 2014). These forms of coaching target specific groups of employees, thus differing from business coaching, which can be considered

an overarching term referring to any individual within an organisation who receives coaching to improve performance (Grover and Furnham, 2016). Executive coaching usually targets an executive or an individual operating at the senior management level. Leadership coaching differs in terms of the goal or outcome of the coaching, being aimed at enhancing the coachee's leadership skills. Managerial coaching, meanwhile, is concerned with the use of coaching by line managers. Performance coaching, on the other hand, focuses on developing employees' performance. This study is focused on coaching for talented employees considered as high achievers and high potentials; as such, performance coaching is not included in this review, as it does not correspond to the group of employees targeted by this study. Accordingly, it seems relevant to focus this review on the executive, managerial, and high-potential coaching studies to better understand coaching in the context of TM.

Executive coaching

Over the past 30 years, coaching has been utilised in a variety of contexts for various purposes (Passmore, 2014; Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2017). Research on executive coaching first began in the 90s. Drawing on a meta-analysis of the existing coaching literature, Kilburg formulated one of the first definitions of executive coaching as follows:

> *'A helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organisation and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organisation within a formally defined coaching agreement'. (1996: 142)*

This definition assumes that (a) the coachee has already reached an advanced stage in terms of career; (b) the coach is external to the organisation; (c) individual and organisational goals are aligned; and (d) the coaching contract is sealed as a tripartite agreement involving the coach, the coachee, and the organisation.

As previously discussed, executive coaching is often defined in comparison with other similar helping interventions in the workplace. In the literature, executive coaching and mentoring have often been compared to explore similarities and differences in terms of nature, practice, and purpose (Jarvis, 2004; Joo, 2005). Specifically, Joo (2005: 475) compared the two practices according to a variety of factors, including purpose, recipient and provider, process, focus, and duration of the intervention, as illustrated in Table 3 below:

Table 3.   Comparison between mentoring and executive coaching

	Mentoring	Executive Coaching
Purpose	Diverse from socialisation to management development	Improving performance through self-awareness and learning
Mentor/Coach	Internal senior manager	External professional
Mentee/Coachee	Diverse from lower level to high potential	Mostly executive and higher-level manager
Process	Less structured and lack of training of the mentor	Systematic and structured
Focus	People-centred	Issue and/or problem-centred
Duration	Long-term	Short-term

This comparison of executive coaching and mentoring assumes that external professionals will deliver executive coaching, although it is increasingly being delivered by internal senior managers and HR managers (Maltbia *et al.*, 2014; Lawrence, 2017). Furthermore, this definition restricts executive coaching interventions to senior employees working at middle and top managerial levels in the organisation. It implies that junior professionals are excluded as potential recipients of coaching. This leaves a void in the executive coaching literature, whereby different types of helping interventions are classified using an employee-segmentation approach, based on experience and seniority level, as opposed to career and leadership development (Ely *et al.*, 2010). Nevertheless, this exclusive approach to executive coaching is often justified in practice by the limited funding available for coaching in organisations (ICF, 2016).

It appears that executive coaching and formal mentoring practices are often blended, considered as hybrid, and fall into the overarching label of 'coaching' in practice (Joo, Sushko and McLean, 2012). This is because they both involve a one-to-one relationship that provides time and space to reflect, learn, and grow as individuals (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2017). However, mentoring typically involves an interaction between two individuals exchanging views based on their respective and imbalanced experience in order to advance the personal and professional development of the less experienced one (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2017). Furthermore, Megginson and Clutterbuck specified that, when mentoring is used with executives or directors, it represents an '*off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking*' (1995: 3). This emphasises the similarities between executive coaching and formal mentoring in terms of purpose (Joo, Sushko and McLean, 2012). As such, both mentor and executive coaching functions aim to facilitate the career progression and personal growth of their mentee/coachee. This

questions the characteristics and role of coaching used in the context of TM programmes, which target different groups of employees operating at various seniority and hierarchical levels.

Managerial coaching

Workplace coaching is increasingly delivered internally by line managers, senior managers, and HR managers (Lawrence, 2017). Managerial coaching is considered one of the most beneficial forms of workplace coaching for enhanced employee self-efficacy, leading to improved individual performance and competitive advantage (Pousa and Mathieu, 2015; Kim, Egan and Moon, 2014). As a result, line managers are increasingly required to coach their direct reports and their teams, as well as to demonstrate a coaching approach to leadership. A CIPD report (2015) revealed that approximately 80% of organisations expect their line managers to coach others.

Managerial coaching is defined as a non-directive, developmental, and goal-focused intervention, but possessing blurred boundaries regarding the exploration of underlying performance issues and derailing behaviours at work (Hagen, 2012; Beattie et al., 2014). Many variants of managerial coaching co-exist in organisations, labelled as 'hierarchical', 'peer', 'team', and 'cross-organisational' (Beattie *et al.*, 2014). However, hierarchical coaching has been identified as one of the most effective forms of learning and development (CIPD, 2015). According to a review of the managerial coaching literature, line managers engaging in coaching tend to focus on improving the skills, competence, and performance of others (Beattie *et al.*, 2014). The central focus of most empirical managerial coaching studies has primarily been to demonstrate a positive correlation between coaching and performance (Ellinger, Hamlin, & Beattie, 2010; Hagen, 2012; Kim, Egan, Kim, & Kim, 2013). For instance, a survey of 129 coaching experts conducted by the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) and the European Mentoring Coaching Council (EMCC) in 2009 revealed that managerial coaching benefits individuals and organisations by improving performance, motivation, team cohesion, employee retention, and conflict resolution. The study also outlined that the group of employees most likely to receive coaching are managers themselves or individuals identified as high-potential and positioned in the organisation's talent pipeline (EFMD, 2009).

Based on a recent review of the literature, managerial coaching has been defined in two ways (Lawrence, 2017), either assimilated within other forms of coaching in organisations (Beattie *et al.*, 2014) or defined as a separate discipline (Anderson, 2013; Dahling et al., 2016; Fatien & Otter, 2015; McCarthy & Milner, 2013). When considered as a distinct intervention, these studies have suggested that certain skills regarded as core by external coaches may not be so important to the managerial coach, and that workplace coaching may be more directive than other forms of coaching. Lawrence (2017) advocated that at least four coaching skills, including building relationships, providing

feedback, agilely switching from one type of managerial conversation to another, and coaching teams are employed by both internal and external coaches, but with different emphasis. Other skills and behaviours for effective managerial coaching include the facilitation of learning, which involves creating a learning environment, caring and supporting staff, providing feedback, communicating, and providing resources, including other people (Hamlin, Ellinger, and Beattie, 2006).

An alternative view is that managerial coaching has emerged and evolved in response to a transfer of responsibility for people development from HR function to line managers (Ellinger *et al.*, 2014; Lawrence, 2017). This may explain why the leader's role is increasingly to facilitate the development of their direct reports. However, managerial coaching does not occur often in practice (Dixey, 2015; Ellinger et al., 2003; Ellinger et al., 2016; Gilley et al., 2010; Heslin et al., 2006; Longenecker & Neubert, 2005; Misiukonis, 2011; Turner & McCarthy, 2015).

Various factors may affect the effectiveness of managerial coaching in organisations. First, the line managers' pre-dispositions towards coaching others may influence the efficacy of coaching. For instance, the managerial philosophy of the manager-coach contributes to determining his/her mindset towards coaching to support individual learning and development (Lawrence, 2017). Additionally, occupational self-efficacy and emotional maturity may predict an individual's propensity to coach (Anderson, 2013, Dixey, 2015; Ellinger et al., 2014).

Second, coaching capacity in organisations may represent a practical barrier for managerial coaching. Managers often claim that they do not have time to coach (Chong et al., 2016; Dixey, 2015; Ladyshewsky, 2010; Orth et al. 1987; Wilson, 2011). Consequently, they may perceive coaching as a training burden and an additional HR development-related task (Ellinger, Hamlin, & Beattie, 2008). Accordingly, although some managers may welcome the opportunity to broaden their leadership portfolio and demonstrate a willingness to coach, others may resent the need to engage in managerial coaching, viewing it as an additional time-consuming duty.

Third, coaching capability may pose another barrier to managerial coaching in organisations. The lack of coaching skills and internal support in terms of training and supervision may prevent managers from actively engaging in coaching others (Beattie et al., 2014; Fatien & Otter, 2015; Misiukonis, 2011; Orth et al. 1987; Turner & McCarthy, 2015). Conversely, the over-confidence in managers' coaching skills may result in overlooking the necessity of training and support (Beattie *et al.*, 2014). An EFMD/EMCC report (2009) claimed that only 53% of participating organisations had trained their managerial coaches, and only 20% had received support through coaching supervision. Additionally, 75% of the concerns regarding coaching in these organisations resulted from a 'lack of

support', 'inadequate coaching skills', or a 'lack of understanding'. Accordingly, the assumption related to managers' coaching capability is likely to turn to ineffective managerial coaching practices in organisations. Despite this, however, there remains a lack of empirical evidence concerning the impact of managerial coaching on individual and organisational learning and performance (Hagen, 2012; Beattie, 2014, Lawrence, 2017).

Fourth, managerial coaching may be perceived as a compulsory activity by both the line manager and the coachee, and as such, coaching may be perceived to be imposed. One of the most important barriers to coaching effectiveness includes the coachee's unwillingness to be coached and to be open for change (Dixey, 2015; Evered & Salman, 1989; Gregory & Levy, 2012; Joo, 2005; London & Smither, 2002; McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2016). This suggests that the voluntary commitment of both the manager-coach and the coachee may positively or negatively influence the effectiveness of managerial coaching.

In sum, managerial coaching is increasingly employed in organisations. It is considered one of the most effective, and perhaps most cost-effective, ways to develop individual and organisational performance (Pousa and Mathieu, 2015). Despite this, further empirical studies are needed to evidence its effectiveness in practice (Beattie *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, the deployment of managerial coaching requires not only the development of organisational coaching capability and capacity, but more importantly, a change in organisational culture (Lawrence, 2017). Therefore, examining coaching in organisations requires an in-depth understanding of the social and cultural context, which extends beyond the traditional coach–coachee relationship (Lawrence, 2017). As such, this study endeavours to provide a context-sensitive analysis of coaching employed as part of a TM strategy in a global firm.

High-potential coaching

Coaching is increasingly used in organisations for leadership and talent development purposes (ILM, 2013b; Deloitte, 2015; CIPD, 2015). Consequently, some scholars have explored the specific needs of high-potential employees to develop as global leaders (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015; Brownell and Goldsmith, 2006). Specifically, an empirical study argued that leaders' needs for coaching may differ at various stages in their career (Dongen, 2014). The survey, based on 126,250 employees from 34 companies across 11 countries, suggested that leaders may require different types of interventions and different types of coaching as they progress on the career ladder: (a) at the junior or novice stage, mentoring would be more appropriate; (b) at the intermediate stage, internal and external executive coaching is suitable; (c) at the senior level, external executive coaching prevails. Accordingly, the author (Dongen, 2014) reinforced the claim that coaching in organisations is

particularly effective for managers at senior or executive levels. However, few empirical studies on coaching have differentiated the needs of global leaders according to their seniority level in the company (Al Ariss, 2014; Salomaa and Mäkelä, 2015). Therefore, this study addresses this gap by exploring the need and role of coaching as perceived by talented employees at different stages of their career.

To better understand the use and rationale of executive coaching in organisations, a survey conducted amongst 140 participants in the US explored the reasons for hiring an external coach in organisations (Coutu and Kauffman, 2009). The findings highlighted that coaching is primarily used for developmental purposes in the context of leadership development and TM. Participants believed that coaches are hired to develop high potentials or facilitate transition (48%), to act as a sounding board (26%), and surprisingly, to address derailing behaviour (12%). The report also highlighted a change of status and perception of coaching in organisations. For instance, one of the study participants, an executive coach, stated the following:

> *'In the past five years, because companies faced a shortage of talent and were concerned about turnover among key employees, firms wanted to signal their commitment to developing their high-potential executives, so they hired coaches. At the same time, business people needed to develop not just quantitative capabilities, but also people-oriented skills, and many coaches are helpful for that. As coaching has become more common, any stigma attached to receiving it at the individual level has disappeared. Now, it is often considered a badge of honour'. (Coutu and Kauffman, 2009: 4)*

As such, the study suggested that the rationale for executive coaching has evolved from a remedial intervention of performance management to a sign of recognition for high-performing and high-potential employees as part of a talent and reward strategy.

Few empirical studies have examined the perceptions of talented employees receiving coaching, yet one doctoral study shed light on high-potential coaching in the context of TM (Rose, 2015). Based on 12 semi-structured interviews of high-potential senior managers and executive coaches, the findings emphasised the diversity of personal views, tinted by confusion and cynicism about coaching in a TM context. The study also revealed that reputation management seemed to be of prime importance for high-potential employees to climb the career ladder. Consequently, they may develop gaming behaviours that are misaligned with the desired objectives of TM programmes. Notably, external coaches do not perceive high-potential coaching as a distinct area of practice, although they admit

their practice needs to be adjusted to meet the needs of high-potential employees in the TM context. Furthermore, being identified as a high potential was not always experienced as an unmitigated positive, as it can hold both risks and opportunities—an issue confirmed by other empirical studies regarding the significance of talent status as either a curse or a blessing (Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2017; King, 2016; Sumelius, Smale and Yamao, 2020).

In sum, the definition of coaching in organisations is manifold and often amalgamated with several other dyadic helping interventions, such as mentoring. Executive coaching, business, managerial, and team coaching seem to form the four main subsets of coaching in organisations, yet most workplace coaching studies have tended to focus on executive coaching and its efficacy (Bozer and Jones, 2018; Cotterill and Passmore, 2018). Despite the growing use of coaching to develop talent, few empirical studies have explored the perceptions of junior and middle management talented employees. As such, this study seeks to address this gap by examining coaching as experienced by talented employees from junior to executive levels in the organisation, which has received little attention by coaching and TM scholars (Ely *et al.*, 2010; Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016). Having reviewed the different practices of dyadic coaching in organisations, the following section examines the theories underpinning coaching studies.

3.3   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR COACHING STUDIES

Coaching represents a nascent field of study drawing from multiple disciplines, including management, psychology, education, social sciences, philosophy, and sports (Cavanagh, Grant and Kemp, 2005). Consequently, different approaches, traditions, and philosophies enrich its knowledge base (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2018). This section reviews the main theories and models underpinning the coaching intervention in organisations, including adult learning, psychology, and HR development (Schutte and Steyn, 2015). Following this, it examines the various streams of literature in workplace coaching studies.

3.3.1   Theoretical framework of coaching studies

Adult learning theories

Workplace coaching is primarily concerned with the learning and development of adults. Cox et al. (2018) emphasised the theoretical contribution of adult learning theories to the coaching realm. The authors posited that andragogy, experiential learning, and transformative learning theory shape the knowledge base of coaching and underpin all coaching activities. First, andragogy comprises the study of the inherent characteristics of adult learning, contrasting with the traditional teaching and learning approaches for children (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2011). Second, experiential

learning originates from the philosophy of Dewey (1910), later developed by Kolb (1984). This constructivist theory considers learning as a process that first integrates an experience, then an observation of this experience and a reflection, leading to the implementation of future actions and behaviours. For instance, this approach underpins coaching practices that are goal-oriented and solution-focused (Hernez-Broome and Boyce, 2011; Whitmore, 2009; Kimsey-House *et al.*, 2018). Third, transformative learning refers to the shift in perceptions that enables an individual to challenge a paradigm in order to review beliefs, assumptions, and principles that guide the thinking process (Mezirow, 1990; Mezirow, 2000). Notably, Mezirow (1990) claimed that shifting perspectives is particularly difficult; however, this needs to be addressed to allow deep learning to occur, as opposed to surface learning. Furthermore, Gray (2006) argued that the theory of transformative learning comprises an alternative theoretical model underpinning coaching practices. Specifically, the transformative coaching approach may lead to more effective and sustained change to practice through reflective learning and self-reflection (Askew, 2011).

Additionally, an experiential approach to learning, referred as the 70-20-10 model, has increasingly been used to design talent and leadership development programmes in organisations (Tarique and Weisbord, 2018). Lombardo and Eichinger (1996) developed the 70-20-10 model for training and leadership development purposes. Based on a study analysing the experience of 200 successful leaders, it suggested that 70% of learning is accomplished on the job; 20% through relationships with coaches, mentors, and role models; and 10% learned with training and activities typically delivered in the classroom. The 70-20-10 model suggests that leaders may benefit from developing working relationships with others, thus developing high-contact experiences and expanding their social capital. This model echoes the low-contact vs high-contact development experiences supporting learning and development programmes in MNEs discussed in chapter two (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2009). According to this classification, the 10% of formal training constitutes low-contact development experiences, whereas coaching and on-the-job activities refer to high-contact development experiences, considered conducive to effective learning and development. Despite criticism regarding the lack of empirical underpinnings and limited generalisation to populations other than executives and leaders, this model presents itself as a rough proportion to be remembered by professionals when designing leadership development programmes.

Psychology and HR development theories

Drawing on a review of empirical studies published since 2007, Flip and Renier (2015) argued that the most prevalent theory on executive coaching suggests a relationship between psychotherapy and HR development. Specifically, they claimed that two paradigms dominate executive coaching

studies—namely, the HR development and psychology paradigms. First, building on psychology and counselling literature, Peltier (2001) identified five major approaches to executive coaching interventions: psychodynamic, behaviourist, person-centred, cognitive therapeutic, and system-oriented. In addition, a number of coaching techniques, tools, and approaches draw on a range of psychology disciplines, such as positive psychology, transactional analysis, or the gestalt approach, which are commonly employed in executive coaching practice (Passmore, Peterson and Freire, 2013; Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2018). Moreover, coaching psychology has emerged as a sub-discipline defined as '*enhancing well-being and performance in personal life and work domains, underpinned by models of coaching grounded in established adult learning and child learning or psychological approaches*' (Grant & Palmer, 2002: 75). Accordingly, psychology and counselling theories represent fundamental components informing the coaching theoretical framework. Second, in the context of HR development, the theoretical roots of coaching are multiple and include adult learning theories, adult development, neurosciences, management education, organisational behaviour and behavioural sciences, psychotherapy, and counselling psychology (Ellinger *et al.*, 2014).

Recently, the SET has emerged as an alternative theoretical framework in coaching studies (Schutte and Steyn, 2015; Kim and Kuo, 2015). The SET proposes a framework to understand the dynamics of the triangular relationships of coach–coachee–organisation, whereby there is a perceived obligation on the part of subordinates to reciprocate high-quality relationships. It argues that these relationships are developed over time through a series of interactions, whereby the two parties develop a social behaviour based on a cost-benefit analysis to determine risks and benefits (Blau, 1986). Furthermore, Schermuly and Graßmann (2019) argued that the SET offers a theoretical lens to understand both positive and negative effects that can occur in a close dyadic relationship such as coaching. Since helping behaviours such as coaching comprise a specific type of resource exchange, SET can thus be used to understand the outcomes of coaching relationships (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019).

According to a review of the business coaching literature (Schutte and Steyn, 2015), some coaching studies have recently referred to constructs derived from the SET, including the leader-member exchange and the psychological contract. Drawing on the SET, the leader-member exchange theory posits that leaders develop different types of exchange relationships with their subordinates, and that the quality of these relationships influences leaders' and subordinates' attitude and behaviours. For instance, Onyemah (2009) positioned the coaching relationship in organisations as an intervention underpinned by the leader-member exchange theory. The psychological contract

represents another construct derived from the SET, referring to the unwritten set of expectations and duties in the employment relationship (Rousseau, 1995). It complements the formal employment contract and defines the employee-organisation relationship. For instance, the psychological contract has been used as a frame of reference to examine coaching inefficacy in a corporate environment (McComb, 2009), to explore how coaching may align expectations of young millennials and their organisation (Solomon and van Coller-Peter, 2019), and to examine the influence of the coach's unconscious mind on the coaching process (Stewart, 2017). Accordingly, coaching scholars are exploring alternative conceptual framings to investigate the coaching relationship at work so as to advance the field, with SET and psychological contract offering a relevant frame of reference in coaching studies (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019; Nyfoudi and Tasoulis, 2018). This study focuses on unfolding the function of coaching as a helping dyadic relationship in a TM programme. Specifically, it explores the perceptions of multiple stakeholders involved in talent coaching, rather than the coach-coachee relationship forming the coaching dyad. As such, SET and its derived concept of psychological contract seems particularly appropriate to understand the dynamics of coaching relationships between talented employees and their organisation. This is further discussed at the end of this chapter.

3.3.2 Streams of literature

According to a review of the coaching literature, five key themes exist in the executive coaching literature: (a) coaching as a process; (b) coaching relationship or working alliance; (c) the balance between individual and organisational needs; (d) a way of working with others; and (e) a new face of leadership for the 21st century (Maltbia *et al.*, 2014). This study aims to analyse talented employees, HR managers and coaches' views of coaching as a one-to-one intervention operationalised as part of a global TM strategy. As such, this section focuses on four sub-themes in the workplace coaching literature deemed relevant for this study, including coaching relationship, coaching for talent and leadership development, international coaching, and development of a coaching culture in organisations.

Coaching relationship

The workplace coaching literature appears particularly focused on examining the core coaching competencies and the active ingredients for a successful coaching relationship (McKenna and Davis, 2009; De Haan, Culpin and Curd, 2011). The coaching relationship has been explored to understand what factors or components contribute to its success. For instance, De Haan (2016) claimed that three components of the coaching working alliance—namely, agreement on tasks, agreement on goals, and affective bond between coach and coachee—contribute differentially to coaching

effectiveness. Surprisingly, this study revealed that personal connection between the coach and coachee is perceived as less significant for coaching effectiveness. However, the coaching working alliance and goal-oriented practice emerged as key ingredients of coaching efficacy, particularly from the coachee's perspective. This demonstrates the prevalence of the purpose and the strength of the working alliance for coaching efficacy. In the context of TM, this raises the question of whether goals and needs are similar for talented employee at different seniority levels in terms of leadership development and career planning. Furthermore, the strength of the coaching relationship may be questioned in the context of TM, whereby formal coaching sessions are bounded by the structure of the TM programme.

In addition, some scholars have explored the coaching tripartite relationship (coach–coachee–organisation) through the lens of power dynamics (Pliopas, 2017; Fatien-Diochon and Nizet, 2015; Louis and Fatien-Diochon, 2018). For example, building on the Lefebvrian political approach to space, Louis and Fatien-Diochon (2018) argued that the coaching space can be viewed as generator, supporter, or analyser of power within the triad formed by the coach, coachee, and organisation. Moreover, the triangular coaching relationship may generate conflicting interests and ethical dilemmas for executive coaches (Fatien-Diochon and Nizet, 2015). The nature of the triadic coaching relationship involving multiple stakeholders may generate multiple, contradictory, and hidden agendas, in turn potentially resulting in ethical dilemmas and missed coaching opportunities (Louis and Fatien-Diochon, 2019). To offset the complexity involved in coaching in organisations, coaching supervision is increasingly viewed as a best practice, especially in the corporate environment (Hawkins and Smith, 2006; Passmore, 2011; Hawkins and Turner, 2017).

Coaching for talent and leadership development
Several studies have identified the benefits of coaching, including leadership, performance development, and employee engagement (Pallavi, 2017; Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2016; Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen, 2014). In addition, coaching is recognised by HR professionals as one of the most used (40%) and one of the three most effective activities with coaching (45%), high-potential in-house development schemes (35%), and mentoring and buddying schemes (30%) (CIDP, 2015). Coaching also represents one of the learning interventions adopted by organisations to deliver talent and LD programmes (Canwell *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, coaching and in-house training are regularly identified by HR managers and CEOs as the most effective TM activities (Deloitte, 2015). However, managing the talent pipeline requires implementing a long-term strategy and activities that are not perceived as particularly effective. A CIPD survey on learning and talent development (CIPD, 2015) revealed that, although three-fifths of organisations undertake TM

activities, 71% rank their activities as 'fairly effective', and only 8% rank them as 'very effective'. In addition, a recent report based on a survey sent to 520 organisations in the UK (CIPD, 2015) found that the objectives of TM are (a) to develop high-potential employees (56%); (b) to grow future senior managers/leaders (52%); and (c) to retain key employee (38%). Notably, only 27% of respondents included that TM activities aim to support the achievement of the organisation's strategic goals in their first three responses.

Despite a steady interest in coaching for leadership development and TM, coaching is often overlooked in TM studies (chapter two). Surprisingly, few evidence-based studies have been conducted on the role of internal coaching in TM programmes. An exception is provided by an empirical analysis of coaching in the context of TM activities (Clutterbuck, 2012). This study explored the challenges of TM and succession planning in organisations and proposed running 'critical conversations' between the individual, the organisation, the stakeholders, and the social network. Clutterbuck (2012:144) argued that coaching and mentoring represent a support mechanism for 'internal dialogue' aiming at developing career self-awareness in organisations. This was confirmed by another study (Farndale *et al.*, 2014) arguing that alignment of the individual, organisation, and stakeholder objectives is critical for the success of the TM and succession planning activities.

However, most empirical surveys and studies (CIPD, 2015; ICF, 2020) have analysed data collected from HR, LD professionals, and decision-makers in organisations, but not specifically from the participants being coached in these programmes, with the coach's perspective on coaching sessions being overrepresented in the coaching literature (De Haan, 2019). It has been claimed that there is little empirical research on the role of coaching from the perspective of leaders involved in TM programmes (Passmore, Peterson and Freire, 2013; Clutterbuck, Poulsen and Kochan, 2012; Clutterbuck, 2012). Therefore, this gives scope for this study to add to this stream of coaching literature by exploring the views of multiple stakeholders, including talented employees, HR managers, and internal and external coaches.

International coaching

As globalisation of business operations escalates, MNEs seeks specific interventions to deal with challenging issues related to intercultural competence, global leadership development, expatriation, international mergers, and acquisitions (Cascio and Boudreau, 2016; Vesa, 2002). A variety of terms have been used in the executive coaching literature to refer to the international perspective in coaching, such as international coaching, global coaching, coaching for expatriates, cross-cultural coaching, coaching across borders, and intercultural coaching (Grant and Stober, 2006; Passmore,

2013; Moral and Abbott, 2009). This study refers to international coaching as an overarching term highlighting the international context in which MNEs operate.

Based on conceptual analysis and personal observations, various coaching frameworks have emerged to highlight how culture may influence the coaching and mentoring process. For instance, Rosinski (2003) pioneered research into combining coaching and cultural theories in the form of the Cultural Orientations Framework Assessment. Based on intercultural management theories, the questionnaire explores seven cultural categories and 17 dimensions to support leaders and coaches in leveraging cultural diversity. In addition, Rosinski (2010) adopted a holistic approach to coaching in the context of global leadership and organisational development. His definition of global coaching integrated six dimensions, including the physical, managerial, psychological, cultural, political, and spiritual. Moreover, the author claimed that global coaching is more than a professional practice or a leadership style; rather, it is viewed as a culture itself (Rosinski, 2010). Furthermore, the coach's role is prominent in the coaching process, whereby he/she is a role model acting with congruence, authenticity, and determination to embody the coaching culture. This suggests that the coaching process is entangled with the cultural environment in which it occurs.

Another approach to international coaching was provided by Abbott et al. (2013) in the form of a four-fold framework for conceptualising how culture is involved in coaching and mentoring practice: (a) cultural diversity within the coaching and mentoring practice; (b) coaching and mentoring in a cross-cultural context (working with executives on expatriates assignments); (c) coaching and mentoring in diversity and inclusion (working to celebrate and work with diversity as a resource rather than dealing with diversity as a 'problem'); and (d) culture as part of a holistic approach, encompassing cultural intelligence as a resource and dimension of learning for coaching and mentoring situations. However, as highlighted by Abbott and colleagues (2013), there remain few empirical studies on the role of coaching in the development of global leaders.

Several other scholars have engaged with the topic of international coaching, particularly Passmore (2013), Hawkins and Smith (2006), Clutterbuck (2002; 2012), Plaister-Ten (2013), and Abbott and Salomaa (2016). Most of these international coaching studies tended to focus on how culture (corporate, national, profession, industry) influences the coaching process. Notably, these studies have contributed significantly to raising the awareness of culture's impact on the coaching relationship in the coaching community. The following section of this chapter explores the development of a coaching culture in organisations, representing another trend within the workplace coaching literature.

Coaching culture

To begin, coaching culture can be defined as follows:

> *'One where people are empowered and where coaching happens at every level,*
> *and not only does it happen at every level, but it adds to bottom-line*
> *performance. It is the recognised development tool that touches every part of the*
> *employee life cycle'. (Jones and Gorell, 2014:13)*

This definition of coaching culture suggests a tension between the inclusive and exclusive approaches of coaching for leadership and talent development purposes. A survey (ILM, 2013a) highlighted that, whilst 95% of companies recognise the benefits of coaching as a catalyst for organisational and individual performance, only 52% make it available to all their employees, which can represent a barrier to developing a coaching culture. Additionally, 85% of organisations claimed that coaching is aimed at middle managers and directors. Conversely, only 4% of organisations reported that coaching is used to support organisational or transformational change. This suggests that coaching in organisations may be the preserve of senior and executive managers, which signals an exclusive approach to coaching. This resonates with a TM-exclusive philosophy that often underpins TM strategies in organisations (chapter two).

In sum, coaching remains an evolving practice and an emerging field of study (Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016). The theoretical framework of coaching studies is varied and relates to several areas in the HR development, psychology, and adult learning fields. Despite a steady increase of coaching studies over the past 15 years, scholars unanimously call for further research underpinned by robust research methods and a clear theoretical framework in order to better understand why and how executive coaching may influence individuals, organisations, and other stakeholders (Passmore, 2011; Blackman, 2016). In the theoretical landscape of coaching studies, SET has recently emerged as an alternative theoretical framework to understand coaching relationships at work as well as the impact of TM activities at individual and organisational levels (chapter two). As this study seeks to connect the TM and coaching fields, the SET is utilised as the main theoretical lens to analyse the dynamics in the coaching relationship and the role of coaching in the context of TM. Following the exploration of the theoretical framework and steams of literature in coaching studies, the following section focuses on the impact of coaching in organisations.

3.4   IMPACT OF COACHING IN ORGANISATIONS

An important part of the coaching literature concerns the impact of coaching in organisations in terms of outcomes and effectiveness. The coaching discourse emphasises the positive effects of

coaching and its positive contributions at the individual and organisational level (Grover and Furnham, 2016; Bozer and Jones, 2018; Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2016). However, there remains a paucity of empirical studies to ascertain coaching's efficacy in organisations (Passmore and Gibbes, 2007; Maltbia *et al.*, 2014; Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016). This section examines the impact of coaching in organisations, paying particular attention to the emerging trend focussing on the potential negative effects of workplace coaching (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019). This leads to a discussion concerning the limitations and issues in investigating coaching in organisations.

3.4.1 Coaching outcomes

A consistent body of research has attempted to evaluate whether coaching works by providing a comprehensive list of coaching outcomes at the individual and organisational levels (Grover and Furnham, 2016). The topic of executive coaching outcomes has attracted considerable attention compared to other forms of workplace coaching, such as managerial coaching (Lawrence, 2017; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). First, executive coaching outcomes have been examined through the four phases composing the coaching process, including the pre-requisites, process, proximal, and distal outcomes (Joo, 2005). Based on a review of the nascent executive coaching literature, Joo (2005) proposed differentiating proximal and distal outcomes of coaching. Specifically, proximal coaching outcomes would include self-awareness and learning, whereas distal outcomes concern the career success of the individual, subsequently leading to positive influence over organisational success. Other studies have also emphasised increased productivity and performance, behavioural change, stress management, and self-confidence (Passmore and Gibbes, 2007; Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2016; Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen, 2014; Bozer and Jones, 2018).

The contribution of coaching in the area of leadership development was analysed by Passmore (2015), who claimed that coaching benefits leaders' growth in four dominant ways: (a) learning; (b) skill enhancement; (c) self-awareness development; and (d) motivation development. Specifically, coaching enables leaders to transfer learning from the classroom to the workplace, personalises leadership development interventions, and links concepts with previous knowledge and experience. In addition, a mixed-method study based on 41 executives in a public health agency revealed that coaching enhances goal attainment, increases resilience and workplace well-being, and reduces depression and stress (Grant, Curtayne and Burton, 2009). Moreover, it has been argued that coaching contributes to developing leaders' creativity, enabling them to find innovative solutions to the challenges of the present and the future (Cavanagh and Palmer, 2009). Finally, a recent survey

suggested that the use of managerial coaching can increase an employee's self-efficacy, develop organisational resilience, and contribute to competitive advantage (Pousa and Mathieu, 2015).

Additionally, some studies have focused on evaluating the outcomes of a coaching culture and emphasised its benefits for both organisations and employees in terms of performance management, TM, and organisational development (Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; Jones and Gorell, 2014). First, coaching outcomes related to performance enhancement translate into performance/skills, well-being, coping attitudes, and self-regulation (Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen, 2014), especially when delivered by an internal coach (Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2016). At the organisational level, coaching seems to enhance transformational leadership and performance (Grover and Furnham, 2016). These studies have suggested that organisations may benefit from developing a coaching culture to reinforce the impact of coaching already deployed in TM programmes. In other words, by adapting a more inclusive approach to TM, an organisation may leverage coaching interventions and extend its benefits. This was confirmed by a literature review on coaching culture (Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh, 2014), which suggested that coaching should be presented as an integrated part of the organisational system. Furthermore, the authors claimed that organisations need to promote coaching internally through the commitment and intervention of internal coaches and senior leaders. Yet, it remains unclear how coaching practices mutually benefit the organisation and the individual (Maltbia *et al.*, 2014; Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016).

Another limitation is that the majority of coaching-outcome studies are based on small samples of participants involved in leadership and executive coaching (Grover and Furnham, 2016), which represents a rather limited proportion of the workforce in organisations. This issue of targeted attention is similar to many studies of TM practices, where the views of multiple stakeholders, especially those of talented employees, remain under-represented (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020).

3.4.2   Coaching effectiveness

The scale of companies' investment in coaching has prompted professionals and academics to evaluate its effectiveness in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of coaching as a profession and its value as a corporate intervention (Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016). However, the measurement of coaching effectiveness remains subject to controversial debates with some scholars arguing that the measures of coaching's effectiveness are inaccurate (Grover and Furnham, 2016). Despite the emergence of tools of measurement such as ROI (De Meuse, Dai and Lee, 2009) and alternative qualitative and holistic approaches such as the Well-Being and Engagement Framework (Grant, 2014), and the Coaching Effectiveness Survey (Tooth, Nielsen and Armstrong, 2013), it

appears that organisations face challenges in evaluating coaching due to the multiple stakeholders involved, combined with the need for a multi-level analysis at the micro and meso levels.

Departing from a quantitative approach to coaching effectiveness, some scholars (Du Toit, 2014; Kim and Kuo, 2015; De Haan, 2016; De Haan *et al.*, 2016) have focused on examining the conditions and factors for successful coaching, particularly the nature of the coach–coachee relationship and its impact on coaching effectiveness. For example, a recent large-scale study evaluated the contribution of executive coaching as perceived by leaders, coaches, and sponsors (De Haan *et al.*, 2016). Specifically, the study analysed coaching's effectiveness by exploring the coach–coachee working alliance, particularly coachee self-efficacy, personality, and personality match between coach and coachee. It highlighted the strength of the working alliance between coach and coachee, with a clear focus on goals and tasks, and to a lesser extent, the personality match between coach and coachee.

Another approach based on a meta-analysis of the benefits of executive coaching argued that coaching effectiveness can be better evaluated using staff engagement and retention data, although further quantitative data is needed (Grover and Furnham, 2016). The study findings revealed no effect of the research design, longevity of the coaching, the number of coaching sessions, or the coaching format on coaching effectiveness. However, the authors claimed that coaching achieves a more positive impact when delivered by an internal coach and when coaching is not supported by a multisource feedback, such as a 360° assessment. Finally, the study highlighted that executive coaching remains the preserve of senior and top managers due to cost constraints, although managers in an early career stage would benefit even more from coaching to progress in their career. This echoes the need to study coaching as a TM practice for talented employees at different stages of their career from junior to senior levels, as was highlighted in the TM literature review chapter (chapter two).

Despite numerous studies focussing on the effectiveness of executive coaching, little is known regarding the role of coaching in the development of future global leaders as part of a global TM strategy (Al Ariss, 2014; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015; Bond and Naughton, 2011). Furthermore, coaching outcomes at the organisational level have been overlooked compared to the individual level (Grover and Furnham, 2016). Specifically, it is unclear how positive coaching outcomes at the individual level may translate into organisational gains. For instance, based on a review of the literature, Grover and Furnham (2016) claimed that coaching improves transformational leadership, fosters the coachee's leadership behaviour, and positively effects those working closely with coaching recipients. However, some empirical studies (Agarwal et al., 2006; Lawrence, 2015; O'Connor and Cavanagh, 2014) have argued that the managers' propensity to

coach others after receiving coaching themselves is not established. Other studies have claimed that self-efficacy is improved after an executive coaching intervention (De Haan *et al.*, 2013; Grant, 2014), whereas some have suggested that it is an antecedent of coaching rather than an outcome (Bozer and Jones, 2018; Grover and Furnham, 2016). Therefore, there remain some inconsistencies in executive coaching outcomes and the coaching effectiveness literature, suggesting that the field is still in an early stage of development (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). This gives scope for this study to contribute to the field by examining the various impacts that the use of coaching in the context of TM may have on individuals and their organisation.

3.4.3 Positive and negative effects

Multiple meta-analyses of the literature have underlined the positive effects of coaching in the workplace (Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2016; Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen, 2014; Bozer and Jones, 2018; Grover and Furnham, 2016). Besides the many positive effects of coaching, though, the coaching literature has often overlooked its potential negative effects. This is surprising, since negative impacts have been studied in other helping relationships, such as mentoring, supervision, and psychotherapy (Kilburg, 2002). Despite this, little is known regarding the negative impact of coaching, which seems a taboo in the literature (Kilburg, 2002).

Grant (2017) argued that it is critical to explore coaching's negative effects in order to advance the profession by understanding its limitations and supporting practitioners in identifying, attenuating, or preventing them. Furthermore, exploring negative effects may support organisations in deciding when to use coaching and who would or would not benefit the most (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019).

To address this neglect, some scholars have begun investigating the negative effects of coaching in organisations (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019). From a theoretical perspective, the exploration of coaching's negative effects has been analysed through the lens of SET (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019). Helping dyadic relationships, such as the coaching relationship, may comprise both positive and negative effects, which is characteristic of close relationships (Homans, 1961). In the context of coaching, negative effects can be defined as unwanted, harmful, and occurring with a direct connection with the coaching process (Schermuly at al., 2014). A review of the negative effects of coaching in organisations based on nine studies revealed that negative impacts may affect clients, coaches, and organisations differently (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019). For instance, coaches are more prone to experiencing negative effects as a result of a high socio-emotional demand in the coaching process. Additionally, they are often not sufficiently prepared for these challenges. Furthermore, almost all coaches involved in the study (94%) experienced at least one negative effect

during the coaching process. Moreover, Schermuly and Graßmann's literature review (2019) argued that negative effects occur because of two main deficiencies—namely, the coaching relationship and the lack of supervision. However, the authors highlighted that preliminary empirical research on coaching's negative effects remains limited by the fact that they are often evaluated exclusively from the coach's perspective.

From an organisational perspective, coaching's negative effects for organisations remain under-explored, with the exception of a study published in German (Oellerich, 2016). Accordingly, further empirical studies are needed to ascertain these claims and explore how organisations may be negatively affected by coaching practices. To this end, this study addresses this neglect by examining the role of coaching in positive and negative terms from the perspective of the employee receiving coaching as part of a TM programme and from the perspective of the organisation.

3.5 DEBATES AND LIMITATIONS OF COACHING STUDIES

Following a review of the executive coaching and workplace coaching literature, this section examines the debates and limitations of coaching studies.

3.5.1 Debates in coaching studies

An ill-defined and multifaceted helping intervention

In the context of leadership development, coaching is broadly defined as a collaborative, non-directive, and developmental intervention (Ting and Scisco, 2006). Consequently, workplace coaching encompasses multiple variants of interventions. Bond et al. (2013) listed several approaches to coaching in organisations, ranging from executive business coaching to life coaching, with numerous variations and permutations in between, as discussed previously. Consequently, the routes and perceptions of coaching are varied and diverse (Du Toit, 2014).

Another challenge in situating coaching in organisations concerns the alignment between the individuals and organisational goals. Some recent studies have explored coaching's influence on individuals and organisations, concluding that coaching can be a catalyser for enhanced performance and competitive advantage (O'Rourke, 2012; Utrilla, Grande and Lorenzo, 2015; Solomon and van Coller-Peter, 2019; Taconis, 2018). However, no coaching studies have focused on the impact of the alignment or misalignment between individuals and organisational goals, contrary to some TM studies (Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a; Hedayati Mehdiabadi and Li, 2016).

Additionally, the purposes of coaching in organisations are varied and may include skills and performance, health and well-being coaching, and career coaching (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck,

2018; Grant, 2017). In addition, coaching is often associated with personal development, performance, and well-being enhancement (Grant and Stober, 2006; Whitmore, 2009). This suggests a multi-dimensionality of coaching for individuals and organisations, with different purposes for each.

Moreover, coaching can be used for both poor- and high-performers in organisations. McCauley and Hezlett (2001) argued that executive coaching was initially developed to rescue talented individuals who were in danger of stalling their careers or losing their jobs because of a defect in their performance. The other group of individuals who may participate in coaching include high-potential executives and managers who require additional development to advance along the corporate ladder (McCauley & Hezlett, 2001). Since the early 2000s, organisations have provided coaching as an executive perquisite to their best senior employees (Joo, 2005). In this way, coaching in organisation may be perceived differently by various stakeholders and may hold various functions in the context of talent and leadership development.

A surge in academic publications

In the first literature review of executive coaching , Kilburg (1996) claimed that executive coaching research has lagged behind practice. Since this call, the academic interest for coaching has surged (Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). For instance, the increasing number of academic journals specialising in coaching and mentoring illustrate the steady scholarly interest in this practice (*International Journal of Evidence-Based Coaching and Mentoring; Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice; International Journal of Coaching in Organizations; International Journal of Coaching and Mentoring in Education; International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching, International Coaching Psychology Review)*. Notably, executive coaching articles can also be found in highly ranked academic journals specialised in leadership and HRM (*The Leadership Quarterly, Journal of Management, Human Resource Management Review, Advances in Developing Human Resources, South-African Journal of Human Resource Management*), as well as in psychology (*Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research, European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology).* Despite this steady interest and an increasing number of empirical studies, though, the coaching literature seems scattered across journals related to HR and psychology, combined with emerging specialist journals. However, the publication of executive coaching studies in both HR and psychology journals is unsurprising, considering they form the two main paradigms underpinning this emerging field (Schutte and Steyn, 2015).

Paucity of empirical studies

Several reviews of the executive coaching literature have been published over the past decade (Ely, 2010; Athanasopoulou, 2015), with scholars claiming repeatedly that further empirical research is needed to advance the coaching field. Similar claims have been made for the TM field (chapter two), which is typical for emerging fields of study and gives scope for this study to contribute to their advancement.

Another debate in workplace coaching studies concerns its independence from practitioners and coaching buyers. Specifically, based on a force-field analysis of leadership coaching for leaders in transition between two positions or roles, some scholars (Bond and Naughton, 2011) have argued that professional bodies, business organisations, HR professionals, and coaches consider coaching as a potential TM instrument. They advocated further independent academic research in the field of leadership and executive coaching, suggesting potential conflict of interest between the coaching sponsors and researchers investigating coaching's effectiveness in organisations. Despite the compelling argument for leadership coaching in organisations, however, their study highlighted the lack of evidence-based and independent research that would support decision-makers in organisations to implement *'the right things, at the right time, for the right people'* (Bond and Naughton, 2011: 166). Furthermore, a recent empirical study has emphasised that the legitimisation strategies employed by leadership programme designers are decisive in shaping those programmes (Fatien-Diochon and Nizet, 2019).

3.5.2   The limitations of coaching research

Based on meta-analysis and reviews of the workplace coaching literature, some limitations related to the methods, capability, ethics, and independence of the research on workplace and executive coaching studies are discussed (Bond, 2011; Passmore, 2011; Ely, 2010; Blackman, 2016). First, echoing the debate on research independence, the executive coaching discourse has been elaborated by coach practitioners, which inevitably possess a strong business interest in promoting coaching (Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016). This may have led to an over-positive and subjective view on the topic, tainted by some financial and business interests, raising an ethical issue on executive coaching studies in organisations, as mentioned in the previous section. According to Blackman's review of the empirical coaching literature (2016), one of the key limitations of coaching studies is the continuing concern among researchers involved with establishing coaching as a legitimate HR development activity and with the development of coaches as professionals. Paradoxically, the ever-growing attention from scholars, HR representatives, and coaching and consulting professionals towards coaching research is encouraged by the need expressed by leaders

in organisations (CIPD, 2015). As such, improved learning and development schemes may support talent, leadership, and career development within organisations.

Second, the coach's role has been critically examined regarding coaching's effectiveness, and it has been argued that coaches can act as reproduction agents of the existing corporate culture in the post-modern organisation (Western, 2012). In addition, Western (2012) claimed that leadership and coaching approaches need to be supported by a new leadership paradigm that fits the specificities of the post-modernist workplace. Furthermore, he called upon coaches to become actors of corporate change by leading, challenging the norm, and asking ethical, existential, and networking questions. In this way, the coach's role in organisation involves trying '*to open a new dialogue and to connect their coachee with the network they need to influence*' (Western, 2012:111). This emphasises social capital extension as a purpose for leadership coaching. However, there remain few evidence-based studies focussing on how leadership coaching influences social capital, which is seen as critical for career progression in organisations.

Third, some methodological concerns have been discussed amongst coaching scholars (Ely *et al.*, 2010; Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). Although coaching has benefited from steady attention of scholars and practitioners over the past 15 years, studies attempting to evaluate leadership coaching remain limited concerning their research design and data analyses (Ely *et al.*, 2010). From a methodological perspective, coaching studies may be limited by a preponderant reliance on self-reported data (Ely *et al.*, 2010; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). This is critical, considering that individuals tend to inflate their performance and self-assessment (Kruger & Dunnind, 1999). Furthermore, data may reflect a Hawthorne and social desirability effect, whereby study participants alter their behaviour or responses due to their awareness of being observed (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). In addition, despite general agreement concerning the importance of evaluating coaching in organisations, there remains no prescribed and commonly recognised framework for evaluating coaching effectiveness (Ely *et al.*, 2010). Particularly, the evaluation of coaching in organisations is not articulated in terms of career progression and job enhancement in the organisation, which may provide further insights into coaching's role in a corporate environment (Ely *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, the replicability and rigour of existing studies has been questioned (Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen, 2014), and there is a need to undertake longitudinal studies with larger sample sizes (Grover and Furnham, 2016). Moreover, there remains a paucity of empirical research examining the efficacy and role of coaching in organisations (Maltbia *et al.*, 2014; Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016).

Fourth, the field of executive coaching has developed with an egocentric Western ethos, leading to potentially biased research and inappropriate practices in an increasingly globalised and complex environment (Plaister-Ten, 2013). Executive and leadership coaching practices have been defined and developed predominantly in Western countries, with limited references to cross-cultural research in its practice (Whitmore, 2009; Grover and Furnham, 2016). Despite a recent increase of international research interest, coaching research is often conducted and published in developed countries (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2018; Plaister-Ten, 2013; Abbott and Salomaa, 2016). In addition, a positivist and dimensional approach of culture has given rise to criticism as '*it promotes unhelpful stereotyping and depicts culture as a rigid and static force that must be worked around to avoid problems*' (Passmore, 2013: 487). Cross-cultural management models are often culturally biased, as they are often designed by Western researchers using their own worldview to examine culture. Accordingly, the researcher acknowledges her potential cultural biases, coming from a white, Christian, Western, and middle-class socio-cultural background.

Finally, Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2018) claimed that most executive coaching outcome studies overlook the social context, with more than half (60 of 110 published papers) having no consideration of the interrelation between executive coaching outcomes and the relational, spatial, or temporal context within which they take place. Their literature review indicated that only a few studies have focused on all three stakeholders (organisation, coachee, coach) (Fatien-Diochon, Garvey and Gray, 2018; Fatien-Diochon and Nizet, 2015; Louis and Fatien-Diochon, 2018; Pliopas, 2017), confirming that executive outcome research erroneously treats coaching as an individual-level intervention rather than a social process with active involvement of multiple stakeholders (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). This was confirmed by a recent review of the qualitative coaching studies, which claimed that hidden personal and organisational agendas are often overlooked in coaching literature, despite coaching being identified as an intervention supporting wider organisational agendas, such as change (De Haan, 2019). As such, further integration of the organisational context in coaching studies is needed to advance the field, which this study seeks to address by providing a detailed description of the study's context, eliciting perceptions of talent coaching from multiple stakeholders, and comparing the views on talent coaching at the individual and organisational level.

In sum, coaching in organisations represents an emerging field of study, characterised by a myriad of theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning multiple variants of coaching in practice. As such, the field of coaching has been metaphorically compared to a tree to represent the variety of academic disciplines contributing to it (Stein, 2003). Despite a surge in publications over the past 15

years, as well as the emergence of executive coaching as one of the top five leadership-development practices, further empirical coaching studies are needed to advance the field (Maltbia *et al.*, 2014; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). Recent reviews of the literature have emphasised the need for further empirical studies based on rigorous research methods, which may be achieved by collecting views from multiple stakeholders and focussing not only on coaching outcomes, but on the dynamics of coaching relationships and underlying mechanisms in the organisational context (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018; Cotterill and Passmore, 2018; De Haan, 2019).

3.6 KEY POINTS ON THE COACHING LITERATURE

Coaching and mentoring comprise widely used learning interventions to support the career enhancement of global leaders. Over the past two decades, research on coaching and leadership development has developed at a fast pace (Cotterill and Passmore, 2018). Coaching in the workplace is operationalised through multiple forms and appellations, potentially leading to confusion and misunderstanding regarding its nature and purpose. From a practitioner perspective, coaching is broadly defined as a developmental practice, often similar to mentoring, with the two terms commonly used interchangeably in practice.

Coaching can be viewed as an ill-defined and amorphous intervention in practice. 'Coaching' represents an umbrella term overarching the manifold helping interventions in organisations (Garvey, 2004). Despite attempts to distinguish executive coaching from similar interventions, such as performance, leadership, and business coaching, the term 'executive' prevails as a type of coaching in organisations and refers to one-to-one conversations aimed at developing leaders in transitions between two roles and supporting the success of both individuals and organisations (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015; Joo, 2005). This means it does not necessarily apply to less experienced and/or young professionals identified as talent, who join TM programmes and receive coaching to support their ascension along the career ladder in the organisation (Bond and Naughton, 2011; Taconis, 2018). As TM programmes may include successful employees at various hierarchical levels, this study seeks to include young and less experienced talented employees to compare their views against more experienced senior managers. This helps develop a more holistic understanding of coaching within TM programmes across an organisation, and to understand some of the more nuanced aspects of executive coaching.

Most studies on coaching are practitioner led and characterised by a lack of independent academic research (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). Over the past 20 years, the literature has focused on defining coaching as a specific professional practice to establish both commonalities and differences

with other learning interventions (Garvey, 2004; Peltier, 2001). The streams of literature and debates in the executive coaching literature have often focused on the methods for identifying coaching outcomes, calculating a potential ROI, and establishing correlations between the cost of coaching and the contribution to the firm's competitive advantage (De Meuse et al., 2009, Grant, 2012). Coaching studies have also often reported the views of HR managers, but rarely the perceptions of other stakeholders (coachees, internal and external coaches, and TM and LD programme managers). In addition, despite a steady exploration of the benefits and effectiveness of coaching in organisations, the perspective of the coachee is often overlooked. Therefore, some TM and coaching scholars (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Ely *et al.*, 2010) have called for further empirical research based on the perspective of leaders receiving coaching, as well as other stakeholders.

The development of coaching practice in organisations follows two different paradigms (Schutte and Steyn, 2015). The first, oriented towards psychology, focuses on understanding the coaching relationship and the behaviours leading to leadership and performance enhancement. The second orientation concerns HR development, with a focus on evaluating the impact of coaching in terms of effectiveness and ROI. This may be due to workplace coaching being funded by the organisation as part of a leadership development and TM strategies (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015; Joo, 2005).

Although the coaching literature has emphasised the positive outcome of executive coaching, the role of coaching in leaders' career progression and development remains under-explored. It has been claimed that the articulation of coaching as part of career progression within organisations is missing (Ely et al., 2010). In addition, Abbott et al. (2013) claimed that, as the practice of executive coaching increases, particularly through executive programmes in MNEs, more knowledge is needed regarding what is being done, what is possible, and what is the impact of coaching interventions funded by large corporations. Therefore, this study seeks to advance the coaching field by exploring the meaning and function of coaching deployed in a TM programme in a global firm. The next section discusses SET as the main frame of reference for this study.

3.7 SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY AS A THEORETICAL LENS FOR THIS STUDY

This study employs SET as the main theoretical framework to examine the perceived role of coaching in the context of organisational TM programmes. There are four justifications for selecting SET as a relevant theoretical lens for this study on coaching in TM programmes. First, SET posits a perceived obligation on the part of subordinates to reciprocate high-quality relationships, and that these relationships are developed over time through a series of exchanges (Blau, 1986). In the context of

coaching, the dynamics of the triangular relationships between coach–coachee and the organisation remain under-explored (Schutte and Steyn, 2015). However, SET provides a relevant theoretical lens to analyse the underlying mechanisms of coaching as a tripartite working alliance, and allows for exploring the positive and negative effects of coaching in organisations (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019).

Second, SET has been used as an alternative theoretical framework in previous studies in both the coaching and TM fields (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019; Dries, 2013a; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Sparrow, 2019). Nyfoudy and Tasoulis (2018) concluded their review of coaching in the context of TM by calling for more empirical studies underpinned by theories related to TM and coaching. This suggests that SET may contribute equally to extending existing knowledge in both fields (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019; Makram, Sparrow and Greasley, 2017; Sparrow, 2019). Specifically, the psychological contract as a construct derived from SET may provide a useful lens to understand how coaching may influence expectations within the triangular coaching relationship in a TM context.

Third, SET provides a relevant frame of reference to address numerous calls from coaching and TM scholars regarding the need for more context-sensitive empirical studies to advance the respective fields (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). The SET emphasises the social context in which coaching and TM occur. As such, it may provide a relevant theoretical framework to explore coaching as a TM practice in a large firm.

Fourth, SET may provide a theoretical lens to explore both positive and negative effects of coaching in organisations (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019). Specifically, authors have argued that SET proposes a theoretical framework and a lens to understand why negative effects may occur in close relationships, such as coaching. Coaching may be considered a helping dyadic intervention, which comprises a specific type of resource exchange (Homans, 1961). Therefore, SET can be applied to understand the outcomes of coaching relationships. Furthermore, according to SET, negative effects represent an integral component of close dyadic relationships. In addition, studies on other dyadic helping relationships, such as mentoring, psychotherapy, and supervision, have explored and highlighted their negative effects, yet empirical studies exploring the 'dark side' of coaching in organisations remain limited (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019). Therefore, this study is underpinned by SET, which is used as a frame of reference and theoretical lens to understand coaching's perceived role in the context of TM, and understand how it is perceived by multiple stakeholders, especially the talented employees, the coaches, and the organisation. SET has emerged as a useful explanatory framework to make sense of the data during the analysis phase since it sheds additional

The figure 3 below summarises the theoretical positioning of this study. The following chapter details the methodological approach chosen for this exploratory study.

Figure 3.   Theoretical framework of the study

TM theories:

RBV

Human capital

Institutionalism

SET

and

PC

Coaching theories:

Adult learning

Positive psychology

HR development
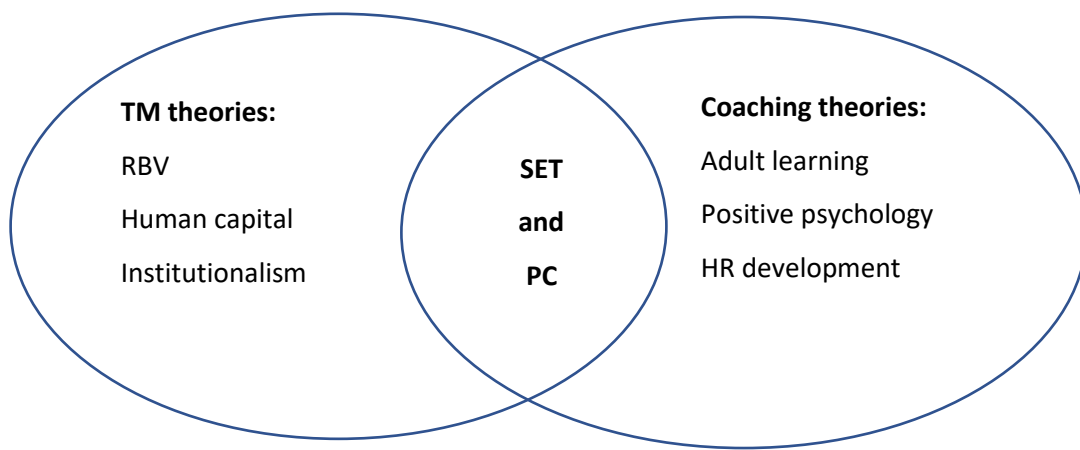
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the methodology adopted to conduct this study. First, it examines the researcher's philosophical stance, as well as the research design, data collection, and analytical methods selected by the researcher. Then, a brief introduction of the case company GlobalFinCorp is provided. In addition, the multiple units of analysis and the participants' demographics are introduced. Following this, the thematic approach for data analysis is discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the case study research design, along with a detailed set of measures adopted by the researcher to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity in this qualitative study.

4.2 ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL STANCE

This section examines the researcher's ontological and epistemological views. First, assumptions regarding the nature of a social phenomenon reveal the researcher's ontological stance. Ontology is interested in the form of reality and the extent of the knowledge held concerning this reality (Kerry & Howell, 2013). Second, epistemology involves the researcher's assumptions and beliefs on the nature of knowledge, as well as the relationship between the researcher and the object of the investigation (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Silverman, 2013).

4.2.1 Objectivist ontological stance

Objectivism is an ontological position that implies that social phenomena confront us as external facts beyond our reach or influence (Bryman and Bell, 2015). As noted in the introduction (chapter one), the researcher is coming from a French educational background which is widely influenced by an objectivist approach of social sciences and a positivist approach to life sciences. Her familiarity with objectivist research conventions has undeniably influenced her position as researcher in this study. Specifically, the thesis considers the case organisation and its talent management programmes as objects that have an existence independent of the researcher. Indeed, the rules, regulations, policies used by GlobalFinCorp were approached as external facts beyond the researcher's reach or influence (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Further, in line with Bryman and Bell (2015)'s objectivist ontology, the researcher took the view that an organisation has a reality which is external to its individual members. For example, employees discover, learn and apply the criteria for being identified as a talent as part of their daily interaction at work and professional experience. So, talent management practices and coaching were studied as existing social phenomena, which are separate and external from the actors. However, the researcher considered that actors' experience of a social phenomenon influences their perceptions and the meanings attached to the social entity in question.

Finally, by taking an objectivist stance, the researcher examined coaching as a TM practice in the case company as a social phenomenon, which is separate from the researcher and to a certain extent from the actors. The researcher believes that people may influence the reality in which they evolve. Individuals experiencing a social phenomenon may act as reproduction or change agent in a specific context. Therefore, her ontological position departs on this point from the objectivist view that organisation is a "*constraining force that acts on and inhibits its members*" (Bryman and Bell, 2015: 32).

4.2.2 Interpretivist epistemological stance

Second, epistemological considerations focus on defining knowledge in the social world and discuss whether a natural science model of research is suitable for researching the social world (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Business and management scholars often debate the strengths and limitations of positivist and interpretative research paradigms (Creswell, 2009; Silverman, 2013; Gaya and Smith, 2016). Interpretivists believe that the researcher is linked with the investigation and that the construction of knowledge is transactional (i.e. a result of the exchange between participants and the researcher). Accordingly, the findings of interpretivist studies are subjective, since the assumptions, values, and beliefs of the researcher and participants may influence the research process, analysis, and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In addition, interpretivism requires the social researcher '*to grasp the subjective meaning of social action*' (Bryman and Bell, 2015: 29). This means that an interpretative epistemological stance emphasises the understanding of the phenomenon or concept from the perspective of those involved in the studied social phenomenon.

This study seeks an in-depth understanding of the role of coaching interventions in TM programmes. Specifically, it aims to unfold the views of talented employees and other stakeholders involved in coaching in order to understand the meaning of their coaching and TM experiences, as well as the function that coaching may hold for leadership and career development in the organisation. The nature of the inquiry is in line with the interpretivist paradigm, whereby the researcher seeks participants' worldviews in relation to the topic of coaching for TM purposes (Bryman and Bell,

2015). As such, the researcher adopts an epistemological stance positing that '*reality is constructed intersubjectively through meaning and understandings developed socially and experientially*' (Harrison et al., 2017:10). Therefore, based on the nature of the inquiry and the position of the researcher, this study adopts an interpretivist paradigm.

4.2.3   Idiography

Nomothetic and idiographic represent terms used to distinguish two approaches to knowledge. The nomothetic approach seeks to generalise from a large sample of observations, whereas the idiographic approach tends to specify and is concerned with the particular (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Whilst nomothetic is typical of natural sciences and seeks the formulation of general laws explaining an objective phenomenon, idiographic research is interested in understanding the meaning of contingent and subjective phenomenon (Gomm, 2008). This study aims to develop an in-depth understanding of the particularities of a social phenomenon—coaching—used in the specific context of TM in a corporate environment. Therefore, this study draws upon social-constructivist ontology and interpretivist and idiographic epistemology. The following section discusses the research strategy adopted based on these ontological and epistemological considerations.

4.3   QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STRATEGY

4.3.1   Qualitative inquiry

Qualitative and quantitative research are considered two clusters of research strategy (Creswell, 2009). They derive from epistemological and ontological considerations, with interpretivism typically calling for a qualitative approach (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The researcher's philosophical orientations regarding social research are idiographic and interpretivist, and thus aligned with the qualitative research strategy (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1988; Merriam, 2009; Gaya and Smith, 2016).

Additionally, based on existing TM and coaching literature, a qualitative research strategy seems suitable for this empirical study. Indeed, 56% of TM empirical and conceptual papers draw upon quantitative methods (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017). Despite this, scholars claim that, as a nascent field of study, more qualitative studies are needed to advance the field (Tarique and Schuler, 2010; McDonnell *et al.*, 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Moreover, a recent review of the coaching literature indicated that numerous coaching studies adopted a qualitative approach (De Haan, 2019). Notably, qualitative approaches in coaching studies is seen as particularly suitable for the *how* and *why* questions, especially when organisational change is involved (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). Therefore, drawing upon reviews of the TM and coaching literature, a qualitative

approach is suitable for this study due to the nature of the inquiry and the scope for contribution to both TM and coaching fields of study.

4.3.2 Abductive logic of inquiry

The data analysis drew on abductive reasoning. Coined by the pragmatist philosopher Charles S. Pierce, abduction is typically defined as "*a cerebral process, an intellectual act, a mental leap, that brings together things which one had never associated with one another: A cognitive logic of inquiry*" (Reichertz, 2007: 220). It emphasises the familiarity of the researcher with the literature and existing theoretical frameworks as a starting point to understand the phenomenon studied in real life (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Van Maanen, Sørensen and Mitchell, 2007). The familiarisation allows the researchers to explore the relationship between theory and the data. Abduction is used as a form of scientific inference to solve a puzzle and to look for an explanation for a surprising phenomenon (Welch *et al.*, 2013).

The study followed an abductive logic of analysis, which stems in a puzzle or unanticipated findings and includes an iterative and recursive approach to literature (Mantere and Ketoviki, 2013; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012). This is because the dominant theoretical frameworks in TM and coaching including human and social capital theories could not account for the set of reciprocal obligations and the development of strong ties between coach-coachee-organisation associated with coaching in the context of TM. The SET has emerged as a useful lens to understand how talent coaching was experienced as a pivotal career-event and may strengthen the triangular coaching relationships.

The researcher acknowledges that it is impossible to approach data analysis and interpretation without referring to preconceptions and preunderstandings stemming from her knowledge of the literature. In line with Alvesson and Karreman (2007), she wanted to remain open to the possibility of being surprised by the data and find the best explanations to explain unexpected findings, rather than using the data to confirm her preconceptions. Hence, an abductive approach was adopted to make sense of the data collected and the various perceptions of coaching in the context of TM.

This study aims to explore the views and experiences of coaching of multiple stakeholders involved in TM programmes in order to understand its underlying mechanisms. In this endeavour, the SET is identified as a useful theoretical lens to enhance understanding of coaching's role in the TM context, as discussed in chapter three. The researcher identified the SET as a relevant framework for this study during the analysis phase. In addition to the reasons mentioned for using SET as a valid framework in TM and coaching studies (chapter three), SET emerged as a useful frame to make

sense of the participants' accounts. Therefore, this study's methodological design is qualitative and abductive. The following section discusses the research design selected for this study.

4.4 CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN

4.4.1 Definition and justification

Multiple definitions of case study research design exist. The term is often used interchangeably for various practices and purposes, such as education (case study method), medicine, law (case), and research. Case study research designs are widely employed in business studies (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). In social sciences, a case study is often defined in contrast with other research methods or research strategies, such as experimentation and social survey (Gomm, Hammersley and Foster, 2000). Furthermore, a case may refer to a single organisation, a single location, a person, or even a single event (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Primarily, case studies are viewed as a suitable research design to use when (a) the topic is broad and complex, (b) a theoretical framework is emerging, and (c) context is important (Dul and Hak, 2012).

Two schools of thought define the use of case study in qualitative research. Yin (2009), Flyvbjerg (2006), and Eisenhardt (1989) adopted a positivist perspective on case study as a methodology. By contrast, Stake (1995) and Merriam (2009) adopted a social-constructivist stance. Drawing on naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, and biographic research methods, Stake (1995) argued that case study research design may support qualitative inquiry, although he also acknowledged that quantitative methods may be used. As such, case study research design is defined by the singularity of the phenomenon being studied, and not by its methods.

Nevertheless, case study research designs share characteristics, such as the study of a case in its singularity and an anchorage in real-life context (Yin, 2009). Case study research design is suitable for investigations seeking to enhance the understanding of a phenomenon in its real-world context and to produce a context-sensitive analysis of this phenomenon (Yin, 2009; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995). Furthermore, Stake claimed that '*case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances*' (1995: xi).

Case study research design typically emphasises the significance of the context in which the case is set. For instance, Merriam claimed that the qualitative case study represents:

> *'An intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources'. (1988: 16)*

Furthermore, Simons articulated the objective and the context in which cases studies are suitable:

> *'An in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a real-life context. It is research based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led. The primary purpose is to generate an in-depth understanding of a specific topic, programme, policy, institution or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action'. (2009: 21)*

This comprises the definition adopted for this study, as it emphasises the TM and leadership development context in which coaching as a social phenomenon is likely to be deployed in large organisations (Deloitte, 2015; CIPD, 2015).

Moreover, the literature review chapters of this thesis emphasise multiple calls for undertaking context-dependant studies to advance both fields of TM and coaching (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020; Grover and Furnham, 2016; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). In response to these calls, this study adopts a case study research design. In doing so, it seeks to address this methodological lag in the TM and coaching literature. Furthermore, scholars have claimed that the coach's perspective is often over-represented, and that the accounts of multiple stakeholders are critical to obtain a holistic view of coaching in organisations (Ely *et al.*, 2010; Nyfoudi and Tasoulis, 2018; De Haan, 2019). Accordingly, this study seeks to enhance our understanding of coaching's contribution in the context of TM programmes by soliciting the views of various stakeholders to obtain multiple data sources. The following section presents the type of case study and the units of analysis defined based on the case company's use of coaching for TM and leadership development purposes.

4.4.2 Single case study research design

Type of case study

Case studies may adopt different shapes to support various types of inquiry. Yin (2013) classified case study research as exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, and evaluative. According to his classification, this case study research qualifies as descriptive, since it seeks to provide a detailed description of the phenomenon of coaching in context. In addition, according to Merriam (1988), the

purpose of qualitative case study research may be descriptive, interpretative, or evaluative. This study seeks to provide a detailed description of the coaching phenomenon in the context of TM to '*illustrate, support or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to data gathering*', and to '*analyse, interpret or theorise about the phenomenon*' using SET as the main theoretical framework (Merriam, 2009: 38). As such, the purpose of this case study is interpretative, according to Merriam's typology.

Moreover, it has been argued that the case study research design may be used to '*help sharpen existing theory by pointing to gaps and beginning to fill them*' (Siggelkow, 2007:21). This study seeks to examine coaching in the context of TM through the lenses of SET and its derived concept of psychological contract in order to enhance understanding of its contribution for talented employees and their organisation. As revealed in this study's literature review, SET has recently emerged as an alternative frame of reference in TM and coaching studies (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019; Dries, 2013a; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Sparrow, 2019). Accordingly, it is expected that this study will contribute to explaining how SET can be used to understand coaching in a corporate environment and how talented employees make sense of their experience of coaching within the triangular coach–coachee–organisation relationship. Therefore, this case study research design is descriptive, and its purpose is interpretative.

Single case study

Yin (2003) suggested that the rationale of single case study can be multiple. A single case study design is appropriate when it represents (a) a critical case in testing a well-formulated theory; (b) an extreme case or unique circumstance; (c) a typical case, representative of the experience of a large institution, for instance; (d) a revelatory case, previously inaccessible to the scientific community; or (e) a longitudinal case, revealing how certain conditions may change over time. In this study, the case organisation has been selected for its representativeness of TM and coaching practices in the banking and financial services sector. It comprises a typical large organisation with a long-standing experience of coaching as part of a global TM strategy.

GlobalFinCorp has been identified as a suitable case company for this single case study research for exemplarity and access to data (Creswell and Poth, 2016). The researcher is based in London, and the London branch of this large organisation comprises a diverse international workforce attracting talented employees at all stages in their career and professional development. Furthermore, the location within the EMEA region offers the potential to interview global leaders and HR managers based in London offices and across EMEA subsidiaries.

Therefore, the single case study research design is considered suitable for this study for three main reasons: (a) its relevance to the type of inquiry; (b) as a response to the repeated calls for qualitative and in-depth empirical research evident in the TM and coaching literature; and (c) the convenience and access to data. The following section further highlights the characteristics of the case company chosen for this study.

4.4.3   Introduction of the case company

The case organisation is an MNE in the banking and financial services sector operating in more than 160 countries. The study focuses on the TM and leadership development programmes delivered by the company in the EMEA region, which accounts for approximately 55 countries. The company name and references are not displayed so as to guarantee anonymity. Instead, the company is referred as GlobalFinCorp in this study to facilitate the reading. The following details about the company were extracted from the 2015 and 2016 Global Citizenship Reports available on the company's website.

An American company, GlobalFinCorp has been operating in the banking sector for more than two centuries and has developed extended business relationships in countries across the world. The general headquarters are based in New York, and in London for the EMEA region. GlobalFinCorp is a leading global bank with more than 200,000 employees worldwide, approximately 30,000 of which are based in EMEA.

Several years after the global financial crisis, GlobalFinCorp reported that the competition for talent remains high among banks and financial institutions (2015 Global Citizenship Report). The talent landscape has shifted in recent years due to the digitalisation of the financial sector. Financial service companies are increasingly facing a shortage of talent, particularly for skill sets beyond traditional finance (Martin and Gollan, 2012; Sparrow, Farndale and Scullion, 2013). As a result, GlobalFinCorp seeks to attract and recruit talented candidates from various educational and cultural backgrounds. In addition, the retention of employees represents a concern for the company, which accounts for a global employee turnover rate of 20%, and 17% in the EMEA region (2015 Annual Report). Consequently, GlobalFinCorp identified talent attraction, development, and retention as one of the key priorities for business success in 2015 and 2016.

In addition, the firm has a track record of experience in TM and leadership development practices developed over time and across countries. For example, the firm claims that approximately 10,000 leaders participate each year in their core leadership development programmes to strengthen the leadership pipeline and enhance leadership and management capacity (2015 Global Citizenship

Report). Additionally, GlobalFinCorp has developed numerous programmes to maximise the potential of all employees. The company's learning and development approach is underpinned by the 70-20-10 model in the form of on-the-job experiences, collaboration with others, and formal training, with a focus on leadership and ethical behaviours at work. For instance, 35,000 employees were trained in ethics and leadership in 2015. The number of training hours per employee increased significantly between 2011 and 2015 from 38 to 46 hours on average for the firm.

Specifically, GlobalFinCorp holds extensive experience in designing and operating global talent and leadership schemes. The GlobalFinCorp talent programmes typically include a combination of instruction-led, web-based learning, mentoring, peer coaching, and career discussions with HR managers. Additionally, the company has developed a global network of leaders in the form of short- and long-term mobility programmes, a centralised global recruitment system, and ongoing training programmes. The table below provides an overview of the four TM programmes investigated in this study:

Table 4.   Overview of the four TM programmes studied

Programme	Target participants	Length	Coach	Structure	Format
A	Junior leaders: AVP, VP	6 months	Internal (HR and MD)	3 sessions	Group and individual Internal
B	Senior leaders: D, MD	3 months	Internal (HR and MD)	2 sessions	Individual, 360° Assessment and Hogan Development Survey
C – Business specific (Consumer division)	Middle management leaders: VP, D	6 months	Internal (HR)	3 sessions	Individual, 360° Assessment
D – Gender specific (Women)	Women senior leaders: D, MD	3 months	Internal (HR and MDs) and external	4 to 5 sessions	Individual, 360° Assessment and Hogan Development Survey

At GlobalFinCorp, the TM strategy aims to develop a global leadership pipeline through experience. To do so, GlobalFinCorp believes in exposure to diverse businesses, products, and regions as key differentiators for developing global leaders. Regarding the seminal 'make-or-buy' dilemma for talent recruitment, GlobalFinCorp advocates an internal promotion process, which is made possible by the management of a global leadership pipeline and the transition of leaders to strategic positions across departments and countries.

In 2015, GlobalFinCorp reviewed and implemented a new leadership standards framework establishing the skills, competences, attitudes, and behaviours expected by all leaders. This framework is used for the promotion of managers, performance management, and recruitment purposes. The deployment of these standards and criteria at different stages in the employee life cycle stems from the organisation's willingness to foster a culture of diverse and inclusive leadership.

Embedded multiple units of analysis

Following a brief introduction of the case company, this section clarifies the units of analysis selected for this single case study. Yin (2003) identified two types of unit analysis for single case studies: (a) the embedded case study, which accounts for multiple units of analysis; and (b) the holistic design, which accounts for a single unit of analysis. This study aims to analyse coaching in four TM programmes used in GlobalFinCorp EMEA. As such, the research design can be defined as an embedded single case study with four units of analysis corresponding to the individual coaching practices implemented in each of the four TM programmes operated in GlobalFinCorp EMEA. The level of analysis is concerned with participants and stakeholders' views of coaching as a one-to-one intervention used in TM programmes, exploring how it is perceived by multiple stakeholders

The following figure illustrates the embedded multiple units of analysis for this single case study:

Figure 4.   Embedded multiple units of analysis
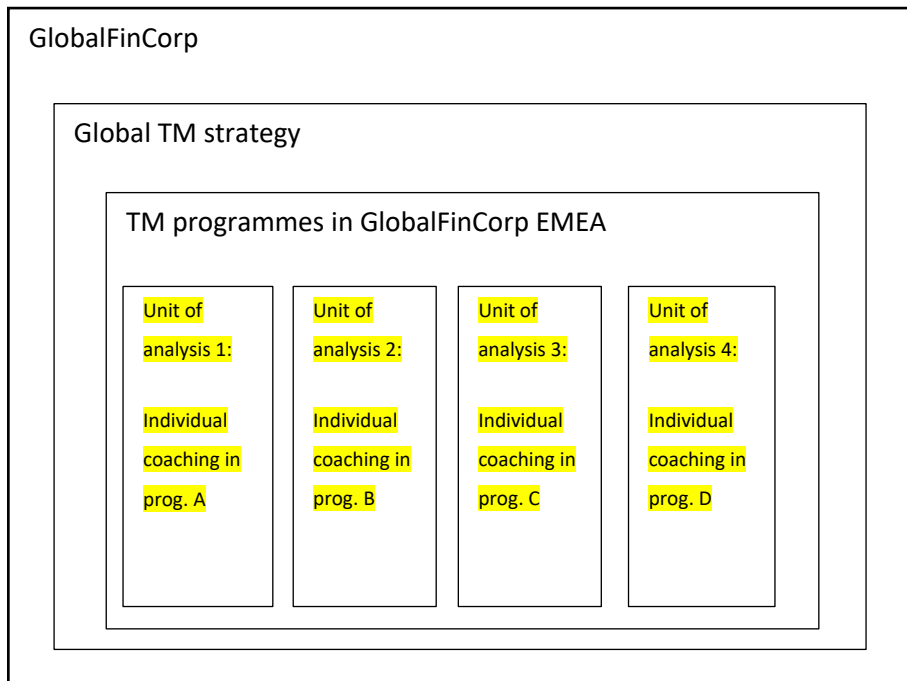
Discounted alternative methodologies

Alternative research designs were also considered for the study—specifically, grounded theory and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). First, Glaser and Strass defined grounded theory as a methodology aiming at '*the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research*' (1967: 2). This study seeks to generate knowledge by examining coaching through the lens of existing theories and concepts—namely, SET and psychological contract. The objective of this study is not to generate a new theory, but rather to use existing theories as a frame of reference. Therefore, grounded theory was not compatible with this study's goals, and thus was discounted.

Second, IPA was also considered, although not selected for this study. Recently, IPA has become a popular research design in coaching studies (Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011). It aims to explore how participants make sense of events or situations they experience (Smith, 2009). It focuses on unveiling the process of constructing meanings in a phenomenological approach. However, this study's objective is not to reveal the mechanisms of sense-making of the personal experience of coaching of talented employees. Rather, this study focuses on comparing the views of multiple stakeholders in order to gain a holistic perspective concerning the role of coaching delivered as part of a TM programme. Additionally, the sample for IPA study is typically smaller than the sample

defined for this study. As such, an IPA approach was not considered suitable to achieve this study's aim. Following the discussion on the rationale for conducting a single case study and the definition of its multiple units of analysis, the following section explores the sampling and data collection established for this study.

4.5   DATA COLLECTION

This section explains how the data collection took place in the case company. The data collection process results from methodological considerations emerging from good practice in case studies, insights from the literature review chapters, and practical considerations related to the use of coaching in TM programmes at GlobalFinCorp EMEA.

4.5.1   Sampling

Methodological considerations

Two methodological considerations were used to determine sampling in this case study. First, as highlighted in the literature review chapters, TM studies often focus on the organisational level (Tarique and Schuler, 2010), with only 23% of empirical studies collecting and examining data from the employee level. In addition, when data is collected at the individual or micro level, most TM studies focus on one population, such as HR managers or CEOs (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Consequently, few empirical studies have reported on the experiences and perceptions of talented people in organisations (Dries, 2013b). Specifically, little is known regarding the links between TM practices and specific employee and organisational outcomes (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013). To better understand these links, patterns, and underlying processes of TM, scholars have called for empirical research collecting data from multiple stakeholders (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016).

Second, another reason for collecting data from various groups of stakeholders is that this provides multiple data sources, enabling an in-depth analysis in a single case study, which is recommended in qualitative case studies (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018; Guba, 1989; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As such, this study seeks to address a neglect in the TM and coaching literature by eliciting the views of multiple stakeholders in the data set.

Purposive sampling

The sampling and recruitment of the study participants is based on the use of individual coaching in the four TM programmes deployed by GlobalFinCorp EMEA. This has been extensively discussed with the head of organisational development and the manager of coaching and TM EMEA during

preliminary meetings. They also provided a coaching report, which helped to understand the coaching provision in TM programmes in the company, discussed in further detail in the following chapter. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to undertake the study, which fits with the real-life coaching activities in the TM programmes in the case company (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

First, the study participants were selected based on their participation in at least one of the four TM programmes deployed by GlobalFinCorp EMEA as part of its global TM strategy in 2014–15. Each programme targeted talented employees at different managerial levels based on the company's organisational structure. Two programmes (A and B) targeted employees across countries and business units in the EMEA area. Two additional programmes are business specific (Programme C – for employees in the Consumer division) and gender specific (Programme D – for senior women). These two programmes have been included in the study so that all TM programmes deployed in EMEA could be analysed.

Second, the sampling approach also includes talented employees at various stages of their careers. The junior, middle, and senior managerial levels of talented employees refer to the organisational structure and represent common appellations in the banking and financial institutions industry, as illustrated in Table 5:

Table 5.   Level of seniority and career stages of structure at GlobalFinCorp

Position	Career stage
Associate vice president (AVP)	junior
Vice president (VP)	middle
Senior vice president (SVP)	middle
Director (D)	senior
Managing director (MD)	senior

Third, the search for consistency in the data collection, combined with pragmatic considerations, led to the restriction of potential study participants. Data was collected during a specific timeframe so as to ensure consistency in data collection and to ensure that participants would express views on the most recent coaching interventions delivered as part of the TM programmes. Additionally, the manager of coaching and TM EMEA revealed that the total number of participants in the selected programmes was above 1000, as some programmes have been running for more than 10 years. This would have been too large of a sample to analyse for one researcher. As such, it was decided that only participants who joined a global TM and leadership development programme between 01/07/2014 and 01/07/2015 would be contacted. As a result, the number of potential participants invited to participate was approximatively 150 individuals. Therefore, this sampling criteria was selected, as it allowed collecting the most recent experience from participants and facilitated administration of the data collection.

Fourth, to gather in-depth data from multiple perspectives, various stakeholders involved in the delivery of coaching in the global TM programmes were included in the sample. They were identified according to the organisational structure of the company and the TM programmes included in the study. The coaching stakeholders in TM programmes comprised: (a) the head of organisation development EMEA; (b) the manager of coaching and TM EMEA; (c) the HR managers acting as programme leaders; (d) the internal coaches, who are typically HR managers and managing directors; and (e) the external coaches sponsored by the company to deliver coaching in TM programmes.

Participant recruitment

Participants were invited to contribute to the study via an email from the manager of coaching and TM EMEA. The email invitation, available in Appendix 1, provided a brief overview of the study and the researcher's contact details for participants to express their interest. This was to ensure that the identity of research participants was not communicated to any other organisation representatives. The email made clear that participation is voluntary and discarded any connection between research participation and any internal personal or performance review.

Upon receiving initial expressions of interest from the study participants, the researcher sent a consent form and participant information sheet. The participant information sheet attached to the invitation follows the Oxford Brookes University research ethics requirements and is also available in Appendix 2. When a participant confirmed their participation, the researcher introduced herself, scheduled the interview, and answered any questions the participant had concerning the study. This was accomplished by phone or email.

The researcher anticipated a low response rate, but the participant turnout was relatively high. Out of 146 potential participants, 27 persons expressed interest, and 23 were interviewed, representing a response rate of 15.75%. All participants received regular updates on the study's progress and were invited to comment on their interview transcriptions. In addition, the researcher shared early finding reports with all and solicited the participants' feedback during the second round of interviews.

4.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews enable collecting rich and detailed answers, with an emphasis on how the interviewees frame and view the issues, patterns, and behaviours examined in the study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This qualitative case study sought to explore in depth the talented employees and other stakeholders' views on coaching used in the TM context. As such, interviews were considered appropriate to achieve this endeavour (Silverman, 2013). Interview guides, including a specific set of questions for each group of participants (talented employees, HR managers, and internal and external coaches), were prepared based on the study's research questions and the literature review. The following topics were covered during the interviews: (a) delivery of coaching in the programme; (b) views on coaching pre and post leaders' participation in the programme; (c) purpose of the coaching; (d) exploration of the contribution of coaching in the programme; (e) impact of coaching related to leadership development and career progression; and (d) impact of the global dimension of the programme. Each interview lasted between 0.5 and 1.5 hours.

Following initial analysis based on the first round of interviews, a second round was organised to gain further information on the participants' experiences of coaching in the organisation's TM programmes. The key areas explored during the second interviews included (a) the difference between coaching/mentoring in TM programmes, (b) internal/external provider of coaching, (c) long/short term, (d) human and social capital development, (e) expectations and obligations from talented employees and the organisation emerging from coaching in the TM context, (f) knowledge transfer, (g) innovation, (h) self-perception as talent, and (i) cultural impact on the coaching process or relationship. The interview questions prepared for the first and second round of interviews are available in Appendices 3 and 4.

In sum, the number of participants in this study was determined by the desire to provide in-depth empirical data from multiple perspectives, with a focus on the coachees involved in various programmes. The primary data was collected between October 2015 and April 2016, following

approval of the company's head of organisational development EMEA and Oxford Brookes University Ethics Research Committee.

In total, the primary data includes 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews divided as follows: (a) 12 coachees from four different TM programmes, from associate vice president to managing director levels, (b) 5 internal and external coaches, and (c) 6 HR managers and programme leaders. After a first round of 23 interviews, the second round of interviews took place between September 2017 and January 2018. Those who had already participated in the study and provided their consent to be contacted in a potential second stage were invited by email for a second interview. One new participant who expressed interest in the study was added at this stage. Consequently, seven additional interviews were recorded, comprising a total of 30 interviews.

Table 6.   Data collection and interviews with different stakeholders

TM Programmes in EMEA	1st interview	2nd interview	
Programme A - junior	3	1	
Programme B- senior	2	1	
Programme C- middle management - Consumer division	4	1	
Programme D- senior women	3	1	
External coaches	3	2	
Internal coaches	2	1	
HR managers	3	0	
Programme managers	3		
	23	7	30

Secondary data includes reviews and reports provided by HR managers at GlobalFinCorp, coaching and HR practitioner books, and magazines referring to TM and coaching in the case company.

Recordings and transcription

All interviews were scheduled for one hour during working hours at a convenient time for all participants, preferably face to face in the company offices in London or via phone/Skype. If the interview was conducted via Skype, the video was switched on to facilitate communication and rapport with participants. Skype interviews were audio recorded only, using Skype recorder software (Amolto Call Recorder). This was to ensure that a similar type of data was collected in a consistent fashion in both interview settings.

All interview transcriptions were completed by independent professional services with a secured data system. Data was anonymised to guarantee that participants would not be impacted in their current or future employment. Then, the verbatim transcriptions were reviewed by the researcher to add any details, sound, or silence that may convey underlying meaning in the data analysis phase (Rapley, 2001; Silverman, 2013).

This study was sponsored by the Harnish grant from the Institute of Coaching, McLean Harvard Medical School Affiliated. Specifically, the professional transcriptions were funded in full by the research grant. Due to delays in grant administration and funding transfer, the transcription phase was sensibly delayed. From the researcher's perspective, the impact was minimal, since the analysis phase could begin based on field notes and audio recordings. However, from the participants' perspective, the interview transcriptions were received later than the two weeks originally planned. All participants were informed of the delay. Additionally, the researcher maintained contact with participants by email to provide updates on the study. Finally, all transcriptions were sent to participants, who were given the opportunity to make amendments before uploading the data set on Nvivo. The next section details the study participants' profile.

4.5.3   Participant demographics

This research comprises a qualitative case study based on 30 in-depth interviews of 23 stakeholders involved in the TM programmes of GlobalFinCorp EMEA, either by receiving, designing, operating, and/or delivering dyadic coaching. This section provides an overview of the data set and discusses the impact of some participants' characteristics on the study.

Table 7.   Profile of interviewees

Name	Gender	Job level	Group	Experience	Talent Programme	Country	Interview round
Amy	Female	Chief Executive Officer	Coachee	More than 15 years	D	Saudi Arabia	2nd round
Nathalie	Female	Director	Coachee	11-15 years	Multiple	UK	2nd round
Patricia	Female	Director	Coachee	0-3 years	D	UK	Both
Oliver	Male	Managing Director	Coachee	0-3 years	B	UK	Both
Eleonor	Female	Managing Director	Coachee	11-15 years	Multiple	UK	1st round
Louisa	Female	Senior Vice President	Coachee	11-15 years	A	Russia	1st round
Emma	Female	Senior Vice President	Coachee	4-6 years	A	United Arab Emirates	1st round
Alan	Male	Vice President	Coachee	7-10 years	C	Poland	1st round
Sarah	Female	Vice President	Coachee	0-3 years	A	UK	1st round
Carry	Female	Vice President	Coachee	7-10 years	A	UK	1st round
Peter	Male	Director	Coachee and internal coach	4-6 years	Multiple	Israel	1st round
Anne	Female	Managing Director	Coachee and internal coach	More than 15 years	D	Ireland	1st round
Lucy	Female	Vice President	Coachee and internal coach	7-10 years	Multiple	Hungary	1st round
Catherine	Female	Not Applicable	External coach	More than 15 years	Multiple	UK	1st round
Paul	Male	Not Applicable	External coach	11-15 years	D	UK	Both
Olivia	Female	Not Applicable	External coach	More than 15 years	Multiple	UK	Both
Adam	Male	Not Applicable	HR manager and internal coach	4-6 years	Multiple	USA	1st round
Elizabeth	Female	Not Applicable	HR manager and internal coach	11-15 years	D	Romania	1st round
Charlotte	Female	Not Applicable	HR manager and internal coach	0-3 years	Multiple	United Arab Emirates	1st round
John	Male	Not Applicable	HR manager and internal coach	11-15 years	Multiple	UK	1st round
Steve	Male	Not Applicable	HR manager and internal coach	4-6 years	B	UK	1st round
Georges	Male	Managing Director	Internal coach	7-10 years	Multiple	UK	1st round
Charles	Male	Managing Director	Internal coach	11-15 years	B	UK	Both

Countries

As this study focuses on TM practices in EMEA, it was expected that participants would come from multiple cultural backgrounds and be based in one of the 55 countries comprising this vast region. In fact, most study participants were based in the UK (13 participants). Other participants were from

various countries across Europe and the Middle East. One participant based in New York has also been included as the researcher's first contact at GlobalFinCorp before he was promoted to the USA after a five-year experience as a talent manager in EMEA.

Table 8.   Participants by region and countries

Region	Countries	Number of participants
Europe	UK, Republic of Ireland, Russia, Hungary, Romania	18
Middle East	Israel, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates	4
Africa	None	0
Other	USA	1
Total		**23**

It must be noted that Africa is not represented in the data set despite being included in the EMEA region. Accordingly, no views were expressed from the African continent in this study. This was disappointing, especially since empirical studies on emerging markets are scarce, with the exception of South Africa, part of the so-called 'BRICS countries' (Dirani and Nafukho, 2018; Budhwar *et al.*, 2017). This suggests that further investigation on coaching for TM purposes in Africa is needed. In addition, the proportion of participants from the UK, and especially from London, is significant regarding the deployment of coaching within EMEA. Talented employees and HR managers confirmed that most internal coaches are based in London, the EMEA headquarters of GlobalFinCorp.

Gender

GlobalFinCorp has a long-standing commitment to gender diversity. A company report highlighted the following improvements in EMEA (GFC EMEA Diversity Women's Charter, 2017): (a) the proportion of women on the global GFC Board increased to 30%; (b) the EMEA Operating Committee has seen female representation rise from 9% in 2014 to 18% in 2017; and (c) the proportion of female country officers increased from 15% in 2014 to 26% in 2017. Additionally, the case company comprises a formal signatory of the UK Women in Finance Charter, which promotes greater gender balance, both in senior levels and across the pipeline. As such, an initial goal has been internally set to have 30% of senior management roles in the EMEA region held by women by 2025.

Notably, the proportion of male and female participants is unbalanced in the data set, with only three male talented employees taking part. This may be due to the nature of the TM programmes

studied, which included one programme dedicated to developing women leaders (Programme D). However, both men and women are represented in equal proportion as coaches.

Multiple roles of interviewees

The interviews revealed that HR managers and senior business leaders often hold multiple roles regarding coaching in TM programmes. Typically, internal coaching in TM programmes is provided by senior business leaders at the managing director level, with longstanding experience at GlobalFinCorp and overall in financial services. In addition, some study participants at the director level reported that they also act as coaches or mentors, following their participation in a TM programme or because they have developed an interest in coaching and mentoring as a leadership style and volunteered to coach in TM programmes. Finally, HR managers act as internal coaches and coordinators of multiple TM programmes and leadership development schemes.

4.6   THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This section examines the method employed to analyse the data set. First, thematic analysis is discussed as a suitable method to analyse this study's qualitative data. Second, considerations regarding trustworthiness in thematic analysis supports the elaboration of an analytical protocol. Third, quality and rigour in qualitative case study are discussed. Finally, ethical considerations and measures taken to protect study participants are specified.

4.6.1   Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) represents a qualitative research method employed to identity, organise, describe, and report themes found in a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This is considered a suitable method for analysing the views of different study participants, enabling the researcher to reveal any similarities or discrepancies, and generate unanticipated insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In addition, TA is suitable to summarise key features of a large data set in case studies (Brooks *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, TA was selected as an appropriate method to analyse this case study data set, which includes perceptions of coaching from multiple groups of participants. Due to the extent of data collected, the analysis was supported by the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo (Gibbs, 2002).

For Bryman and Bell, a theme represents '*a category identified by the analyst through his/her data*' (2015: 600). The identification of themes is achieved by searching for a series of patterns emerging from the data (Simons, 2009). Furthermore, Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggested that researchers look for the following patterns to identify themes: (a) repetitions; (b) indigenous typologies or

categories; (c) metaphors and analogies; (d) transitions; (e) similarities and differences; (f) linguistic connectors; (g) missing data, reflecting on what is not in the data by asking questions about what interviewees may have omitted in their answers; and (h) theory-related material. According to this analytical approach, the researcher searched for patterns emerging from the data to establish codes on Nvivo.

Thematic analysis is a widely used analytical method for qualitative studies, yet it presents some pitfalls, including the lack of literature on this specific method compared to other popular approaches, such as grounded theory, ethnography, or phenomenology (Braun and Clarke, 2006). One of the main shortfalls involves a risk of inconsistency and a lack of coherence when the researcher develops the themes derived from the data. However, some scholars have argued that consistency and cohesion can be promoted by adopting and applying an explicit epistemological position that underpins the study's empirical findings (Holloway and Todres, 2003). As detailed in the previous sections, this study adopts an interpretivist epistemological stance, which considers that the researcher-interviewer and interviewee co-construct a reality that is inherently contingent and subjective (Rapley, 2001). The interpretivist stance of this study is prevalent in discussing the quality of this qualitative case study in terms of trustworthiness and authenticity. Additionally, the researcher designed a five-stage TA protocol to ensure consistency and cohesion. Trustworthiness considerations and the TA protocol for this study are discussed next.

4.6.2   Trustworthiness in thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2017; 2006) argued that TA can facilitate the emergence of trustworthy and insightful findings from a large or small sample of qualitative data, such as interviews. Drawing on Braun and Clarke (2006), trustworthiness can be established in each phase of the TA by activities undertaken by the researcher (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). The following table, adapted from Nowell et al. (2017), illustrates the actions taken by the researcher to establish trustworthiness in the TA process:

Table 9.   Researcher's activities to establish trustworthiness in the study

Phases of thematic analysis	Researcher's activities to establish trustworthiness in the study
Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data	- Prolong engagement with data - Document theoretical and reflective thoughts (field notes and memos) - Document thoughts about potential codes/themes (memos) - Store raw data in well-organised archives - Keep records of all data field notes, transcripts, and memos
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	- Reflexive journaling (field notes and memos) - Use of a coding framework (codebooks on Nvivo)
Phase 3: Searching for themes	- Diagramming to make sense of theme connections - Keep detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes (memos and Nvivo codebooks)
Phase 4: Reviewing themes	- Themes and subthemes vetted by research team members (supervisors) - Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data (continuous reading and familiarisation with raw data)
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	- Research team consensus on themes (working under research supervision) - Documentation of theme naming (memos)
Phase 6: Producing the report	- Describing the process of coding and analysis in sufficient detail (memos) - Detailed description of context (chapter five) - Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study (memos)

The table above describes the actions undertaken by the researcher to enhance trustworthiness of at each phase of this study. The researcher found the use of field notes and memos particularly useful to keep a record of her reflections and the decisions made during the data analysis phase. Field notes were written immediately after each interview in order to encapsulate the context, emotions, and any details that may be relevant for the analysis. In addition, a series of memos were written systematically for each interview at each stage of the data analysis. As such, each interview generated one field note and three memos, all uploaded on Nvivo for the data analysis explained in the following.

4.6.3   Protocol for data analysis

Drawing on the considerations of Braun and Clarke (2006) and Nowell et al. (2017) regarding trustworthiness in TA, a five-stage protocol was designed to ensure coherence and consistency in this study. The data set is composed of audio-recordings and field notes written by the researcher following each interview. Memos were also written following the coding of each interview. These field notes and memos document the researcher's theoretical and reflective thoughts, including

potential codes/themes (Gibbs, 2002). Additionally, the variation of codes and reasons for modification were documented on Nvivo.

Based on prolonged engagement with the data set and the researcher's field notes, TA was used to identify emerging themes, patterns, similarities, and discrepancies expressed by the study participants (Nowell *et al.*, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Braun, 2017). The coding phase included three cycles: open coding, axial coding, and theoretical sampling. Codebooks were established after each coding cycle to document the emergence of patterns and consistency in an analytical approach (Gibbs, 2002). Then, based on Nvivo codebooks and memos, the Gioia methodology (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013) was applied to extract transferable concepts and principles from the collected data.

The Gioia methodology includes three steps. The first stage is based on the informant centric codes, topics, and terms used in the interviews. In the second stage, the research concepts, themes, and dimensions are extracted. This informs the aggregated dimensions and overarching themes in the third stage. Figure 5 below illustrates the consecutive stages established for the TA of the data set.

Figure 5.   Stages for the thematic analysis of the data set

Stage 1: Preparation and pre-analysis	Stage 2: Open coding	Stage 3: Axial coding	Stage 4: Theoretical sampling	Stage 5: Data structure
1st round interviews: fieldnotes	Memos	Memos	Memos	1st order themes (informant-centric)
Emerging themes	Codebook 1	Codebook 2	Codebook 3	2nd order themes (research-centric)
2nd round interviews: fieldnotes				3rd order themes: Aggregated dimensions and underlying themes

Continuous familiarisation with data

In sum, the TA was completed in a five-stage analysis protocol, which comprises various techniques: pre-analysis, open coding, axial coding, theoretical sampling, and data structure. Each coding decision and theoretical reflection of the researcher was encapsulated in multiple memos and codebooks, which were then used to extract the data structure, leading to aggregated dimensions and emerging themes.

In addition, the researcher read the transcriptions and listened to audio recordings multiple times throughout the process. Consistency and coherence emerged from this analytical process, with similar themes emerging from the data after multiple reviews and coding phases. Despite the researcher's intention to establish a rigorous process for data analysis, however, qualitative case study research designs may produce limitations in interpreting findings, as discussed next.

4.7   DISCUSSION ON SINGLE CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN

Despite its popularity in business studies, the case study research design has generated considerable debate and criticism concerning its generalisability and validity as a scientific research method (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Gaya and Smith, 2016; Eisenhardt, 1989). This section discusses the strengths and limitations of case study research design and examines how this single case study seeks to achieve trustworthiness and authenticity.

4.7.1 Strengths and limitations of case study research design

Reliability, replicability, and validity are criteria commonly used to evaluate the scientific value of a research inquiry (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Creswell, 2009). These criteria are often at the forefront of scholarly debates to evaluate the quality of case study research design, particularly its capacity to generate knowledge (Simons, 2009; Creswell and Poth, 2016; Eisenhardt, 1989; Gaya and Smith, 2016; Flyvbjerg, 2006). The following table, based on Simon (2009) and Thomas & Myers (2015) summarises the main strengths and limitations of case study research design discussed in the literature:

Table 10.   Strengths and limits of case study research design

Strengths	Limitations
- Following a qualitative method, promotes an in-depth study and analysis of the precise socio-political context in which programme and policies are set-up - Accounts for multiple perspectives and examines similarities and discrepancies - Demonstrates the influence of key actors and interaction to reveal what, how, and why a phenomenon is occurring - Suitable for exploring and understanding the dynamics of change and process - Set up in real life, which means that case study can determine the factors for implementation of programmes in action and can analyse patterns or connections between them - Flexible, not restricted by time or any specific method - Case study has the potential to engage the participants in the research process. This is a political and epistemological posture that recognises the importance of the co-construction of perceived reality and encourages the researcher to adopt a self-reflexive approach when analysing the data set	- The large amount of data collected may be difficulty to process - May present a distorted picture of how things are as researcher and participants express a perception, which is by nature subjective - Lack of structure, scope, and focus: multiple definitions of case study - Cross-sectional data implies that the participants express views captured at a specific moment in time. Yet, people and organisations move on and change constantly - The validity, reliability and replicability, and usefulness of qualitative case studies are questioned according to positivist paradigm - One cannot generalise from a case study - One cannot theorise from a case study

In sum, case studies are often criticised for lacking precision and rigour as a social sciences research methodology (Ellinger and McWhorter, 2020; Rule and John, 2015). Based on the positivist criteria of validity, reliability, and replicability, generalisation cannot be achieved from case study design, and *a*

fortiori from a single case. Although it has been claimed that one cannot generalise from a single case study, generalisation is not always what is desired from an inquiry. As highlighted by Thomas and Myers, *'we don't always want or need generalisation, and some of the most inspired and insightful research, of any kind, has come about from case study'* (2015: 15). Rather, the aim of this study may reside in the particularisation and presentation of a rich portrait of a single setting to inform practice, establish the value of the case, and/or add to knowledge of a specific topic, namely coaching in TM context (Simons, 2009).

Additionally, generalisation differs from theorisation. Ylikoski argued that '*the generalisation from case studies is theory-mediated rather than direct empirical generalisation*' (2019: 14). From an epistemological perspective, this means that the value of case study research design may emerge from theorisation and analytical processes (Ylikoski, 2019). Accordingly, case studies may be used to '*help sharpen existing theory by pointing to gaps and beginning to fill them*' (Siggelkow, 2007:21). As such, this study is theory-mediated and seeks to enhance understanding of coaching in TM programmes by using the SET as the main theoretical framework.

Drawing upon the case study literature and the aims of this study, it is expected that this qualitative single case study would make a theoretical contribution by extending the understanding of coaching as a social phenomenon in the context of TM by using the SET and psychological contract to unfold underlying mechanisms at play between individuals and their organisation. In addition, this study does not aim to generalise from one case, though transferability can be achieved from a representative case presented with a detailed description of the context. Accordingly, other scholars may establish the degree of fit or similarity with another context and apply the study insights to a new context (Ketokivi and Choi, 2014; Yin, 2013). The next section discusses the evaluative criteria for qualitative inquiry.

4.7.2 Quality in qualitative studies

The researcher utilised two sets of criteria to ensure quality in this qualitative single case study. The first sets of criteria relate to trustworthiness and authenticity in qualitative studies offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The second set is borrowed from Tracy (2010), who proposed eight key indicators of quality in qualitative research.

First, Lincoln and Guba (1985) were concerned with the trustworthiness and authenticity to warrant quality in qualitative studies. Specifically, they defined four criteria to evaluate qualitative studies' trustworthiness: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Additionally, the authors (1985) added a set of criteria concerned with authenticity to reflect the

intrinsic nature of qualitative inquiry. Authenticity is concerned with (a) fairness, (b) ontological authentication, (c) educative authentication, and (d) catalytic and tactical authentication.

The following table details how this study employed the criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1989; 1985). Particularly, it illustrates the various activities and processes undertaken by the researcher to meet these criteria throughout the study.

Table 11.   Activities undertaken by the researcher for trustworthiness and authenticity

Criteria	Definition	Type of activities and processes	Activities and processes undertaken by the researcher in this study
Trustworthiness Used as analogy for scientific understanding of conventional notions of internal validity, external validity, reliability, objectivity	**Credibility**	Persistent and prolonged engagement Triangulation of data by use of different sources with multiple stakeholders being interviewed Member checks	- Data collection process with two rounds of interviews - Interview of talented employees participating in four different TM programmes, HR managers, internal and external coaches - Debrief and update meetings, sharing updates on the research with all participants - Continuous, informal testing of information by soliciting reactions of respondents to the researcher's reconstruction of what had been expressed in the interviews
	Transferability	Search for negative cases and incongruence in the data set Description of the context of the study so that others can judge the degree of fit or similarity with other contexts and apply all or part of the findings in different settings	- Search of any discrepancies and incongruence in the data set - Detailed description of the context of GlobalFinCorp, TM and leadership development programmes, type of coaching deployed
	Dependability Confirmability	Account of the values, assumptions, background of the researcher Self-reflexivity External audit	- Epistemological and ontological views are presented, implications of the research design are discussed - Self-reflexivity documented by field notes and memos during the data collection and analysis phases of the study - External audit is provided in the form of supervision, presentation of early findings to academic conferences and various research committees are discussed
Authenticity Emerging complementary way to evaluate qualitative inquiry, aligned with socio-constructivism. Assumes that interpretations are socially constructed, co-construction of knowledge resulting from the exchange between researcher and participant, leading to idiographic, context-dependant, and time-bound insights	**Fairness**	Multiple stakeholders invited to express their views Member check	- Interviews of leaders, HR managers and representatives, internal and external coaches - Update meetings with HR managers, working papers and presentations sent to all participants
	Ontological authentication	Ontological views discussed	- Study aiming at developing an in-depth understanding of the role of coaching as part of TM systems
	Educative authentication	Dissemination of findings	- Sharing progress reports with research participants and broader audience (scholars, HR, and coach practitioners) - Dissemination of final findings with final report sent to all participants in the case company, paper in academic conferences and HR-Talent-Coaching practitioner conferences, publication in relevant academic and professional journals
	Catalytic authentication Tactical authentication	Facilitates and stimulates action and understanding of complex reality	- Collecting data from multiple perspectives to account for different perceptions of coaching used in talent programmes in GlobalFinCorp

The table above illustrates the actions undertaken by the researcher to enhance this study's trustworthiness and authenticity. In response to methodological concerns about the lack of rigour and context in case studies (Ellinger and McWhorter, 2020), regular checks and informal feedback from participants were completed during the study. Additionally, a detailed description of the study's context, including the TM programmes, the type of coaching, and organisational culture, is provided in the next chapter (chapter five).

Second, building on trustworthiness and authenticity criteria, Tracy (2010) defined eight key indicators of quality in qualitative research: (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigour, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence. The following table details how the researcher used Tracy's eight markers of quality for qualitative inquiry:

Table 12. Activities undertaken by the researcher to ensure quality

Criteria for quality (end goal)	Means, practices, and methods used by the researcher to achieve quality in this study
Worthy topic	The topic of the research is relevant, timely, significant, and interesting: literature review chapters
Rich rigour	The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex - Theoretical framing: social exchange theory - Purposive sampling, context-dependant, and time-bound insights - 30 semi-structured interviews - Thematic analysis
Sincerity	Self-reflexivity about subjective values, assumptions, and inclinations of researcher: - Interpretivist and socio-constructivist stance of the researcher linked with the qualitative nature of the inquiry - Position of the researcher external to the organisation - Rationale of the study
Credibility	This study is marked by - Detailed description of the TM programmes deployed by GlobalFinCorp - Multivocality: data collected from multiple stakeholders - Continuous update meetings with HR managers of GlobalFinCorp, solicitation of informal check and participants' reflections
Resonance	Transferable findings in banking sector and MNEs deploying a similar exclusive approach to TM and coaching
Significant contribution	- Theoretical/ conceptual contribution: role of coaching in TM programmes through the lens of social exchange theory and psychological contract - Practical contribution: supporting HR practitioners in shaping coaching as a developmental intervention for the career progression and global leadership development of leaders as part of a TM strategy
Ethical	- Preserving anonymity of participants - Contact maintained with participants throughout the study
Meaningful coherence	- Uses methods and approaches that fit the stated goal and research question - Connects the literature, research questions, findings, and interpretations with each other

The table above illustrates the actions, means, and methods employed by the researcher to enhance the quality of this qualitative case study. Particularly, the data collected from multiple stakeholders, the contextualisation, and the theoretical framing of the study seek to address the previously discussed concerns in coaching and TM studies (Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019; Nyfoudi and Tasoulis, 2018).

In sum, drawing on existing evaluation criteria for qualitative studies, multiple measures and actions were undertaken by the researcher to ensure that quality is achieved in this qualitative single case study. Another important aspect to consider is research ethics, as discussed next.

4.8   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher is external and independent from the case company, which limits any potential bias or conflict of interest between the researcher and the subject of this inquiry. Following a series of preparatory meetings with the head of organisational development of GlobalFinCorp EMEA, a protocol was agreed upon to ensure that potential participants would remain anonymous and not be impacted in their employment in any way. All interviewees signed a consent form and were given the option to withdraw at any point. Formal approval providing access to data was received by the researcher on 3 August 2015. Then, the research project was approved by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee on 6 August 2015.

Risk analysis

The researcher did not anticipate any major risks for the participants, all of whom were adults and speak fluent English. However, they were invited to share their perception of the role of coaching as part of a TM and leadership programme deployed by GlobalFinCorp, which could be perceived as a sensitive topic. Therefore, no name of the interviewees was shared with any other participants, and the data set was anonymised. Following the transcription phase, English first names were given randomly to study participants in order to facilitate the reading. In addition, participants were free to withdraw from the study at any point. These measures, which are in line with research ethics procedures and good practices in qualitative research (Silverman, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), are clearly stipulated in the information sheet, in the consent form, and were reiterated at the interview stage.

Protection of participants

It is important that data is anonymised in order to ensure that participants are not impacted regarding their employment at GlobalFinCorp (Silverman, 2013; Bryman and Bell, 2015). However, the study participants include some restricted groups with small numbers of individuals involved as HR managers and representatives of the organisation: one EMEA head of organisational development, one manager of coaching and TM for EMEA and global leadership development. Consequently, it may be impossible to guarantee anonymity/confidentiality of these participant identities, although the name of the company is kept confidential. Therefore, the participants were

advised of this limitation in both the participant information sheet and consent form, which were adapted for these groups. This was also discussed prior to the interview.

During the data collection and analysis phases of the study, several changes occurred, with some participants and HR managers being promoted or leaving the company. For example, the EMEA head of organisational development left the company, and the EMEA manager of coaching and TM moved to the New York headquarters for a more global role. Following a restructuring of the EMEA HR department, the new TM and coaching manager position was moved to the company's branch in Eastern Europe in 2017. However, the researcher maintained the relationship with study participants and organised numerous meetings to update them on the progress made in the study.

4.9   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed the epistemological and ontological positions of the researcher and has drawn upon the literature review and research questions to justify the research design adopted. This study comprises an in-depth qualitative case study on the role of coaching as perceived by talented employees at various stages in their career development in a single case company. The researcher's philosophical assumptions are in line with the interpretivist paradigm. The research aims to secure an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and meaning of coaching as a contingent and subjective phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Therefore, the methodological design of the study is qualitative, idiographic, and inductive.

The research strategy follows a qualitative single case study research design. This study seeks to analyse views on coaching collected from multiple stakeholders, including talented employees, HR managers, and internal and external coaches. The data set includes a total of 30 semi-structured interviews, audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data set and was supported by a five-stage process, including multiple coding phases supported by Nvivo, a software suitable for qualitative analysis.

The strengths and limitations of case studies were discussed, and the actions undertaken by the researcher to enhance the study's trustworthiness and authenticity were presented. This study does not intend to generate theory from a single case study design. However, transferability of the findings can be achieved by providing a contextualised presentation of the findings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The next three chapters present the findings and overarching themes emerging from the thematic analysis of the data set. These findings chapters begin with a detailed description of the context in which TM and coaching take place in GlobalFinCorp.

CHAPTER 5: PROGRAMME TALENT COACHING AT GLOBALFINCORP – FINDINGS PART 1

5.1   INTRODUCTION

The findings section of this thesis is composed of three chapters: (a) contextualisation of the study; (b) the role of talent coaching at the individual level; and (c) the role of talent coaching at the organisational level. This chapter is primarily descriptive, as opposed to the two subsequent chapters, which are more analytical. It provides a detailed description of the study's context, which is consistent with the exploratory nature of this inquiry and its qualitative research design (Gaya and Smith, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2016). Additionally, drawing on the literature review, this chapter seeks to provide details concerning the context in which TM practices are operated in the case company, which is seen as critical regarding the quality of qualitative studies in the TM field (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016). Although a single case study research design is adopted for this study, and limited generalisation is warranted, the subsequent finding chapters examine patterns and variations across the multiple embedded units of analysis composing the data set in order to answer the study research questions .

The names of participants are fictive, and direct reference to the company's website was avoided so as to maintain confidentiality. Verbatim quotations from the study participants are used throughout the analysis chapters to support empirical analysis and voice their perception of coaching in TM programmes. To facilitate the reading, the study participants are identified according to the following denomination system: 'Name, Group of participants, Programme (if applicable), Interview round', such as 'Peter, T, C, 1'.

Table 13.   Abbreviations used for study participants

Participants	Abbreviation
Talented employees	T
HR managers	HR
Internal senior business leader-coach	Int. C
External coach	Ext. C

To begin, details on the TM strategy and programmes in which coaching is embedded are provided. The second section examines the nature of coaching in TM programmes and the two key events

taking place before the start of the coaching relationship—namely, the talent designation and the coaching matching process. The third section provides an overview of the data structure composed of two dimensions and four overarching themes emerging from the data analysis. The emerging themes are discussed separately in the subsequent chapters.

5.2 TALENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES AT GLOBALFINCORP

This section provides an overview of the global TM strategy, the TM programmes, and the participants' views on the talent-designation process at GlobalFinCorp.

TM and leadership development programmes at GlobalFinCorp

This study focuses on the coaching intervention embedded in four TM programmes operated in the EMEA region of GlobalFinCorp. Each TM programme targets leaders at different stages of their careers from junior to executive levels. Regarding content and modalities, the four TM programmes include a range of developmental events, such as group business project, work assignments, mobility and rotational programmes, and the delivery of specialist courses on relevant topics for leadership development. The table below provides an overview of coaching delivered in the four TM programmes investigated in this study:

Table 14.   Coaching in the global talent management programmes

Talent Programmes	Total No. of participants in EMEA	Frequency	Length	Seniority level	Format	Type coaching	No. of coaching sessions
Programme A: emerging leaders	85	3 per year	6 months	AVP, VP	Group business project	Internal	1-3
Programme B: senior leaders	3 to 5	1 every 18 months	3 months	D, MD	3 days intensive, 360° Assessment, and Hogan Development Survey	Internal	2 + 1 opt-in session
Programme C: growing leaders-Consumer Business Unit	35	1 per year	6 months	VP to D	1 week intensive, 360° Assessment	Internal	3
Programme D: women senior leaders	3 to 5	1 every 18 months	3 months	D, MD	1 week intensive, 360° Assessment, and Hogan Development Survey	Internal and external	4-5

The first two programmes (A and B) are delivered across business units in the bank in EMEA, while the last two programmes (C and D) target a specific employee segment—namely, the employees working in the consumer banking division and women senior bankers. The total number of participants joining these programmes provides a scale of the TM programmes' selectivity, considering that EMEA accounts for approximately 30,000 employees. Two additional coaching schemes for senior and executives are offered by the company in the form of ongoing internal and/or external coaching. The prerogative of executives and senior executives in the bank, this coaching is granted exclusively upon request and approved by the head of organisational development in EMEA. Access was not granted to this group. However, some participants, being coaches or coachees, referred to it in their accounts, as they may have progressed to this level of seniority and benefited from this coaching activity.

Drawing upon the 70-20-10 model, a new learning and development strategy was implemented in 2014 to create a culture of continuous learning by building leadership and management capability, driving ethical and cultural change, and empowering employee-led development. This approach to learning and personal development is in line with the adult learning models widely employed in organisations, as highlighted in the coaching literature review chapter (Oliver *et al.*, 2009; Lombardo and Eichinger, 1996).

Exclusive approach: selectivity and attractiveness

The TM programmes illustrate the exclusive approach to TM adopted by GlobalFinCorp, with few

employees nominated to take part in those programmes (Table 14). Selection is based on high-performance achievements and high-potential attributes of the employee. This suggests alignment between the workforce differentiation and the exclusive approach of TM (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014), as well as a benchmark for companies operating in the financial sector (Sparrow, Farndale and Scullion, 2013).

This selectivity was highlighted by the study participants. For instance, some talented employees and coaches explained that they were being '*hand-picked*' (Charlotte, HR, 1) and that TM programmes were '*reserved to the high-potentials and promotable*' employees (Catherine, Ext. C, 1). The participants' perceptions of selectivity and exclusivity in the TM strategy and programmes were also acknowledged by HR managers. For example, Steve (HR, 1) revealed that 100 employees in EMEA participated in a talent programme in 2015. As EMEA accounts for approximately 30,000 employees, this implies that less than 0.33% of employees would have been designated to join a TM programme per year. The selectivity and exclusivity of the TM approach at GlobalFinCorp may position TM programmes as attractive and desirable developmental activities for talented employees. This approach is coherent with mainstream TM literature, which postulates that TM is based upon workforce segmentation and exclusivity (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and González-Cruz, 2013; Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe, 2014). In addition, this suggests that TM practices at GlobalFinCorp may be representative of those adopted by similar large firms, particularly in the financial and banking sector.

London vs New York: attractiveness and tensions between subsidiaries and headquarters
The interviewees often referred to the company's headquarters based in New York, with a total of 146 occurrences in the data set. Three interviewees discussed it liberally, with 19, 23, and 31 references, respectively (Paul, Ext. C, 2; Georges, Int. C, 1; and Patricia, T, A, 2). London, where the EMEA headquarter offices are located, was also mentioned frequently, which is not surprising, as most interviewees were based in the UK. Specifically, HR managers highlighted the attractiveness of these two cities for talented employees by defining them as cosmopolitan career hubs. However, they also perceived tensions in the operationalisation of GlobalFinCorp's global TM strategy. Furthermore, HR managers often deplored the lack of ability to locally adapt the TM policies designed in the New York headquarters. Meanwhile, some HR managers (Steve, John, HR, 1) reported feeling that their responsibilities were restricted to implementing the global TM strategy in their region.

GlobalFinCorp was often described by the study participants as a highly centralised and hierarchical organisation that provides few opportunities for adaptation of its global policies at the local level.

Furthermore, the prevalence of the US headquarters as a decision-making and strategic centre point for TM and career development was often conceded by interviewees. As stated by Patricia (T, A, 2), the New York HQ represents the '*mothership*' in charge of designing the global TM strategy and supervising its implementation in the different regions. Additionally, she suggested that the EMEA region might be perceived by New York's top management as a '*trouble maker*' in the implementation of global HR strategy, requiring local adaptation due to its heterogeneity of national cultures and economic context. This suggests that the GlobalFinCorp TM strategy may be deployed at the global level following an ethnocentric approach whereby the norms and TM practices of the company's home country prevail. This resonates with seminal debates in the international HRM and TM literature between adaptation and standardisation of global policies in headquarters and subsidiaries in large firms (Tarique, Briscoe and Schuler, 2016; Tarique and Schuler, 2018). The following section examines how the TM strategy was supported by the company's leadership framework.

5.2.1 Leadership development and career progression

Preliminary meetings with EMEA talent and coaching managers (Adam, Steve, HR, 1) and the EMEA head of organisational development (John, HR, 1) were held in 2015 and 2016 to prepare the study research design and data collection. These pre-discussions revealed that the TM strategy was underpinned by a GlobalFinCorp leadership framework and code of conduct, which were reviewed following the financial crisis of 2008-9.

5.2.2 GlobalFinCorp leadership standards framework

The GlobalFinCorp code of conduct includes a leadership standards framework, which provides the firm's definition of leadership and related expected behaviours. Specifically, a successful GlobalFinCorp leader is defined by a set of skills, abilities, and knowledge, including the following: (a) developing people; (b) driving value for clients; (c) working as a partner; (d) championing processes; (e) living GlobalFinCorp values; and (f) delivering results. The GlobalFinCorp leadership standards framework promotes an organisational culture focused on performance and results, as is typical in the financial services and banking sector, according to HR managers (Steve, John, Elizabeth, HR, 1). In addition, the framework emphasises people development, collaboration, and high ethical standards as key objectives for successful leaders. Notably, a leader-coach approach is expected by the organisation to drive high performance, with the framework often referring to coaching skills, such as '*active listening, constructive dialogue and feedback*'. Moreover, it defines the GlobalFinCorp leader as a '*role model, guardian of ethical standards'*, and as a '*talent development dynamo'*. This suggests that leaders are expected to act as a moral compass and magnet for others. This was

confirmed by study participants Oliver, Charles, and Georges, MDs and coaching champions, who claimed that coaching represents an essential part of their role: '*I've always felt from the first day that I was in charge of people, that the role meant coaching*' (Georges, Int. C, 1). Accordingly, coaching is promoted as an expected behaviour and key leadership skill at GlobalFinCorp. The following section explores the articulation between the GlobalFinCorp leadership pipeline and in-house career progression.

Leadership pipeline defining the career path at GlobalFinCorp

The GlobalFinCorp leadership pipeline assumes a traditional career progression from junior to senior management and further executive positions in the organisation. It is represented in the form of a pyramidal ascension, as presented in Figure 6. The TM programmes are positioned at transition points in participants' leadership development towards increased responsibilities and strategic decision-making positions. The metaphor for pyramidal ascension suggests an attrition of talented leaders due to increasing competition and selectivity to reach the highest leadership position as CEO and top executives in the firm. The figure below represents the career development mechanisms articulated upon the hierarchical structure and the titles typically held by leaders at different managerial levels. The four TM programmes investigated in this study appear in bold and underlined.

Figure 6.   Articulation between TM programmes and career progression at GlobalFinCorp

Senior executive programme

Executive assessment work

Programme D (MD)

Programme B (MD)

Programmes B1, B2

Programme C (VP, D)

Programme A (AVP, VP)

CEO

EXECUTIVE LEADER

MANAGER OF MANAGERS

MANAGER OF OTHERS

MANAGER OF SELF
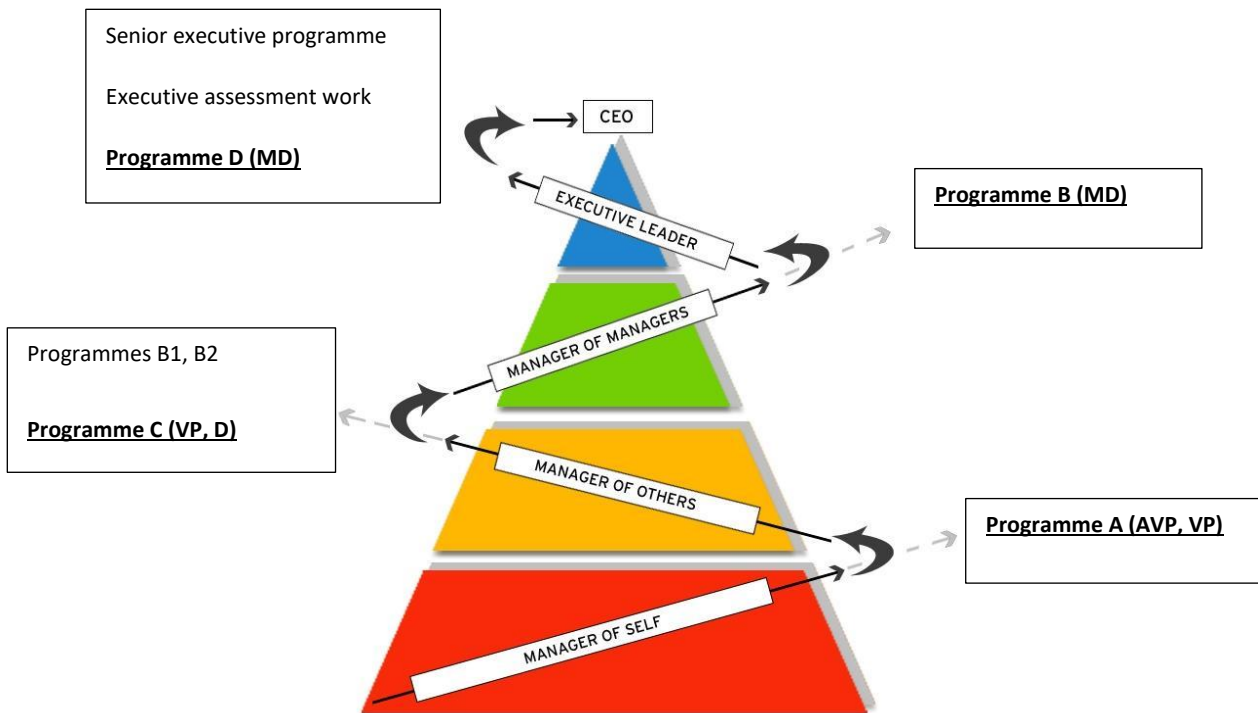
According to HR managers, the purpose of the leadership pipeline is three-fold. First, it seeks to provide a strategic and incremental approach to the development of leaders at the organisational level. Second, it represents a visual and conceptual roadmap for career management. Third, it provides a tool to help managers frame their discussions with their direct reports regarding career and work assignments. Surprisingly, talented employees made only limited references to the GlobalFinCorp leadership pipeline or leadership standards framework. Instead, the study participants often referred to career progression and leadership development by using the title or seniority level related to the position in the hierarchy, as detailed in the table below:

Table 15.   Seniority levels applied to the leadership pipeline

Seniority level	Title/position	Role in the leadership pipeline	TM programmes
Junior employees	Associate vice president (AVP) and vice president (VP)	Managing self	Programme A
Middle managers	Senior vice president (SVP) and director (D)	Managing others	Programme B1 and B2 Programme C (Consumer division)
Senior leaders	Managing directors (MD)	Managing managers	Programme B
Senior leaders, top executive managers	Managing director (MD), CEOs	CEOs	Programme D (Women leaders) Senior executive programme Executive assessment work

The HR managers claimed that leadership development and career progression were well-structured with milestones, increased responsibilities, adequate training to support transitioning leaders, and a clear position or grade from bottom to top management positions. Conversely, some junior and middle management talented employees argued that they lacked access to a clear career path despite the numerous TM programmes available at GlobalFinCorp (Sarah, T, A, 1; Nathalie, T, Multiple, 2). These views are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

5.2.3   Talent designation and status

During the interviews, talent leaders were asked to recall their reactions when they were informed of their talent designation and invited to join a TM programme. Their accounts revealed some key information regarding the process of identification, nomination, and communication of their talent status. This section examines talented leaders' reaction to talent status so as to establish any potential impact on the talent coaching process.

An opaque process

Despite the structured career path suggested by the GlobalFinCorp leadership pipeline, few talented employees mentioned holding regular career and talent development conversations with their line managers prior to their nomination as talent. In some instances, talented employees claimed that they were unaware of their nomination (Carry, T, A, 1; Eleonor, T, A–D, 1). For example, when asked about how she joined the TM programme A, Carry explained the following:

> *'I didn't enter. I didn't enter, so I didn't, because I didn't know about it; I didn't enter. My managing director had somehow nominated me (…). Because I am not sure, actually, I really don't know how. That's my only thought is he nominated*

me for me, and because the only email I got was to say, you know, congrats, you

have been selected, so someone has to nominate. He's the only person I can think

of'. (Carry, T, A, 1)

However, other talented participants referred to the combination of high performance and high potential used as criteria for talent designation. Meanwhile, though, one HR manager claimed that talent was still ill-defined in the organisation (Steve, HR, 1). When asked about the definition of talent and his role as talent manager, Steve stated the following:

'Okay. If I am perfectly honest, I feel that talent management is not clearly

defined. I feel that nobody really fully understands it (...). Having clearly defined

responsibilities, boundaries, whatever you want to call it (...). It is important, and I

feel that that was lacking in talent management and especially here at

GlobalFinCorp.' (Steve, HR, 1)

These perceptions resonate with the ongoing debates in the TM literature, which questions the nature and purpose of TM (Meyers *et al.*, 2019; Nijs *et al.*, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier, 2013a). This further suggests that talent designation at GlobalFinCorp may depend on the subjective appreciation of high performance and/or high potential, which is primarily established by the line manager. As a result, some talented employees perceived TM as a managerial, *'tick in the box'* exercise to satisfy internal metrics and organisational objectives (Emma, T, A, 1; Oliver, T, B, 1; Paul, Ext. C, 1). Furthermore, one interviewee developed a restrictive perception of the role of line managers regarding TM as transactional and compliant with the organisations' metrics (Oliver, T, B, 2). This suggests that talent designation may be perceived as a managerial task, subjective, and not systematically evaluated according to the criteria established in the GlobalFinCorp leadership framework.

Moreover, line managers, MDs, and HR managers are positioned at the core of the talent-designation process. Line managers are expected to nominate members of their team, reinforcing the relationship with their direct reports and making line managers *'look good'* (Patricia, T, A, 2) in their direct report and for their own line manager. On the one hand, the decision of talentship relies on the line managers' judgement, which is perceived as subjective and discretionary by talented employees. On the other hand, the HR managers' role is operational with activities such as liaising with managers, profiling coachees, preparing for coaching programmes, and pre-selecting potential talented candidates for executive programmes. Overall, the opacity, subjectivity, and discretionary judgement of line managers was openly criticised by talented employees and some HR managers,

who raised concerns regarding the display of high-performance or high-potential traits of some talented participants:

> 'Another aspect is if the individual is not talent, actually (…). Because of how these programs are built, they are built for talent (…). And I could notice sometimes that, maybe, some of the participants were good performers, but they were not truly, you know, high-potential'. (Elizabeth, HR, 1)

Occasionally, HR managers and senior leader coaches claimed that talent designation may be misused to address employee under-performance, derailing behaviours, or mental health issues (John, Steve, HR, 1; and Paul, Ext. C, 1). They expressed concerns regarding what they considered a misuse of coaching. Finally, they insisted that each case be dealt with on an individual basis, which may suggest that clear policies and boundaries are lacking regarding the provision of coaching in the organisation.

The opacity of the talent-designation process was perceived as problematic, often managed with strategic ambiguity (Dries and Gieter, 2014) or with secrecy (Meyers et al., 2017). Furthermore, the non-transparent communication about TM was identified as a major source of frustration and dissatisfaction by the talented employees (Dries and Gieter, 2014).

The relational factor in talent designation

Conversely, some talent leaders (Alan, T, C, 1; Eleonor, T, A–D, 1; Emma, T, A, 1) argued that HR managers played an important role in their talent nomination, undertaking tests and pre-nomination interviews, approaching them first and encouraging them to have a conversation with their line managers and MD in order to increase their visibility and establish relationships with members of the Committee Review Board. This suggests that the relationships, network, reputation, and visibility may be key factors for talent designation. This is in line with Makela and colleagues' (2010) study on the factors influencing the decision process in talent identification in MNEs. This empirical paper argued that the inclusion of employees in a talent pool is based not only on performance appraisal evaluation, but also on three main factors—namely, (a) the cultural and institutional distance; (b) homophily between the employee and the decision-makers; and (c) the network position of the individual.

By contrast, Carry commented on her lack of awareness of the talent-identification process and suggested a feeling of helplessness:

'Because the only email I got was to say you know congrats you have been selected, so someone has to nominate. (My MD) He's the only person I can think of, I never really asked him in fairness, I could have and that was it yes. So, it's, I mean at their level I am sure the seniors in the bank nominate people from their business (…). It goes to a vetting cycle and it spits out a result I think is what happens'. (Carry, T, A, 1)

In sum, the study participants deplored the lack of transparency in the talent-designation process and admitted having limited awareness of the process for talent-pool inclusion. Consequently, talented employees may develop negative reactions to their talent status and the associated TM practices, such as coaching. This is discussed later in this section.

A time-bounded talent status

Human resource managers and talent leaders reported that all TM programmes included in the study were established for a period of three months to one year. The length of the TM programmes seems to influence how talent participants perceived their talent status. Some talent leaders expressed concerns regarding the short-term nature of their talent status in GlobalFinCorp. Some participants claimed a contradiction between the restricted time of talent status and the extended time for organisational investment and personal commitment deemed necessary for talent and leadership development. For instance, Sarah, a junior talent leader who was successful in winning the team project assignment in programme A, but was not invited to join another programme, commented as follows:

'There needs to be some ongoing work with those people. If you were identified as a high performer, that doesn't change at the end of that six months'. (Sarah, T, A, 1)

Moreover, some talented employees claimed a lack of continuity between the different programmes. After the official completion of their TM programme, some talent leaders expressed feelings of disarray regarding the loss of their talent status when they were re-assigned to the '*general population*' (Carry, Sarah, T, A, 1; Lucy, T, C, 1). By contrast, HR managers presented the TM strategy at GlobalFinCorp as a progressive and incremental curriculum, as was also confirmed in GlobalFinCorp internal communications on TM and leadership development strategy. As such, the organisational practices for career progression (including talent coaching), which may typically require persistence and effort over time, were seen as misaligned with the short-term talent status imposed by TM programmes. As a result, talented employees who expected a clearer career path could experience disappointment and frustration (Sarah, T, A, 1; Natalie, T, Multiple programmes, 2).

These findings are coherent with existing studies that have found that talent status may be perceived as impermanent and unstable by TM programme participants (King, 2018). This is also aligned with prior studies suggesting that an information asymmetry may exist between talented employees' awareness of their status and the organisational views on their talent status (Dries and Gieter, 2014). As such, the talent-designation process at GlobalFinCorp was often seen as opaque, subjective, and inconsistent. This may influence the internal reputation of the TM programmes and, consequently, the reputation of the talented employees taking part in those programmes, as discussed in the following section.

Lack of institutionalisation of TM programmes

Some talent participants and HR managers deplored the impermanence of the TM programmes at GlobalFinCorp. First, some talent leaders commented on the proliferation of the talent programmes and initiatives. For example, some talent leaders admitted not being sure which talent programmes they had joined (Eleonor, T, A–D, 1 and Carry, T, A, 1).

In addition, some participants explained that ongoing economic turmoil, turnover, and restructuring waves led to a limited transmission of the knowledge, content, history, and reputation of some TM programmes. Due to a high employee turnover rate and consecutive structural changes in the firm (chapter 4), TM schemes were created, implemented, and then sometimes stopped within a short period of time. Consequently, the life cycle of some TM programmes was too short to generate career development spillover, such as enhanced internal reputation and visibility (Nathalie, multiple, 2 and Carry, T, A, 1). This suggests that the lack of institutionalisation of some TM programmes may contribute to reducing their internal visibility and positive reputation. As a result, talent leaders may not be informed of the quality (or not) of the TM programmes, and more importantly, they may not benefit from the positive halo of talent status for their future career growth in the company.

Reactions to talent status

Various reactions of talented employees regarding their talent status were observed during the interviews. Talent status was largely experienced as a positive, motivating, and rewarding experience by most talent leaders, who described it as a gratifying confidence boost (Anne, T, D; Carry, T, A; Emma, T, A; Lucy, T, C) . However, some negative reactions emerged from the talent leaders' accounts as well (Carry, T, A; Nathalie, T, multiple). For example, Nathalie expressed a disbelief in the TM schemes and talent status, *'I survived from the talent'*, which echoes a paper comparing the talent designation and status as a curse (Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2017).

Furthermore, some participants reported that no previous conversation with their line manager had occurred prior their designation as talent. Combined with the lack of knowledge of the TM programme, this situation may trigger a feeling of apprehension, stress, or confusion regarding the purpose of the talent designation and activities in the TM programme:

> *'But, this one [the TM programme] I would say, no idea, no idea. I asked people,*
> *no one had done it and [...]. I was happy to do a programme; I was just*
> *apprehensive about what the objective of this one would be'. (Carry, T, A, 1)*

In sum, talent designation is often experienced by talented employees as an opaque, subjective, and impermanent process, in which their involvement is limited or non-existent. Relying on the discretionary behaviour of line managers, HR managers, and MDs, talented employees may develop positive and negative reactions to talent status. In turn, this may influence, positively or not, their expectations of coaching as a distinctive intervention provided as part of TM programmes, as discussed in the subsequent chapters. Following the review of the TM strategy and its operationalisation at GlobalFinCorp, the next section examines how coaching is used as TM practice.

5.3   COACHING IN TALENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES AT GLOBALFINCORP

This section provides a detailed presentation of coaching embedded in the four TM programmes investigated in this study. This section is based on the preliminary interviews with HR managers and the study participants' accounts. The term 'talent coaching' is used to refer to the coaching intervention targeting talented employees in the organisation, which may or may not occur as part of a structured programme. 'Programme talent coaching', meanwhile, refers to talent coaching deployed as part of a specific TM programme.

5.3.1   Nature of coaching in TM programmes

The study participants described the various formats of coaching used in the TM programmes at GlobalFinCorp. From this, six main features may help characterise coaching in TM programmes (Figure 7).

Figure 7.   Types of talent coaching used at GlobalFinCorp

Internal/External
Short-term/Long-term
Formal/Informal
Group/Individual
Face to face/At distance
Imposed/Voluntary
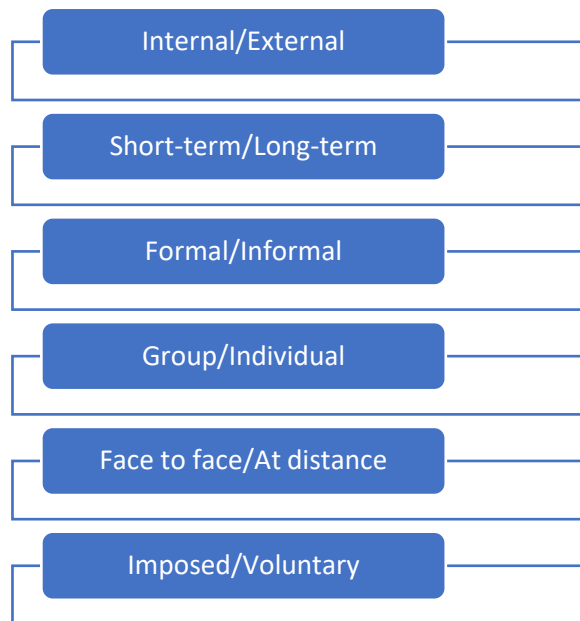
Internal/external

Programme talent coaching involves internal and/or external coaches. First, HR managers and senior business leaders may intervene in various TM programmes simultaneously as internal coaches (Steve, HR, 1; Charles, Int. C, 2). Second, external professional coaches may be appointed as guest speakers to deliver specialised sessions on topics, such as communication, public speaking, or career management. External executive coaches were exclusively appointed for senior leaders in programmes B, D, and for executive development (John, HR, 1). In fact, the main providers of programme talent coaching at GlobalFinCorp were internal coaches. Human resource managers explained that a significant shift in the coaching provision had occurred as a result of the 2008 financial crisis. Before the crisis, most coaches were recruited externally, whereas at the time of the study, most coaches in TM programmes were internal. According to HR managers and external coaches, this is primarily due to cost restrictions (John, HR, 1; Paul, Ext. C, 1; Catherine, Ext. C, 1).

Short-term/long-term

Talent management programmes at GlobalFinCorp last between three and six months. The number of coaching sessions offered as part of TM programmes increases from two to five according to the seniority level of the talented employee. Each coaching session may last between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours. Notably, the participants often commented on the length of the TM programmes. Specifically, they argued that the coaching approach was shaped by the limited number of coaching sessions included in the programme. For instance, some external coaches claimed that programme

talent coaching '*is not coaching*' (Paul, Ext. C, 1) due to the shortness and sporadic nature of the intervention. This view was shared by Peter, talented employee at the director level in programme C:

> '*I think, you know, in 45 minutes, you can probably learn a few very specific, and then somebody can give you very specific advice; you could call it coaching. But, like, for me, coaching is more a process than something that is ad hoc, like 45 minutes*'. (Peter, T, C, 1)

Furthermore, some talent leaders (Oliver, T, B, 1; Eleonor, T, A–D, 1) referred to the limited number of coaching sessions as insufficient for any substantial long-lasting outcomes, although coaching was often experienced as a key event in the TM programme:

> '*It was underwhelming, because it was half an hour, was half an hour, and you know in a three-day programme, it went on and on and on, and so it wasn't very much. It was just a taste, but it's the bit I remember, really*'. (Oliver, T, B, 1)

Finally, HR managers (John, Adam, Steve, HR, 1) shared the perception that programme talent coaching's primary objective is to provide talented employees with a '*taste of coaching experience*' (John, HR, 1), as opposed to a '*pure*' coaching experience (Adam, HR, 1). In this way, programme talent coaching was experienced as a short-term intervention, or a preamble to a full coaching experience. This implies that further talent coaching might be delivered outside the official TM programme. In fact, talented employees joining Programme B benefited from an opt-in, follow-up session, and senior managers may also request additional executive coaching sessions at the end of the programme. Interestingly, additional coaching sessions were noted to take place on an informal basis outside the framework of the programme (Steve, HR, 1).

Informal/formal

In addition to the formal provision of coaching as part of TM programmes, study participants explained that an ongoing informal voluntary coaching relationship may develop after the official end of the programme (Lucy and Emma, T, A, 1). They evaluated this continued coaching relationship as a sign of success. For instance, Emma commented as follows:

> '*And it was so good that, for example, I told him I'm not going to let go of you. We are off coaching, but once in a while, I stop by, and we keep on chatting. So, I see it as a very … a very successful coaching relationship, because it created the relationship, and he's a senior guy in the firm here*'. (Emma, T, A, 1)

Surprisingly, this view was also shared by internal and external coaches (Georges, Int. C, 1; Catherine, Ext. C, 1*). For external coaches working with senior leaders and executives, any contact beyond the formal coaching provision tends to demonstrate the coachee's appreciation of the coaching provided. For instance, Paul (Ext. C, 1) explained that an ongoing coaching relationship after the end of the official TM programme may signal positive coaching outcomes from a coachee's perspective. Consequently, it may be perceived as a form of reward by the coach. In this way, positive initial evaluation of coaching outcomes may lead to the continuation of the talent coaching relationship on an informal and voluntary basis after the official end of the TM programme. This is surprising, since mentoring is typically delivered in an informal format as opposed to coaching (Joo, Sushko and McLean, 2012), as discussed in chapter two. Additionally, this raises questions regarding the funding and monitoring of talent coaching delivered as a more fluid and informal intervention (Steve, HR, 1).

Group/individual

The four TM programmes investigated in this study include a coaching element, which was delivered on a group or individual basis. First, group coaching offered in all programmes took the form of external or internal guest speaker interventions. Talented employees at junior and middle management levels (Sarah, Carry, Emma, Louisa, T, A, 1; Alan, T, C, 1) described the coaching intervention as a highly interactive group session where the external coach provided business management content and feedback, in addition to inspiring and offering career management advice to talent participants.

> *'There's a couple of external trainers that come in, and you have help with things*
> *like CVs and interviewing, presentation skills, things like that'. (Sarah, T, A, 1)*

This suggests that the term 'coaching' may be used in practice to refer to various types of learning interventions, including training, mentoring, and motivational speech. However, the study participants predominantly defined talent coaching as an individual form of coaching as opposed to group or team coaching. This represents the form of coaching examined in this study.

Distance/face to face

Due to the geographic spread of the EMEA region, programme talent coaching was delivered either face to face or at a distance. Advantages and disadvantages of both modalities were discussed with participants. Some HR managers argued that distance coaching supported the development of communication skills, which were deemed critical for global leaders. Furthermore, one HR manager argued that distance coaching may promote vertical mobility across divisions (Adam, HR, 1).

However, participants considered distance coaching to be ineffective and inappropriate, considering the short time allocated for this activity in most TM programmes. Consequently, talented employees often favoured a face-to-face coaching relationship. Additionally, they mentioned that face-to-face coaching helped build a rapport between coach and coachee, which may be challenging to achieve at distance:

> *'I think, for such a short programme, you have someone in the location that you are in'. (Sarah, T, A, 1)*

Furthermore, talent leaders often perceived face-to-face coaching as a key factor for successful coaching relationships. For example, when asked about the role of face-to-face coaching in the success of the relationship, Emma replied as follows:

> *'From zero to ten, it played a role, like, 100 (...). It would have never been the same without this … I mean, you need this, if I may say, this human touch as a minimum' (Emma, T, A, 1).*

Moreover, some junior talented employees (Emma, Sarah, Patricia, Carry, T, A, 1) considered that initiating the coaching process with face-to-face meetings was necessary to establish rapport and trust between coach and coachee. However, they added that, after a couple of sessions, the relationship could evolve as a distance relationship. This was also the view of an external coach who possessed extensive experience with international distance coaching (Catherine, Ext. C, 1). Accordingly, the face-to-face modality was perceived as a significant factor for building trust at the beginning of the talent coaching relationship.

Imposed/voluntary

Talent coaching was often presented as a compulsory activity embedded in TM programmes. However, talented employees highlighted the lack of consultation during the matching process, as discussed in the following section. Some participants reacted differently to the imposition of a coaching activity, expressing contrasting reactions towards programme talent coaching, such as compliance, resistance, or curiosity and enthusiasm. Noticeably, some participants questioned the high performance and/or high potential of other employees in the programme. Additionally, external coaches argued that compliance with a programme or with a line manager's decision may lead to resistance from the coachee (Olivia, Ext. C, 2; Paul, Ext. C, 1), thus potentially negatively influencing the coaching relationship (Paul, Ext. C, 1). Accordingly, the imposition of coaching on talented employees was perceived overall as a barrier for a successful coaching relationship. The

following section examines the coaching matching process, which was experienced as a critical event by talented participants.

5.3.2 Coaching matching process

An HR-driven process

According to the study participants, the coaching matching process was driven by HR managers. Once identified as talent, all talented participants were allocated an internal and/or external coach depending on their seniority level. In programmes designed for junior and middle managers (programmes A and C), talented employees were matched with internal coaches, whereas external coaches were allocated exclusively to senior leader and executives (programmes B and D).

At GlobalFinCorp, internal coaches typically comprised senior business managers operating at the MD level and HR managers. External coaches include highly qualified professionals with extensive experience in coaching at GlobalFinCorp. In TM programmes for talented employees at the senior level (programmes B and D), both internal and external coaches were allocated.

According to Steve (HR, 1), the most important matching criteria is concerned with ethical considerations. Specifically, internal coaches would not possess direct managerial responsibilities over their coachee, though they may work in the same business division and in the same country within the EMEA region. Noticeably, gender does not appear as a relevant criteria in the matching process across programmes. This is reflected in both the study participants' accounts and the data sample. Women and men seemed to be randomly paired in the study sample, including in the programme D targeting senior women talent leaders, as confirmed by participants (Amy, Anne, Eleonor, T, D, 1).

Nevertheless, talented employees selected for senior and executive TM programmes were given a list of two or three external coaches pre-selected by HR based on an external coaching pool. Following a chemistry session, the coachee would then select the coach of their choice (Eleonor, T, D, 1, Olivia, Ext. C, 1; Steve, HR, 1). In this way, senior talent leaders were invited to engage actively, whereas junior talented employees were not consulted in the matching process.

In addition, HR managers identified four organisational constraints for managing the coaching matching process in TM programmes. First, they pinpointed the internal coaching capability as a restriction. Human resource managers often insisted on offering *'high-quality'* coaching provision in TM programmes, which requires skilled internal coaches willing to take part in TM activities (John, Adam, Steve, HR, 1). Second, the internal coaches' capacity to coach others in TM programmes was often perceived as difficult to organise in a hectic business environment. Third, the location and

business division of internal coaches was considered to meet ethical standards in coaching practice and avoid any conflicts of interest. As such, from an HR perspective, the allocation of internal coaches to TM programmes was achieved by taking into consideration multiple limiting factors so as to balance coaching capacity and coaching capability within the EMEA region. Finally, the direct and indirect costs involved in coaching and the source of business funding were highlighted as critical by HR managers (John, Adam, Steve, HR, 1).

Talented employees' views on matching

As previously described, the matching process was driven by HR managers with limited or no consultation of the coachee, especially at VP and director levels (Carry, T, A, 1; Alan, T, C, 1). For example, Alan was asked how the coaching pairing was accomplish, replying as follows:

> *'I don't know whether it was, you know, randomly, or whether there was some logic behind this'. (Alan, T, C, 1)*

In addition, some talent leaders reflected on their random allocation to a coach, making matching an exercise of '*pure luck*' (Elisabeth, HR, 1; Sarah, T, A, 1; Lucy, T, C, 1). This suggests that talented employees may perceive matching as an inconsistent and almost secretive process, especially at junior and middle management levels.

Moreover, the lack of involvement of talented employees regarding the matching process may induce a feeling of powerlessness and disappointment. This feeling can be exacerbated when the coachee is not offered an external coach like other participants in the same TM programme. For example, Anne (T, D, 1) reported that she was allocated an internal coach, whereas all other talented women in the same programme were paired with an external coach. She felt compelled to accept this allocation in order to maintain a positive relationship with her allocated internal coach, who was considered a senior and influential leader in the organisation. She felt that she benefited from the coaching partnership despite a feeling of injustice due to not receiving the opportunity to work with an external coach like the other women in the programme.

Furthermore, some interviewees argued that the matching process may significantly influence the coaching relationship (Sarah, Carry, T, A, 1; Steve, HR, 1). For example, Sarah claimed that she did not benefit from her coaching relationship due to a two-month delay in being allocated a coach, combined with geographical distance and the lack of engagement of her internal coach:

'So, I met him once and had a telephone conversation, and I didn't find I was getting any benefit from that so, and he wasn't an active participant, shall we say'. (Sarah, T, A, 1)

This confirms that organisational constraints such as coaching capability, willingness, and workload of internal coaches across the EMEA region may be critical in the matching process and successful coaching relationships. Furthermore, the perception of a suitable or unsuitable match influences the participants' views of the efficiency of the talent coaching relationship. Following the review of the TM strategy and programme talent coaching at GlobalFinCorp, the following section introduces the overarching themes and dimensions emerging from the thematic analysis of the data set.

5.4   OVERARCHING THEMES

This chapter introduces the main themes and the data structure emerging from the analysis of the data set. In particular, this section provides a summary of the four overarching themes emerging from the data analysis. A full description of the data structure, themes, and sub-themes is available in Appendix 5. The themes emerging from the thematic analysis of the data are discussed in further detail in the following two chapters (chapters six and seven).

Based on the five-stage thematic analysis process described in chapter four (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013), two dimensions and four overarching themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the data set. The study participants emphasised two main dimensions regarding the role of programme talent coaching: the individual and the organisational levels. The role of coaching for talented employees at the individual level was highlighted. Additionally, since coaching is deployed as an HR practice supporting the TM strategy of the case company, participants often commented on its impact at the organisational level. As such, the findings illustrate that programme talent coaching may contribute differently at the micro (individual) and meso (organisational) levels.

At the individual level, the following two overarching themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) talent coaching for human and social capital development and (b) emergence of a rhetoric of coaching. At the organisational level, two themes are also revealed: (c) talent coaching as a vector for leadership change and (d) instrumentalisation of coaching. Table 16 provides a summary of the findings, including the two dimensions, four themes, and sub-themes emerging from the analysis of the data on the perception of coaching's role in TM programmes.

Table 16. Summary of themes

Dimensions	Aggregated themes	Explanation of the themes	Second order categories, underlying themes
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL	Talent coaching for social and human capital development	Talent coaching supports the development of talented employees at all seniority levels by enhancing their social and human capital, which are considered pivotal skills for career and leadership growth	- Knowledge and confidence building - Bespoke career progression plan - Network development - Mutual trust and affiliation
	Emergence of a rhetoric of talent coaching	The perception of coaching as a TM practice is influenced by the organisation's exclusive TM philosophy. In this context, coaching becomes a symbol of high status and enacts the talent status acquired by leaders	- Symbol of high status - Way of doing *vs* being - Expectations *vs* experience - Person-centric *vs* institutionalisation of coaching in TM programmes
ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL	Talent coaching to develop a coaching culture	From an organisational perspective, programme talent coaching is established to broaden the leadership portfolio, to equip leaders to hold better quality conversations, and to build internal coaching capability through coaching champions	- Coaching as key leadership competency - Better conversations - Ripple effect of coaching
	Instrumentalisation of talent coaching	Talent coaching is used as an instrument to support the identification, selection, and recruitment of the talent elite in the leadership pipeline. Coaches act as employee and employer agents in the TM context	- Natural selection of talent elite - Mediation and conflict resolution - Position of HR as strategic partners

5.5   KEY POINTS ON FINDINGS – PART 1

This chapter provided a detailed description of the TM strategy and the multiple forms that coaching may take when employed in TM and leadership development programmes at GlobalFinCorp. It further provided details about the case company context in which coaching is deployed so as to support a contextualised interpretation of the findings.

In sum, GlobalFinCorp's TM strategy is based on an exclusive approach to TM whereby only a few candidates are nominated to participate in TM programmes and hold a talent status in the organisation. This approach to TM seems to appeal to the talented employees interviewed. They often appreciated being identified as talent due to the perceived benefits associated with the talent status at GlobalFinCorp. However, the talent designation and subsequent coaching matching processes were described as opaque, secretive, and often independent from the talented

employees' input. The talent status was overall experienced positively by talented employees as a self-confidence boost and a gratifying career event. Despite this, its impermanence and opacity sometimes led to disappointment, frustration, and helplessness. In turn, when these feelings emerged, they appeared to negatively shape the perceptions of coaching as a TM practice and generated resistance to the talent coaching process.

In addition, the company has developed a structured and incremental approach to TM and leadership development. Various TM programmes targeting talented employees at different seniority levels were designed to support leaders' transition on the career ladder. Career progression at GlobalFinCorp is underpinned by a leadership standards framework whereby coaching is promoted as a key leadership behaviour. However, the study participants rarely mentioned this framework in their accounts.

Moreover, the findings also revealed six tensions that characterise the multiple forms that coaching adopts in the context of TM: (a) internal/external; (b) short-term/long-term; (c) formal/informal; (d) group/individual; (e) face to face/at distance; and (f) imposed/voluntary. Notably, the study participants explained that, since the financial crisis, corporate coaching practice has shifted from external to internal coaching, which is increasingly delivered by HR managers and senior business leaders at the MD level. This was primarily to accommodate internal budget restrictions. Subsequently, talent coaching was implemented as a short-term intervention to provide a taste of coaching to talented employees, considering the limited organisational coaching capacity and capability. As part of a TM programme, the coaching matching process was often seen as critical by the study participants. Talented employees receiving coaching in the four studied TM programmes highlighted that they were not consulted, with coaching matching remaining largely a HR-driven process. As such, programme talent coaching at GlobalFinCorp largely seems imposed, according to talent participants.

Finally, this chapter introduced the overarching themes, sub-themes, and dimensions emerging from the data structure. The findings can be classified using two dimensions: (a) the individual level and (b) the organisational level. These are discussed in the following two chapters. The next chapter focuses on the analysis of the perceived role of talent coaching at the individual level, examining two overarching themes: coaching for human and social capital development and the rhetoric of coaching.

CHAPTER 6: THE ROLE OF TALENT COACHING AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL – FINDINGS PART 2

6.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a description of the context in which talent coaching is operated in the case company and began to elaborate on the multiple forms that coaching may take in TM programmes (RQ3). This chapter and the next present the findings emerging from the thematic analysis of the data set and explore the perceived contribution of talent coaching (RQ1 and RQ2).

Overall, the participants perceived that programme talent coaching played a critical role at both individual and organisational levels. These two dimensions emerged from the data in relation to (a) the context of the inquiry and (b) the study research design and data collection. First, this study is focused on coaching in the context of TM. Since TM aims to develop talented employees who contribute differentially to the firm's competitive advantage, it is not surprising that study participants discussed expectations and outcomes of coaching as a TM practice at the micro and meso levels. Second, the data set includes views collected from various stakeholders, such as talented employees, HR managers, and internal and external coaches. Therefore, it can be expected that HR managers and senior business leaders who act as representatives of the organisation may hold holistic views of talent coaching. By contrast, talented employees and external coaches tend to focus on the individual outcomes of talent coaching. Surprisingly, the two dimensions—individual and organisational—of the contribution of talent coaching emerged across all participants' accounts, regardless of their seniority level or role in the delivery of talent coaching. Therefore, the micro and meso dimensions have emerged as significant themes to understand programme talent coaching.

This chapter focuses on the role of talent coaching at the individual level. Specifically, this chapter seeks to examine the perceived contribution of talent coaching at the micro level, with an emphasis on the related overarching themes emerging from the data analysis: (a) the development of human and social capital of talented employees; and (b) the rhetoric around talent coaching.

First, the theme of human and social capital development is presented in order to discuss the role of coaching for talented employees at different stages in their careers (RQ2 and RQ3). Second, the findings suggest the emergence of a rhetoric around talent coaching, whereby talent coaching is experienced as a signal of high status in the organisation (RQ3). Table 17 below summarises the aggregated themes and sub-themes emerging from the data analysis from an individual perspective:

Table 17.   The role of programme talent coaching at the individual level

Dimensions	Aggregated themes	Explanation of the themes	Second order categories, underlying themes
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL	Talent coaching for social and human capital development	Talent coaching supports the development of talented employees at all seniority levels by enhancing their social and human capital, which are considered pivotal skills for career and leadership growth	- Knowledge and confidence building - Bespoke career progression plan - Network development - Mutual trust and affiliation
	Emergence of a rhetoric of talent coaching	The perception of coaching as TM practice is influenced by the organisation's exclusive TM philosophy. In this context, coaching becomes a symbol of high status and enacts the talent status acquired by leaders	- Symbol of high status - Way of doing *vs* being - Expectations *vs* experience - Person-centric *vs* institutionalisation of coaching in TM programmes

This chapter aims to illustrate a duality of talent coaching in participants' accounts. Despite the numerous benefits of talent coaching, interviewees revealed that talent coaching may be experienced as an irreconcilable dilemma.

6.2   TALENT COACHING FOR HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

This section explains how programme talent coaching may support the development of talented employees' human and social capital. First, the contribution of coaching for human capital (HC) development is explored via two sub-themes: (a) personalised learning and confidence building (HC1) and (b) as a bespoke plan for leadership and career growth (HC2). Second, the role of talent coaching for social capital (SC) development is derived according to two sub-themes: (c) network development (SC1) and (d) mutual trust and affiliation with senior business leaders and executives in the organisation (SC2).

6.2.1   Personalised learning and confidence building (HC1)

Personalised learning for leadership development

First, programme talent coaching was often described as an opportunity to reinforce and consolidate learning by using a personalised approach. Participants across all groups (T, HR, Int., and Ext. C) highlighted that talent coaching reinforces the training received as part of the TM programmes. They claimed that coaching provides talent participants with an opportunity to revisit the content covered by guest speakers, referred to as 'coach', as part of plenary session(s) in TM programmes. Specifically, talented employees mentioned that coaching is useful in customising

training by making it relevant and applicable to their specific individual circumstances. This view was also captured by external coaches:

> *'My role is to tailor the learning experience for them so they get the most out of it'. (Paul, Ext. C, 1)*

This suggests that talent coaching may be used to consolidate instructional learning. Furthermore, Oliver (T, B, 1) suggested that coaching may support the development of critical thinking, which he considered one of the key components of leadership.

In addition, senior talents and internal and external coaches (Patricia, T,D, 1; Oliver, T,B. 1; Alan, T, C, 1; Paul, Ext. C, 1; Charles, Int. C, 2) claimed that talent coaching may support talented employees in reflecting on their experience in order to grow as leaders:

> *'One of the principles of coaching is to allow multiple perspectives to come through the conversation and allow people to reinterpret what they are already taking in, and then they will find their own direction'. (Charles, Int. C., 2)*

This suggests that talent coaching is perceived as a person-centred approach that encourages talent leaders to engage in reflective practice, considered critical for transformational change at the individual level.

Confidence building and self-efficacy

Second, some participants, especially women across all seniority levels, claimed that talent coaching significantly developed self-confidence by increasing their work motivation and feelings of self-efficacy (Anne, Charlotte, Eleonor, T, D, 1; Emma, Lucy, A, 1st round). For instance, Emma (T, A, 1) claimed that the role of programme talent coaching *'was a massive confidence builder'*. For Lucy (T, A, 1), coaching *'gives (us) a confidence boost'*. Furthermore, Eleanor (T, A–D, 1) noted that the development of self-confidence may not only be a valuable outcome for talented leaders in transition between two positions, but that it is equally important for those seeking to develop their abilities in their current role.

However, it was not always clear in the data set if the participants were exclusively referring to the coaching element of the programme or the overall TM programme. Nevertheless, this may suggest that women leaders focus more on self-confidence and self-efficacy for the development of their leadership skills compared to their male peers. However, further investigation is necessary to confirm this point.

Sharing know-how and implicit corporate knowledge

Third, talent participants claimed that they benefited greatly from the advice, knowledge, and know-how of their internal coach (Anne, Patricia, T, D, 1; Lucy, T, A, 1), as was also confirmed by an internal coach (Georges, Int. C, 1). In addition, Amy (T, D, 2) commented that internal corporate coaching involves *'being able to leverage on existing knowledge and experience'*. She explained that she benefited from the guidance provided by her internal *'circle'* and HR director during her transition as a CEO in a new country. Although not specifically related to talent coaching, her view offers insight into the outcomes of internal coaching as a knowledge management practice.

6.2.2   Bespoke plan for leadership and career growth (HC2)

The participants often claimed that talent coaching contributes to leadership development by providing talented employees an allocated time and a confidential space to reflect, receive feedback, and elaborate a bespoke career plan.

Space and time to think

First, talent participants often emphasised how coaching may be seen as a time to pause in a hectic and demanding work environment. Participants across all groups experienced coaching as a critical event allowing them to refocus on career, priorities, and challenges, especially when transitioning between two positions (Anne, T, D, 1; Charlotte, HR, 1; Eleonor, T, A–D, 1; Catherine, Ext. C, 1). Additionally, this view was shared by external coaches (Olivia and Paul, Ext. C, 1⁻2), who defined talent coaching as *'time to think'*, referencing the seminal coaching book from Kline (2009). For instance, talent coaching is helpful as a time to think, stop, and reflect, as suggested by Catherine: *'People appreciate the time, thinking space, and the focus'* (Ext. C, 1). Furthermore, she stressed that talent coaching is effective when coachees are *'investing time'* and demonstrate commitment to their personal development. However, time was often considered a scarce resource at both the individual and organisation levels. Catherine (Ext. C, 1) referred to an expected *'return on people investment in time and money'* in relation to the direct and indirect costs of talent coaching. This was also highlighted by HR managers (John and Steve, HR, 1). As such, talent coaching was defined by talented employees as a useful time allocated for career development. Simultaneously, it was experienced as an investment by the organisation in their future career. Consequently, the participants may establish a correlation between talent coaching and investment mediated by time.

Feedback

Talented employees and external coaches often mentioned feedback as a key feature of coaching in TM programmes. For instance, one senior leader CEO viewed her coach as *'holding up the mirror'*, providing her honest and critical feedback (Anne, D, 2). Similar views were expressed by senior

talent leaders (Anne, T, D, 1; Eleonor, T, A–D, 1), who compared coaching to a *'wake-up call'* (Anne, 1) to reflect on personal limiting barriers and to point out development opportunities for a future promotion. This corroborates the views of Paul, an external coach, who further claimed that programme talent coaching *'is not coaching; it is feedback'* (Ext. C, 1).

Furthermore, other participants referred to talent coaching as a feedback session based on a series of psychometric tests. For example, 360-degree assessment is used in programmes B, C, and D, and the Hogan assessment inventory is proposed to senior leaders (Programme B and D). These tests are commonly used in organisations for leadership development purposes (Olivia, Ext. C, 1). According to external coaches and HR managers, their purpose is to initiate a dialogue between the coach and the coachee in order to challenge the coachee when necessary, and to undertake reflection on career planning.

Surprisingly, some external coaches revealed that feedback may also be based on conversations held previously with HR managers, MDs, and line managers of the talent leader receiving coaching, particularly at senior and executive levels (Paul and Olivia, Ext. C, 1). This suggests that the coach may hold a position of messenger between representatives of the organisation and the senior talented employee, signalling and delivering feedback on how talent leaders are perceived internally and what they could improve in order to make it to the next level in the organisation. One of the key topics for talent coaching at the senior level is feedback, which may be based on a combination of psychometric tests and various opinions collected informally from different stakeholders. As such, the content of the feedback questions the level of trust in the coaching relationship and the role of the coach in the tripartite coaching relationship.

Bespoke career path

Third, the participants often claimed that talent coaching aims to design a bespoke career plan in the organisation, which may be distinct for talented employees due to their personal skills, qualities, and ambition. For example, Carry claimed that the *'formula'* for career promotion was not pre-determined and needed to be '*tweaked'* with the help of a coach:

> *'You realise that the organisation doesn't necessarily have a structure for people who want to peddle faster, because it's a very case-by-case basis how people get to the next point'.* (Carry, T, A, 1)

Furthermore, she highlighted the role of coaching in developing political skills to *'game'* her way up the career ladder:

'I think it, oh god, I think it becomes critical to understand how to navigate; I call it the game. Some people call it politics, you know, but in certain institutions, there is a game that, you know, you kind of approach with the naiveness of, proportionately, what I give into work is what I will get back, and to become savvy about that'. (Carry, T, A, 1)

By contrast, some talent participants expressed frustration and cynicism regarding the typical career path suggested in the GlobalFinCorp leadership framework. For example, Nathalie claimed that the promises were not yet met by the organisation, using expressions such as *'it is a hard landing', 'there is no formula',* and *'it is not the formula on the website'* (Natalie, T, Multiple, 2). Despite organisational communication promoting a fast-track career progression for talented employees, some talent leaders expressed a need for individual support, such as coaching to develop political skills, which they perceive as prevalent for in-house career growth. Accordingly, talent coaching was often identified by talented employees as a useful personalised intervention for career planning and social capital enhancement.

Conversely, one executive talent participant (Amy, T, D, 2) and one external coach (Olivia, Ext. C, 1) claimed that talent coaching is not consistently conducive to career progression. Instead, they stressed that promotion may result from a combination of independent factors, such as employee turnover, change of organisational structure, and capacity of the talented employee to take on new responsibilities. In this way, career development at GlobalFinCorp was perceived as a complex and unpredictable process that depends not solely on the performance of talented employees, but more importantly on the economic context, employee turnover, and internal politics.

Therefore, the findings suggest that talent coaching plays a significant role in developing talented employees by providing a personalised learning experience and enhancing self-efficacy. In addition, talent coaching provides a time and cognitive space for feedback, reflection, and focus on career planning. Furthermore, it contributes to the development of the talented employees' political skills, which are viewed as essential for in-house career progression. However, due to various organisational and economic factors, talent coaching may not result in the career progression of talented employees. The following section focuses on the role of social capital for career progression at GlobalFinCorp.

6.2.3   Network development (SC1)

The study participants highlighted how talent coaching may contribute to extending social capital and enhancing the corporate network of talented employees.

Network extension for career progression

First, the participants often highlighted the prevalence of a corporate network in strategic locations, such as New York and London offices, for career progression. They often defined the two cities as career hubs for talented employees. Furthermore, they compared them to platforms giving access to hidden promotion opportunities. For example, Georges (Int. C, 1) reported that he advised his coachees seeking to progress from the D to MD level to expand their networks in London and New York offices:

> *'They needed to get out of that country and come to London and New York, and build their network a little bit more'. (Georges, Int. C, 1)*

This suggests that London and New York headquarters operate as career hubs and centres of influence for promotions and career growth. The extension of professional networks in London and New York was prevalent for talented employees due to the access to influential global senior managers, especially in the centralised structure of GlobalFinCorp. This view was also reinforced by the attractiveness of these two cities for highly educated people and entrepreneurs at the macro level, as suggested by a recent OECD study (Tuccio, 2019).

Second, most study participants viewed the extension of professional network as one of the most valuable outcomes of programme talent coaching. It seemed particularly important for emerging and transitioning talent leaders at the VP and D levels. Furthermore, Anne, who had recently transitioned from MD to CEO role, stressed the importance of her corporate network, also called the *'circle'*, for in-house career progression (Anne, T, D, 2).

Talent leader's development: from high performer to navigator of internal politics

Second, talent coaching supports leaders in developing their awareness and capacity to manage internal politics, sometimes compared to a corporate political *'game'* (Carry, T, A, 1). Political and social skills were identified as critical for leadership development and career progression by both coachees and coaches. For instance, Emma identified it as a key talent coaching topic:

> *'And we touched on topics that are critical as well to evolving in a corporate environment and the entire politics element, and how to approach … and how to approach mobility, how to make things happen, basically'. (Emma, T, A, 1)*

In addition, study participants often highlighted that the development of political and social skills though coaching varied according to the seniority level of the talented employee. At the junior level, coaching may support talented employees in developing interpersonal, political, and social skills

(Emma, T, A, 1; Eleonor, T, A–D, 1; Lucy, T, C, 1; Patricia, T, A, 1⁻2). At the senior level, the external coach is considered an expert in people dynamics in organisations, supporting leaders in understanding and managing them effectively (Oliver, T, B, 1; Paul, Ext. C, 1; Olivia, Ext. C). As such, the findings indicate that talent coaching supports leaders in their transformation from high potential to navigators of people dynamics in the organisation by developing their political, social, and interpersonal skills.

The coach as sponsor

Third, internal and external coaches may play an active role in the career progression of talented employees by acting as sponsors. At the junior and middle management levels, talented employees often refer to their internal coach as their *'sponsor, advocate, ambassador, mentor'* to increase their visibility and support their internal application to a talent scheme, a promotion or a new position:

> *'And that's where coaching comes in—either on understanding it or having the coach that will be your brand ambassador, or the mentor, or the sponsor. You name it. Here, I'm putting everything. So, basically, it's just … I'm quite sure that coaching helps in the positive politics that you need to evolve in any firm'. (Emma, T, A, 1)*

Senior business leaders acting as internal coaches are more prone to play a sponsoring role, as they typically hold positions of influence and authority, extensive knowledge, and experience of successful career promotion in the organisation. Specifically, Adam (HR, 1) explained that internal coaches in TM programmes often comprise highly senior managers whose role is to increase the visibility and career mobility of their coachee.

Some TM programmes formally separate the role of the coach from the sponsor. For instance, programme D presented originality in the fact that internal coaches were recruited to act specifically as sponsors for senior women bankers (Steve, HR, 1). By contrast, the role of external coaches in programme D was to prepare the talented women to hold career conversations with their sponsor/internal coach. When discussing programme D, Adam attempted to delineate the role of advocate for senior women leaders in the programme:

> *'It's not strictly a mentoring relationship, although you know, I think a bit of coaching and mentoring does happen. The role of the advocate is more, we designed it to focus really on increasing visibility, on expanding the women's network, on exposing different parts of the business to advocate and represent*

> *the women in talent mobility, talent development, conversations at the top of the*
> *house, so that's really what the role of the advocate is for'. (Adam, HR, 1)*

This suggests that internal coaches may play an active role in the career growth of senior talent leaders, and particularly in programme D, which is dedicated to senior women leaders. Notably, some talented employees highlighted that, in turn, they may reciprocally act as brand ambassadors for their internal coach:

> *'If you are positively impacted by a coach, you are the brand ambassador for him*
> *as well. Trust me; I know my coach'. (Emma, T, A, 1)*

This suggests that talent coaching may develop a reciprocal set of duties between the coach and the coachee, which is in line with the SET and psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995; Conway and Briner, 2005).

Surprisingly, external coaches may also act as internal sponsors for their coachee. The three external coaches interviewed stated that they have been working with GlobalFinCorp bankers on a long-term basis, including up to 20 years for Olivia (Ext. C, 1). They confirmed holding an extended network in the company and across the banking industry, which may position them as potential advocates and interpersonal connectors. They also reported that their network was particularly appreciated by talented employees seeking connection or advice on how to deal effectively with other GlobalFinCorp employees (Paul, Olivia, Ext. C, 1). Specifically, Paul (Ext. C, 1) referred to *'tactical coaching'* for career progression, which includes establishing networks, clarifying career objectives, and identifying an internal sponsor. This suggests that external coaches may refer to their corporate network at GlobalFinCorp for the benefit of their coachee.

Conversely, Eleonor, CEO, argued that, at highly senior levels, the role of the external coach may become redundant as a sponsor:

> *'I do think that, the more senior the employee becomes, the more important the*
> *network becomes, and the more trust there is within that kind of network, and*
> *frankly, I don't need somebody else. I know who to go to, and they would give me*
> *ultimately significantly more insider value than an external coach'. (Eleonor, T, A–*
> *D, 1)*

This suggests that, ultimately, the senior and executive leader's corporate network provides a form of informal support, which may overtake the contribution of external coaches as sponsors in TM programmes. As such, internal and external coaches may use their social capital and corporate

network to support the career progression of talented employees, either by sponsoring their coachee or by supporting them in developing their network and identifying key stakeholders. This suggests that talent coaching may require coaches to hold an extensive network and experience in the company (Paul, Ext. C. 2; Olivia. Ext. C, 1). This represents an unusual requirement for external coaches, which may question their independent position in relation to the funding organisation.

6.2.4   Mutual trust and affiliation (SC2)

According to the participants, successful talent coaching is based on long-term relationships, mutual trust, and positive affiliations. However, most TM programmes last between three and six months, which may hinder the relationship building between talented employees and their coach.

Long-term relationships

First, according to the study participants, a successful talent coaching relationship would typically translate into a long-term work alliance with internal and external coaches. For example, Eleonor (T, A–D, 1) recalled a rather positive talent coaching relationship that extended after the end of the official TM programme for approximately two years. She explained that a long-term engagement was pivotal in establishing trust with her external coach, resulting in coaching conversations being informed by a deep understanding of the context of both the individual and the company. Olivia and Paul, external coaches, corroborated Eleonor's account, as they both mentioned having long-term and ongoing coaching relationships with GlobalFinCorp senior leaders and executives. Furthermore, Paul explained that the long-term coaching relationship may be perceived as a signal of a successful talent coaching relationship for the coach:

> 'I think that you build up connections which are, like, sustainable over long periods of time (...). And, well, it's very rewarding for the coach because, I mean, you know that you've made an impact if somebody is thinking about you (...). And it's also nice when you get feedback'. (Paul, Ext. C, 1)

Moreover, Louisa (T, A, 1) explained that long-term coaching relationships were particularly valuable as her internal coach became a *'friend'*, attending similar meetings and sharing the same network. She emphasised her appreciation of an evolving relationship from structured, formal, short-term intervention as part of the talent programme into a more informal and *'relaxed'* relationship afterwards. This suggests that talent coaching relationships display some similarities with mentoring, which may extend in the long term. As such, long-term and open-ended talent coaching relationships are experienced as beneficial from the perspective of talent leaders and coaches. This finding is surprising, since coaching is commonly defined as a structured and time-bounded

relationship (Clutterbuck, Poulsen and Kochan, 2012). This suggests that programme talent coaching may provide a framework to develop the network of different stakeholders involved—namely, talented employees, HR managers, and internal and external coaches.

Trustworthy relationships

Second, the participants identified a series of critical events for coach–coachee relationship building, such as informal meetings during plenary TM sessions, chemistry sessions for senior and executive talent participants, and first coaching sessions. Trust was underlined as paramount across all groups of participants (Alan, T,C, 1; Anne, T, D, 1; Charlotte; HR, 1; Elizabeth; HR, 1 ; Eleonor, T, A–D, 1; Emma, T, A, 1; Patricia, A, 1; John, HR, 1; Adam, HR, 1). For instance, Charlotte (HR, 1) argued that talent coaching provides a confidential and '*safe place'* where trust is based on a common understanding of the business challenges:

> '*So, I think it makes them feel safe that, okay, I have this person that I can speak to. And this is a safe phone, and this is confidential'. (Charlotte, HR, 1)*

Furthermore, John (HR, 1) identified the capacity to establish trust as a key coaching skill:

> '*So, actually, as a coach, one of the things … one of the tensions you're always having to manage is, you know, what do I need to do to build this relationship with this individual? What do I need to do to appear credible—somebody that this individual thinks, you know, I can trust and have a relationship here. And that might mean meeting them with some content. Right? It might mean that. And, you know, I think, as the relationship gets established, over time, it shifts'. (John, HR, 1)*

According to John, internal coaches may establish trust by providing content and expertise first before evolving towards the exploration of more sensitive topics, including career plans, emotions, and leadership identity.

Similarly, trust and rapport were viewed as critical by external coaches (Olivia, Ext. C, 1-2, Paul, Ext. C, 1). A subtle account was offered by Paul, who commented on trust and confidentiality within the triangular relationship between coach–coachee–organisation. He acknowledged that trust is also constitutive of the relationship between the external coach and sponsoring organisation, but trust between coach and coachee prevails in the triangular coaching relationship:

> '*You basically have two clients, you know. One of my clients is GlobalFinCorp, but my primary client when I enter into a coaching, I think I have told you before, it's*

always the coachee, and I would never betray the confidence of a coachee to

their organisation'. (Paul, Ext. C, 2)

Overall, the study participants emphasised that trust is essential for a successful talent coaching relationship to provide a safe and confidential space to talented employees, which is in line with previous studies on coaching relationships in the organisation (Kim and Kuo, 2015; Cox, 2012).

Positive affiliation and construction of new work identity for future leaders

Third, talent coaching may develop a sense of belonging to the global talent community at GlobalFinCorp, especially at junior and middle management levels. Talented employees may view their affiliation with senior business leaders as a positive outcome of talent coaching. For instance, Emma explained that coaching partners may be associated in a positive way:

> *'On being identified by a senior person, on being [mapped] as well, I think*
> *coaching plays a massive role in that (...). When you have the chance to be*
> *associated with the right people, it's definitely … it definitely plays a massive role*
> *in making you move and having brand ambassadors, because that's what you*
> *need to navigate anyway'. (Emma, T, A, 1)*

Furthermore, Emma highlighted that both internal coaches and coachees may benefit from the talent coaching partnership for reciprocal corporate reputation building:

> *'If you are positively impacted by a coach, you are the brand ambassador for him*
> *as well. Trust me; I know my coach'. (Emma, T, A, 1)*

This suggests that talent coaching may contribute to extending the social capital and visibility of both talented employees and internal coaches, which is in line with SET (Cook *et al.*, 2013). As such, a social dimension to coaching seems to emerge from the findings, although coaching is primarily designated as a dyadic activity in TM programmes.

In addition, talent leaders reported that they were invited to reflect on their employee relationship during the programme talent coaching sessions. One topic for talent coaching seems to focus on the modified obligations and expectations forming the psychological contract of the talented employee. For instance, participants across all groups revealed that GlobalFinCorp expects talented leaders to use coaching as a managerial approach and to become leader-coaches in future TM programmes (Alan, T, C, 1; Elizabeth, HR, 1; Charles, Int. C, 2; Olivia, Ext. C, 2). As highlighted by Elizabeth, *'It's expected leaders, for example, to act sometimes as a coach for the team'*. Additionally, Charles considered that *'there's many things that can make a good coach that can also make a good leader'*.

This suggests that talent coaching may signal coaching as an expected behaviour for future leaders at GlobalFinCorp.

Therefore, talent coaching may provide a framework for building mutually beneficial relationships between coach and coachee, and personal branding based on long-term and trustworthy relationships. Furthermore, the talent coaching relationship may bring to light some additional duties and expectations related to the talent status and invite the talented employees to forge a new work identity as global leaders and to reflect on their relationship with the organisation. This suggests that talent coaching may play a role in modifying the psychological contract between talented employees and the organisation.

Summary

Programme talent coaching is often perceived as a developmental dialogic approach exclusive to employees designated as talent in the company. According to the study participants, talent coaching primarily contributes to the development of talented employees' human and social capital.

First, from a human capital development perspective, the findings suggest that programme talent coaching contributes to reinforcing the talent leaders' learning and enhancing their confidence and self-efficacy. It may also support the design of a bespoke career plan and a personalised action plan by providing talented employees time and space for guided personal reflection.

Second, programme talent coaching appears to contribute to broadening talented employees' social capital. Talent coaching is typically delivered by internal and external coaches who are well-connected in the organisation and possess comprehensive experience in the banking sector. As such, talented employees benefit from the talent coaching relationship by extending their professional network and learning how to navigate internal politics. From an internal coach perspective, talent coaching seems to positively rebrand their corporate image. However, the role of external coach as internal sponsor may raise questions regarding their independent position within the triangular coaching relationship.

Accordingly, coaching as TM practice seems to entail a long-term and trustworthy work alliance characterised by positive mutual benefits for both coaching partners. Once the trust and rapport are established, talent coaching provides the space and time to reflect on career planning and to construct a new work identity as talent leader, which entails a new set of mutual obligations and expectations between the talented employee and the organisation as part of the psychological contract.

Although all study participants acknowledged coaching's contribution to developing talented employees' human and social capital, they also highlighted a number of flaws related to its implementation: the need for long-term coaching relationships to build the trust; the multiple roles of internal and external coaches, suggesting a risk of confidentiality breach; and an over-reliance on coaching for talent development and career progression. The following section focuses on the emergence of a rhetoric of coaching as a TM practice.

6.3   THE RHETORIC OF TALENT COACHING

This section extends the examination of the individual dimension of coaching as a TM practice with the emergence of a rhetoric of talent coaching. This section is composed of four sub-themes. First, talent coaching as a sign of high status in the organisation is explored. Second, the ambivalence of coaching as a managerial task and leadership approach is explained. Third, positive and negative reactions towards coaching that may emerge from the talent coaching relationship are investigated. Fourth, talent coaching's dependence on the discretionary behaviour of internal coaches, which hinders its adoption as an institutionalised and sustainable TM practice, is explored.

6.3.1   Symbol of high status

The findings revealed that talent leaders perceive programme talent coaching as a symbol of high status within the organisation. However, the significance of talent coaching is closely related to the impermanent status of these talented employees, suggesting that talent coaching may be perceived as an enactment of the talent status, but only as long as this status may last. This is apparent through the sub-themes that follow.

Reward mechanism and recognition

First, talented employees across various seniority levels (Alan, T, C, 1; Emma, T, A, 1; Eleonor, T, A–D, 1; Oliver, T, B, 2) perceived programme talent coaching as a reward and a recognition of exceptional high performance. For instance, Alan (T, C, 1) and Nathalie (T, multiple, 2) recalled external and internal coaches emphasising the exclusivity of TM programmes and the unique opportunity to develop as future global leaders provided by GlobalFinCorp.

In addition, talent leaders and HR managers often claimed that coaching was an expensive developmental practice and subsequently perceived it as an organisational investment in talented employees. For instance, Eleonor included talent coaching in *'those little bits and pieces [that] add to the pot'* (T, A–D, 1), using a metaphor for coaching as an element of the remuneration package at GlobalFinCorp. This suggests that talent coaching may be perceived as a component of the remuneration and benefits package. Furthermore, when asked about the meaning of coaching

within a TM programme, Eleonor noted that talent coaching can be seen as a reward in addition to existing pay and benefits mechanisms:

> 'First of all, I think there is some degree of appreciation, you know the company cares (…) so they are looking at what additional resources that they can offer me as an individual. So, (…) you feel a little bit of love, that they care about you, and they want to spend time and money on you; and so, that you're kind of not completely unnoticed, (…) we are being recognised or rewarded'. (T, A–D, 1)

As such, talent coaching appears to be a relational non-financial reward for talented employees and, as such, is often experienced as a gratifying experience. This was confirmed by other talented employees who associated talent coaching with rewards, especially when the TM programme benefited from a positive internal reputation (Emma, T, A, 1).

Conversely, Steve (HR, 1) did not consider coaching as a reward mechanism in the organisation:

> 'Coaching is not a reward, but its benefits are the reward they (leaders) get'.
> (Steve, HR, 1)

As such, from an HR perspective, rewards for talented employees may result from the positive outcomes of the coaching relationship more than the provision of the coaching intervention itself.

Nevertheless, talent coaching was seen as an exclusive TM practice supporting the workforce segmentation and a discreet investment in talented employees' development. This is due to the direct and indirect costs associated with talent coaching in the organisation.

Enactment of talent status

Second, programme talent coaching was often considered by talent leaders as an exclusive and differentiating intervention. Being coached represented a sign of high status in the organisation. This is coherent with the talent-designation process and the subsequent invitation to join a TM programme, including an individual coaching element at GlobalFinCorp (chapter five). Specifically, employee segmentation between talented and non-talented employees was signalled by the allocation of a personal coach. The employee segmentation is further reinforced by the allocation of external coaches to senior leaders and executives. This is due a higher degree of interest for the leadership development of talented employees at senior or executive levels, according to HR managers (John, HR, 1; Adam, HR, 1). From an organisational perspective, the direct cost of coaching delivered by an external coach can be justified by an expected disproportioned contribution to the organisation's success by the senior talent leader. From an individual perspective, the perceived

exclusivity of the talent status is signalled by the allocation of an individual coach. Senior talent leaders may feel *'hand-picked'* (Charlotte, HR, 1) by the organisation. Furthermore, Anne (T and Int. C, D, 1) claimed that talented employees saw the allocation of external coaching as more rewarding, since it is perceived as a more exclusive intervention. This was confirmed by Paul (Ext. C, 1), Catherine (Ext. C, 1), and Georges (Int. C, 1), who identified external coaching as the prerogative of top talent and senior executive leaders. Moreover, Carry (T, A, 1) claimed that talent coaching represents a rather '*luxurious*' intervention offered exclusively to the high-potential employees in the organisation. Therefore, talent coaching signals the talent status of talented employees.

Conversely, participants insisted that coaching is not an approach that can meet all needs and expectations. This view was unanimously claimed across the participants, including external coaches (Paul, Ext. C, 1) and HR managers:

> *'Coaching is not a panacea for all our management capability or management leadership development'. (Adam, HR, 1)*

> *'I don't think coaching is necessarily the right intervention for everybody. Just because you're on a leadership development programme doesn't mean you need or want coaching'. (Paul, Ext. C, 1)*

Consequently, talent coaching was operationalised and experienced as a talent segmentation intervention. Differences of seniority level within the talent pool were reflected in the coaching matching process, whereby internal coaches were allocated to junior and middle managers, whereas external coaches were the preserve of talented employees at the most senior and executive levels. However, as suggested by Amy (T, D, 2), *'There's no such thing as infinite resources'*, as discussed further in the following chapter. Therefore, talent leaders tend to see programme talent coaching as an enactment of their talent status, particularly for those talented employees at the most senior and executive levels who are allocated an external coach.

Rite of passage

Third, talent coaching may be experienced as a sign of achievement and career progression by some talented employees. Oliver suggested that the significance of talent coaching can be compared to a rite of passage. He further explained that talent designation may be compared to a mechanism acknowledging the transition of leaders towards further responsibilities, typically from director to MD level at GlobalFinCorp:

> *'I use it more as a kind of a ritual thing and as an acknowledgement as manager'.*
>
> *(Oliver, T, B, 2)*

Beyond this, Oliver explained that coaching may signal that a talented employee has significantly progressed on the career ladder, and therefore, is *'worth further investment'* from an organisational perspective. As such, talent coaching symbolises the transition of a talented employee towards greater managerial responsibilities.

In sum, the findings suggest that talent coaching enacts the talent status by providing a differentiated opportunity for personal support, a symbol of high status, and a reward recognising high performance and managerial capability. Additionally, talent coaching can be viewed as a rite of passage for talented employees' transition from middle to senior management roles in the organisation. However, the impermanence of the talent status, combined with the limited number of coaching sessions in TM programmes, may result in cynicism for some (Sarah, T, A, 1; Oliver, T, B, 1; Nathalie, T, multiple, 2). The following section explores the coaching discourse that frames coaching as a managerial task as opposed to a leadership skill.

6.3.2   Way of doing *vs* being

The findings indicate that programme talent coaching is often perceived as a managerial task (doing) as opposed to a leadership approach employed in daily conversations (being). This section discusses the ambivalence of talent coaching perceived by the study participants.

Talent coaching as an ill-defined practice

First, the talent coaching discourse at GlobalFinCorp is marked by uncertainty surrounding the definition and the boundaries of coaching. Most participants could not clearly articulate the difference between coaching and mentoring, and often emphasised the overlap between these two approaches:

> *'I think that's different from mentoring, sorry, from coaching, (...) I am not sure,*
> *is there a difference between coaching and mentoring?' (Oliver, T, B, 1)*

Despite being ill-defined in practice, coaching often held a positive reputation, especially amongst senior talent leaders at GlobalFinCorp. For example, when Oliver was invited to join the TM programme B by his line manager, he recalled the following:

> *'I thought that was the most interesting proposition, because I hear a lot about*
> *coaching all the time'. (Oliver, T, B, 1)*

Furthermore, during his second interview, he reflected on the necessity to develop coaching as an evidence-based practice underpinned by a theoretical framework to help define its nature, scope, and purpose. By contrast, Patricia insisted on the qualifications and training as a determinant characteristic of coaching:

> 'I think the problem with some coaching stuff is I don't understand the underlying theory'. (Oliver, T, B, 1)

> 'So, I'm a mentor slash … I think I'm a mentor. I don't really know the differences between a mentor and a coach. I think coach would probably have to be a bit more qualified than a mentor just in terms of coaching … well, I don't know'. (Patricia, T, A, 1)

However, some study participants made a clear distinction between a normative and prescriptive definition of coaching '*by the book'* and the actual practice in TM programmes (Emma, T, A, 1). Furthermore, some HR managers contrasted coaching with '*a capital C'* and quality conversations between manager and direct reports:

> 'What we can do, though, is encourage our managers and our leaders to have coaching style conversations. You know? I'm not expecting them to be a coach with a big, capital C; I am inviting them into a different quality of conversation'. (John, HR, 1)

This suggests that internal coaching may be perceived as a sub-activity in contrast with external coaching. As a result, some participants revealed feeling unsettled and confused regarding their practice and experiences of coaching at GlobalFinCorp. The term 'coaching' was often used interchangeably with mentoring, and both were applied in the context of daily conversations between line managers and their counterparts:

> 'It doesn't … It didn't feel as coaching, because my definition of coaching may be wrong. My definition of coaching is having an issue. The thing is, specifically. So that's how maybe I'm [unclear], and I go by the book'. (Emma, T, A, 1)

This was confirmed by Catherine (HR, 1): *'Everybody's got different theories about coaching'* in practice. In this way, talent coaching was perceived as an ill-defined intervention, often used as a label for a one-to-one conversation between a senior manager and talented employee, or between a line manager and direct reports.

Talent coaching as a managerial task: a way of doing

Second, the findings indicate that talent coaching was often perceived as a managerial task incumbent to HR managers and business leaders. As mentioned previously, programme talent coaching was seen as a costly learning intervention. The participants often argued that its cost is frequently associated with the concept of investment made by the organisation in a talented employee. For instance, the node recorded on the Nvivo codebook for *'cost and investment'* counts 53 references, with almost all participants referring to these topics in the interviews. This indicates that this theme was consistent and relevant for all group participants. From an individual perspective, since external talent coaching incurs a tangible cost for the organisation, it can be compared to a direct investment in the development of talented employees, as highlighted by Eleonor:

> *'They want to spend time and money on you, and so that you're kind of not completely unnoticed'. (Eleonor, T, A–D, 1)*

From an organisational perspective, the purpose of the investment in talent coaching is typically to develop the talent leader in the perspective of enhanced engagement and performance. This implies that the organisation may expect a return on investment from TM activities, which are viewed as particularly difficult to measure according to HR managers and Charles (Int. C, 2).

In addition, talent coaching was often perceived as a time-consuming activity, especially for internal coaches who are either HR managers or senior business leaders, typically at the MD level:

> *'I think the only thing is, on the coaching, is that we have to try and find the time to do the coaching'. (Anne, T, D, 1)*

As a result, talent coaching may be perceived as an additional managerial task for senior business leader (Oliver, T, B, 2).

Moreover, talent coaching at GlobalFinCorp is not rewarded as a managerial activity despite being clearly promoted in the company leadership standards (chapter five). Notably, Steve (HR, 1) deplored the absence of formal mechanisms for recognising and rewarding coaching undertaken by senior managers. As such, programme talent coaching may be viewed as a supplementary managerial task expected from HR managers and senior business leaders. Combined with limited internal resources and various coaching capabilities, this may generate a rhetoric of coaching as a 'white elephant', whereby talent coaching represents a corporate scheme particularly complex to operate, generating uncertain and limited benefits.

Talent coaching as a leadership skill: a way of being

Third, from an HR perspective, the aim of talent coaching is to *'broaden the leadership repertoire of leaders'* so as to enable GlobalFinCorp leaders to hold better quality conversations with their direct reports and teams (John, HR, 1). Coaching is thus promoted amongst senior business leaders and talented employees as a leadership capability (Charlotte, Steve, John, HR, 1). This was confirmed by senior leader-coaches (Georges, Int. C. 1; Charles, Int. C, 2), both of whom presented coaching as a key leadership skill:

> *'There are opportunities for individual coaching, transitional-type coaching, but then, eventually, you get to the point where, whether you are a manager of others or you are a leader of a virtual organisation, you need to start to understand that leadership is about the way you bring excellence in others'.*
> *(Charles, Int. C, 2)*

Furthermore, Charles highlighted that leaders may develop coaching skills by practicing them on the job and teaching others how to coach:

> *'I think there's many things that can make a good coach that can also make a good leader. The best way to learn that, the best way to learn anything, is to try and teach it. So, trying to get some of our leaders to coach others is a way for them to take on and practice, so we absolutely encourage that'. (Int. C, 2)*

Therefore, the role of leader as coach is viewed as an integral part of leadership at GlobalFinCorp. This was confirmed by HR managers (Adam, Steve, HR, 1):

> *'I feel that coaching is a key component of manager or leader or executive capability, and being able to coach your direct reports, to coach your peer group, and actually even to coach up, is a key—a key element'. (Steve, HR, 1)*

Notably, senior leaders and HR managers often proposed a holistic definition of coaching as leadership approach, which seems to be expected by the organisation:

> *'I have multiple roles, and I am seen as someone who can influence the organisation widely, and that influence only grows as I do two things: one is I act as an internal coach for others. I try to integrate the way of being when you are coaching people into my leadership style. I don't mind using that sort of word; it is more of a way of being in the workplace rather than an affectation that you create'. (Charles, Int. C, 2)*

Furthermore, Georges suggested that a large part in the role of senior managers is to manage talented employees, and that this implies coaching:

> '*I think the seniors definitely get that there's ... a large amount of their role is talent management—is coaching'. (Georges, Int. C, 1)*

In sum, the findings suggest that coaching is regarded as a core leadership skill and activity that senior business leaders and talented employees should utilise to broaden their leadership repertoire and hold better quality conversations with their direct reports. Despite being seen as a managerial task by some study participants, talent coaching was also recognised as a way of being by HR managers and by some senior business leader-coaches acting as coaching champions in the organisation:

> '*So, there is that organic view of, over time, building that [coaching] skill into your leadership, but for me, it's more of a way of being within the workplace'. (Charles, Int. C, 2)*

As such, the study participants revealed two opposite perceptions of talent coaching. On the one hand, talent coaching was seen as a managerial task for senior leaders, although it was not recognised formally by the organisation. By contrast, talent coaching was viewed as a leadership approach expected by the organisation. This ambivalence in talent coaching generated confusion and cognitive dissonance for senior business leaders, who thus refrained from engaging in coaching relationships with talented employees.

6.3.3 Expectations *vs* experience of talent coaching

The study participants highlighted another form of duality in talent coaching whereby expectations may contrast with the actual experience of coaching. This section discusses the experience of programme talent coaching, which may or may not match the expectations of talented employees. It explores three sub-themes emerging from the thematic analysis—namely, readiness for coaching, expectations, and reactions to talent coaching.

Readiness for coaching

Readiness for coaching is commonly defined as the factors that predispose a coachee to engage in a coaching relationship. It often refers to the coachee's level of preparation mediating their capacity to engage in the coaching relationship and, as such, has been characterised as a multi-layered and complex concept (Kretzschmar, 2010). In this study, some talented employees admitted that they possessed no or limited previous experience with coaching. Conversely, it was expected that talent

leaders at the MD level would have been exposed to coaching prior to the TM programme in the form of managerial coaching or as part of another TM programme (Steve, John, HR, 1).

Some talented employees identified that the talent-designation process triggered mixed feelings towards coaching. For instance, Carry felt apprehensive when she received the invitation email to the TM programme comprising coaching:

> *'I was happy to do a programme; I was just apprehensive what the objective of this one would be perhaps, but I did want some level of guidance, because I could feel some invisible barriers from a soft skill perspective that I wanted to work on, and a one-on-one coaching thing I had tried in Dublin while I was there, and that didn't really go very far'. (Carry, T, A, 1)*

In this case, her unsuccessful past experience of coaching, combined with her lack of information regarding the objectives of the TM programme, led her to doubt the purpose of the talent coaching intervention. Although the email invitation described it as a particularly selective programme for talented employees, Carry felt insecure and suspicious of an underlying remedial performance management purpose. Her concern about ambiguous internal communication on talent coaching resonates with Charlotte's account (HR, 1):

> *'Some people don't really know what the coach is there for. And I think, as an organisation, we're kind of learning to be more explicit and to repeat those communications again and again so that people would know exactly what is the objective behind having coaches there with them'. (Charlotte, HR, 1)*

As such, information asymmetry and communication channels adopted by GlobalFinCorp when inviting talented employees to TM programmes may create suspicions and uncertainty concerning the programme's actual objectives and, subsequently, the embedded coaching element. This is in line with recent studies exploring how organisations communicate talent status and how this may influence talented employees' perceptions (Sumelius, Smale and Yamao, 2020; Björkman *et al.*, 2013; Ehrnrooth *et al.*, 2018). Accordingly, information asymmetry appears to negatively influence talented employees' readiness for coaching and can even generate resistance towards talent coaching.

In addition, the cultural diversity characterising the EMEA region may pre-dispose coachees and coaches to various coaching practices. For example, Lucy explained that talented employees from different cultural backgrounds may hold different views on coaching:

> *'I think Romanians are more open because, in general—I'm also Romanian—we*
> *are attracted about new ideas and new stuff. So, for example, Romanians will,*
> *and especially the young ones, will give it a chance (...). On the other side,*
> *Hungarians, I think they are not so open. And I find Czechs being, in general,*
> *being a little bit more cynical about these concepts'. (Lucy, T, A, 1)*

Moreover, attitudes towards coaching and commitment to engage in the process may influence the future coaching relationship. For example, some coachees viewed coaching as a '*magic wand*' (Eleonor, T, A–D, 1) or expected the coach to act on their behalf in the organisation (Elizabeth, HR, 1). The passive attitudes of some talented leaders might be due to a disbelief in coaching as a short-term intervention within a TM programme, as highlighted by John:

> *'It's about readiness; it's about expectations; it's about knowing that, you know,*
> *this is a very discreet, targeted coaching intervention, and not an ongoing*
> *relationship, although they may spin out into ongoing relationships'. (John, HR, 1)*

Therefore, talent leaders may be predisposed differently regarding a coaching relationship. However, the participants often emphasised readiness for coaching as a key element for a successful coaching relationship (Louisa, T, A, 1; Sarah, T, A, 1; Steve, HR, 1; Georges, Int. C. 1; Olivia, Ext. C, 1). For instance, Georges stated the following:

> *'Coaching is not for everybody. But the people who will go to coaching sessions*
> *with an open mindset are the people I think eventually go into the big leadership*
> *roles'. (Georges, Int. C, 1)*

Previous positive experiences of coaching and personal predispositions, such as openness, may contribute to a successful coaching relationship (Mackie, 2015; McKenna and Davis, 2009; Kretzschmar, 2010). This indicates that, when organisations invest in coaching, even during the short length of TM programmes, creating the right impressions and expectations could be pivotal for enhanced returns in people engagement and development.

Expectations of talent leaders

The participants' accounts revealed considerable disparity in expectations regarding programme talent coaching. Some talent leaders held low expectations (Eleonor, T, A–D, 1; Carry, T, A, 1), which were reiterated by external coaches (Catherine, Olivia, Ext. C, 1). For instance, Eleonor mentioned that she did not know what to expect, whereas Carry expected a group workshop, including psychometric exercises. The low expectations expressed by some talent participants may be due to limited knowledge on coaching and/or unsuccessful previous experiences of coaching.

By contrast, some talent leaders may bring high expectations to the talent coaching sessions, which are considered unrealistic by coaches, considering the limited number of sessions provided as part of the TM programme. Some talented employees expected their coach to solve their issues at work or tell them what to do to climb the career ladder at GlobalFinCorp (Catherine, Ext. C, 1; Charlotte, HR, 1; Georges, Int. C, 1). For example, Catherine reflected on some of the unrealistic expectations of some talent leaders:

> 'Sometimes, they expect a magic wand (...). That you can produce and raise level awareness and problems (...). Sometimes, their expectations are very low. If they have had poor experiences in the past of coaching, then they may not be expecting very much'. (Catherine, Ext. C., 1)

However, most talent leaders expected coaching to focus on enhancing leadership skills, pursuing their next promotion, or transitioning between two roles (Patricia, T, A, 1; Georges, Int. C, 1). Notably, John (HR, 1) acknowledged that talented employees are initially seeking advice and expertise during programme talent coaching sessions. According to him, it is only after the end of the TM programme that leaders at the senior level start looking for a '*thinking partner rather than a technical expert*' (John, HR, 1). This echoes the view that junior and middle management level talented employees may expect a mentoring relationship instead of coaching as part of a TM programme.

In addition, the coach and coachee's expectations of what a talent coaching intervention entails may not align. Specifically, Elisabeth (HR, 1) commented on this asymmetry, explaining that some talented employees desired a directive coach focused on providing advice, technical skills, and network links, whereas the coaches perceived their role as non-directive. The variability and asymmetry of talent leaders' expectations may be explained by the conflicting views on the boundaries and purpose of talent coaching in practice, as discussed previously (section 6.1). When two views on talent coaching collide, a re-negotiation of mutual expectations ideally occurs between the talent leader and the coach (Paul, Ext. C, 1). However, when the coaching relationship does not evolve to meet the talent leader's specific needs, this may lead to a sense of deception and frustration (Carry, T, A, 1; Catherine, Ext. C, 1). Following the examination of the talent leaders' expectations, the next section examines the talent leaders' range of reactions regarding programme talent coaching.

Positive and negative reactions

In this third sub-theme, the study participants expressed various reactions towards talent coaching.

Although they widely acknowledged the benefits of coaching, some expressed considerable doubts and even reluctance regarding its added value for leadership development and career progression at GlobalFinCorp.

Some positive reactions to programme talent coaching included the learning achieved, such as Alan's account of experiencing coaching as part of programme C:

> *'We spent two, three hours [unclear] during these two meetings. And then, I learned a lot. I experienced a lot because, as I mentioned, I was surprised that that person is not giving me a statement or, you know, just clear direction for what I should do, but she asked me, you know, very, very good, open questions. So, this, as I mentioned, coaching, for sure, in my experience and in this particular situation, was very, very successful'. (Alan, T, C, 1)*

In addition, Oliver recalled the enthusiastic reaction of fellow participants in programme B while sharing his more neutral evaluation of coaching, which he described as a '*very nice chat'*:

> *'I think the enthusiasm for the coaching was amazing, amazing. They really felt, I think, it had touched them; they were deeply appreciative of the time we had. I remember it was a very pleasant chat because this, my colleague here [name], had gone on another coaching; it was kind of fun to see what coaching was'. (Oliver, T, B, 1)*

By contrast, some talented employees questioned the benefits of programme talent coaching due to a lack of clarity regarding its purpose and an asymmetry between expectations and the actual experience:

> *'I think that distinction if it (is) more clear and upfront communications about the programmes, that would help, because the perception is driven off of your expectation if your expectation is not aligned; then yes, but as what it is, it's delivered well, and there is a time and a place for it, yes'. (Carry, T, A, 1).*

In addition, some interviewees expressed frustration and disappointment related to TM and specifically the lack of subsequent career development opportunities (Nathalie, T, Multiple, 2; Lucy, T, C, 1). Some talent leaders viewed the TM system and practices (including coaching) with cynicism and considered them ineffective in fulfilling the promises made to talent leaders. For example, Nathalie referred to a *'hard-landing'* after golden promises of fast-tracked career perspectives in the company (T, Multiple, 2).

Moreover, Sarah expressed frustration when her coach did not engage in the coaching process:

> 'So, I met him once and had a telephone conversation, and I didn't find I was
> getting any benefit from that, so, and he wasn't an active participant, shall we
> say (...). Slow to respond to meeting invites. On the occasion I met him, I didn't
> gain any benefit from it. I don't think he was clued up about the course; he hadn't
> been told about it; he didn't know anything about it. So, I don't feel I had any
> benefit from a coach'. (Sarah, T, A, 1)

Therefore, programme talent coaching may not be systematically beneficial, especially at the junior level, when talent coaching is delivered internally. This may be due to the limited internal coaching capacity and capability, as suggested by Steve (HR, 1). In turn, this may contribute to creating a negative reputation for coaching in general in the organisation. For instance, Oliver (T, B, 2) reflected on his role as leader-coach and, despite referring his direct reports to coaching, expressed scepticism about coaching:

> 'No. I'm not sure, well, so honestly, like, I think if I suggested then to help them,
> they should get a coach. I think they would roll their eyes'.

Furthermore, when asked about his perception of coaching in the organisation, he replied as follows:

> 'In the organisation. I mean, it's not positive. It's not positive. Maybe because I
> haven't experienced it (...). Yes, I don't want to poo poo coaching, but I don't
> know'. (Oliver, T, B, 2)

As can be seen, a wide range of contrasting attitudes towards talent coaching were expressed by the study participants. This may be due to a combination of factors, including the diversity of developmental needs across various seniority levels, career objectives, expectations, readiness for coaching, and the type of coaching provided—internal or external—as part of the TM programmes. However, the variability in talent leaders' experiences may feed an ambiguous reputation of talent coaching in the organisation, ultimately damaging the reputation of TM and coaching.

6.3.4   Altruism and discretionary behaviour

According to the participants, the operationalisation of talent coaching is seen as particularly challenging due to the variability of coaching capacity combined with a lack of institutionalisation of TM programmes at GlobalFinCorp. Another factor may be that programme talent coaching tends to rely on the good will of internal coaches.

Variability of the quality of coaching

First, HR managers often highlighted the quality of talent coaching provided in EMEA compared to other geographical regions:

> '[In EMEA], we are really focused on high-quality coaching experiences, and coaching almost in a more pure coaching. We worked [to think] about the spectrum of interpretations of coaching. We would be more toward the more open ended, you know, reflective actions. Coach as the holder of the process versus leader, owner of the process and content. So not a coach as the expert'. (Adam, HR, 1)

Furthermore, Adam highlighted the importance of financial investment in coaching at the organisational level:

> 'I think, when you get to more senior levels where there's higher investment in the quality of coaching, especially in regions or areas that put a greater importance on coaching and higher investment, such as EMEA, then you can see the impact and the shift'. (Adam, HR, 1)

However, the high variability in the quality of talent coaching seems to be a concern, especially for the internal coaching provision (Adam, John, HR, 1). Human resource managers claimed that ensuring a similar quality of coaching across TM programmes, seniority levels, and countries represents a major challenge. They claimed that the quality of coaching provision is not homogeneous across EMEA. This may be due to the lack of a shared definition of talent coaching as a TM practice at GlobalFinCorp. Additionally, this may be explained by the reliance on internal talent coaching and on the personal interest, availability, and commitment that the internal coaches are willing to engage in to coach talented employees.

Discretionary behaviour

Second, talent coaching was often perceived as an altruistic activity offered by internal coaches, particularly by MDs and senior HR managers. Human resource managers were typically expected to intervene as coaches in TM programmes as part of their HR function (Steve, HR, 1; Amy, T, D, 1; Charles, Int. C, 2). However, when asked about how senior business leaders combine their business activities with coaching talented employees in TM programmes, Steve expressed some perplexity:

> 'So then, when people are passionate about it, and they are willing to give up some time, but it's in business hours. How they manage their time, I don't know. I

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> *know that I am quite lucky in that this is part of my, this is part of my, part of my*
>
> *job (...). HR people expect coaching to be part of your job'. (Steve, HR, 1)*

This suggests that programme talent coaching may be perceived as a discretionary behaviour from the perspective of internal coaches. This represented a matter of concern for Steve (HR, 1), who deplored the lack of formal recognition or reward for talent coaching as a key leadership skill of senior business leaders:

> *'If the business wants to recognise coaching as a key capability, then that's*
>
> *something that we should potentially look at'. (Steve, HR, 1)*

Therefore, although positioned as a key leadership skill in the GlobalFinCorp leadership framework, talent coaching delivered by internal coaches was not formally rewarded and received limited recognition, as confirmed by Anne:

> *'Truthfully, I don't think the organisation actually does recognise it (...). Truthfully*
>
> *(...). I mean, we do it because it's altruistic to a certain extent (...) but I don't think*
>
> *there's any reward or recognition for it'. (Anne, T and Int. C, D, 1)*

In addition, talent coaching was often perceived as a transient HR intervention that was subject to variations due to the global economic context and company profits. For instance, referring to hardship during the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis and the multiple ongoing restructuring in the company, Georges (Int. C, 1) suggested that internal coaches retracted from coaching others: *'On a battlefield, nobody's doing any coaching'*.

Although perceived as beneficial for people and the organisation, external coaching was suspended during economic downtimes due to cost restrictions, as highlighted by external coaches (Olivia, Catherine, Paul, Ext. C, 1). Moreover, talent coaching was often perceived as time-consuming, expensive, and difficult to evaluate, as previously discussed. The personal commitment and time required by internal coaches to coach talented employees led to question the sustainability of talent coaching as a TM practice (Steve, HR, 1). This further raises questions concerning the drivers for talent coaching in organisations. Finally, the lack of institutionalisation, combined with a lack of transparency of TM processes and transience of TM programmes, may damage the internal reputation of TM practices. Furthermore, this seems to dilute the talented employees' view of the attractiveness of TM schemes (Natalie, T, multiple, 2). In sum, programme talent coaching may not be perceived as a stable and institutionalised intervention at GlobalFinCorp. In turn, this may trigger some scepticism from talented employees regarding its actual contribution as a TM practice.

6.4   KEY POINTS ON FINDINGS – PART 2

This chapter has argued that talent coaching plays a significant role in developing the human and social capital of talented employees by providing an individualised and bespoke learning experience, as well as by providing access to a network of senior managers and executives in the case company. This is particularly relevant for junior and growing leaders who otherwise might not be able to reach top managers in this large and hierarchical global firm. The personalised approach in talent coaching was perceived as critical by study participants. Talent coaching is deployed to help talented employees define a bespoke career path and to allow them to reflect on their identity, role, and position in the firm.

Second, the embeddedness of coaching in TM programmes led to the emergence of a coaching rhetoric at GlobalFinCorp. Without a shared definition of coaching, talented employees, HR managers, and coaches often perceived programme talent coaching as a sub-coaching practice, as highlighted by expressions such as *'small c'* coaching, *'not pure coaching'*, and *'it's not coaching'* used by some participants. This suggests that talent coaching takes the form of a blended practice, including mentoring, sponsoring, instructional coaching, and occasionally counselling approaches. Accordingly, talent coaching was often viewed as a hybrid practice aiming to develop better quality conversations in the organisation and to broaden the leadership repertoire of business leaders.

Third, this single case study is set in a large global firm in the financial services and banking sector which adopted an exclusive philosophy of TM. In this context, talent coaching was perceived as a symbol of high status and a materialisation of talent status in the organisation. It was further experienced as a rite of passage, especially by leaders transitioning from the D to MD level, where managerial responsibilities increase. Subsequently, the talent status becomes meaningful following the allocation of a coach. For some talented employees who sought a fast-track career, talent coaching may induce high expectations in terms of career opportunities, network, and leadership development from the organisation. However, such expectations were not always fulfilled, potentially leading to negative reactions towards coaching, including disappointment and frustration, along with a risk of subsequent psychological contract breach.

Fourth, talent coaching was often seemingly imposed on talented employees in TM programmes. This may trigger some resistance towards coaching interventions and impede a successful coaching relationship. From the perspective of internal coaches and talent leaders, talent coaching can be seen as a managerial task undertaken to comply with the TM policies. By contrast, talent coaching can also be viewed as a desired leadership approach, as promoted by the organisation's leadership

standards framework. Therefore, coaching is deployed with talented employees to initiate upskilling and enhance the leadership portfolio of leaders at GlobalFinCorp.

Finally, the rhetoric of talent coaching appears marked by the concept of investment made by the organisation regarding individuals. Programme talent coaching was often considered an expensive and impermanent intervention that fluctuates according to economic cycles and funding availability. Consequently, programme talent coaching might be perceived as an unsustainable indulgence for talent elite. However, talent coaching was also promoted internally by HR managers and senior business leaders, who acted as coaching champions in the organisation. Despite a wide interest and enthusiasm for coaching across all groups of participants, the driving force for coaching others internally was often questioned. Participants queried how MDs can find the time to coach talented employees without any formal recognition and reward mechanism. This remained an unresolved question for the participants. Consequently, they often viewed talent coaching as a discretionary behaviour and an altruistic activity undertaken by the most committed senior business leaders. Additionally, HR managers were often expected to coach talented employees as part of their people's development role in the organisation.

This chapter has highlighted that programme talent coaching is perceived as an ambivalent practice that can result in positive and negative effects for talented employees. Following the analysis of themes and patterns emerging from an individual perspective, the following chapter focuses on the findings at the organisational level.

CHAPTER 7: THE ROLE OF TALENT COACHING AT THE ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL – FINDINGS PART 3

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on examining the themes emerging from the data with regards to the impact of talent coaching at the individual level. In turn, this chapter examines the role of talent coaching at the organisational level. This chapter is divided in two sections. The first section draws upon the accounts of the study participants, who considered talent coaching as a pivotal intervention for developing a coaching culture at GlobalFinCorp. The second part focuses on how talent coaching may be used to achieve wider organisational goals. Table 18 below summarises the themes and sub-themes emerging from the data analysis regarding talent coaching's role at the organisational level:

Table 18.   The role of programme talent coaching at the organisational level

Dimensions	Aggregated themes	Explanation of the themes	Second order categories, underlying themes
ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL	Talent coaching to develop a coaching culture	From an organisational perspective, programme talent coaching is set up to broaden the leadership portfolio, to equip leaders to hold better quality conversations, and to build internal coaching capability through coaching champions	- Coaching as key leadership competency - Better quality conversations - Ripple effect of coaching
	Instrumentalisation of talent coaching	Talent coaching is used as an instrument to support the identification, selection, and recruitment of the talent elite in the leadership pipeline. Coaches act as employee and employer agents in the TM context	- Natural selection of talent elite - Mediation and conflict resolution - Position of HR as strategic partners

7.2 TALENT COACHING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COACHING CULTURE

This section examines the study participants' perceptions regarding the role of programme talent coaching. They argued that it is deployed to encourage talented employees to develop their coaching skills and to hold better quality conversations with their counterparts. By doing so, GlobalFinCorp signals that talented employees are expected to act as manager-coaches themselves and, more broadly, as coaching champions in the organisation.

7.2.1 Promoting better quality conversations in the organisation

Three sub-themes indicate the use of talent coaching to promote better quality conversations in the organisation: (a) talent coaching for upskilling HR managers, senior leaders, and talented employees with coaching skills; (b) talent coaching as a positive, albeit succinct, experience; and (c) the expected ripple effect of talent coaching into managerial practices.

Coaching skills for better quality conversations

According to HR managers, external coaches and senior business leaders, the deployment of coaching in TM programmes forms part of the organisational development strategy in EMEA. Human resource managers (Adam and John, RH, 1) argued that the objective of programme talent coaching was primarily strategic:

> *'The aim really wasn't so that they could coach on programmes. That was … It was functional in that [it] helped us address that need, that specific design need in programmes, but the aim was always so that these professionals could have better, higher quality conversations for managers and leaders that they support—so that they would have an expanded repertoire of conversations to have with the leaders'. (Adam, HR, 1)*

Conscious that programme talent coaching represents a short-term intervention with limited direct impact, HR managers claimed that it aimed to improve the quality of conversations in the organisation. Furthermore, they assumed that *'better quality'* interpersonal interactions could be achieved in the company by encouraging coaching style conversations. To begin, coaching aimed to upskill HR people and senior managers in their capacity to hold better quality conversations:

> *'We started building a cadre of internal coaches, initially using HR folks for that (...). Not because we needed a huge cadre of internal coaches, but that, actually, coaching was something that people were interested in, they were keen in developing competence in. And even if they go through basic coach training and never coach anyone, my sense is their listening skills, their conversational skills, improve. So, their ability to show up in conversation differently happens'. (John, HR, 1)*

John stressed that programme talent coaching played a significant role not only at the individual level by broadening leadership and managerial skills, but also at the organisational level as a key instrument for changing the nature of day-to-day conversations in the organisation:

> *'And it's all about, really, just my OD [organisational development] agenda, if you like, is increasing the quality of conversation in the organisation—it's nothing more than that'. (John, HR, 1)*

Adam confirmed that coaching was often framed as an intervention to broaden the leaders' leadership portfolio and shift the organisation's culture:

> *'I think there is coaching in a broader sense as related to management and leadership capability. So, coaching as a means to develop the size of leadership and management [capacity] of GlobalFinCorp is underdeveloped. I think GlobalFinCorp is probably more action-orientated and less reflective. So, I think coaching as a means to develop that capability and balance out the orientation of the company … I think it's one additional aspect in addition to an individual career progression or development'. (Adam, HR, 1)*

Ultimately, it is expected that exposure to coaching and coaching practice will enable leaders to hold better quality conversations across the organisation. This suggests that TM programmes may be operationalised as a 'coaching nursery' to enhance coaching capabilities of senior leaders and future talent leaders.

A positive, albeit succinct, experience

In the context of TM programmes, talent coaching was often described as a '*taste*' or '*experience'* of coaching (Peter, T, B, 1; Paul, Ext. C, 1, John, HR, 1) aiming to inspire and motivate talented employees to use a similar approach with their team and direct reports. To this end, HR managers prioritised providing a positive and valuable coaching experience to talented employees and, consequently, emphasised the *'high quality'* of coaching provided in TM programmes. This may be counter-intuitive to seek a high-quality coaching intervention within the rather succinct timeframe of the TM programmes. Nevertheless, Adam confirmed as follows:

> *'We really focused on high-quality coaching experiences and coaching almost in a more pure coaching'. (Adam, HR, 1)*

Furthermore, John emphasised the quality of coaching conversations to support work relationships and employee engagement:

> *'So, I think, you know, as people, we're wired for connection—we need to be in a relationship (…). And coaching is, I think, supportive of really high-quality*

This suggests that, from an organisational perspective, the quality of talent coaching is critical to induce behavioural change in leadership capability and encourage talented leaders to integrate coaching skills in their managerial practice.

Ripple effect of talent coaching into managerial practices

All group participants argued that talent coaching possesses a potential ripple effect in terms of transferability of coaching skills into managerial practices. Notably, Charles (Int. C. 2) explained that the expected coaching outcomes are concerned with not only the leaders' capacity to hold better quality conversations, but also with their capacity to share implicit knowledge, innovate, and collaborate across business. Specifically, Adam (HR, 1) suggested that talent coaching plays a role in shifting the organisation towards innovation:

> ' GlobalFinCorp has an innovation team, and I think they're one of the biggest
> advocates in support of coaching, because I think, they see it, too, as part of a
> cultural shift, or an element of culture that, if it were integrated into
> GlobalFinCorp, could help make more innovation possible'. (Adam, HR, 1)

He added that the GlobalFinCorp innovation team was investing in coaching to develop innovation across the organisation. Similarly, John (HR, 1) suggested that talent coaching is deployed to enable cross-division collaboration, which is expected to enhance innovation in the organisation.

From a talent-leader perspective, Amy, newly promoted as CEO, claimed that coaching comprises an approach that promotes problem-solving, creativity, and innovation, explained as follows:

> 'In our [business], it's more about having strategic solutions, problem-solving,
> that is a big part of innovation, as well as keeping abreast with technology, as
> being international services, specifically as being an important part of
> innovation'. (Amy, T. D, 2)

Furthermore, she claimed that leaders at the senior level have to become *'inspiring and innovative, right to think about global standards'*. She suggested that talent coaching may support leaders in transitioning to more senior positions and defined coaching as an approach to *'leveraging knowledge or experience'* cumulated in the organisation. Conversely, Patricia, junior talent leader, remained vague on any correlation between coaching and innovation: *'I cannot think of any [example], but I can see how it could'*. For her, talent coaching provides time to think and discuss,

and so it may '*unblock problems*'. Eventually, however, she admitted, *'I don't know if innovation is the right word'* (Patricia, T, A, 2). As demonstrated, divergent opinions of talents emerged at various seniority levels with regards to the role of coaching as supporting innovation in the organisation.

From a coach perspective, Elizabeth (HR, 1), learning advisor and internal coach, suggested that specific topics, such as innovation, are delivered by external coaches in TM programmes. Paul (Ext. C. 2) confirmed that innovation is part of the coaching topics discussed, as all leaders evolve in an uncertain environment, requiring quick adaptation and constant change in a restrictive regulatory framework. However, he admitted to providing *'very little input'* on this topic (Paul, Ext. C, 2). Therefore, although coaching is seen as improving communication and cross-division collaboration, the link between innovation and talent coaching activities was not unanimously acknowledged by the participants. However, the term 'innovation' may have been understood differently by different participants. As such, further research would be needed to investigate the potential role of talent coaching regarding innovation.

7.2.2 Talent coaching for building internal coaching capability

The study participants argued that programme talent coaching contributes to building the organisation's coaching capability by (a) encouraging talented employees to become a leader-coach, (b) signalling a desired change in leadership style, and (c) enacting the talent status and strengthening the talented employee-organisation set of mutual duties and expectations.

Talent leaders as leader-coach

Some HR managers (Adam and John, HR, 1) claimed that talent coaching is deployed to encourage talented employees to become manager-coaches. Despite some initial scepticism about coaching in the organisation, Adam reported that this strategy has been successful:

> *'In places where there's been a greater investment in coaching and high-quality coaching, you can see the impact on the business (...). It's great to see, because there was a lot of scepticism around, oh, the business will never take up coaching, they don't believe in that stuff. But I think, once they see the power of those types of conversations, and they can see how that's another useful way that they could use in their repertoire of conversations of being a manager or a leader'. (Adam, HR, 1)*

In addition, John, articulated the relationship between coaching skills, better quality conversations, and the role of managers in attracting and retaining talented employees in the organisation:

> *'If we teach managers to coach, one of the things we teach them to do is to listen*
> *and to question and to be curious, rather than not to listen and to tell and not to*
> *be curious (...). So, they are going to show up differently. They are going to show*
> *up in a way that builds engagement'. (John, HR, 1)*

This suggests that coaching skills such as listening, curiosity, and questioning are sought in future leaders, which is in line with the GlobalFinCorp leadership framework (chapter five). Furthermore, John discussed the expected distal outcomes of talent coaching in terms of employee engagement, retention, and personal development:

> *'That engagement will be built in interview, so it will attract people. It will be built*
> *every day in the conversation, say, after they're [employed]. So, it will retain*
> *people. And, actually, if somebody is genuinely interested in you and your*
> *development, my gut tells me you're going to pay attention to your*
> *development'. (John, HR, 1)*

As such, talent coaching may play a critical role in building the organisational coaching capability. This was confirmed by external coaches, who explained that a coaching style in daily conversations is increasingly expected by the organisation. For instance, Paul stated the following:

> *'Well, they want to make coaching part of, you know, the day-to-day*
> *management of the business. They want their leaders to take more of a coaching*
> *approach, to change from a directive autocratic, you know, kind of sort of system*
> *or machine, into something that's more of a community where people are helping*
> *each other develop continuously'. (Paul, Ext. C. 1)*

Paul also suggested that the development of coaching capability supports the development of GlobalFinCorp as a learning organisation:

> *'And I think, you know, this model. You've heard the 70-20-10%. You know?*
> *Seventy percent of the learning should be on the job. And if that's going to be*
> *truly effective, then, you know, you need the managers to be equipped with a*
> *certain level of coaching skill, especially at more senior levels'. (Paul, Ext. C, 1)*

In addition, talented employees may be invited to become talent coaches at the end of the TM programme. For example, Peter explained how he was invited by HR managers to coach others:

> *'I have, today, three people I coach. Two of them are unrelated, of course, and*
> *one is an outcome of the course. Because after I went to the course, I was asked*

> *to coach some lady as part of, again, I think it's a VP lady programme; I'm not*
> *sure. So, it was like 12 sessions I was supposed to sit with her, something like that*
> *(...). So, they asked me to keep coaching her after the programme is over. So, I*
> *guess people participate in the programme are sometimes asked to become*
> *coaches'. (Peter, T, C, 1)*

Conversely, talented employees and senior business managers were not expected to perform as a professional external coach, but rather to improve internal conversations using coaching skills:

> *'What we can do, though, is encourage our managers and our leaders to have*
> *coaching style conversations. You know? I'm not expecting them to be a coach*
> *with a big, capital C; I am inviting them into a different quality of conversation. A*
> *conversation where, which, actually feels better for them because, instead of*
> *them feeling on the hook to have all the answers, you know, they can say, you*
> *know what, I don't know, but that's really interesting'. (John, HR, 1)*

This implies that a double standard of coaching is accepted within the company, whereby managerial and internal talent coaching are associated with coaching style conversations, and external and HR coaching are defined as *'pure'* coaching practice.

So, talented employees are expected to become talent coaches in TM programmes and leader-coaches with their team and direct reports. However, this may lead to the perception of a double standard of talent coaching practice characterised by an opposition between external coaching, seen as the 'real deal', and managerial coaching, seen as enhanced quality conversations. The next section explores how the role of leader-coach stems from a broader and desired shift in the leadership culture at GlobalFinCorp.

Signalling a desired change in leadership style

Drawing on the study participants' interviews, talented employees experienced coaching as a nudge to adopt a coaching style in their leadership and management practices. For instance, Peter claimed that coaching is embedded in programme B to signal the leadership style expected by GlobalFinCorp:

> *'So, I think probably, the deal there is to give you a sense of what you as a*
> *manager should be doing to coach your direct employees'. (Peter, T, B, 1)*

In addition, Charlotte reported how she felt inspired to become a coach:

> *'So, if I see a lot of examples of managers within my own business (…) good at this (…). As manager, I will be far more encouraged to actually follow their steps, because I see that it's happening, I can observe it, I can experience it, and I know that it's bringing positive results for myself, for my team as well. So, I will be more inclined to actually follow them. So, I think having role models, coaches who are role models as well, it's quite important, and that has to happen from the top of the house and down the line as well'. (Charlotte, HR, 1)*

This suggests that the combination of a positive experience of talent coaching with senior business leaders acting as coaching champions may induce talented employees to develop coaching skills and, subsequently, create a coaching snowball effect in the organisation. Two internal coaches reflected on coaching as an integral part of their leadership and management role:

> *'Ever since I've been a manager is when I notice that, you know, part of the management is being the coach, effectively'. (Georges, Int. C, 1)*

> *'I see a need for coaching to be embedded in the leadership. I see a need for leaders to be able to coach organisations through a lot of complexity and a lot of uncertainty'. (Charles, Int. C, 2)*

This suggests that senior leaders may play an important role in championing coaching in TM programmes. Consequently, they may act as role model to inspire talented employees to become manager-coaches, which, in turn, is expected to facilitate the development of a coaching culture in the organisation. It appears that TM programmes are designed as experiential learning platforms where coaching is used to induce future managers to utilise more coaching. As such, talent coaching may be used to signal to talented employees the organisational expectations regarding their role as leader-coach.

A 'two-way street': talent coaching as the enactment of mutual expectations and duties

Some talented employees expressed a feeling of increased duty towards the organisation's success as a result of their participation in a TM programme (Eleonor, T, A–D, 1; Lucy, T, C, 1; Anne, T, D, 2). For instance, Eleonor explained that talent coaching may be perceived as a recognition of individuality in a firm accounting for more than 200,000 employees worldwide. Consequently, she experienced talent coaching as an intervention strengthening her relationship with the company (Eleonor, T, A–D, 1):

'So, there's a little bit of kind of, you know, you feel a little bit of love that they care about you and they want to spend time and money on you, and so that you are kind of not completely unnoticed (...). So, you feel some degree of responsibility, because then, you kind of feel like, well, obviously, there is a lot that to give back, and once you get to a certain leadership, it is beyond your job description and your nine-to-five kind of work. So, it's a two-way street, so kind of, help me help you, and that's again like one of the ways how a firm can help me take a broader and sort of more strategic and high-level perspective on being part of their organisation'. (Eleonor, T, A–D, 1)

This indicates that talent coaching may induce a range of implicit duties and responsibilities that strengthen the talented employee-organisation relationships. For instance, Eleonor claimed that, following her participation in TM programmes A and D, and having benefited from two years of ongoing coaching with an external coach, she felt the need to increase her work performance by going *'beyond [her] job description'*. Similarly, Anne mentioned that she was a *'firm believer'* in coaching and wanted to *'pay back and give back particularly to women'* in the organisation (T, A, 2). As such, talent coaching may reinforce the psychological contract of talented employees. Drawing on the SET and psychological contract (Blau, 1986; Rousseau, 1995), implicit mutual expectations and duties are developed between the employer and employee. As such, talent coaching may mediate the reinforcement of the psychological contract between talented employees and the organisation by enacting the talent status. The following section explores the concerns and obstacles perceived by participants in developing a coaching culture in the organisation through programme talent coaching.

7.2.3 Barriers for the deployment of a coaching culture

Despite being signalled as a core leadership skill in the GlobalFinCorp leadership framework, the deployment of coaching in TM programmes was described as an arduous task by HR managers. Ethical, geographical, and structural barriers seemed to prevent the operationalisation of talent coaching at the global level and, consequently, hindered the development of a shared coaching culture in the organisation.

Ethical dilemmas

The study participants reported that internal coaching generated ethical challenges related to trust, confidentiality, power, and conflict of interest. Internal coaches reported finding themselves in uncomfortable positions, torn between the confidentiality of their conversations with their coachee and their loyalty towards other peer senior leaders. For instance, Oliver and Georges, both internal

coaches and senior leaders at the MD level, shared their concerns about talent coaching leading to the promotion of a talented employee in another business division or a departure of the talented employee:

> *'I am not encouraging them to leave. I am not encouraging them to look around in the same ways that I would a mentee. Well, I guess, what they do, do whatever it is, is that I do try and be supportive of getting new opportunities'. (Oliver, T, B, 1)*

Oliver also commented on the conundrum related to coaching talented employees in his own business unit after completing programme B:

> *'Sometimes, they will tell me their problems and issues they are having with their manager, whom I would actually [have] reporting directly to me (...). I am definitely not in the role of boss there, because, you know, I try and make a mental compartmentalisation in my mind because I don't want to use anything they tell me as I interact with their boss; you know, I really draw a sharp line, but I often am probably a little schizophrenic thing, you know, I would say what I think: you should really put pressure on that guy to get you this and this ... Even though I know he's my direct report, and he's going to come to me, you know'. (Oliver, T, B, 1)*

Therefore, internal coaching delivered by senior leaders appears to lead to a cognitive dissonance, since senior leaders may simultaneously play opposite roles as coaches and managing directors. Therefore, senior leaders may experience their dual role of talent coaches and business leaders as irreconcilable.

Similarly, some talented employees reported ethical concerns regarding their coaching relationship. For instance, Patricia (T, A, 1) reported being in a difficult position when she did not agree with her internal coach. Because he was particularly influential and at a highly senior level in the organisation, she felt that she could not openly disagree with him. Furthermore, trust and confidentiality may be questioned, as suggested by Paul:

> *'Even if you have a senior HR leader [as coach] (...) the people will be more guarded because, you know, no matter how much, idealistically, we would like the competition to remain outside the organisation, there is internal confrontation'. (Paul, Ext. C, 1)*

This questions the openness, integrity, and mutual trust in the coach–coachee relationship in a TM programme, where coaching is delivered internally.

In sum, the study participants suggested that talent coaching delivered by internal coaches can lead to conflicts of interests and ethical dilemmas for both coaches and coachees. One implication was that ethical challenges may arise from the imbalance in power dynamics involved in the internal talent coaching relationship, as is discussed further in the subsequent discussion chapter.

Geographical and departmental variations

Talent leaders and HR managers reported a variety of interpretations concerning the nature and purpose of talent coaching. Since the EMEA region includes approximately 55 countries, John (HR, 1) highlighted that cultural diversity is expected to influence how talented employees and coaches would approach the coaching relationship. Additionally, HR managers questioned whether the coaching approach envisioned in London would be shared across countries in EMEA (Adam, Steve, HR, 1). This was confirmed by Lucy, who commented on the different levels of understandings about coaching in Romania, the Czech Republic, and Russia (Lucy, T, C, 1).

Noticeably, the EMEA was frequently compared to the North American region regarding coaching practices. Human resource managers, MDs, and external coaches claimed that more *'advanced'* coaching practices were used in the EMEA region. Steve (HR, 1) complained that coaching was undervalued in the North American area, stating '*we are not serious about coaching [in NY]*'. Furthermore, Adam offered a specific example of the variability of coaching in programme D:

> *'I think that women in EMEA were more engaged. I think they're different factors that play into that. So, I think in EMEA we have a smaller cohort because of the small regions. I think the EMEA … we are much more explicit about our orientation to coaching and what it does, what it doesn't, who it serves, who it doesn't, how we do it, how we don't do it, etc. Whereas in other regions, there's less structure and investment in coaching'. (Adam, HR, 1)*

This suggests variation in the deployment of coaching practices across regions. Interestingly, Adam considered coaching practices in the EMEA as better practices than the North American region.

In addition, HR managers emphasised the complexity of ensuring a consistent approach in the delivery of coaching across countries and divisions:

> *'So, you know, it's kind of who are senior HR people we think can do this. They coach, but the way they coach probably isn't, you know, standard across regions.*

> *Also, some of the ways that they coach, I might interpret as training or consulting*
>
> *versus team-applied coaching'. (Adam, HR, 1)*

As such, the high variability in the quality of coaching provision may be perceived as a barrier for the implementation of talent coaching.

Moreover, some HR managers claimed that the level of investment and funding for coaching heavily influences the quality and, consequently, the coaching capacity building:

> *'That said, you know, how coaching is demonstrated and the quality of coaching*
>
> *that is taught during that very short experience, I think this is variable. I think,*
>
> *when you get to more senior levels where there's higher investment in the quality*
>
> *of coaching, especially in regions or areas that put a greater importance on*
>
> *coaching and higher investment, such as EMEA, then you can see the impact and*
>
> *the shift'. (Adam, HR, 1)*

It appears that talent coaching is not operationalised as a homogeneous practice in the different regions and business units in the company. This is due to a divergence in the nature of coaching and the level of investment and funding for coaching across regions. This patchwork approach has implications for the operationalisation of TM programmes and coaching at a global level, and consequently on the capacity to create a global corporate coaching culture. Next, the sparse internal capacity and capability of coaching represents another factor that may hamper the development of a coaching culture in GlobalFinCorp.

Limited internal capability and capacity

The internal coaching capability and capacity was often questioned by HR managers and talented employees. First, HR managers explained that providing coaching in TM programmes was part of an HR development strategy to build coaching capability and enable better conversations between managers and their direct reports and teams (John, Steve and Adam, HR, 1). However, they did not mention any systematic coaching training, certification, or supervision of new internal coaches. This was confirmed by talented employees invited to become talent coaches after experiencing coaching in a TM programme without any specific training (Peter, T, B, 1). Nevertheless, some senior business leaders and HR managers mentioned participating in coaching masterclasses or being part of an internal coaching academy (Georges, Int. C, 1; Adam, HR, 1). However, HR managers conceded that they could not offer all internal coaches professional training certification due to limited funding (Steve, HR, 1; Charlotte, HR, 1). Coaching supervision for internal coaches was not provided either. As such, at an organisational level, the development of an internal coaching capability was not

consistently supported by adequate coach training, development and supervision. This was perceived as a major challenge by HR managers.

In addition, some talented employees questioned the availability and commitment of their internal coach. For example, Carry suggested that the hectic workload of senior business leaders may prevent them from engaging fully in the talent coaching relationship:

> '*My coach didn't come; I didn't see a lot of coaches. Again, I think it is, I am not criticising those guys, but I wonder again, do we have too many programmes? Are these seniors asked to do too many of these, and they can't give you the bandwidth? It is very possible (…). Some people, I think, maybe sign up for the commitment, but they are not really in it*'. (Carry, T, A, 1)

Finally, Peter claimed that expectations of internal and external coaching could not be equivalent. Comparing internal and external coaching, he justified his opinion by explaining that he was *'not a professional person, not my day-to-day [job]'*. Furthermore, he referred to talent coaching as a discretionary behaviour expected from MDs, yet emphasised the time and commitment involved in this activity:

> '*It [internal coaching] is a task; it's something that requires time and attention, and it's not always easy, especially if people ask for it to continue for a long period of time*'. (Peter, T, B, 1)

This echoes the perception of talent coaching as an additional task to the role of senior leaders at GlobalFinCorp (chapter six). Therefore, both capability and capacity to coach others were questioned by study participants and identified as a challenge.

Cynicism about a cyclical and ephemeral coaching intervention

In addition to the concerns regarding the internal provision of coaching, some study participants expressed cynicism towards talent coaching and coaching in general as a leadership capability at GlobalFinCorp. Some talented employees complained that talent coaching was not institutionalised as a long-term intervention (Sarah, T, A, 1; Nathalie, T, 2). Instead, talent coaching may be viewed as an HR and managerial practice deployed in the organisation during organisational growth, and subject to being scrapped in difficult economic contexts.

From a coach perspective, some external coaches (Catherine and Paul, Ext. C, 1) explained that their appointment as executive coach suddenly stopped due to the financial crisis in 2008. Subsequently, they adjusted their coaching services from executive coaching to coaching training, group coaching,

guest speaker, and talent coach. Specifically, Catherine expressed cynicism regarding the commitment of some banking and financial service firms towards coaching:

> '*Coaching is the first thing to go when the markets get tough (...). People are the most important aspect. That doesn't necessarily always ring true when support for people is cut in tough times. I think that would be the only other thing that, whether or not the truth is really spoken in the organisations, it's interesting to me, and I am not a cynical person by nature'. (Catherine, Ext. C, 1)*

From the perspective of internal coaches, Georges explained that the acute stress due to job uncertainty in a period of crisis prevented leaders from coaching others, as they had to redefine their role as coaches and protect their own position due to fierce internal competition:

> '*So, that's the challenge. So, for the people at the top, they've got to move between sort of thinking of their role as being coaches to moving, when things go wrong; it's, all of a sudden, it's battle leadership, and they're very different things. It's one time. You know, on a battlefield, nobody's doing any coaching'. (Georges, Int. C, 1)*

Therefore, the role of talent coach may be perceived as redundant in times of economic downturn.

In sum, there are numerous internal barriers for the development of talent coaching as a TM practice and leadership skill to develop a coaching culture in the organisation, including the following: (a) ethical concerns; (b) geographic and cultural variations on the nature of coaching; (c) limited internal capacity and capability; and (d) the perception of coaching as an impermanent and cyclical intervention. These barriers may explain the cynicism expressed by some participants towards coaching in organisations, and talent coaching in particular. As such, despite the organisation's endeavour to create a coaching culture and improve daily conversations in the organisation, coaching was perceived as difficult to operationalise as part of a TM and organisational strategy. The following section explores the second emerging theme, which highlighted the instrumentalisation of talent coaching at the organisational level.

7.3   THE INSTRUMENTALISATION OF TALENT COACHING

This section presents the final theme emerging from the data analysis, arguing that talent coaching may be used as an instrument to achieve broader goals at the organisational level. Three sub-themes are explored. First, study participants claimed that talent coaching operates a natural selection process for recruiting an elite talent pool. Second, talent coaching was viewed as a buffer

for managing employment concerns and employee relations at senior and executive levels. Third, talent coaching contributes to asserting the role/position of HR as strategic business partners.

7.3.1   A mechanism supporting the talent pool segmentation

The study participants revealed that talent coaching was used as an invisible and untold mechanism to identify the talent elite within the existing leadership pool. Programme talent coaching may support the identification of future coaching champions and leader-coaches among the talented employees participating in a TM programme. Subsequently, these individuals were invited to coach others in other TM programmes and to become leader-coaches with their teams. This implies that coaching is positioned as a differentiating skill for talented employees to accelerate career progression at GlobalFinCorp.

Identification of leader-coaches and coaching champions in TM programmes

First, some participants argued that talent coaching supported identifying talented employees to be listed in the elite talent book of the company. Some interviewees revealed that the successful participation and engagement of talented employees in the talent coaching relationship was interpreted as a sign of interest for coaching and a good fit with the company's vision of leadership (Adam, John and Steve, HR, 1; Georges, Int. C, 1; Charles, Int. C, 2).

> *'There'll be the smaller group [of employees] that think, yes, I can do that [coaching] to make me sort of a better person, whether it's here or outside work or whatever. And they're the people that I think eventually go into the really big leadership roles'. (Georges, Int. C, 1)*

Furthermore, Georges highlighted the rationale of the exclusive approach to TM adopted by the EMEA Executive Committee in selecting 12 manager-coaches from the leadership pipeline to participate in a coaching masterclass:

> *'I think, obviously, they know who they think are the next … the leaders coming through the pack that they need to give the extra toolkit to. And that's the right approach—the targeted coaching to people who will use it to take themselves and the bank to the next level'. (Georges, Int. C, 1)*

In addition, some study participants claimed that talent coaching was provided to talented employees not only to foster their leadership skills and support their career progression, but also to induce them to adopt a coaching style in their conversations with their direct reports (Adam, John, Steve, HR, 1; Charles, Int. C, 2). Therefore, from an HR perspective, talent coaching aims to enhance

the quality of internal conversations at the organisational level, as discussed in section 7.2.1. However, Lucy also commented on how talented employees who reacted negatively or resisted talent coaching were perceived:

> *'For this type of people, the coaching comes against their own internal values. So, then, they sabotage themselves. They're going to criticise the programme—that it doesn't work, or it doesn't make sense—when the reality is that they are not so happy in their position, but they're also not willing to change something at them, so they don't give it a real try'. (Lucy, T, A, 1)*

By saying they *'sabotage themselves'*, she seems to suggest that their attitude may be interpreted as a lack of interest or commitment towards coaching by HR managers and MDs. Consequently, talent leaders who do not engage in the talent coaching relationship were perceived as not fitting in with the firm's desired leadership approach. By contrast, talent employees who demonstrated a willingness to develop coaching skills were likely to be invited by HR to become talent coaches. This could take the form of future participation in a TM programme as an internal coach (Paul, Ext. C, 1; Anne, T, D, 1; Eleonor, T, A–D, 1, Peter, T, B, 1). Talent participants were also invited to coaching forums including other senior business leaders (Adam, Steve, HR, 1) and in-house training events provided by external coaches (Paul, Olivia, Ext. C, 1). Alternatively, Olivia (ext. C, 1) mentioned an internal recruitment process including a formal application by senior business managers to become talent coaches. As such, an interest in coaching appears a desirable predisposition for leadership and career advancement in the company.

Furthermore, talented employees were often expected to become leader-coaches themselves after the TM programme. From an organisational perspective, it was assumed that the role of leader-coach in the organisation is to challenge perceptions, act as role model, and be influential over people and processes in order to make an impact, as suggested by Charles:

> *'[Talent leader coaches] don't need to be the decision-makers; they can help funnel things forward. These are influential people, right, and their being itself is something of a coaching pattern, right, because these are people who have learnt to be very careful in how they use their language to respectfully invite people to look again at something from a slightly different perspective (...). We coach people, but we do that with the intent of those leaders understanding the value of a coaching mindset, because it dovetails with so many things that are influential'. (Charles, Int. C, 2)*

Interestingly, Paul explained why an organisation would provide coaching to talented employees even though they may leave the organisation as a result of the coaching process:

> 'It's much better, I think, to have, like, an employee who is not engaged in their job move on rather than stay; and, you know, because that, or a disengagement will tend to affect the rest of the business units that they lead and, you know, the people around them; and they become, like, an energy vampire. You know? They suck the energy out of the organisation. So, I think that this is why organisations do it'. (Paul, Ext. C, 2)

This suggests that programme talent coaching may support the internal selection process of the talent leaders who are perceived as potential internal coaches and who could act as role leaders for their team and others. These leaders would form the elite talent pool. As such, talent coaching may play the role of catalyst for identifying a talent elite in the organisation. The following section specifically examines how talented employees may be recruited as talent coaches through the TM programme.

Recruitment of internal talent coaches

Some senior talent leaders and HR managers (Peter, Charles, Georges, Steve) explained that, following their participation in a TM or executive coaching programme, they had been invited to coach other talented employees. Talent coaching may support the informal recruitment process of future talent coaches. Elizabeth suggested that internal and external coaches would provide details about participants to HR managers in order to facilitate an informal selection process of talent elite in TM programmes:

> 'The coaches have the role to observe (...) to give feedback to the participants to act in the management programme and feedback to the programme manager'. (Elizabeth, HR, 1)

This was confirmed by Paul (Ext. C, 1), who claimed that talent coaching operates a *'natural selection'* process whereby the organisation selects the elite talented employees who adhere to the desired leadership style and coaching culture:

> 'It's almost like a form of natural selection—that you go and reflect with the coach, think about what you want to do with your career, and, you know, it's a matter of determining whether or not you're right, it's the right fit, it's the right time and, you know, and for you'. (Paul, Ext. C, 1)

Furthermore, HR managers and internal coaches (Steve, HR, 1; John, HR1; Georges, Int. C, 1; Charles, Int. C, 2) often emphasised that *'coaching is not for everybody'*, reinforcing the necessary selectivity of coachees at the organisational level. Therefore, talent coaching may facilitate an invisible natural selection amongst talent leaders in TM programmes to compose an elite talent pool in the organisation.

Differentiating skill for elites and future global leaders

Some study participants described talent coaching as a differentiating skill between talented employees. Specifically, two senior leaders argued that coaching contributes to extending their influence and differentiating them from other senior managers (Georges, Int. C, 1; Charles, Int. C, 2). Georges (Int. C, 1) reported that 12 internal coaches in TM programmes were selected by the EMEA Executive Committee to take part in an exclusive coaching programme, including an advanced coaching course alongside coaching forums and senior meetings:

> *'That was externally run, but the invite list was 12 people in EMEA, and they were selected by the EMEA operating committee on the top floor (...). So, I mean, I think, obviously, they know who they think are the next leaders coming through the pack that they need to give the extra toolkit to'. (Georges, Int. C, 1)*

This suggests that becoming an internal coach is perceived as a desirable role by senior business leaders. Furthermore, it signals the top management committee's support of the development of internal coaching capability. One implication is that talent coaching may be used as a platform for the segmentation of the existing leadership pipeline and the identification of a talent elite pool.

In sum, coaching skills may differentiate senior business leaders at the MD level to demonstrate their coaching capability, which forms a requirement according to the GlobalFinCorp leadership framework. In addition, programme talent coaching may support the internal recruitment process for the elite talent book and the identification of future coaching champions in the organisation. Next, talent coaching is explored as an alternative mechanism for the management of employee relations.

7.3.2 An alternative for employee relations management

The role of the talent coach may exceed its primary purpose of leadership growth and career progression in the organisation. Some study participants revealed that talent coaches may help manage the relationships between senior talents and the organisation. First, they argued that the coach's role is to act as a trusted advisor for talented employees. Second, in the triangular coaching relationship, the coach may become a mediator between the talent leader and the organisation. As

such, the talent coach may help to solve conflicts, balance emotions in difficult times, and sustain positive long-term relationships when talent leaders leave the company. Consequently, some participants claimed that talent coaching may offer an alternative mechanism for employee relations, particularly for conflict resolution with senior and executive leaders.

Coach as trusted advisor

The study participants often emphasised trust as the foundation of any successful coaching relationship. In particular, the talent coach, whether internal or external, was often considered a trusted advisor by interviewees. The node 'trust' has been identified in almost all participants' interviews. For example, Charlotte claimed that talent coaching provides talented employees a *'safe place to share insights, thinking, (and) feelings'* (Charlotte, HR, 1). This was further emphasised by Paul, who argued that talent coaches play the role of confidant:

> *'I think that we play the role of confidant. You know? So, there are, like, a lot of times where people air things to us that they feel like they can't air to other people. So, you know, if you establish that kind of rapport and trust, then you're somebody they can unburden themselves with. You can be, often, you know, a trusted advisor. So, you know, they may ask for your opinion'. (Paul, Ext. C, 1)*

Therefore, trustworthy relationships appear to be particularly important between the coach and coachee. In addition, some external coaches highlighted the role of trust in their relationship with the sponsoring organisation. In his second interview, Paul further discussed how trust resides at the core of the coaching triangular relationship. Specifically, he referred to the feedback required by the company regarding his coaching relationship(s) and the progresses made by his coachee(s):

> *'It creates a bit of an artificial ticking-the-box exercise, these feedback sessions, because I will never say something that my coachee doesn't want me to say. You know, because that would ruin the trust, and as soon as that goes, then there's no point in being their coach, because they are not going to talk to me (...). If you lose the trust of your coachee, what's the point?' (Paul, Ext. C, 2)*

This suggests that the talent coach may experience some ethical challenges in their relationship with the coachee and the sponsoring organisation. Nevertheless, the participants, and especially external coaches, perceived trust as a critical component of the talent coaching relationship. However, trust and confidentiality may be difficult to maintain, particularly in the context of internal talent coaching, where personal and conflicting interests may arise. This echoes the ethical dilemmas discussed in section 7.1.3.

Coach as mediator

Additionally, the talent coach may play the role of mediator and messenger to signal employment issues faced by senior talent leaders and executives to the organisation. For example, Eleanor explained that talent coaching may support *'agreed transparent mechanisms'* allowing the coach to share some employment relation concerns with the organisation without damaging trust in the coaching relationship (Eleonor, T, A–D, 1). Furthermore, she suggested a desired role for the external coach as mediator:

> *'This is still a professional relationship where a person is paid by the firm (...) to make sure that, as a talent of the firm, it's working right (...). Nobody is going to break any rules. She is not here and going to break confidentiality and trust and all the rest of it. But if, at some point, the person will tell me, "Do you mind if I have, like, a quiet chat?" I would think about it, and I am hoping that I would trust my coach enough that it would be done in a way that won't hurt me, but it might potentially help me and, ultimately, help the organisation'. (Eleonor, T, A–D, 1)*

This suggests that the talent coach may play the role of messenger and whistle-blower in the talented employee–organisation relationship. Consequently, talent coaching may be considered as an alternative to the formal process of employment and conflict resolution in the organisation, which is usually held by the Employee Relations department at GlobalFinCorp. For example, Eleonor expressed her preference for managing critical tensions with her employer with the assistance of an external coach:

> *'[I] don't need to go all the way to Employee Relations [to discuss an issue] (...). Coaching is, by definition, more private, more intimate, more informal'. (Eleonor, T, A–D, 1)*

From the perspective of external coaches (Paul and Olivia), the talent coach may also provide sensitive feedback from the organisation to senior talent leaders. However, Paul insisted that the role of talent coach as mediator should not come at the expense of the relationship between the coach and coachee: *'I would never betray the confidence of the coachee'* (Paul, Ext. C, 2). Furthermore, Olivia recalled being in a position of messenger between HR, representing the organisation, and her senior manager/executive coachee. Although feedback was agreed upon and shared in the triangular coaching relationship, she admitted to having some concerns about this position of the talent coach as intermediary, torn *'in between'* the interests of the client and the organisation (Olivia, Ext. C, 2). This echoes the ethical concerns in the operationalisation of talent

coaching discussed previously in section 7.1.3. Therefore, it appears that the external talent coach may hold difficult conversations with senior talent leaders on behalf of the organisation or on behalf of their coachee. This role positions the talent coach as employer and employee agent in the triangular coaching relationship.

Finally, Paul explained that talent coaching for senior leaders and executives may contribute to sustaining positive long-term relationships with the senior talent leader in the perspective of future collaborations. This suggests that external talent coaches may act as a third party to maintain positive relationships between senior talented employees and the organisation, regardless of whether they stay or leave the organisation. This further implies that tacit information may be shared without damaging the trust underpinning the coaching relationship. Therefore, the talent coach may act as a mediator to prevent any psychological contract breach and support both employee and the employer in solving employment and career issues *'in the best way possible'* (Paul, Ext. C, 2). In sum, talent coaching may be used as an alternative to the formal process of conflict resolution proposed by the Employee Relations department in GlobalFinCorp. This may have implications for the preparation, training, and supervision of external talent coaches. The following section examines an additional function of talent coaching at the organisational level whereby it may support revitalisation of the relationships between senior business leaders and HR managers.

7.3.3   An assertion of HR as strategic business partner

Human resource managers explained that the HR function was often considered a functional support and cost-centre by other revenue-making business units in the firm. In this context, they argued that talent coaching may be a means to reposition HR as a strategic business partner. To achieve this, HR managers started to upskill HR people with coaching skills, which subsequently increased the HR staff's coaching capability.

Need to upskill HR people

First, HR managers advocated that talent coaching has become an integral part of the HR contribution in the organisation. John (HR, 1) explained that, following the financial crisis, a sharp decrease in the appointment of external coaches occurred due to cost imperatives. Simultaneously, the HR function was shaken by multiple restructures and downsizing waves. This situation urged HR managers to review what HR functions could be outsourced to cut costs and what functions could be internally reinstated. As a result of this internal evaluation, coaching was identified as a strategic intervention for organisational development that could be delivered by HR people instead of being delivered by external coaches. John, head of organisational development EMEA, described this as follows:

'We were going through some major business transformation and some major
HR transformation, which has been ongoing ever since (...). And one of the things
we were doing in HR was looking at, well, how might we partner more
strategically with the business? How might we commoditise some of the
transactional work and move it to service centres? And, actually, if we take HR
folks who have built their careers on being specialists—either in employee
relations, in compensation, in pensions—what kind of skills might they need to
show up as more strategic and consultative?' (John, HR, 1)

Furthermore, according to John, HR managers were seeking to reposition themselves as business partners. They wanted the HR function to be perceived as more strategic by senior business managers. In this context, coaching was identified as a core leadership skill and an approach that may support this perception shift. Thanks to coaching skills, it was expected that HR staff would hold less transactional and more strategy-oriented conversations with senior business leaders (John, HR, 1). Therefore, the shift from external to internal coaching in the organisation was driven by multiple factors, including (a) organisational constraints; (b) the desired transformation of the HR function; and (c) the change in leadership approach.

Additionally, John and Steve (HR, 1) argued that coaching represents a key leadership skill for revitalising trustworthy relationships with senior business managers and improving the coaching commissioning process driven by HR:

'So, their ability [of HR people] to show up in conversation differently happens
(...). And also, when our HR folks had an understanding of what good coaching
felt like, both to receive and to practice, the commissioning of coaching becomes
much easier (...). And so, we've carried on down that track'. (John, HR, 1)

Therefore, HR managers were first to upskill or reskill to become internal coaches. Then, senior business leaders were invited to join TM programmes with embedded coaching by internal/external coaches in order to provide them with an experience of coaching. Subsequently, potential internal coaches were invited to act as talent coaches in future TM programmes. Simultaneously, the company reviewed its leadership standards framework, which institutionalised coaching as a key leadership skill (chapter five). Notably, HR managers and talented employees often considered coaching as an HR function, as highlighted by Steve:

'I know that I am quite lucky in that this is part of my, this is part of my, part of
my job (...). HR people expect coaching to be part of your job'. (Steve, HR, 1)

However, he suggested that talent coaching may be perceived as a task by some HR managers, much like senior business managers, with similar constraints in terms of time, availability, and skills to provide coaching (chapter six). Furthermore, Steve highlighted the need to continuously upskill internal coaches:

> 'We need to upskill the coaching people and how we are going to do this, and we need to provide an element of support for our coaches. I think what I have found very interesting over the last few months, even, is that people who I thought were confident coaches are not'. (Steve, HR, 1)

Furthermore, he revealed that some junior HR managers were *'afraid'* of coaching MDs and executives, feeling uncomfortable in this position and perceiving that their lack of business knowledge may hinder the trust and efficacy of the coaching relationship. This suggests that power dynamics may hinder the coaching relationship between HR managers, especially for those at the junior level, and senior business leaders. This echoes the ethical considerations in the internal coaching relationship discussed previously in section 7.1.3.

In sum, the HR managers claimed that the HR function has evolved to include coaching as a key competency and responsibility in the organisation. As such, talent coaching may be seen as an opportunity to reposition HR managers as strategic business partners with senior business leaders.

Repositioning HR as culture-change enablers

The second aspect relating to the changing role of HR and coaching can be examined through the shift in internal coaching as opposed to external coaching provision. John argued that talent coaching may contribute to modifying the perception of the organisation's HR function as enabling leadership change in the organisation. John stressed that coaching capability building was implemented not only for operational and cost-cutting purposes, but more importantly, to drive a leadership change and equip leaders with coaching skills for better quality conversations (section 7.2.1).

Furthermore, when asked about any connection between coaching, TM, and engagement, John explained that coaching may drive different relationships between talented employees and, subsequently, may enhance employee engagement, leadership development, and retention:

> 'They are going to show up in a way that builds engagement. That engagement will be built in interview, so this will attract people. It will be built every day in the conversation (...) So, it will retain people. And, actually, if somebody is genuinely

> *interested in you and your development, my gut tells me you're going to pay*
>
> *attention to your development'. (John, HR, 1)*

As such, talent coaching contributes to enhancing the quality of conversations, which in turn may influence the engagement and retention of talent in the organisation. Furthermore, John concluded as follows:

> *'So, I think, [name of researcher], it really is as simple as increasing the*
>
> *conversational repertoire of the organisation (...). Right? So, moving away from*
>
> *conversations which are, you know, ask-tell conversations into conversations*
>
> *which are, you know, explore and suggest, instead. It's that straightforward'.*
>
> *(John, HR, 1)*

By deploying coaching in TM programmes and coaching talented employees, HR managers sought to instil leadership change in the organisation. Acting as coaching champions, they may position themselves as leadership change agents. It is expected that talent coaching would positively impact their relationships with senior business leaders, who may increasingly perceive them as strategic partners.

HR as strategic partners

Talent coaching may be used as another organisational driver for change in HR's perceived role at GlobalFinCorp. Human resource managers (John, Adam, and Steve, HR, 1) claimed that programme talent coaching was implemented to develop relationships between HR, talented employees, and senior business leaders. John suggested that talent coaching may support HR to *'partner more with the business'* (John, HR, 1). Accordingly, HR managers sought a long-term and trustworthy partnership with key decision-makers and leaders in the organisation.

To manage this shift, HR managers claimed that they endeavoured to provide a positive and valuable experience of coaching to senior business leaders and talented employees. It appears that this strategy was fruitful, since Charles and Anne, senior leaders, claimed that they valued being coached by HR managers as strategic partners and trusted internal advisors (Charles, Int. C, 1; Anne, T, D, 1). This was confirmed by Adam (HR, 1), who noticed a growing interest for coaching among business leaders to the point where they outnumbered the HR coaches at an internal coaching event:

> *'The talent in EMEA, some of our top 350, were starting to sign up to be part of*
>
> *our coach faculty because they found it so powerful. They also want to make the*
>
> *statement to the organisation, I think that, look, this is worth investing in, so they*

signed up for coaching in programme B. Then, they would attend things like our

coach development practice. So, I would host those on occasion with our internal

faculty, our internal coach contacts, who are primarily HR. But the last one I held

in EMEA, I think 40% of the room was from talent, from the business, and they

spoke for 80% of the time. So, and they were so passionate about it. At some

point, you want to help save and contain some of that energy, but it was just

wonderful to see how they believed in coaching and what they could do'. (Adam,

HR, 1)

This suggests that business leaders may, in turn, become coaching champions in the organisation, role, which was previously held by HR people. However, this raises questions regarding the positioning of HR and its role in operationalising the TM strategy. Human resource devolution refers to the extent to which HR responsibilities are devolved to other stakeholders, mainly line managers. In the context of talent coaching, it may be argued that some HR duties are being transferred to the external coach to an extent. Specifically, external coaches (Olivia and Paul, Ext. C, 1) suggested that the talent coaching process supported the devolution of HR by delegating some interpersonal attributions, such as the management of employee engagement and work relations, to the external coach. For example, Olivia recalled why she was appointed by HR to coach an executive manager based in the USA:

> *'You get these American guys just ringing you up saying, could you do my job?'*
> *(Olivia, Ext. C, 1)*

This suggests that some HR responsibilities may be transferred to external coaches, especially when the recipient is a senior or executive talent leader. This echoes the previous point about talent coaching as an alternative for employee relations. Furthermore, this suggests that coaching deployed in a TM programme may support a hidden agenda at the organisational level, in addition to the leadership development and career management of talented employees.

7.4   KEY POINTS ON FINDINGS – PART 3

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the perceptions of talent coaching at the organisational level (RQ1 and 2). To this end, this chapter sheds light on programme talent coaching as a method to develop a coaching culture. In particular, it signals coaching as a desired leadership style to its future global leaders (RQ2 and 3). Furthermore, the data analysis suggests that talent coaching may be instrumentalised in the deployment of the TM strategy. Specifically, it may be used to achieve some concealed purposes related to TM and leadership change (RQ3).

This chapter has argued that programme talent coaching plays a significant role from an organisational perspective. First, it contributes to developing a coaching culture at GlobalFinCorp, described as a hierarchical, centralised, and action-oriented organisation. Notably, coaching is promoted as a desired leadership skill by top management, represented by the EMEA executive committee, MDs, and senior HR managers. Coaching is deployed through TM and leadership development programmes in a top-down approach, starting with senior talent leaders and cascading downwards for talented employees at the junior level. Due to the short length of TM programmes and the limited internal coaching capacity and capability in the organisation, talent coaching aims to provide an experience of coaching to current and future leaders, as well as to inspire them to broaden their leadership repertoire. As such, talent coaching contributes to upskilling managers with coaching skills in order to hold better quality conversations in the organisation.

In addition, internal coaches, especially HR managers and senior business leaders, may act as coaching champions to actively support the organisational development strategy with the aspiration of developing a coaching culture in the firm. This is based on the belief that coaching as a leadership style may support the organisation in becoming more resilient and innovative in a sector characterised by a fast-changing, highly regulated, and increasingly competitive business environment, where talent shortages are constantly identified as a key concern. As such, coaching is deployed in TM programmes not only to develop the talent leaders' human and social capital, but equally as a means to build the internal coaching capability and prepare future leaders to collaborate horizontally and vertically (across hierarchy and business divisions). Human resource managers and MDs expected that better quality conversations combined with human and social capital would enable leaders to innovate and sustain the firm's competitive advantage.

Moreover, coaching is operationalised as a TM practice to support the ascension of talented employees in the company's leadership pipeline. Specifically, it may support a natural selection process of the talent elite. Talented employees joining a TM programme are allocated either an internal or external coach depending on their seniority level in the company. During the sessions, they are provided an opportunity to experience coaching as a developmental approach to define a bespoke career path. Additionally, the coaching relationship may serve as an internal recruitment platform for an elite group amid talented employees. Specifically, the talented employees who demonstrate an interest in developing as a leader-coach may be invited to join the group of internal coaches and gain access to coaching masterclasses and other networking events with senior leaders at the MD level and above. As such, it appears that talent coaching may support some informal mechanisms for talent segmentation within the leadership pipeline.

Furthermore, coaches may play a pivotal role in the natural selection process of talent elite. First, they may act as intermediary between HR and the talent leaders by sharing relevant information on the coachee's experience of coaching and by making recommendations for future coaching champions. Second, they may signal to talent leaders that the organisation is committed to moving towards a coaching culture and that coaching has become an expected leadership skill for business leaders. Third, external coaches may act as mediators and trusted advisors, especially with senior talent leaders. Their role is to maintain positive relationships and balance negative emotions that may arise in case of business disagreement or employment conflict, such as non-granted promotion.

Overall, programme talent coaching was perceived by study participants as a long-term investment that may serve wider organisational goals. At junior and middle management levels, talent coaching aims to develop leadership capability, select the talent elite, and identify future coaching champions. At senior and executive levels, external coaches may play the role of mediator between the senior talent leader and the organisation. At all seniority levels, programme talent coaching may be used to reposition HR people as strategic business partners. As such, talent coaching may be perceived as a multifaceted intervention with various impacts at the individual and organisational levels. The following chapter discusses these findings in light of the literature in order to establish this study's contribution.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Following the detailed presentation of this study's context (chapter five) and the four main themes emerging from the thematic analysis of the data set (chapters six and seven), this chapter discusses the empirical findings and their contributions to the study.

This discussion chapter is divided into three parts to examine the main findings in light of the TM and coaching literature. First, it discusses the role of talent coaching from an individual perspective (RQ1, RQ2). Second, it reviews the role played by talent coaching from an organisational perspective (RQ1, RQ2). Third, it discusses the specificities of talent coaching and the factors perceived as significant by the study participants for a successful talent coaching intervention (RQ3).

8.2 THE ROLE OF TALENT COACHING AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

This section discusses the role of talent coaching at the individual level, with the exploration of two themes, namely the human and social capital development of talented employees (theme 1) and the rhetoric of talent coaching (theme 2).

8.2.1 Theme 1: development of human and social capital

Firstly, the findings illustrate that coaching in TM programmes is often considered as a pivotal intervention for the development of human and social capital of talented employees. Numerous studies on leadership development practices in MNEs have claimed networking and social capital development are amongst the most effective global leadership development activities (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2009; Linehan and Scullion, 2008; Malhotra and Singh, 2016). This is coherent with an empirical study which claims that coaching, mentoring and job assignment enhance social capital and human capital capabilities for leadership development (McCallum and O'Connell, 2009). However, existing TM studies have not explored coaching as a specific intervention independent from other interventions for global leadership development such as mentoring, team simulation and international assignment (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2009). Therefore, this study adds to the TM and coaching literature by revealing the impact of coaching as a specific TM practice for the development of human and social capital of leaders. As such, it defines the features of the dynamic interplay between TM and coaching.

Secondly, this study provides specific insights into how talent coaching may support talented employees differently according to their seniority level in the organisation. This is coherent with a

study which argues a differentiated approach to leadership development in a multinational organisation according to the level of expertise and career stage of leaders (Dongen, 2014). Table 19 below summarises the different roles of coaching for talent leaders at different career stages, whilst highlighting the common themes overarching these differences (RQ2).

Table 19.   Role of talent coaching at different seniority levels of talent leaders

Junior and middle managers	Senior and executive managers
Extension of social capital Reputation- visibility Individual career path Confidence building	Extension of human capital Leadership and work identity Space to think Management of emotions
Coach = SPONSOR/MENTOR	**Coach = TRUSTED PARTNER, MEDIATOR**

The findings indicate that junior and middle management talented employees benefit from talent coaching as a way to develop their social capital. Indeed, participants emphasised the role of talent coaching for extending their professional network and building long-term relationships with MDs. They also claimed that, through these professional ties, their visibility was increased, and they could learn how to navigate internal politics, which was perceived as critical for being promoted. This use of talent coaching for the enhancement of social capital amongst junior talented employees is coherent with previous studies emphasising the role of social capital in terms of peer relationships and mentorship for successful career progression in organisations (Bilhuber Galli and Müller-Stewens, 2012; Cullen-Lester, Maupin and Carter, 2017). Moreover, a review of the TM and career management literature suggests that networking extension is more prevalent to achieve career progression at junior and middle management level, which is coherent with the study findings (Claussen *et al.*, 2014). However, this view of coaching is very similar to mentoring whereby the mentor plays the role of the sponsor (Clutterbuck, 2012). So, the TM programmes for junior and middle management talented employees operate more like structured and formal mentoring schemes, whereby participants are introduced to senior business manager-coaches, who would be difficult to access otherwise. This indicates that coaching in the context of TM is an extension of mentoring for junior and middle management employees.

By contrast, senior and executives claimed that coaching supported the development of their human capital, specifically to understand and develop their identity as leaders and manage their emotions at work. Indeed, senior talented employees valued coaching as a safe space to construct their identity as leaders and extend their human capital. This is in line with previous leadership studies on

the role of coaching for the construction of a new work identity for leaders (Yip *et al.*, 2019), students (Priest *et al.*, 2018), and women in leadership programmes (Brue and Brue, 2018). In addition, senior talented employees claimed that talent coaching plays a significant role in the management of emotions, which is in line with previous coaching outcomes studies (Grant, Curtayne and Burton, 2009; Grant, 2014).

Another aspect revealed in the findings concerns how the career stage and seniority level of talented employees moderate the needs and expectations regarding talent coaching. This is in line with a conceptual TM paper which argues that talent develops over time and that relationships between human and social capital change in the talent career life cycle (Crane and Hartwell, 2019). However, few empirical coaching studies have explored the specific needs of junior talented employees. Indeed, by definition, the executive coaching literature focuses on coaching outcomes for managers at senior level or above to be delivered by external coaches (Kilburg, Leonard and Kilburg, 1996; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). Therefore, this study provides an exploration of the needs of talented employees, especially at junior level, which have been neglected so far in the executive coaching literature (Ely *et al.*, 2010). The variability of needs of talent leaders at various career stages has implications in the TM programme designs. TM programmes would provide social capital extension opportunities when needed the most, i.e. at junior and middle management levels. Additionally, it indicates that the role of the talent coach is contingent and dynamic according to the needs and management level of the talented employee.

Moreover, the findings indicate that talented employees perceive talent coaching differently, whether it is provided internally or externally. In TM programmes positioned at junior and middle management level, coaching was delivered by internal coaches, characterised by high status, expertise and excellent reputation as senior business leaders (MDs) or HR managers in the organisation. In this context, the coaching relationships are based on an imbalance in power, authority and experience between the coach and coachee. It appears that the talent coach's role may be perceived as an equivalent of a sponsor, advocate, ambassador and mentor (Murphy and Kram, 2014). This finding revives the long-standing debate in the coaching literature about the distinction between coaching and mentoring (Maltbia *et al.*, 2014; Grover and Furnham, 2016), but the findings here indicate that coaching and mentoring practices blend in the context of TM, especially when delivered internally. This corroborates the view that workplace coaching and mentoring are hybrid practices in the workplace (Western, 2012; Joo, Sushko and McLean, 2012).

At the senior level, talent coaching was typically delivered by external professional coaches, and senior HR managers. Senior talented employees considered their talent coaches as trusted partners.

Trust is often emphasised in the coaching literature, which considers the coaching relationship as a work alliance with trust being as paramount for a successful coaching relationship (De Haan *et al.*, 2016). However, one unanticipated finding concerns the role of coaches as mediators and a proxy for employee relations management. Both senior talented employees and external coaches' accounts corroborate the agentic role of the coach in pacifying relationships in the organisation. This echoes the 'palliative function' of coaching advocated by Salman (2008), by which the coachee can mourn his/her career aspirations and save face (Goffman, 1959). This functional dimension of coaching in organisations has rarely been discussed in previous coaching studies, except by Nizet and Fatien-Diochon (Fatien-Diochon and Nizet, 2012b; Nizet, 2012). Drawing on functional analysis (Merton, 1968), however they were able to explain that coaching in organisations represents a multifunctional practice, encompassing manifest, latent and (dys)functions at the individual and organisational levels (Fatien-Diochon and Nizet, 2012a). According to their analysis, coaching may hold the latent function of mediation between employees and the organisation, to which this study provides empirical evidence in the context of TM. The mediation role of coaching in organisations is also represented in the emerging conflict coaching literature (Brinkert, 2016). The following section reviews the empirical findings, focussing on the emergence of a rhetoric associated with talent coaching in the organisation.

8.2.2   Theme 2: emergence of a talent coaching rhetoric

The second sub-theme concerns how the participants expressed their views on talent coaching, based on their past and current experience in various TM and leadership development schemes in the company. According to the findings, the deployment of talent coaching generates a rhetoric of coaching characterised by mixed messages from the participants. This suggests a duality in the talent coaching practice, whereby it may be perceived as an effective, gratifying, yet unsustainable intervention, particularly complex to operationalise in a global firm.

Coaching as a symbol of high status

First, talent coaching is often perceived as a sign of high status, which differentiates employees identified as talent from non-talent. It appears that the perception of coaching is influenced by the exclusive TM approach adopted by GlobalFinCorp. Participants overall agreed that talent coaching represents an exclusive, well-regarded, and gratifying intervention. For them, coaching signals their belonging to the talent book of the organisation. In GlobalFinCorp, talent coaching was perceived as a symbol of high status and signals the talent status acquired by high-potential and high-performing employees. As such, it may be experienced as a differentiating intervention by talent leaders, who consequently make sense of coaching as a career anchor event. This is in line with the HR attribution

theory which posits that employees attribute meaning to the HR practices operated by the organisation (Nishii, Lepak and Schneider, 2008). Furthermore, the theme around the coaching rhetoric identified that talent coaching may be perceived by employees as a badge of honour and a rite of passage signalling a promotion towards managerial responsibilities (Tansley and Tietze, 2013). This coheres with Berglas (2002) and Joo's (2005) claim that coaching can be perceived as a perquisite for executives. Participants also often viewed coaching as a gratifying experience. This is in line with the SET which posits that *" the sociability in a work group involves experiences that are not specifically profound, but are intrinsically gratifying"* (Blau, 1986: 15). Talent coaching may be interpreted by its recipients at a signal of the high status of talented employees in a differentiated HR architecture. As such, talent coaching symbolises their incorporation to the leadership pipeline of the company (Tansley and Tietze, 2013).

However, the findings indicate a lack of awareness of talented employees regarding their talent status and the purpose of the compulsory coaching activity in the TM programme. Organisations have been recognised to have poor communication regarding TM (Dries and Gieter, 2014). Based on the concept of the psychological contract and status, Ehrnmooth et al. (2018) argue that status awareness influences how talent responds to organisational inducement, with the aware-talents potentially reacting more positively to talent practices than unaware-talents. Drawing on Ehrnmooth et al. (2018), talented employees may react more positively to talent coaching when they are aware of its developmental purpose. Otherwise, they may perceive it as a remedial intervention for performance management and react negatively by not engaging in the process. Few studies have examined the negative perceptions of talent status and TM outcomes (Gelens *et al.*, 2013; Sumelius, Smale and Yamao, 2020; Björkman *et al.*, 2013; Ehrnrooth *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, while talent coaching can be seen as a gratifying event, it can also be associated with the behavioural issues of leaders which needs to be addressed. Talent coaching may be seen as a symbol of high status and a social reward by talented employees. Conversely, it can be perceived as an expense and investment in the individual, which might not be recouped. However, the organisational communication asymmetry occurring in GlobalFinCorp regarding talent designation may influence the predisposition of talented employees for being coached, and subsequently, their reactions towards talent coaching. This suggests that organisations should communicate more openly on the talent status and the purpose of talent coaching (Dries and Gieter, 2014).

This study raises the possibility of talent coaching being seen as a relational activity whereby the talented employees expect to receive coaching as part of a contingent and non-financial reward package offered by the firm. In reviewing the literature, the effects of talent status awareness and

the communication of talent status have been examined (Ehrnrooth *et al.*, 2018; Sumelius, Smale and Yamao, 2020). However, a recent study claims that strategic ambiguity in the communication of talent has few long-term positive effects on the attitudes and behaviours of talent and non-talent employees (Sumelius, Smale and Yamao, 2020). This suggests that this gratifying feeling of being coached may not last. There is very little reference in the coaching literature regarding this aspect, with the exception of a study examining the various relational rewards to create a fulfilling workplace environment (Joshi, 2016). No data was found on the significance of coaching intervention related to the perceived talent status of talented employees. In considering coaching as a relational reward for talented employees, this finding has important implications for designing TM programmes. However, this further raises the question of talented employees' level of engagement in the coaching process, particularly when coaching is imposed upon them, as is in the studied TM programmes. An imposed coaching relationship may result in resentment, an overt or covert resistance to the coaching process, or sometimes conflict (Welman and Bachkirova, 2010).

The study participants often highlighted that talent coaching practices imply direct and indirect, as well as tangible and intangible, costs. Talent coaching was often seen as an organisational investment on the individual, with the expectation that they prepare to hold pivotal positions in the company in the future. This is coherent with the resource-based view used in previous TM studies arguing that talent is construed as a capital developed to differentially impact the organisational success and competitive advantage (Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Dries, 2013b; Vaiman and Vance, 2008). There is also evidence in the literature that employees expect investment from their organisation on their future career and leadership development (Dries *et al.*, 2014).

Positive and negative reactions towards talent coaching

The study revealed a range of positive and negative reactions and attitudes towards TM practices, which are in line with empirical evidence found elsewhere (De Boeck, Meyers and Dries, 2018). In examining talent leaders' positive and negative perceptions of coaching as a TM practice, the findings indicate a duality in practice. For instance, talented employees viewed talent coaching as a valuable intervention for their career and leadership development. However, they also questioned the organisation's capacity to respond to their expectations in terms of clear career paths. They further outlined a discrepancy between the promises and reality in the organisation. Although promoted by the company as mechanisms providing a clear career path (De Vos and Dries, 2013), TM programmes were not perceived by participants as a guaranteed step towards career promotion at GlobalFinCorp. Rather, talent coaching was viewed as an effective supportive mechanism for talented employees to manage their own careers, especially for senior leaders and executives who

saw coaching as an opportunity to manage their way in or out. As such, talent coaching supports the career employees' free agency, which departs from the findings of Inkson and King (2011).

The TM literature suggests negative and positive connotations around TM (De Boeck, Meyers and Dries, 2018), which this study confirms. In addition, the coaching literature has also identified negative reactions to coaching, specifically where the role and value of coaching are not explained to participants (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019). As such, the poor management of TM programmes, as well as the limited resources afforded to these programmes and the coaching within them, compounds the likelihood of cynicism and mistrust. However, participants were keen to try and make the most of the coaching allowed through the TM programmes where this was possible.

Minimal impact of national culture

This study focuses on global TM programmes deployed in the EMEA region, accounting for more than 55 countries. Consequently, it was expected that the study participants would express their views on the international aspect of talent coaching (Passmore, 2013; Plaister-Ten, 2013; Abbott and Salomaa, 2016; Salomaa, 2014). Surprisingly, the study participants often minimised culture's impact on the talent coaching relationship. Whilst acknowledging that culture may influence the coaching relationship, they seemed to minimise this by emphasising the nature of their work in a global company. They often assumed that talented leaders and members of the talent pool were culturally competent. However, few interviewees could articulate how cross-cultural communication influenced coaching in TM programmes. For example, Georges (Int. C., 1) explained that talented employees outside of the UK may find it difficult to achieve the English proficiency required for a role at global level. In this case, the impact of culture is reduced to the talented employee's English-language proficiency. This resonates with existing empirical studies examining the role of language skills and accents of non-native English speakers for career success in international organisations (Śliwa and Johansson, 2014; Śliwa and Johansson, 2015; Barner-Rasmussen, 2015). Other participants explained that, in London, the cosmopolitan environment tends to minimise and homogenise cultural differences in contrast with other countries, such as South Korea or Saudi Arabia, where cultural differences would be more visible and immediately palpable. Therefore, cross-cultural competence was often perceived as the expected norm.

Other cross-cultural aspects in the coaching relationship, such as values, beliefs, religion, and ethics (Abbott and Salomaa, 2016; Bozer and Delegach, 2019; Passmore, 2013), were either dismissed or minimalised by the study participants. However, they emphasised the power dynamics between the headquarters and the subsidiaries with regards to the deployment of TM programmes. This may be explained by the centralised and ethnocentric culture at GlobalFinCorp (Tarique and Schuler, 2018).

Coaching as a leadership approach *vs* an unsustainable indulgence

The ambivalence of talent coaching was also revealed in participants' discourse on coaching as a leadership approach as opposed to an unsustainable indulgence for talented employees. To this end, the participants underlined a paradox in the perceptions of talent coaching. On the one hand, coaching was perceived by participants as a way of being, defined as a leadership approach that promotes personal development and collaboration between employees. On the other hand, talent coaching was presented as an additional time-consuming task incumbent on senior managers, HR managers, and talented employees to deliver. Conversely, when coaching was provided by external coaches, talent coaching was often described as an expensive and impermanent TM activity, fluctuating according to the company's financial and economic growth cycle. Furthermore, talent coaching was perceived as a route to differentiate leaders in the talent pipeline, but also as a profligate leadership task incurring costs, signalling the organisation's inconsistency in investment in the talented employees' development and commitment to leadership. This finding contrasts previous coaching studies emphasising the positive effects of coaching at the individual and organisational levels (Grover and Furnham, 2016; Bozer and Jones, 2018; Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2016). Additionally, it resonates with the nuanced views on talent pool practices, deemed effective when underpinned by rigorous and strategic decision-making process (Jooss, Burbach and Ruël, 2019). Furthermore, the perception of talent coaching as an unsustainable indulgence contrasts with the coaching literature promoting the development of a coaching culture in organisations (Jones and Gorell, 2014).

This inconsistency may explain why talent coaching was viewed as a contingent reward mechanism dependant on the company's economic constraints. Talent coaching, when delivered internally by senior managers, may be seen as an unsustainable indulgence offered exclusively to high-performing employees in times of organisational and economic growth. As a result, talented employees may view it as a relational reward available exclusively for members of the talent pipeline. This echoes the interpretation of talent coaching as a social reward based on the SET, as discussed previously in this section, yet expected by talented employees. Coaching has been analysed as a social process (Shoukry and Cox, 2018) and a space producing power relationships in the workplace (Louis and Fatien-Diochon, 2018). However, it has not yet been examined as a social reward. Therefore, this study adds to the coaching literature by proposing an alternative perspective of talent coaching as a social reward mechanism in organisations. By considering coaching as a social reward mechanism supporting the talented employee–organisation relationships, this study adds to the emerging TM literature underpinned by the SET and psychological contract regarding employees' reactions to TM practices (King, 2018; King, 2016). One implication is that internal and external coaches play a pivotal

role in implementing coaching in TM programmes. Drawing on the concept of psychological contract and contract-makers in organisations (McDermott *et al.*, 2013; Rousseau, 1995), coaches act as agents for strengthening the psychological contract of talented employees. By doing so, coaches benefit by increasing their visibility, strengthening their corporate reputation and extending their social capital. The following section discusses the findings related to the role of talent coaching at the organisational level.

8.3   THE ROLE OF TALENT COACHING AT THE ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

Following the analysis of the role of talent coaching at the individual level, this section examines how this TM practice may serve wider organisational goals based on two themes. First, talent coaching may be used to build coaching capability and promote the development of a coaching culture (theme 3). Second, talent coaching may be instrumentalised to create a talent elite in the organisation (theme 4).

8.3.1   Theme 3: development of a coaching culture

The findings suggest that talent coaching is deployed in GlobalFinCorp to support the development of coaching as an organisational capability as well as a corporate culture change. Coaching was perceived by HR managers and senior business leaders as a key leadership skill to be developed for future career progression. Consequently, talented employees and senior business leaders were encouraged to develop coaching skills and become manager-coaches during the coaching process in order to support organisational leadership change. To an extent, this finding appears to support the literature on coaching culture and manager-coaches (Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; Hamilton, 2019; Hawkins, 2012; Jones and Gorell, 2014; Rogers, 2012; Ting and Scisco, 2006). Surprisingly, only talented employees who had experienced a positive coaching relationship reported being formally invited, or induced, to take part in future TM programmes as coaches. This suggests that talent coaching may be used as a support mechanism for identifying internal coaches, which was unexpected.

This finding was confirmed by HR managers, who justified the presence of coaching in TM programmes at different hierarchical levels in two ways. First, coaching in TM programmes serves a designation process for the talented employees who display a propensity for coaching in the form of leadership attributes and qualities compatible with the desired leadership culture at GlobalFinCorp. Second, it provides an opportunity to develop the talented leaders' coaching capability to hold quality conversations promoting an internal dialogue within the organisation. The evidence of coaching as enhancing managerial conversations in this study aligns with previous coaching

literature (Clutterbuck, Poulsen and Kochan, 2012; Farndale *et al.*, 2014; Grant, 2017), but coaching's role as an internal and informal recruitment mechanism for coaches in TM programmes has not yet been identified in previous empirical studies.

While confirming the benefits of coaching at the individual level (Bozer, C. Sarros and C. Santora, 2014; Grant, Curtayne and Burton, 2009), this study offers an additional perspective on the impact of talent coaching at the organisational level by arguing that it can be used to develop a coaching culture. While no empirical studies have explored the impact of coaching as a TM practice for the development of a coaching culture, one conceptual paper has concluded that coaching can be used to support organisational change and can be deployed in the context of TM to attract and enhance knowledge retention in the organisation (Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh, 2014). Surprisingly, the participants indicated that support provided by the organisation for the development of talent leaders' coaching skills was rather limited or non-existent. Left to the talent leader's personal commitment and discretion, the lack of coaching training and supervision may become a barrier to the desired organisational change (Hawkins, 2012; Hawkins and Turner, 2017). Gormley and van Nieuwerburg (2014) proposed four factors enabling the creation of coaching cultures in organisations: (a) senior leaders should be involved in promoting coaching though the organisation; (b) coaching should be an integrated part of the organisation; (c) role modelling must be employed; and (d) leaders should demonstrate strong personal commitment to the development of their own capabilities. This study adds another factor to this list—namely, the training and supervision of internal coaches. As such, this study contributes to the coaching and TM literature by examining how programme talent coaching may support organisational change. Specifically, it argues that talent coaching may be a catalyst for leadership change and the development of a coaching culture in organisations, provided that adequate continual support and recognition are given to manager-coaches.

Ethical concerns in talent coaching relationships
The participants described situations of conflicting interests and some ethical concerns when talent coaching was delivered internally by senior business managers (MDs) or HR managers. The findings revealed that breaches of confidentiality may occur due to the multiple relationships and the complex organisational dynamics involved in the talent coaching process. For instance, conflicting interests were identified due to different agendas held by the talented employee, the (internal or external) coach, and the company engaged in a triangular coaching relationship. In the context of TM, the complexity of coaching relationships is increased due to the multiple modalities and variations in the delivery of coaching (internal/external, by HR manager/by MDs, directive/non-

directive approaches). Previous empirical studies have focused on examining ethics in the executive coaching triangular relationship (Pliopas, 2017; Fatien-Diochon and Nizet, 2015; Fatien-Diochon and Louis, 2015; Louis and Fatien-Diochon, 2018; Louis and Fatien-Diochon, 2014). These results reflect those of Louis and Fatien-Diochon (2018), who advocated a definition of coaching as a political space in organisations. The political dimension of coaching was striking in the participants' accounts in the current study, especially with the multiple roles played by the different stakeholders involved in the coaching process. For example, the senior HR managers representing the organisation were simultaneously TM programme coordinators and internal coaches who hired internal and external coaches and used coaching to position themselves as a strategic partner with senior leaders.

In addition, the findings suggested that HR managers, internal coaches, and TM programme participants are likely to have different agendas, leading to ethical dilemmas. For example, an internal coach was supporting a talented employee in transitioning across business divisions and, consequently, was incurring a loss of talent in his division. Another dilemma occurred when the coachee disagreed with their coach but felt that she could not express it because of the power and influence of her coach. These results corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work in ethical challenges in executive coaching (Fatien-Diochon and Nizet, 2015).

Furthermore, most talented employees exhibited little awareness of talent coaching being used as a mechanism for selecting a talent elite. It has been suggested that multiple agendas set in the executive coaching triangular relationships can pose an issue when the coach is not fully aware of the organisational power dynamics at stake in the coaching relationship (Louis and Fatien-Diochon, 2014; Louis and Fatien-Diochon, 2018). The findings provide empirical evidence that external coaches and HR managers were aware of those dynamics to an extent. However, it was not the case for coachees at junior and middle management levels and for some internal coaches. Nevertheless, the participants identified power dynamics as a concern in the talent coaching relationship when a disagreement or lack of engagement occurred. Otherwise, the imbalance of power and influence was considered an opportunity for talented employees at junior and middle management level through gaining access to powerful senior managers. This illustrates some similarity between coaching and mentoring in TM programmes for talented employees at junior and middle management levels.

One practical implication emerging from this study is that internal and external executive coaches need to receive training and support to understand the organisational power dynamics and become aware of the ethical implications of their intervention in a complex environment where personal and organisational agendas may misalign. As coaching supervision is part of the code of conduct in the

practice of external executive coaches (Passmore, 2011; Hawkins and Turner, 2017), it seems equally essential to promote it for internal coaches in organisations. However, the findings indicate a concern regarding the permanence of resources for internal coaching training and supervision, which may compromise the development of coaching in organisations.

In summary, this study contributes to the coaching literature by highlighting the complexity of talent coaching relationships and the role of talent coaching as a catalyst for leadership change, in addition to underlining the ethical concerns that may arise in practice. The next section explores the last aggregated theme revealed by the analysis—specifically, how talent coaching is deployed as an organisational instrument for the management of talented employees.

8.3.2 Theme 4: instrumentalisation of talent coaching

The fourth theme emerging from the findings concerns the instrumentalisation of talent coaching. This study argues that talent coaching may be used to achieve wider organisational goals and, sometimes, hidden agendas of the organisation. The first sub-theme concerns the formation of a talent elite based on the company's existing leadership pipeline. The participants' accounts suggested that programme talent coaching may be used to support an informal selection of a talent elite within the leadership pipeline. This selection of elite talented employees seems to be based on the potential coaching capability and coaching interest exhibited by some of the talented employees during the TM programme, and more specifically their engagement in the coaching relationship. The following lists three implications of this finding. First, talent coaching may support an informal talent elite designation process. Second, the propensity and willingness to coach others comprises part of the criteria employed by HR and senior managers to identify the talent elite in the organisation. Third, the coach is placed in the position of agent in facilitating the selection process of a talent elite in the organisation.

The first implication in using talent coaching as an employee-segmentation device is that it increases the communication asymmetry between the talented employee and the organisation, which may, in turn, feed mistrust in the TM system, and lead to a psychological contract breach (Dries and Gieter, 2014). It is striking that talent leaders' accounts revealed rather limited awareness of this issue in the recruitment of talent elite and internal coaches, whereas MDs, HR managers, and external coaches clearly mentioned it. The secrecy of strategic organisational goals related to TM and coaching may result in a psychological contract breach for talented employees (Dries and Gieter, 2014). Furthermore, various reactions were expressed by talented employees regarding the talent-designation process and the subsequent invitation to be coached as part of a TM programme. To an extent, the findings appear to support Sumelius (2019), whose empirical study argued that strategic

ambiguity in talent communication affect the reactions of talents, but has few long-term positive effects on the attitudes and behaviours of talent and non-talent employee groups (Sumelius, Smale and Yamao, 2020). However, the findings illustrate that communication asymmetry may possess long-term negative effects on some talented employees, as evidenced by Sarah and Nathalie's accounts. It is worth noting that the effect of communication asymmetry in TM remains under-researched, with a paucity of empirical studies apart from the two cited previously. Nevertheless, these findings support existing studies on ethics in TM (Swailes, 2013; Guest, 2017), which have highlighted the importance of transparency and clear communication in developing and delivering TM programmes.

A second aspect in the formation of a talent elite pool via coaching concerns the subjective criteria employed in this informal selection process. According to the participants, talent coaching was utilised to recruit talented employees who can support the development of a coaching culture in the organisation. The criteria used for recruitment and selection are based on the propensity to become a leader-coach in future TM programmes. The selection of talent elite is also based on the talent leaders' positive reaction to programme talent coaching. It appears that this selection process was facilitated by internal and external coaches, who may sponsor talented employees by reporting their coaching propensity and willingness to HR managers. Described as a *'natural selection'* for talent elite, this process was left to the coaches' appreciation of engagement in coaching. This suggests that a talent elite may be formed based on subjective criteria undisclosed to talented employees.

Talented employees often voiced their intention to become a coach in a future TM programme. This may illustrate a genuine interest in coaching and an awareness of the organisations' expectations regarding the development of coaching skills for leaders. In addition, coaches actively encouraged talented employees to coach others following the completion of the talent programme. This appears to highlight the relational dimension of coaching, which enhances social capital and induces reciprocal altruistic behaviours in the talent coaching relationship. Despite this, talented employees expressed little awareness regarding how a successful coaching relationship did (or did not) influence their talent status in the organisation. Only one interviewee explained that, when talented employees do not engage in TM activities, and particularly in coaching, '*they sabotage themselves'* (Lucy, T, A, 1). Drawing on the role of mentors as contract-makers and agents in the dynamic evolution of the employees' psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995), this finding extends the agentic role of the talent coach. This resonates with Western's critical analysis of coaching and mentoring (2012), which argues that coaches may play the role of agent of reproduction of the existing corporate culture in organisations. Specifically, coaching in a TM context supports the

organisational culture by starting a relationship with talent leaders where they are induced to display and adopt the desired behaviours and attitudes promoted by the organisation. However, no empirical studies have documented coaching as a corporate intervention supporting the selection of talented employees for an elite leadership pipeline. As such, this study contributes to exposing the perceived secrecy surrounding TM pools (Jooss, Burbach and Ruël, 2019; Sumelius, Smale and Yamao, 2020; Björkman et al., 2013; Gelens et al., 2014), and the untold role of coaching in the segmentation of talented employees to supply a talent elite pipeline.

Another implication of the instrumentalisation of talent coaching concerns the role of the coach. The findings revealed an unexpected role of the external coach regarding the management of relationships between senior talented employees and the organisation. From an organisational perspective, maintaining positive relationships with senior and executive talent leaders was described as paramount by HR managers and external coaches. The goal was to ensure positive relationships for potential future collaboration, should they leave the organisation. It appears that aspects of TM stretch beyond the organisation to the wider sector, where talent is scarce (Suseno and Pinnington, 2017; Ulrich, 2015). If organisations cannot provide opportunities for talent, then letting them leave to develop and then come back later because of good terms and maintained relationships can be more valuable to the company in the long run. It has been argued that coaching may be used to retain high-potential employees and provide a customised career plan (Lueneburger, 2012), but this study illustrates that organisations may adopt a long-term approach to TM due the scarcity of talent at the global level, particularly in the financial sector (Gomber et al., 2018). In this context, the organisation may adopt a long-term approach to TM whereby external coaches act as agents to maintain positive relationships with their talented employees whether they decide to stay or leave the organisation. Eventually, these ongoing relationships enhance the benefit of external coaches as they may get referrals for coaching appointments outside of organisational commissions from individuals themselves as they move within the industry.

Consequently, talent coaches may require additional skills, such as conflict resolution, mediation, and employee relations, to deal with challenging situations that may arise during the talent coaching process. This adds to the work by Bond and colleagues (2011), which concluded that executive coaching may be used in organisations as an instrument to mitigate the risks of failure linked to challenging career moves and transitions. In addition, the literature that focuses on conflict coaching and mediation in the workplace has argued that coaching may be used as an internal alternative conflict resolution mechanism (Brinkert, 2006; Brinkert, 2016; Liberman, Levy and Segal, 2009).

However, the role of the talent coach as mediator in the talented employee-organisation relationship remains an uncharted topic in the TM and coaching literature.

Positioning HR managers as strategic partners

Moreover, the findings indicate that talent coaching may be used as a TM practice to assert the role of HR as a strategic partner and change agent in the organisation. Often exhorted to play a more strategic role, the HR function is located within a complex and dynamic social setting (Truss *et al.*, 2002). As discussed in chapter five, the financial crisis of 2008 has called into question the role of HR in the organisation (Martin and Gollan, 2012), with new challenges for the HR function regarding the management and mobility of talent in a globalised and fast-changing economy (Farndale, Scullion and Sparrow, 2010). Based on the HR managers' accounts, the findings suggest that, post-crisis, the HR function at GlobalFinCorp was tasked with extending its organisational value as a support centre, as opposed to a revenue-making centre. Two senior leaders (Amy and Charles, MDs) highlighted the need to become more agile in facing unforeseeable events, which echoes the call from Cappelli and Tavis (2018) to make HR an agile function in organisations.

In this study, the shift in HR's role was widely commented on by HR managers, who see themselves as coaching champions and business partners. Human resource managers claimed that talent coaching is deployed for organisational development and leadership capability purposes. The findings indicate that HR managers play the role of change agent in the TM system in an attempt to institutionalise coaching capability within the organisation. However, some HR managers identified certain limitations in their role of change agent. For example, John (HR, 1) conceded that, due to a lack of a framework, there was no formal evaluation of the impact of programme talent coaching (De Meuse, Dai and Lee, 2009; Tooth, Nielsen and Armstrong, 2013); furthermore, talent coaching may continue informally after the end of the TM programmes. The scale of the task involved in the management of coaching as part of TM programmes was felt as overwhelming by one HR manager, who stated that they *'cannot do it all'* (Steve, HR, 1).

Relevance of the macro TM context

In addition to the micro and meso context, the macro context in which international companies are operating provides key information that may help to understand the participants views on coaching as part of a global TM strategy. This section highlights the changes faced by the banking sector post financial crisis and explores the banking corporate culture as well as the influence of the home-country national culture on management practices. As mentioned in the introduction chapter (chapter one), following the global financial crisis of 2009, the banking sector experienced on-going change due to a disruptive and turbulent environment. Tighter rules and regulations have increased

constraints on risk management and global investment (Thakor, 2019). Additionally, multiple restructurings of the workforce have contributed to a lack of engagement, high turnover and low morale amongst employees (David *et al.*, 2016; PWC, 2017). Ten years after the global financial crisis, the attractiveness of the banking sector for young professionals and graduates in finance has faded in favour of digital and high-tech companies, perceived as more dynamic, innovative and collaborative in their managerial approaches (Lemerle, Rudisuli and Steiner, 2019). Therefore, it was expected that the study participants may refer to the global financial crisis as a pivotal event for the banking sector, the intra-organisational operations and structure, and their career as a GlobalFinCorp employee. The participants' views on the impact of the financial crisis at macro, meso and micro levels were examined in the findings chapters (chapter five, sections 5.2; 5.3; 5.5; chapter six, section 6.3; and chapter seven, section 7.2), with particular attention on how their views on TM and coaching may have evolved accordingly.

In addition to those challenges resulting from the macro economic environment, banks have faced digital disruptions in the global business environment. Specifically, banks had to respond to the threat of new entrants offering digital banking services (Gomber *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, traditional banks have been challenged by digital new entrants such as Amazon, Alibaba, Tencent and Facebook for business lines such as mobile and online payments. The fast-changing environment and challenges faced by banks to respond and adapt quickly has exacerbated the talent gap in the global banking labour market. Digital skills combined with competence in capital markets and commercial banking are rare in a competitive global labour market (Hancock and Schaninger, 2020).

This context has meant that the sourcing and recruitment of talent has become increasingly challenging over the past decade. Finance and banking are largely rejected as a career of choice by graduates who increasingly favour start-ups and big tech companies to start their career, as they hold the reputation of providing more innovative and collaborative corporate culture than the traditional command-control managerial style associated with financial institutions (Lemerle, Rudisuli and Steiner, 2019). Moreover, the attractiveness of long and progressive ascension on the career ladder in a single global financial institution has been eroded by the emergence of new approaches of career development such as boundaryless and protean career (Lemerle, Rudisuli and Steiner, 2019; Böhmer and Schinnenburg, 2016). In conclusion, the financial crisis has damaged the reputation of the sector which is no longer seen as an attractive career path by many graduates and young professionals in finance (Lund, Manyika and Goldshein, 2018).

Finally, the successive restructuring waves of the past decade, combined with an overall reduction of investment in training has led to gaps in the talent pipelines, leading to concerns regarding talent

development and succession planning at all seniority levels (Hancock and Schaninger, 2020). Also, banks operating in regions where labour regulations are more constraining, such as in continental Europe, face a particular TM challenge to manage employment relationships including benefits, staff redundancy. Notably, coaching capabilities are lacking amongst managers in commercial and investment banking, since their promotion is often based on high performance and less on people skills, as suggested by a round table of capital market leaders (Hancock and Schaninger, 2020). This was confirmed by the study participants, particularly by HR managers.

The topic of corporate culture has emerged as pivotal in the banking industry, and is seen as particularly significant to restore the public trust in the banking system and enhancing financial stability following the global crisis (Thakor, 2015). Whilst considerable attention has been paid to executive compensation in banking (Dodd-Frank, 2010; Curry, 2014), organisational culture in banking is increasingly recognised by bank regulators in the United States and Europe as an important factor to generating the desired behaviours of employees, aligned with the value of the organisation: "*Culture not only determines the efficacy of compensation in influencing employee behaviour, but it can also induce employees to work in a manner consistent with the stated values of the organisation, particularly when achieving this outcome via formal contracts may be either costly or infeasible*" (Thakor, 2015: 6). Drawing on the Competing Values Framework (Cameron and Quinn, 2011), corporate banking culture can be characterised by its hierarchical structure, a command-and-control leadership style and stability. This is coherent with the participant's views on the impact of the financial crisis and the traditional leadership style widely used at GlobalFinCorp.

Few empirical studies have explored the role of corporate culture in banking (Thakor, 2019; Thakor, 2020). However, one empirical study conducted in international banks from 75 countries argues that national culture has an effect on bank risk-taking behaviour (Ashraf, Zheng and Arshad, 2016). Specifically, the findings suggest that bank risk-taking is significantly higher in high individualism, low uncertainty avoidance and low power distance culture. The United States and the United Kingdom, where the global and the EMEA headquarters of GlobalFinCorp are located respectively, are amongst the most individualist cultures in the world, with low power distance and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001). As a long-standing American bank, GlobalFinCorp has developed a strong corporate culture which is influenced by its national home-country cultural dimensions and the corporate banking culture. Therefore, it was expected that GlobalFinCorp's culture would be a result-oriented, risk-taking and individualistic, using a traditional command-and-control leadership style and supported by a centralised hierarchical organisational structure, as highlighted in the introduction chapter (chapter one, section 1.2) and methodology chapter (chapter four, section 4.4).

In sum, the study first contributes to theory by examining talent coaching from multiple perspectives in response to the multiple calls from coaching and TM scholars (McDonnell *et al.*, 2017; Sparrow, 2019; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Ely *et al.*, 2010). To this end, it provides a detailed account of the contrasting views of the multiple stakeholders involved in coaching in the context of TM. The following section discusses the characteristics of programme talent coaching.

8.4 TALENT COACHING: A DISCRETE INTERVENTION

This section examines the characteristics of talent coaching (RQ3). From a theoretical perspective, this study considers the SET and its derived concept of psychological contract as a useful framework for understanding the role of talent coaching in the organisation (RQ1 and 2). Specifically, it argues that talent coaching may be perceived as a social reward enacting the talent status and strengthening the psychological contract of talented employees.

8.4.1 A multifaceted relationship

The findings revealed that talent coaching is perceived as a developmental intervention defined by multiple approaches and modalities in practice. Based on the existing coaching and mentoring literature and the study findings, this section focuses on the characterisation of talent coaching in practice, first by comparing it with executive, managerial coaching and mentoring, and second by examining its nature and scope.

Talent coaching compared with other dyadic interactions

Mentoring and executive coaching have been extensively examined in the coaching literature in an effort to differentiate the two approaches. By contrast, the literature on managerial coaching is nascent. Drawing on Joo (2005), Passmore (2010), and Laurence (2017), the table 20 below offers some key distinctive features of coaching in the context of TM.

Table 20.   Talent coaching compared with other dyadic interventions

	Mentoring	Executive coaching	Managerial coaching	Talent coaching
Purpose	Diverse from socialisation to management development	Improving performance through self-awareness and learning	Improving performance, and employee management	Developmental and career progression oriented: diverse from network extension, job transition, career management to development of self
Coach	Internal senior manager	External professional	Internal, line manager	Internal senior manager HR manager External professional
Level of sector knowledge	Extended sector knowledge	Generalist and limited sector knowledge	Extended sector knowledge	Generalist and extended sector knowledge
Coachee	Inclusive and non-selective approach Diverse from lower level of management to high potential and senior managers	Exclusive and selective approach Mostly executive and senior manager	Inclusive and non-selective approach Direct reports	Exclusive and selective approach to talented employees (employee differentiation) Diverse from junior to senior and executive manager
Process	Less structured	Systematic and structured	Less structured when embedded in daily conversations Structured when part of an annual performance review	Structured and systematic during TM programme, less structured after
Level of formality	Less formal, agreement between two parties	More formal, contract or ground rules, often involving the coachee's line manager	Less formal, no agreement between the two parties	Formal during the TM programme. But, may evolve as an informal agreement based on volunteering
Focus	People focused Focus on career development, a long-term career plan, and obtaining the right experience	Issue and/or problem focused Focus on performance, short-term skills, and job performance	Multiple focus on performance and people's development, solution-focused	People focus Focused on career and leadership development, performance enhancement and social capital extension
Duration	Longer term: typically, an unspecified number of meetings over a period of 2–7 years	Shorter term: typically, between 4 and 12 meetings over a period of 4–12 months	Longer term: according to the line management relationship	Shorter-term (in TM programme): typically, 2–5 meetings over a period of 3–6 months Long-term relationship after the end of TM programme, left at the discretion of internal coach and talent leader
Training	More management training: typically, mentors have a background in senior management	More relationship training: typically, coaches have training in coaching-related skills	More technical skills training: line managers are not systematically trained to manage or coach employees	Management training (senior leader coach) and relationship training (HR people, external coach) Typically, minimum training for internal

	Mentoring	Executive coaching	Managerial coaching	Talent coaching
				coaches. Extended coaching-related skills and experience for external coaches
Supervision	No or limited supervision	Supervision as part of the coaching professional ethics and development as coach	No or limited supervision	No supervision for internal coaches Typically, supervision is left at the discretion of the external coach

This comparison between various coaching practices in the workplace illustrates that talent coaching includes a number of similarities with mentoring, executive, and managerial coaching. As such, it may be characterised as an in-between practice (Gray, Garvey and Lane, 2016), or as two sides of the same coin (Stokes, Fatien-Diochon and Otter, 2020). According to the findings, talent coaching for employees at the junior level appears rather similar to mentoring, but with the additional purpose of career management and development of social capital in the organisation (Bilhuber Galli and Müller-Stewens, 2012; Cullen-Lester, Maupin and Carter, 2017). At the senior level, talent coaching displays further similarities with executive coaching practices, as it focuses on development of the self and self-awareness, often in the context of a job transition (Bond and Naughton, 2011; Witherspoon, 2014). Compared with managerial coaching (Beattie *et al.*, 2014; Lawrence, 2017), talent coaching seems more structured when delivered as part of a TM programme. However, managerial coaching is more inclusive, assuming that line managers would coach all their direct reports systematically, although this may not always happen, according to some talented employees who claimed that they had never been coached before the TM programme. This study contributes to understanding the challenges associated with deploying managerial coaching (McCarthy and Milner, 2013) in TM programmes, where coaching is largely delivered internally by senior managers. As such, talent coaching can be characterised primarily as a mentoring relationship that may contain features of executive and managerial coaching.

The following section proposes to characterise talent coaching according to the coaching approach (directive, non-directive) and the seniority level of the talented employees coached in the TM programmes (RQ2).

Talent-coaching continuum

Coaching and mentoring were often experienced as one single intervention by the study participants. The terms 'coaching' and 'mentoring' were often used interchangeably in the interviews. Interestingly, some participants expressed uncertainty regarding the definition of

coaching and questioned the specificity of workplace coaching. They expressed their confusion and, at times, their lack of interest when attempting to differentiate the terms. This is coherent with previous studies revealing that coaching and mentoring are often blended in practice (ICF, 2016; Drake, 2008). The findings further suggest that 'coaching' may be used as a label for dyadic support in the organisation. Consequently, the talented employees' views of talent coaching were often similar to mentoring (Joo, 2005; Passmore, Peterson and Freire, 2013).

In addition, the participants revealed that talent coaching comprises a range of different helping interventions, such as feedback, training, sponsoring, mentoring, mediation, and dialogic coaching. This echoes previous studies that have claimed that numerous variations may be exhibited within coaching and mentoring practices (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2017; Hastings and Kane, 2018; Stokes, Fatien-Diochon and Otter, 2020). These variations of talent coaching can be encapsulated by a continuum of helping relationships. Drawing on the concept of partnership for instructional coaching (Knight, 2011b; Knight, 2007; Knight, 2011a) and Isaacs' work on dialogue (Isaacs, 1999; Isaacs, 2001), dialogic coaching happens when coach and coachee develop a relationship based on partnership, whereby they share their expertise, knowledge, experience and ask questions to elicit options. In adopting a dialogic approach, the coach acts as a partner for the co-creation of new possibilities within a specific context (Lawrence and Moore, 2018).

In capturing the junior and senior talent responses, the findings indicate that the coaching approach varies according to the talented employees' seniority level, which is in line with the career management and coaching literature (Dongen, 2014). Considering the seniority level of talented employees as a determinant factor, the figure 8 below summarises the various forms that coaching may take in the context of TM.
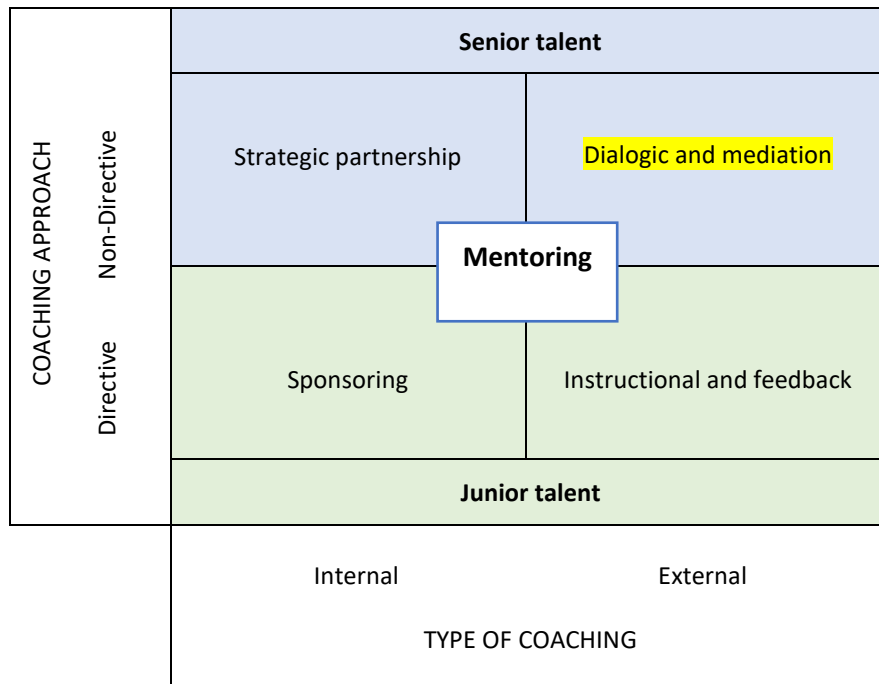
Figure 8.   The talent-coaching continuum
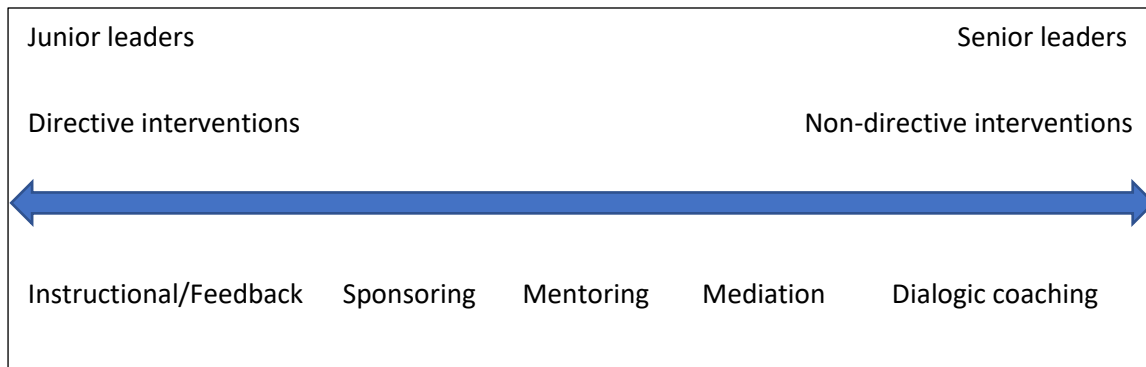
This study argues that talent coaching in the case company may take multiple forms according to the seniority level, needs, and expectations of the talented employees coached. Particularly, based on the study participants' experience, talent coaching may primarily take the form of a mentoring relationship, which may evolve into other types of helping dyadic interventions to meet the talented employees' needs, including instructional feedback, sponsoring, mediation, and dialogic coaching. One implication is that the talent coach should hold numerous skills and competences to adapt to their coachee's needs and provide a bespoke intervention, which has been identified in the case of managerial coaching (Chin Wei *et al.*, 2016), but not in the context of TM. As such, in the context of TM, coaching capabilities seem more varied and complex, which in turn reinforces the need for additional training, support, and supervision for the internal and external coaches.

Therefore, talent coaching can be characterised as a hybrid and complex dyadic intervention due to the structural features of TM programmes, where the coachee's seniority level heavily influences the type of coaching expected. A profusion of studies have examined mentoring, executive coaching, and leadership development in organisations (Grover and Furnham, 2016), but the literature remains marked by a paucity of empirical studies on coaching for talented employees at junior, middle, and senior levels in organisations. By addressing this neglect, this study expands the understanding of coaching in organisations, and particularly its specificities in the context of TM. By doing so, it coheres the work of Nizet and Fatien-Diochon (Fatien-Diochon and Nizet, 2012b; Nizet, 2012) advocating a transversal approach to coaching in organisations, whereby coaching encompasses a range of existing helping interventions. The figure 9 illustrates the various types and coaching approaches used for talented employees at different seniority levels.

Figure 9.   Characteristics of talent coaching

		Senior talent	
COACHING APPROACH	Non-Directive	Strategic partnership	Dialogic and mediation
		Mentoring	
	Directive	Sponsoring	Instructional and feedback
		Junior talent	
		Internal External	
		TYPE OF COACHING	

8.4.2   Factors of effective talent coaching

The study participants expressed views on the perceived effectiveness of the coaching intervention provided as part of TM programmes at GlobalFinCorp. The participants highlighted six characteristics of talent coaching as conducive to positive outcomes: (a) bespoke, (b) developmental, (c) interconnective, (d) long-term, (e) trustworthy, and (f) reflective.

Figure 10.   Six factors of successful programme talent coaching

First, talent coaching is described as the '*human and personal touch*' (Emma, T, A, 1) in a large organisation, allowing the coachees to step back, reflect, and focus on their personal development. Talented employees agreed that the coaching agenda was open to address their personal needs, such as work-life balance, leadership development, reputation building, and career planning. In addition, the readiness for coaching of talented employees has been highlighted as a critical factor for coaching success (Kretzschmar, 2010). In this study, participants outlined that a previous experience of coaching may have an impact, but if this experience was unsuccessful or disappointing, the impact would be negative. Openness to change was also identified as a key ingredient for a successful coaching relationship. Still another important element was trust between the coaching partners, which allowed the coachees to feel they were in a safe learning space, and thus be more inclined to open up and change. Despite a profusion of studies focussing on the coaching relationship and its impact on coaching effectiveness (De Haan, 2016; De Haan, Molyn and Nilsson, 2020), few empirical studies have explored the propensity to be coached. One exception is the recent work of Heyns and Terblanche (2020), which argued that neither personality traits nor propensity to trust represent predictors of coachee trust behaviour. However, the extent to which the coachee perceives the coach to be trustworthy predicts coachee trust behaviour. This study confirms that the propensity to be coached may be an important ingredient for a successful talent coaching relationship, but further investigation of the coach's perceived trustworthiness is needed.

Second, study participants unanimously identified coaching as a developmental intervention as opposed to a remedial tool for performance management. However, a few participants who knew little about TM programmes in GlobalFinCorp questioned its purpose and sometimes felt suspicious or even anxious about being coached. Some participants suggested that coaching remains marked by the stigma of management of poor performance, as recognised by Grant (2017).

Third, programme talent coaching was delivered by internal or external coaches who may play different roles for talented employees at different stages of their careers. The role of the external coach and guest speaker was to motivate, teach, and provide feedback to participants. At the highest senior level, coaching supported leaders in facing challenges in the context of a transition between two positions. Furthermore, this helped them connect with the self in order to evolve as an authentic leader. By contrast, for junior and middle managers, internal coaches acted as *'advocate, ambassadors, and sponsors'*. They enabled junior leaders to navigate the internal politics in order to reach the career ladder, thus acting as developmental and sponsoring mentors. This is in line with the literature on mentoring in organisations (Wanberg, Welsh and Hezlett, 2003; Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2017; Hawkins and Smith, 2006), and a previous study on the prominent role of

mentoring and sponsoring for the career advancement of women global leaders (Linehan and Scullion, 2008).

The SET sheds additional light on the relationships between talented employees and their internal coach. SET stipulates that individuals develop relationships based on a cost-benefit analysis whereby mutual gains are made overtime, and reinforced by the reciprocal benefits generated by this social exchange (Blau, 1986). The data analysis drew on abductive reasoning, which is based on the familiarisation of the researcher with the literature to explore relationships between theory and practice and to provide a contextualised explanation of a phenomenon (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Welch *et al.*, 2011). The study was initially framed by the human and social capital theory, but this could not account for the mutual expectations and duties between the talented employee, the coach and the organisation induced by the talent status and the experience of talent coaching described by the participants. Also, the strong ties developed during the talent coaching process between the coach-coachee combined with an expected reciprocity of favours viewed as social reward was unexpected. Therefore, the researcher turned to SET as an explanatory framework, used as a lens to understand the perceptions of the role of talent coaching and the dynamics of the relationship between the coach, the talented employee and the organisation.

The concept of social exchange considers that interpersonal relations and social interactions are of central significance in social life. Specifically, it posits the following:

> *'A person from whom another one has done a service is expected to express his gratitude and return a service when the occasion arises (...). If he properly reciprocates, the social reward the other receives serve as inducements to extend further assistance, and the resulting mutual exchange of services creates a social bond between the two'. (Blau, 1986: 4)*

Based on this theory, the talent coaching relationship may be considered a mutual exchange of services whereby the talented employee is provided additional career opportunities and networks by the internal coach. If the talented employee responds well to the support provided and returns the '*favours*' by talking about coaching in positive terms, the internal coach may feel gratified. Internal coaches may also seek social approval and raise their internal reputation, as suggested by Emma (T, A, 1). This is coherent with the SET, which suggests that all partners benefit simultaneously from their social interaction, and *'the only cost that they incur is the indirect one of giving up alternative opportunities by devoting time to the association'* (Blau, 1986: 16). Similar to this study, contemporary insights from the SET applied to HR development (King, 2018; Kim and Kuo, 2015;

Khoreva and Vaiman, 2015), resource availability in organisations (Bordia *et al.*, 2014), and mentoring (Rutti, M. Helms and Rose, 2013) provide evidence for how the different stakeholders recognise the social exchange occurring in the coaching relationships developed through the TM programmes. In line with these studies underpinned by the SET, this study argues that coaching can be understood as a social exchange in the context of TM programmes.

Fourth, the findings indicate that that talented employees value long-term internal coaching relationships for developing their leadership skills and mapping their career options. They typically perceived the coaching relationship as successful when it continued beyond the timeframe of the TM programme. When good chemistry occurred, talent coaching became a long-term relationship similar to mentoring. A possible explanation for this may be that talent coaching was based on reciprocity and social exchange. Participants outlined that internal coaches offered their services because they wanted to help junior managers, but also because it helped them demonstrate that they were fit to be senior leaders in GlobalFinCorp by increasing their corporate reputation as leader-coach. This was because the company promoted a rhetoric of coaching as enhancing the quality of conversations and as a critical skill for leaders' success.

However, coaching has typically been understood as a short-term intervention in the literature (Joo, 2005), although a recent meta-analysis of the literature on workplace coaching effectiveness revealed that the coaching format (comparing face-to-face with blended face-to-face and e-coaching) or duration of coaching (number of sessions or longevity of intervention) produced a limited impact on its effectiveness (Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2016). This suggests that talent coaching may necessitate different organisational arrangements compared to other forms of workplace coaching. Drawing on the SET and as outlined by study participants, both coach and coachee may need time to establish their relationship as a social exchange and begin benefiting from it. Therefore, a long-term talent coaching relationship prevails for achieving mutual goals, which can only be achieved through social interaction (Blau, 1986).

Fifth, trust and confidentiality are often claimed as paramount for a successful internal coaching relationship (Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014; Schalk and Landeta, 2017). This was also reflected by Anne (T, D, 1): *'This program, I like it because you are able to keep your coaching element somewhat private'*. This view was further shared by external coaches, who argued that the coach is given a role of confidant, especially at the senior and executive level. Furthermore, study participants unanimously highlighted the prevalence of trust in the talent coaching relationship. However, this vow to keep the coaching confidential and trustworthy may prove challenging for internal and external coaches, as discussed previously. Talented employees also often insisted on the value of

trust built over time with their coach, which they feel cannot be achieved within the time constraints of TM programmes, for example:

> *'I felt that the quality of input that the coach can give me obviously improves with her or his understanding of who I am, and the more the person gets to know me, the better the advice they can provide'. (Eleonor, T, A–D, 1)*

This is coherent with the previously discussed preference for long-term relationships in talent coaching. As such, trust and confidentiality were considered a prominent condition for a successful talent coaching relationship (Rekalde, Landeta and Albizu, 2015). This is in line with previous studies emphasising the role of individual and organisational trust in a peer-coaching relationship (Cox, 2012).

Sixth, the study participants emphasised the value of coaching as a safe space to pause in a frantic and high-performance work environment. Talent coaching was often defined as a permeable bubble where talented employees can re-focus on themselves, explore options, and define priorities regarding their career and personal growth. This opportunity was described as a '*luxury'* time focused on personal development. In addition, reflection and time to think were also associated with the well-being of talent leaders, as highlighted by Olivia (Ext. C, 1), who promoted a holistic approach to talent coaching to support talented employees who may struggle to sustain the relentlessness induced by their talent status (King, 2018). This view was shared by HR managers, who acknowledged the pace of work and higher expectations from talented employees. Talent coaching provided them a time to reflect, consolidate their learning, and recharge to move forward (John, HR, 1).

The outcomes of executive coaching have been heavily debated and researched over the last 10 years (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018; Ely *et al.*, 2010; Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2016). Specifically, outcomes of leadership and executive coaching encompass goal attainment, resilience and well-being (Grant, Curtayne and Burton, 2009), self-confidence, self-efficacy, and awareness (Trevillion, 2018). Overall, it has been claimed that executive coaching contributes to the development of leaders in the organisation (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015). However, little is known regarding the effect of coaching at the individual and organisational levels when delivered as part of a TM strategy. In addressing this omission, this study argues that the talented employee's seniority level heavily influences the coaching approach expected by talented leaders, which can be more directive at the junior level and less directive at the senior level. Previous research has argued that coaching in organisations may take the form of a hybrid practice combining elements of

coaching and mentoring to generate quality conversations (Western, 2012; Grant, 2017). This study adds to the coaching literature by characterising talent coaching in comparison with other common dyadic interventions in the workplace, as well as by integrating the seniority level of the coachee.

In sum, this section has argued that talent coaching is perceived as a successful intervention when a combination of various factors is implemented: (a) bespoke, (b) developmental, (c) interconnective, (d) long-term, (e) trustworthy, and (f) reflective. In combination with the definition of talent coaching as a hybrid practice, this suggests that talent coaching may represent a distinctive practice in organisations that is particularly complex to operate as part of a TM strategy. One implication is that the selection, preparation, and support of internal and external coaches may require some adjustments to prevent any skill inadequacies and to support their continuous development. Furthermore, the SET sheds additional light on the nature of talent coaching, viewed as a social interaction providing mutual benefits to each partner involved. This is examined further in the following section.

8.4.3   A social reward

The concept of social exchange provides a framework to decipher some of the complexity of the social interactions and exchanges, such as talent coaching relationships in a large organisation. Based on the thematic analysis of the data, this study uses SET and its derived concept of psychological contract to analyse coaching as a TM practice. These theories have been used to understand TM, but to a lesser extent in empirical coaching studies (McComb, 2009; Rezania and Gurney, 2016; Onyemah, 2009; Kim and Kuo, 2015). As Blau has argued:

> *'to underlie relations between groups as well as those between individuals; both differentiation of power and peer group ties; conflict between opposing forces as well as cooperation; both intimate attachments and connections between distant members of a community without direct social contact'. (Blau, 1986: 4)*

Furthermore, the SET posits that social change and stability comprise the result of a negotiated exchange between individuals based on a subjective cost-analysis and the comparison of alternatives (Bordia *et al.*, 2014). As mentioned in the literature review chapters, SET and psychological contract were identified as two dominant theories or concepts underpinning TM literature (Dries, 2013a; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Nijs *et al.*, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015). However, few studies have analysed coaching through the lens of SET (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019; Kim and Kuo, 2015). Therefore, there remains a scope for enhancing the

understanding of coaching in the context of TM by using SET as the main theoretical lens, as was pursued by this study.

In considering talent coaching through the lens of SET, this study extends the emerging coaching literature underpinned by SET, which examines the effect of other close dyadic relationships such as mentoring, counselling, and psychotherapy (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019). Furthermore, in claiming that talent coaching comprises a relational reward, this study furthers the coaching and mentoring literature underpinned by the social exchange framework, such as Raina et al. (2013).

Moreover, this study claims that talent coaching represents a form of social reward. As such, it provides empirical evidence that prolongs a conceptual paper considering coaching as a social process (Shoukry and Cox, 2018). Specifically, Shoukry and Cox (2018) argued that neoliberal values are embedded in the coaching discourse and that coaching may be employed as an instrumental device to control people and processes in organisations. Despite the role of coaching in organisations being conceptualised as an instrument of power and social oppression, they argued that coaching has the potential to become an enabler for positive change in organisations and advocated a critical understanding of coaching to advance the coaching profession. This study follows a similar approach by offering a nuanced analysis of coaching operationalised in a TM system. By considering talent coaching as a social reward mechanism, it adds to previous research by illustrating that talent coaching may serve as an inducement to expand further assistance to talented employees who, in turn, may express their appreciation and gratitude publicly. Subsequently, these events and activities help establish the coach's reputation. Therefore, talent coaching may generate mutual benefits for each partner in the coaching relationship, as suggested in the figure below. In this cycle, talent coaching may be seen as a gratifying experience.

Figure 11. Programme talent coaching as a social reward
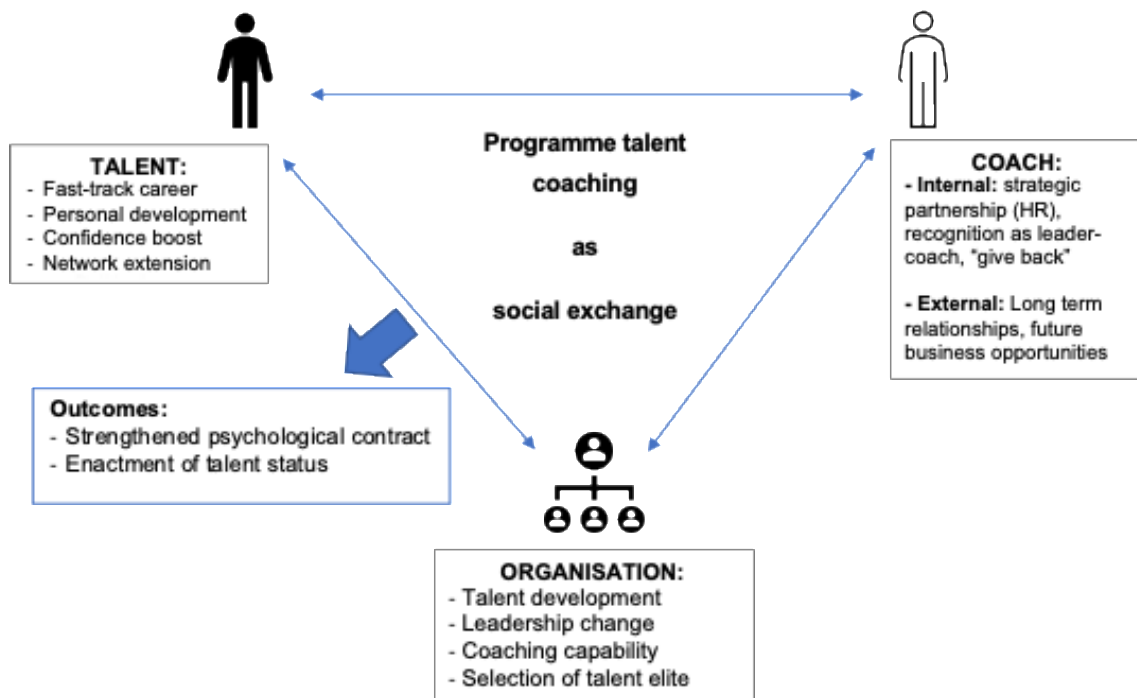
Talent coaching as enactment of talent status

The psychological contract describes a concept based on SET and is defined as *'individual beliefs shaped by the organisation, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organisation'* (Rousseau, 1995:9). As a dominant concept underpinning TM studies, psychological contract has been used to examine how talented employees respond to talent status (Ehrnrooth *et al.*, 2018; King, 2016). However, there remain few coaching studies underpinned by the psychological contract. Exceptions are limited to one case study explaining the effectiveness of a workplace coaching programme (McComb, 2009) and a thesis on psychological contracts in coaching (Stewart, 2017). The study findings indicate that talent coaching is seen as an enactment of the talent status by participants. As such, having a coach at GlobalFinCorp signals the talented employees' positioning in the talent pool to all employees. Therefore, this study adds to the emerging coaching and TM literature with regards to the significance of talent coaching for talented employees.

Regarding the TM literature underpinned by the psychological contract, previous studies have explored how talent designation and status influence the employment relationship and, specifically, the psychological contract for talented employees (King, 2018; King, 2016; Höglund, 2012). For example, King (2016) conceptualised the talented employee–organisation relationship by the 'talent

deal'. Specifically, her paper argued that the psychological contract of talented employees is modified by the talent designation and that TM strategy is experienced in a series of career-related events, such as coaching, promotion applications, and annual performance reviews. In addition, King (2016) argued that the acquisition of the talent status extends mutual duties and responsibilities from talented employees and the organisation. This result was confirmed in the findings by talented employees who expected their workload to increase. Furthermore, some participants felt that their talent status, combined with the allocation of a coach, had reinforced their work commitment and enhanced their performance (Sarah, Emma, Patricia, Carry). Reciprocally, talented employees' expectations regarding the organisation were extended in the form of personalised support and opportunities for a fast-tracked career. In contrast with previous studies that did not indicate how employees make sense of their talent status, such as King (2016), the findings here contribute to the growing body of knowledge on TM by outlining talent coaching's role as a signal of high status for the talented employee.

A mechanism to strengthen the psychological contract of talented employees

The study builds on the TM literature examining the psychological contract of talented employees, which is heightened by the talent status (King, 2016; 2018). For instance, talented employees are expected to become leader-coaches following their coaching experience as part of the TM programme. Therefore, talent coaching appears to enact the talent status and expand the mutual expectations and responsibilities held at individual and organisational levels.

The findings suggest a correlation between the positive perception of talent coaching by talent leaders and an increased commitment towards the organisation, particularly in coaching others following their experience of coaching as part of a TM programme. To an extent, this finding appears to support Mathias (2012), who argued that HRM practices are positively related to employee-perceived talent inducements and that talent inducements fully mediate the direct relationship between skill-enhancing HRM and human capital. Furthermore, the positive perception of effective TM practices mediates an enhanced commitment from talented employees to contribute to the organisation's success by developing the relevant qualities and skills. This suggests that the more positive the perception of coaching, the higher the talent leaders' commitment to developing the desired leadership approaches promoted by the organisation. This confirms the role of coaching as both a catalyst for leadership change and a mechanism strengthening the psychological contract between talented employees and the organisation.

8.5   KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

The study contributes to theory by furthering the applicability of SET in the context of TM (Crowley-Henry, 2019; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Khoreva and Vaiman, 2015; King, 2018; Narayanan, Rajithakumar and Menon, 2019) and coaching (Kim and Kuo, 2015), while also advancing the understanding of coaching's role in TM programmes. Specifically, drawing on the SET and psychological contract, this study argues that talent coaching can be viewed as a social reward that strengthens the relationships within the coachee–coach–organisation triad in the long term. In doing so, this study provides further empirical evidence for a growing body of knowledge concerning the impact of the talent status on talented employees (Ehrnrooth *et al.*, 2018; King, 2018; Sumelius, Smale and Yamao, 2020), and the positive and negative effects of coaching in organisations (Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2016; Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019; Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen, 2014).

In considering talent coaching as a social reward, this study argues that talent coaching may be more effectively deployed as a strategic TM intervention as opposed to simply being embedded in a time-constrained TM programme. Second, this means that internal and external coaches play a pivotal role in the operationalisation of talent coaching. They become the organisation agents in strengthening the psychological contract with talented employees (McDermott *et al.*, 2013; Rousseau, 1995). Additionally, for talents at the senior level, coaches can become employee agents by resolving potential employment conflicts and using their position to influence decision-makers regarding their coachee's career progression and leadership development opportunities. Although the mentoring literature offers insights on sponsoring (Clutterbuck and Lane, 2004; Clutterbuck, Poulsen and Kochan, 2012; Murphy and Kram, 2014), the management of employee–employer relationships remains an uncharted role for coaching in organisations. In this context, talent coaching appears as a variation of mentoring (Joo, Sushko and McLean, 2012; Stokes, Fatien-Diochon and Otter, 2020). However, ethical concerns in the deployment of talent coaching and the multiple roles played by the coach suggest that adequate training and supervision are necessary in the context of TM, which has largely been overlooked by organisations (Fatien-Diochon and Nizet, 2015). The next chapter concludes this thesis and discusses the significance and limitations of the findings.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

9.1 INTRODUCTION

<mark>This study set out to examine how coaching is perceived by talent leaders, coaches and HR managers taking part in TM programmes in a large multinational company.</mark> This final chapter outlines the key conclusions and reviews the research objectives. It further highlights the implications and significance of the empirical findings. To this end, theoretical contributions to the fields of TM and coaching are established, followed by practical recommendations for HR managers, HR practitioners, and coaches. Recommendations for further research are additionally suggested. Finally, the limitations of the study and personal reflections on conducting this research are discussed.

9.2 REVIEW OF OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to examine the role of coaching when deployed in TM programmes in a large multinational company. Talent management is considered as one of the core HR functions (Farndale, Scullion and Sparrow, 2010; Farndale, Morley and Valverde, 2019), yet this presents critical operational challenges in large organisations (Charan, Barton and Carey, 2018; PWC, 2017). Coaching is widely used in organisations and is perceived as one of the most effective interventions for talent and leadership development purposes (Bozer and Jones, 2018; Grover and Furnham, 2016). Despite this, little is known about the role that coaching plays when delivered as part of a TM programme or about the role of coaching for the development of global leaders as part of a TM strategy (Al Ariss, 2014; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015). Additionally, despite recognition of TM and coaching as growing research fields, few empirical studies have explored in depth coaching used as part of a TM programme (Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016). As such, the first intention of this study was to address this omission.

A qualitative case study research design was selected to provide an in-depth understanding of coaching employed in TM programmes in GlobalFinCorp, a single organisation operating globally in the banking sector. This study gives voice to talented employees who received coaching as part of GlobalFinCorp's TM programmes and whose views were largely unrepresented in previous empirical studies (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Ely *et al.*, 2010). It also captures the insights of the HR managers, and internal and external coaches involved in the four TM programmes in GlobalFinCorp. The following section reviews the objectives and research questions of the study.

==How do multiple stakeholders (talented employees, HR managers and coaches) perceive the contribution of coaching in the context of TM and leadership development programmes in a multinational company?==

Findings indicate that talent coaching may hold various roles for talented employees depending on their seniority level in the organisation. First, talents at junior and middle management levels, who are typically coached by internal coaches (senior business leaders and HR managers), tend to value mentoring and sponsoring. They expect a personalised long-term relationship to create a bespoke career plan, increase their visibility, and build up their confidence and self-efficacy. They also expect talent coaching to extend their social capital in the organisation in preparation for a future career move. From this perspective, talent coaching shares features of mentoring in organisations (Clutterbuck, Poulsen and Kochan, 2012).

By contrast, talents at senior and executive levels, who are typically coached by external coaches and senior HR managers, perceive talent coaching as an intervention supporting the construction of a new identity as a leader. They also benefit from talent coaching for managing emotions and extending human capital (Trevillion, 2018).

The various expectations of talent coaching participants contribute to defining the coach's role in the TM context. Specifically, the coach's role for talented employees at the junior level is to connect, sponsor, and develop political savviness. By contrast, the coach for senior talented employees is similar to a thinking partner who provides the confidential space and time necessary to reflect on their experience and next career goals. Therefore, talent coaching was perceived as a developmental dyadic intervention as opposed to a remedial tool for performance management, which is in line with the executive coaching literature (Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Grant, 2017).

However, talented employees revealed a gap between their expectations and reality. Programme talent coaching may be perceived as an inadequate and superficial intervention, referred as '*a nice chat*' by some participants. Some talented employees perceived the coaching intervention as a one-off experience with limited impact on their career progression and leadership development. Additionally, some talented employees expressed cynicism towards coaching, and resistance to engaging in the coaching process. One explanation may be that coaching was imposed upon talent leaders as part of the scheduled activities in TM programmes as opposed to an activity of choice. An additional explanation may be due to coachees considering their coach as untrustworthy, and therefore holding back (Kim and Kuo, 2015; Heyns and Terblanche, 2020).

Despite many of the limitations expressed concerning the role of coaching, there remained widespread positive perceptions of coaching across TM programmes. This is in line with previous studies arguing the effectiveness of coaching for leadership development (Bozer and Jones, 2018; De Haan, 2016; Ely *et al.*, 2010). Positive perceptions were associated with a positive start of the coaching relationship in addressing the talent's needs and expectations. These perceptions were also positively mediated by a long-term relationship stretching informally after the programme, occurring at distance or not. This finding seems to contradict one study claiming that the type of clients, coaches' expertise, number of coaching sessions, and clients' or coaches' perspectives produced little impact on its perceived efficacy (Graßmann, Schölmerich and Schermuly, 2020). Nevertheless, from an individual perspective, findings indicate that talent coaching is often experienced as a variant of mentoring and is perceived as effective according to six characteristics— namely, long-term, interconnective, bespoke, reflective, developmental, and trustworthy.

The participants also acknowledged the coaching's role in supporting careers in the organisation, but with a combination of positive and negative perceptions. Coaching was perceived as helpful in designing a career plan at the junior level and in managing transitions at the senior level (Joo and Ready, 2012; Taconis, 2018). Unexpectedly, participants revealed that talent coaching can also support the selection of future internal coaches and operate as a '*natural selection*' of the talent elite in the organisation. Coaching is commonly used to support the transition of leaders to executive roles (Mcgill, Clarke and Sheffield, 2019), but not as a practice of employee segmentation operated in the TM programme (Bolander, Werr and Asplund, 2017). Drawing on the psychological contract, programme talent coaching appears to send a structural signal to employees to promote coaching as an expected leadership behaviour in the company. The personal interest, combined with the propensity to coach others, may be used as a differentiating criteria by the organisation to select the talent elite within the leadership pipeline.

From an HR managers' perspective, coaching in TM programmes represents a social interaction that initiates long-term and trustworthy relationships between internal coaches and high-potentials (Kim and Kuo, 2015; Heyns and Terblanche, 2020) . As such, it is perceived as a catalyst for leadership change (Shoukry and Cox, 2018). In particular, HR managers outlined that talent coaching may contribute to shifting senior business managers' perception regarding HR's function. The connotations of TM programmes and coaching as being about nurturing future global leaders offers the HR function an opportunity to be seen as contributing to the organisation's competitive success and sustainability. Therefore, HR managers endeavour to establish close relationships through

coaching with senior leaders and future leaders in order to be viewed as a strategic business partner (Farndale, Scullion and Sparrow, 2010).

Participants often considered talent coaching as an organisational investment in the talented employee. Subsequently, some participants highlighted that coaching was a badge of honour in the organisation (Gan *et al.*, 2020). Building on the literature examining how coaching in organisations is perceived (Bickerich, Michel and O'Shea, 2017; Leonard-Cross, 2010), this study emphasises the symbolic function of talent coaching as a meaningful employment event and a formal recognition of one's talent status. This evidences the shift in perceptions of coaching at GlobalFinCorp from a remedial intervention for performance management to a developmental intervention offering opportunities for competitive advantage (Schalk and Landeta, 2017).

Nevertheless, the nature of work in this financial organisation runs counter to the developmental discourse of coaching. This paradox was evident in participants' positive views concerning the value of coaching, yet with an understanding that it was provided with limited support and sustainability. This may lead to the development of a rhetoric of coaching in TM programmes marked by a paradox whereby coaching and TM are considered as best practices, yet restricted by the limited resources and funding available in the organisation to implement them (Conger, 2014). Regardless, participants viewed coaching as 'good to have' as long as it lasts. As such, coaching was sometimes experienced as a valuable 'add-on', and simultaneously as an impermanent and unsustainable talent intervention during economic downtimes. This duality in the perception of coaching and TM is coherent with an emerging stream of studies (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019; De Boeck, Meyers and Dries, 2018; Son *et al.*, 2018).

Moreover, findings indicate that talent coaching may support leadership change in the organisation. Specifically, coaching can be viewed as an alternative to the traditional command-and-control management style utilised in the organisation. In this context, talent coaching may be perceived as way to enhance the leadership portfolio of senior leaders and HR managers by providing them an opportunity to practice and develop coaching skills 'on-the-job' during TM programmes. Human resource managers highlighted that talent coaching represented part of a wider organisational objective to equip managers with coaching skills so that they could hold better quality conversations with their counterparts, direct reports, and other stakeholders (Grant, 2017). Consequently, talent coaching was often considered as a catalyst for leadership change (Cappelli and Tavis, 2018), although HR managers acknowledged the financial and structural constraints for operating coaching at all levels and across borders.

Finally, the study participants expressed contrasting views on talent coaching at GlobalFinCorp. According to the talented employees' accounts, coaching in TM programmes seems to inspire either emulation or scepticism. This inconsistency questions why a TM practice deployed in one company can generate such a range of polarised opinions. The emulation of coaching may derive from the positioning of coaching as a key leadership skill in the organisation. Therefore, talent leaders may emulate their coaching relationship when it is perceived as effective and positive for their career advancement. Conversely, when talented employees perceive coaching as an ineffective or neutral intervention ('*a nice chat*'), they may view it with scepticism. Furthermore, HR managers claimed that coaching may not be an appropriate intervention for all talented employees: '*Coaching is not a panacea*'. By providing a nuanced picture of coaching employed in the context of TM, this study contributes to the emerging coaching literature concerning the negative effects of coaching in organisations (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019).

9.2.2 Research question 2 (RQ2)

<mark>What is the perceived role of coaching for talented employees receiving coaching at various stages of their careers in a global organisation?</mark>

Previous research in coaching and TM has tended to report the views of senior leaders, CEOs, and HR managers while the perception of talented employees receiving coaching often remains overlooked (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Ely *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, despite the extant literature on executive coaching, there is a paucity of empirical studies examining the development of leaders at different stages of their career (Dongen, 2014). This study seeks to address these omissions by examining the views of talented employees at junior, middle management, and senior levels. This section exposes both converging and diverging opinions expressed by participants regarding the contribution of coaching in a TM context.

First, the participants widely agreed on coaching's positive contribution to the development of leadership skills, with an emphasis on network extension for junior and middle management leaders and leadership role and identity for senior leaders. The study participants' views converged in that coaching may support in-house career development of talented employees, although coaching was not perceived as systematically conducive of internal promotion. Interviewees claimed that external and internal business factors, such as economic crisis and structural organisational changes, are critical for the creation of job opportunities at GlobalFinCorp. Consequently, from a coachee perspective, talent coaching was often perceived as '*good to have*', but not sufficient to propel talented employees on the career ladder. This ambivalence echoes the impermanence and short length of TM programmes.

The concept of social exchange refers to '*actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do, in fact, bring from others*' (Blau, 1986: 91). Unlike a literal economic exchange, social exchange entails unspecified obligations that are not stipulated in advance in the relationship, but which create diffuse future obligations (Blau, 1986). The SET provides a useful lens for analysing the dynamics in talent coaching relationships. For instance, the junior talented leaders claimed a positive impact of coaching when it facilitated the extension of their professional network and visibility in the organisation. In exchange, senior leader coaches appear to benefit equally from the talent coaching relationship, which is promoted as a desired leadership skill at GlobalFinCorp. By engaging in talent coaching, both talented employees and internal coaches demonstrate their fit with the organisation's desired leadership behaviour, which support their positioning in the elite talent pipeline.

By contrast, from an external coach perspective, coaching in TM programmes *'is not coaching'*, but rather is viewed as a feedback and thinking partnership. Despite this, both external coaches and HR managers equally valued long-term relationships, which enable external coaches to develop strong ties and extend their social network inside and outside the organisation, should their coachee leave. The SET can provide a useful lens for understanding this aspect of the talent coaching relationship, as it considers how social interaction simultaneously benefits all partners (Rex and Homans, 1962). 'Favours'—and in this case, talent coaching—may generate gratitude and be received as a gratifying intervention by the coachee. This expression of gratitude for being coached represents a social reward (Blau, 1986). This may result in mutual benefits, such as social rewards, which in turn reinforce the trust and induce the coaching partners to develop strong ties. These features indicate stronger similarities with mentoring than coaching (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2017). As such, programme talent coaching offers the beginning for a supportive long-term relationship. A vast amount of research has been conducted focussing on coaching relationships in organisations (Boyatzis, Smith and Van Oosten, 2015; Cox, 2012; De Haan, Molyn and Nilsson, 2020), but this relationship has rarely been explored through the lens of SET, with the exception of one empirical study examining the managerial coaching relationship (Kim and Kuo, 2015). Accordingly, this study adds to the existing coaching literature by providing further empirical support to the theoretical underpinnings of talent coaching relationships based on SET.

Whether delivered internally or externally, coaching in the context of TM seems to increase the complexity of the triangular coaching relationship. Participants claimed that opposite agendas may emerge during the talent coaching process. The findings indicate that talent coaching may trigger ethical concerns, particularly when provided by internal coaches, who are typically in a higher

managerial position than their talented employee-coachee. The inherent power imbalance in the talent coaching relationship may result in a series of positive and negative side effects. On the positive side, talent leaders at the junior and middle management levels may benefit from the experience, influence, and network of internal talent coaches to extend their social capital and to raise their visibility and reputation with key decision-makers in the organisation. Conversely, the talent coaching relationship may pose ethical concerns in terms of confidentiality and conflicting interests between the internal coach and the coachee. In turn, this may result in a detrimental or coercive coaching relationship. However, the study of power in coaching relationships remains at an embryonic stage in the coaching literature (Pliopas, 2017; Louis and Fatien-Diochon, 2018; Louis and Fatien-Diochon, 2014). Therefore, this study provides further empirical evidence by considering that the TM context exacerbates ethical dilemmas in the triangular coaching relationships.

9.2.3   Research question 3 (RQ3)

How is coaching characterised in the context of global TM and leadership development?

This study argues that talent coaching may be approached as a distinct form of coaching in the organisation. Building on Joo (2005), Passmore (2010), and Laurence (2017), this study claims that talent coaching offers a number of similarities with other developmental interventions employed in organisations, including executive coaching, mentoring, and managerial coaching. Talent coaching appears to blend multiple helping interventions according to the seniority level of the talented employee and the delivery mode of coaching (internal or external). Specifically, when talent coaching is delivered internally (typically at the junior and middle management level), it was often perceived as a mentoring relationship. When talent coaching was delivered externally (typically at the senior and executive levels), it was experienced as an executive coaching intervention, but with features of mentoring, since external coaches were appointed because of their extensive experience in working with GlobalFinCorp leaders, and in the banking sector. Previous TM studies have tended to consider TM practices as one body of practice, and consequently, there remains a paucity of studies examining the nature, purpose, and effect of each TM intervention (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2012; Rezaei and Beyerlein, 2018). As such, this study extends the understanding of coaching as a TM practice in particular, which has previously been under-explored.

In addition, the findings indicate that programme talent coaching may encompass multiple types of helping interventions: instructional coaching, feedback, mentoring, sponsoring, mediation, and dialogic coaching. This can be explained by (a) the variety of seniority levels of employees targeted by the various TM programmes in the case company; (b) the variety of expectations from talented employees regarding coaching; and (c) subsequently, the need to tailor the talent coaching

intervention to individuals' needs. This is important, as it outlines a contrast between the coaching literature and its operationalisation in context. In doing so, this study adds to existing critical analysis of the coaching discourse in organisations (Western, 2012; Gray, Garvey and Lane, 2016; Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2017; Western, 2017; Lines and Evans, 2020). Specifically, coaching can be seen to support a neo-feudalistic discourse in global firms, which results in the implementation of HRM practices that favour low-cost and best-practice approaches (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2017; Lines and Evans, 2020). Furthermore, this study argues that talent coaching may take the form of a multifaceted relationship in practice, comprising significant features of mentoring. This echoes a recent article arguing that coaching and mentoring represent 'two sides of the same coin' in practice (Stokes, Fatien-Diochon and Otter, 2020). This study also confirms the challenges in distinguishing coaching from mentoring in practice (Maltbia *et al.*, 2014). The following section summarises the theoretical contributions of this study.

9.3 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY

This study contributes to theory by furthering the applicability of SET and psychological contract for coaching employed in the context of TM. Specifically, this study makes three main theoretical contributions with regard to the role of coaching in TM programmes.

9.3.1 Talent coaching as a social reward

This study analyses coaching in the context of TM through the lens of SET (Blau, 1986; Emerson, 1976) and the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). By doing so, it contributes to both coaching and TM literature, where SET has recently emerged as an alternative theoretical framework (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, 2016; Kim and Kuo, 2015). As opposed to the mentoring literature, whereby SET represents a dominant theoretical framework (Chaudhuri and Ghosh, 2012; Ghosh and Reio Jr, 2013; Parker, Kram and Hall, 2013), only recently has it been argued that coaching can be considered as a social process and an enabler for organisational change (Shoukry and Cox, 2018). Therefore, this study adds to existing coaching and TM empirical studies underpinned by the SET by considering talent coaching as a social exchange and social reward. As such, this study contributes to shifting our understanding of coaching in organisations from solely dyadic relationships, their effectiveness, different approaches, tools and techniques to focus on the relational, social, mutual and political dimension of coaching (Gibb, 1999; Fatien-Diochon and Nizet, 2019).

The SET posits a perceived obligation on the part of subordinates to reciprocate high-quality relationships, and that these relationships are developed over time through a series of exchanges

(Homans, 1961). In the context of TM, the triangular coaching relationship can be examined as a social exchange whereby each party (coach–coachee–organisation) would apply a cost-benefit analysis to determine risks and benefits resulting from the relationship. The findings suggest that TM programmes create a series of social obligations for participants, which are nurtured by other organisational actors—namely, external coaches, senior leaders acting as internal coaches, and HR managers, as well as talented employees. According to Blau (1996), social exchange assumes that, when person A receives a service from person B, A is expected to express gratitude and return a service when the occasion arises. If A reciprocates this service properly, B receives a social reward. As such, social exchange functions as an inducement to expand the set of mutual service exchanges between A and B, creating a social bond between the two and strengthening social ties. Based on the concept of social exchange, this study argues that programme talent coaching can be viewed as a social interaction whereby coaching partners exchange services in terms of knowledge, expertise, networks in the form of mentoring, sponsoring, reputation, and visibility building for future career moves. Drawing on coaching as social exchange, this study further claims that programme talent coaching may be perceived as a social reward by the talented employees and their coach.

9.3.2 Talent coaching strengthening the psychological contract of talented employees

The concept of psychological contract sheds additional light on the role of coaching in TM programmes. The findings suggest that programme talent coaching enacts the talent status of talented employees and strengthens the psychological contract between the talented employee and the organisation (King, 2018).The psychological contract posits that employer–employee relationships are based on an unwritten set of mutual duties and expectations alongside the written employment contract (Rousseau, 1995). According to Rousseau (1995), contracts are constructed based on the interpretation of the promises or commitment that they entail. Psychological contracting relies on two sets of factors: external messages and social cues emerging from the organisation; and the individual's internal interpretations, predispositions, and constructions. Furthermore, Rousseau claimed that organisations *'convey commitment through events signalling intentions for the future'* (Rousseau, 1995: 36). Previous TM studies have argued that the talent designation influences the psychological contract between talented employees and the organisation by heightening their mutual set of expectations (Ehrnrooth *et al.*, 2018; Farndale *et al.*, 2014; Festing and Schäfer, 2014; Höglund, 2012; King, 2018; King, 2016; Mensah, 2018). For example, the organisation may expect talented employees to increase their commitment to leadership competence development (Khoreva, Vaiman and Van Zalk, 2017). Reciprocally, the talent leader may expect a clear career path leading to career promotion and increased managerial responsibilities (King, 2016). This study confirms the results found in the aforementioned studies regarding the

impact of talent designation on the psychological contract of talented employees. However, in this study, talent coaching was not perceived as systematically conducive of career promotion by participants. Furthermore, the talent coaching relationship, which relies on the goodwill and discretionary behaviour of internal coaches, may not be perceived as helpful. Nevertheless, the use of coaching in TM programmes signals coaching as a desired leadership skill for future leaders at GlobalFinCorp. Talented employees felt positively induced to use coaching outside the talent coaching relationship when they perceived it as effective, despite the limited number of sessions included in the TM programmes.

In addition, some participants compared talent coaching with an investment in the individual, a rite of passage, and a badge of honour (Du Toit, 2015). Rousseau (1995) claimed that training can be viewed as an investment signal, meaning that the organisation endeavours to retain the individual and enhance his/her skills over time. This is supported by the findings, which indicate that talented employees may see programme talent coaching as a strong structural signal that contributes to strengthening the psychological contract of talented employees. This further adds to the existing empirical TM studies exploring how talent status influences the psychological contract (Höglund, 2012; King, 2016).

Finally, the creation of a psychological contract relies on people and organisational structural signals, which play the role of contract-makers. Rousseau defined contract-makers as *'any person who conveys some form of future commitment to another person'*, with most contract-makers being *'individuals acting as organisational agents who communicate demands and expectations upon which employment, advancement, remunerations and retention are predicated'* (1995:60). Based on this definition, talent coaches may play the role of psychological contract-makers for talented employees. According to Rousseau (1995), structural signals convey information to employees through HR practices, which include benefits, compensation, and performance criteria. In this study, talent coaching was often perceived as structural signal conveying visible signs of status and a sense of recognition to talented employees. Therefore, this study contributes to enhancing the understanding of coaching as a pivotal career event, which holds promise in terms of career growth and personal development for talented employees. As such, talent coaching contributes to strengthening the psychological contract of talented employees.

9.3.3 A distinct and ambivalent TM practice

The third theoretical contribution of this study concerns the tensions emerging from the operationalisation of coaching in a TM context. This study argues that programme talent coaching represents a distinct coaching practice widely valued by the participants, yet comprising paradoxical

aspects leading to ethical concerns. Participants shared contrasting views regarding the use of coaching in a TM context and outlined its limited and negative effects. This discrepancy suggests a disconnection between the promissory structural signals—such as coaching—and the reality of TM and career progression in a large firm, which was perceived as context-dependant and not exclusively performance-related by the participants. Drawing on Rousseau (1995) and King (2016), a psychological contract breach could result from different interpretations of the TM and talent coaching deals, such as when commitments made by managers, expectations shared by talented employees, and HR practices are disconnected. Some participants commented on the discrepancies between their expectations and TM practices (coaching, training, team work assignments, networking), which may explain why some participants emphasised the limited outcomes of talent coaching in relation to leadership development and career promotion. Furthermore, some participants expressed a combination of cynicism and pragmatism regarding coaching as a one-fits-all TM practice: '*Coaching is not a panacea*'. Meanwhile, few empirical coaching studies have explored the negative aspects of coaching (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019) and the ethical challenges posed by the use of coaching in organisations (Blanton and Wasylyshyn, 2018; Fatien-Diochon and Nizet, 2015; Hannafey and Vitulano, 2013; Pliopas, 2017). Therefore, this study offers a nuanced and contextualised analysis of coaching's effects for talented employees. In doing so, the researcher seeks to advance the coaching research and the profession by highlighting its benefits and downsides in the context of TM. The following section examines the implications and contributions of this study for coaching and HR practitioners.

9.4   CONTRIBUTIONS TO PRACTICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study's contribution to practice is threefold. First, from an HR perspective, talent coaching may be perceived as complex to operate due to the additional workload involved with talent coaching delivered internally. One HR manager (Steve, HR, 1) suggested that formal mechanisms of recognition for coaching, which are not currently employed, could help to alleviate these concerns. However, if recognition is exclusively based on quantitative criteria (such as number of sessions), this may reinforce the perception of talent coaching as an additional managerial task as opposed to a leadership approach. This represents the opposite of the talent coaching's desired outcomes from an organisational perspective.

Second, the findings highlighted some ethical challenges and concerns related to the operationalisation of coaching as part of a TM strategy. From a coach and coachee perspective, ethical concerns may arise regarding confidentiality and conflicts of interest due to the power and influence of internal coaches (senior business leaders and HR managers) in the organisation.

Consequently, large organisations using or planning to use coaching as part of a TM programme may give particular attention to supporting their internal coaches in dealing with (a) ethical concerns; (b) misalignment between the organisational and individual goals; and (c) extension, breach, or violation of psychological contract. Additionally, internal coaches need to be informed of their role as contract-makers of the strengthened psychological contract and learn how to manage it, especially when talented employees perceive that promises are unfulfilled.

Coaching supervision may support internal coaches in examining their coaching practice and reflecting on ethical issues, which would also facilitate the development of their coaching skills. Finally, drawing on Fatien-Diochon and Nizet (2015), who claimed that coaching and mentoring codes of conduct do not fit all situations and all practitioners, an idiosyncratic ethical framework and coaching code of conduct may be drafted to reflect the contingent challenges in operating talent coaching in the organisation. This would help to prevent unethical or detrimental talent coaching relationships.

Third, the findings suggest that programme talent coaching may support leadership change. In this endeavour, it appears critical to adopt a more transparent communication strategy regarding TM and the role of talent coaching for leadership development and career progression (Dries and Gieter, 2014; Sumelius, Smale and Yamao, 2020). The participants widely acknowledged that talent coaching aimed to create a virtuous circle whereby leaders emulate coaching and develop their coaching skills on the job. However, there may be a disconnection between intended objectives and some perceptions of coaching in TM programmes. Talent coaching may inspire both emulation and scepticism amongst the various stakeholders interviewed, as discussed earlier. This may be explained by: (a) the alignment (or not) between the talented employees' needs and the objectives of the TM programme; (b) the impermanence of the TM programmes and of the talent status; (c) the variability of internal coaching capabilities; and (d) whether or not the coaching relationship is perceived as successful. When promises are not fulfilled, this may lead to a breach of the psychological contract between the talented employee and the organisation. These issues need to be addressed by organisations using TM programmes.

9.5   LIMITATIONS

This study features three main limitations. These come in addition to the methodological limitations of the single case study research design, as examined in chapter four. First, the case company selected was a large firm operating in more than 55 countries in the EMEA region. The study participants were based in more than 10 different countries across EMEA, and most of them

originated from another country. However, no participants originated from Africa. As such, further research is needed to explore talent coaching involving talented leaders from the African continent, which echoes the previous call from TM scholars outlining the paucity of empirical coaching studies in other African countries beyond South Africa (Anlesinya, Amponsah-Tawiah and Dartey-Baah, 2019; Gaylard, 2019; Terblanche, Myburgh and Passmore, 2019).

Second, the researcher expected that the collected data would reflect a high level of cultural diversity, which would shape leadership and management practices, and especially coaching and TM (Passmore, 2013; Bird and Mendenhall, 2016; Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe, 2014; Moral and Abbott, 2009; Rosinski, 2010; Abbott and Salomaa, 2016; Bozer and Delegach, 2019). However, the cross-cultural dimension in the talent coaching relationship was often dismissed and sometimes denied by interviewees. The study participants often assumed that talent leaders, especially at the senior level, would be culturally competent. However, one internal coach focused on the importance of improving the English-language skills of one non-native-English-speaking talented employee in order to access higher positions in the organisation. Therefore, further research may explore the role of language and accents in the career promotion of talented leaders (Śliwa and Johansson, 2014).

Third, a longitudinal study design would have been useful for understanding the potential shift regarding the perceptions of leaders before and after the talent coaching interventions. Instead, the study exclusively based its analysis on the experiences of talent coaching post-TM programmes. This was mainly due to organisational constraints and access to data in the case company. As such, it is expected that memories of the coaching received as part of the TM programme may be altered, and some interviewees highlighted this point.

9.6   FURTHER RESEARCH

In addition to the suggestions for future studies mentioned previously, three different propositions are outlined. First, coaching and TM represent emerging research fields, and more empirical studies are needed to analyse both the positive contribution of talent coaching and its potential detrimental effects on individuals and organisations. This study revealed a variety of reactions to coaching in relation to the leadership development and career progression of talented employees and highlighted the ambivalence of coaching in TM programmes. However, further studies on the negative effects of talent coaching in different organisations and TM programme designs would contribute to advancing the coaching literature on the 'dark side' of coaching (Schermuly and Graßmann, 2019) as well as the TM literature on negative impacts of TM (Sumelius, Smale and Yamao, 2020; De Boeck, Meyers and Dries, 2018). Importantly, this may help to prevent any

damaging effect and would assist HR managers, leaders, and policy-makers in operationalising coaching as a TM practice.

Second, further research could also focus on the role of the line manager in TM systems. In this study, line managers were not interviewed, as they do not take part in TM programmes at GlobalFinCorp. However, the study participants highlighted their prominent role in the talent-designation process. Furthermore, as line managers climb the career ladder at GlobalFinCorp, it is likely that they would be invited to coach other leaders in TM programmes and to become leader-coaches for their team. Previous empirical studies on managerial coaching have focused on (a) coaching techniques and evaluation of the coaching capability of manager-coaches (Beattie *et al.*, 2014); (b) managerial coaching effectiveness (Kim and Kuo, 2015; Ellinger, Hamlin and Beattie, 2008); (c) managerial coaching as a source of competitive advantage (Pousa and Mathieu, 2015); (d) the moderating role of gender in managerial coaching (Pousa, Richards and Trépanier, 2018); (e) the role of line managers for career management (Crawshaw and Game, 2014); and (f) the motives of line managers for enacting RH practices (Dewettinck and Vroonen, 2017). Surprisingly, however, there remains no empirical study concerning line managers' role as coach for TM purposes. As such, the line managers' perspective on talent coaching could be investigated in future studies, especially to understand how line managers make sense of their role as talent coach in both formal TM programmes (if/when they are invited to take part) and as part of their managerial responsibilities. This would help to understand the challenges faced by line managers in managing talented employees, especially in relation to the ethical dilemmas and conflicts of interest highlighted by this study.

Third, future studies could also explore the talent coaching relationship at a micro level by interviewing the coaching dyad formed by the talent coach and the coachee as a unit of analysis. This would help to capture the specific elements and conditions for the development of mutuality and reciprocity in talent coaching relationships in organisations.

9.7   PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This PhD journey has confirmed the researcher's positioning as a qualitative researcher. The richness of the data represented a source of joy, but also a source of pressure to report the study participants' accounts with respect and accuracy. At times, the amount of data collected was overwhelming. Participants often wandered off topic, such as with how to cope with stress during career transitions or corporate entrepreneurship as a leadership approach. Although fascinating, this posed its own challenge to remain focused on the research questions.

Another key challenge concerned the access to data. It took more than 1.5 years to guarantee access and be permitted to conduct interviews in this global firm in the banking and financial services sector. This was due to two main factors. First, the researcher did not have any network within the HR department at GlobalFinCorp. Second, the HR staff turnover made it difficult to establish and maintain a working relationship with the participants. For example, the head of coaching and TM EMEA was promoted to the USA, which significantly delayed the initial research process and identification of the study sample. Furthermore, some interviews had to be rescheduled multiple times to fit with the workload and availability of participants, especially managers at the senior and executive levels. As a result, the researcher developed patience, persistence, and resilience.

This study was funded by the Harnish research grant from the Institute of Coaching, McLean Hospital, Harvard Medical School Affiliated. Learning to bid for a research project and managing a research grant successfully represented its own achievement. In particular, it provided opportunities for sharing insights and receiving feedback from fellow researchers in the international coaching community. This will be particularly useful for future research projects and for the dissemination of this study in the form of journal publications, webinars, blogs and conferences.

9.8   FINAL CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, programme talent coaching is perceived by talented employees not only as a developmental intervention, but as an enactment of the talent status, which strengthens their psychological contract with the organisation. Drawing on the SET, this study argues that coaching can be approached as a social exchange in the context of TM. Furthermore, the findings indicate that coaching may function as a social reward, which establishes strong ties between talented employees and their coach. In a talent coaching relationship, both coaching partners typically benefit in terms of visibility, reputation, network, and tacit knowledge extension, which are seen as critical for career progression in a large firm. Furthermore, the study outlines the uncharted social and political dimensions of coaching in a TM context, which contrasts with the coaching steam of literature focusing on coaching approaches, techniques and factors conducive to coaching effectiveness in organisations.

This study further determines that talent coaching can play a critical role in driving leadership change in the organisation. For instance, it may model the desired leadership style promoted by the organisation, or it may inspire talented employees to adopt a coaching approach to conduct quality conversations in the organisation. However, ethical concerns emerge from the use of coaching in a TM context. This study exposes the duality of coaching and reveals inherent tensions that are

difficult to reconcile. In particular, there appears to be a real stretch in practice when attempting to bridge the exclusive nature of TM programmes with the inclusivity underpinning coaching as a leadership approach. This may be due to talent coaching being largely a discretional behaviour, yet not recognised formally in the case company.

Finally, this study argues that programme talent coaching represents a distinct coaching practice encompassing a range of common helping dyadic interventions, especially mentoring and, surprisingly, mediation as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism for talented employees at the senior level. As such, it highlights the complexity of coaching employed as part of a TM strategy with talented employees at different seniority levels. Furthermore, it provides a nuanced view on its benefits and flaws for each stakeholder involved in the coach-coachee-organisation triangular relationship. Therefore, this practice requires a wide portfolio of skills combined with an acute sense of ethics, awareness of organisational politics, and an understanding of the culture and challenges faced by the sector. This is particularly relevant for internal coaches, who are less likely to have access to ongoing support in the form of training, supervision, development, and recognition as coach.

This study contributes to a growing body of coaching and TM literature by providing a contextualised and multiple-perspective analysis. Underpinned by the SET and the psychological contract, it extends the understanding of the multiple roles that coaching may play as part of a TM strategy in a large organisation. The complexity and challenges that individuals and organisations face when deploying coaching as a TM practice and as a catalyst for leadership change cannot be under-estimated.

APPENDICES

1. RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENT

Recruitment advertisement adapted to each stakeholder participants (talented employees, internal and external coaches, HR Managers). The one presented below concerns talented employees.

Karine Mangion is a doctoral student in the Faculty of Business at Oxford Brookes University. She is currently conducting a PhD research, which has received the approval from the Ethics Research Committee of Oxford Brookes University.

The tile is: How is coaching perceived by leaders engaged in a global talent and leadership development programme?

The proposed research aims to examine coaching in a global corporate environment. This study will analyse the role of coaching and how it is perceived by leaders receiving coaching in the context of global talent and leadership development programmes.

She would like to invite leaders to participate to a one-hour interview, organised at a convenient time during working hours in the London-Canary Wharf offices. A Skype interview can also be arranged if more convenient. All data will be anonymised. Your participation is on a voluntary basis and will not affect your employment within the company.

If you meet the following criteria and are interested in participating in this PhD research, please contact Karine for further details on 13126138@brookes.ac.uk or 07707483816:

- You joined a global talent and leadership development programme within the company between 01/07/2014 and 01/07/2015.
- You are receiving or have received coaching as part of this programme.

Thank you.

2. INFORMATION SHEET

Information sheets were adapted to each stakeholder participants (talented employees, internal and external coaches, HR Managers). The one presented below concerns talented employees.

How is coaching perceived by leaders engaged in a global talent and leadership development programme?

You are being invited to take part in a PhD research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

The proposed research aims to examine coaching in a global corporate environment. This study will analyse the role of coaching and how it is perceived by leaders receiving coaching in the context of global talent and leadership development programmes.

Participants involved in a global talent management and leadership development programme are invited to participate voluntarily to an interview. Your company has given permission for the research to take place. Your participation will not affect your employment within the company.

The data collected will be analysed using qualitative methods to better understand the role of coaching in global organisations and to contribute to existing knowledge on the ways coaching might support global talent management and leadership development initiatives in multinational organisations.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You are invited to participate to this study as you are:

- A leader-participant undertaking coaching in one of the global talent management and leadership development programs provided by your company between 01/07/2014 and 01/07/2015.

In total, the data will be collected from 18 coachees-participants, 4 internal and 4 external coaches, at least 4 programme leaders and 2 HR managers.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. Your involvement in the project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied without giving reasons.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will participate to a personal interview, scheduled for one hour and carried out during work time. The date and time will be scheduled at a convenient time for you during the working day, preferably in Canary Wharf-London in the company offices. You can also choose to use Skype or telephone if more convenient. The interview will be audio recorded with your permission.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Participants may develop their self-knowledge through reflection and understanding of coaching as a developmental intervention in the context of talent management and leadership development. Regarding the organisation, getting a better understanding of the perception of coaching will lead to the enhancement of its programmes.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about the individual will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations).

Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material. Data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity. The data generated in the course of the research will be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project.

What should I do if I want to take part?

Send an email to Karine Mangion, who will conduct the research at 13126138@brookes.ac.uk

I will schedule an informal call to set up the date and time of the interview.

If you want to participate to the interviews, you will receive a separate consent form for you to sign.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The research findings will be shared with participants, the coaching community and HR managers in the company. They will be used in my PhD thesis and will be published and held as a public document in the Library of Oxford Brookes University.

I intend to present my findings in conferences in the fields of coaching, leadership development, TM, and organisational development. The results will also be published in key HR, Organisational Development and Coaching academic journals.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I will be conducting the research as a PhD student at Oxford Brookes University, Faculty of Business, School of Business and Management. This research is self-funded.

Who has reviewed the study?

This PhD research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee of Oxford Brookes University UREC Registration No: 150950.

Contact for Further Information

For further information, contact me: Karine Mangion, 13126138@brookes.ac.uk

Should you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, you can contact the supervision team of this PhD research:

Dr Judie Gannon   Director of Studies   Hospitality Management-Business

Dr Nick Wylie   Second Supervisor   Business and Management

You can also contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you

Date: 25/10/2015

3. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (1ST ROUND)

Information sheets were adapted to each stakeholder participants (talented employees, internal and external coaches, HR Managers). The one presented below concerns talented employees.

Interview questions for leaders receiving coaching:

1. Can you introduce yourself and explain how you joined the talent and leadership development programme?

2. What were your thoughts when you saw that coaching was part of the programme?

3. How is coaching delivered in this programme?

4. What is the purpose of the coaching in this programme?

5. The matching process: Is your coach internal or external? How was the matching done?

6. Is there any added value of coaching compared to other interventions such as training or mentoring in this talent and leadership development programme? Please explain.

7. What role might coaching play in your leadership development? Can you provide any examples, please?

8. What role might coaching play in your career progression in the organisation? Can you provide any examples, please?

9. What other roles may coaching have?

10. How important is the cultural diversity in the programme?

11. How might the global dimension of the programme impact the coaching?

12. As a coachee, have you noticed any change in the way coaching is perceived throughout the program? Please explain.

13. As a global leader, how have you used this experience of coaching?

14. What would you like to add to this interview on the role of coaching in global talent management and leadership development programme?

4. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (2ND ROUND)

Information sheets were adapted to each stakeholder participants (talented employees, internal and external coaches, HR Managers). The one presented below concerns talented employees.

Interview questions for leader participants

1. Please, tell me about your experience of TM in your organisation?
2. Please, tell me about any changes related to your career and development as leader since we met?
3. Have you participated to a new talent and leadership programme? Please explain.
4. As a talent, what did you expect from your organisation regarding career and leadership development?
5. As you participated to a TM programme, what impact coaching had on your career progression? On your development as leader? Any other aspect?
6. Retrospectively, how has coaching played a role, if any, on your career progression?
7. What are the key skills, competences, attributes or other characteristics that you perceive important to develop as global leader in your organisation?
8. How can coaching support you in developing them?
9. How may coaching support innovation?
10. Is there any other aspect of your development/career that coaching may support? How?
11. How important is the development of professional network to progress within the organisation?
12. Did coaching continue after the programme? Please, can you explain.
13. To what extent were your expectations fulfilled before/during/after the programme?
14. Any other topics that you would like to discuss on coaching in global talent management programmes?

5. DATA STRUCTURE

1st order concepts: Informant-centric terms and codes	2nd order themes: Researcher-centric concepts, themes, dimensions	3rd order themes: Aggregated dimensions, overarching themes
Aims and purpose of coaching in TM programmes: - Career planning - Variation in the perceived definition of coaching: mentoring, feedback, training - Personalised learning - Leadership development - Natural selection of talent elite	- Network extension and sponsoring - Coaching skills for better quality conversations - Signalling coaching as desired leadership style - Consolidation of learning, bespoke learning - Natural selection process of talent elite	**INDIVIDUAL LEVEL:** **Talent coaching for human and social capital development:** - Network development - Mutual trust and affiliation - Knowledge and confidence building - Bespoke career progression plan
Coaching capability building as a spin-off of programme talent coaching: - Development of leadership capability - Development of closer relationships between HR and business leaders - Challenges and barriers to internal coaching	- Shift the internal perception of HR people from operational/transactional to strategic partners/ relational thanks to coaching relationship - Ethical dilemmas, confidentiality and trust concerns in internal coaching	
Role of the talent coach: - Programme and group facilitator - Increase visibility of coachee - Mediation and conflict resolution - Inspire to shift perspectives - Make talent leaders accountable - Confidence builder	- Sense giver, provide time and space to think - Share tacit knowledge and experience - Adapt coaching to meet personal needs, bespoke - Provide emotional support - Mediate between individual and organisation - Inspire and guide to navigate the internal politics - Embody/enact mutual duties and responsibilities between talent leader, coach and organisation	**Emergence of a rhetoric of talent coaching:** - Symbol of high status - Way of doing *VS* being - Expectations *VS* experience - Person-centric *VS* institutionalisation of coaching
Talent coaching is not always successful: - Not suitable for everybody 'not a panacea' - Programme talent coaching 'is not coaching' - Readiness for coaching - Concerns and limitations of talent coaching - Evaluative attitude: 'pure' coaching, coaching with 'capital C' and 'by the book', as opposed to 'quality conversations' in practice	- Multiple definitions of coaching in practice - Dissonance normative definition and GFC leadership framework and experience of talent coaching	
Variation in the quality of talent coaching: - Seniority of the coach - Investment or not - Region and country (distance or face-to face) - Coaching skills (internal/ external coach) - Coaching as an ill-defined practice	- Positive and negative reactions to coaching - Factors for successful talent coaching: readiness, long-term, trustworthy, bespoke, developmental - Coaching perceived as a time-consuming managerial task - Coaching discourse: norm, institutionalisation and champions for workplace coaching - Coaching as a costly intervention deployed as an investment on talented employees	
Talent coaching process: - Talent nomination and matching - Momentum - Voluntary vs compliance - Funding: formal or informal - Distance vs face to face - Commitment and motivation	- Mistrust in talent identification and matching process - Opacity of TM practices - Ethical dilemmas and conflict of interests inherent to internal talent coaching - Incongruence: short-term programme and establishment of trust in coaching relationship - Positive and negative reactions to talent status - Attractiveness vs compliance towards coaching - Coaching as symbol of high-status	**ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL:** **Talent coaching to develop a coaching culture:** - Coaching key leadership competency - Better conversations - Ripple effect of coaching
Talent definition: - High performers and high potentials - Compliance with internal metrics (gender) - Exclusive approach of TM - Positive and negative employee reactions to talent status - Workforce segmentation: definition of talented employee by contrast with 'general population'	- Talent coaching dilemma: is it worth investing in talented employee who may leave? - Cost-benefit analysis applied to TM and coaching - Coaching as long-term investment - Coaching as reward mechanism	**Instrumentalisation of talent coaching:** - Natural selection of talent elite - Mediation and conflict resolution - HR as strategic partners
Talent coaching as cost and investment: - Organisational/individual level - Cost-benefit analysis applied to talent coaching - Coaching as a time-consuming task	- Coaching as cultural and context-sensitive practice - Coaching for strategic leadership change - Institutionalisation of TM programmes: a key factor for good reputation and visibility - Person-centric TM: local initiatives set up by newly promoted 'good manager' - Cultural agility and diversity are the norm, not perceived as a barrier for talented employees	
Impact of organisational culture and context: - Organisational culture: result-oriented, hierarchical, command and control, pressure of regulatory framework and global competition - Lack of visibility of TM programmes - High variety and number of TM programmes - Impact of cross-cultural context in implementation of TM strategy and talent coaching	- Prevalence of the experience and seniority of internal and external coaches - Lack of progression and bridges between the different TM programmes in practice - Gender in talent coaching: acute sense of trust and partnership with coach	
Global TM programmes nature and structure: - Intergenerational and hierarchical - Time-bounded - Availability of internal coaches - Designed in HQs, implemented locally **Mutual expectations related to talent coaching:** - Organisation/ Talent leaders - Talent leader/ Coach - Organisation/ Coach	- Expectations of career and leadership growth - Co-creation of new expectations and duties (PC extension) related to talent status - Wide range of expectations depending on career stage - Frustration and risk of psychological contract breach when expectations of career promotion are not fulfilled	

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